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## The Urban Response to the Rural Land Reform During the Chinese Civil War: 1945-1949

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# THE URBAN RESPONSE TO THE RURAL LAND REFORM MOVEMENT DURING THE CHINESE CIVIL WAR: 1945-1949

By: Elizabeth Grad

## **Introduction**

China's internal condition immediately following the end of Japanese occupation was complicated and precarious. The conflicting interests of the Kuomintang and the Communists were pushing the nation into civil war and pressure from the United States only hastened the collapse of an already weak internal structure. The Japanese occupation of China during the war had significant implications and affected the political fortunes of the Kuomintang and the Communists in diverse ways.

Initially, the War of Resistance against Japan promoted nationalism and Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese Communists united for the good of the nation.<sup>1</sup> This unity, however, was short lived and the two political factions were never able to compromise on a political policy that would unify and help to democratize modern China. Ambitious in their goals and equipped with strong leadership, the Communists chose to pursue a path of resistance, as well as one of social revolution. The opportunity to utilize the incursion of the Japanese began in north China. Experienced with guerilla warfare, the Communists were able to organize a resistance movement in the countryside behind enemy lines. As a result of their mobilization and effective use of the rural masses by the end of the World War II the Communists could claim control of an area occupied by nearly 95 million people.

Conversely, the Kuomintang was not able to organize an effective resistance movement against the Japanese. Plagued by corruption, weak leadership, and a growing sense of popular discontent, the Nationalist government was unable to find unity in the face of violent Japanese aggression. The Kuomintang chose to pursue a path of

resistance to Japanese invasion without addressing the social and economic needs of the vast majority of the Chinese people.<sup>2</sup> Despite the Kuomintang's ineffectiveness in terms of addressing the needs of the people, Chiang and his government were heralded as national heroes when the defeat of the Japanese was secured in August 1945. It was following the war of resistance and upon the government's attempt to solidify its power that opposition to the Kuomintang grew. The opposition's voice became more predominant and contributed to their unpopularity and difficulty in maintaining support.

The defeat of the Japanese in 1945 was pivotal; initially, it meant a resounding faith in the Kuomintang. However, the policies pursued by the government in the immediate post-war months led to a rapid dissipation of popular support. Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists were faced with the paramount task of reconversion of enemy occupied territories and addressing the demands of two distinct sectors of the nation, the urban and the rural masses.

The government takeover of enemy institutions and territory was imbued with corruption and public disapproval from the outset. Suzanne Pepper notes in her comprehensive study of the Chinese civil war that "just as the Government offered no authoritative procedures for resolving fairly the issue of [enemy] collaboration, so also it

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<sup>1</sup>Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1999), 7.

<sup>2</sup>In Mao Tse-Tung's essay "On Coalition Government" he quotes the Kuomintang as advocating a theory that when "confronted with a formidable enemy, we should not talk about Democracy or the people's welfare; we had better wait until the Japanese are gone" (as stated in "On Coalition Government" in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol. 4, [New York: International Publishers, 1956], 293). He goes on to stress that socially "the points of controversy between the two parties really hinges on the issue of agrarian relationships" (294). This theory will play a significant role in the analysis of the response generated by the Kuomintang land policies and subsequent claims of government inadequacies.

failed to provide any equitable and orderly means for disposing of enemy property.’<sup>3</sup>

Weak policies and contradicting actions in the takeover process only strengthened popular disapproval of government policies.<sup>4</sup> The economy also suffered and the government’s failure to minimize the financial consequences caused by the war’s end only furthered the disintegration of Nationalist rule.

In addition to the political barriers between the Nationalists and the Communists parties another facet of China’s political spectra, the middle forces, began to voice their opinions concerning the welfare and the future of China. In terms of exercising political power the middle forces played a negligible role; however, their influence and prominence as the deciding element in who would prevail in the Kuomintang and Communist disputes was monumental. The middle forces, which were comprised of businessmen, intellectuals, students and professionals, wielded a significant amount of power in terms of influencing public opinion and securing the political power of either of the two preeminent political parties. Ultimately, they would be of vital importance to the Communists in terms securing a base of support in the cities, and their response to land reform was significant in that it undercut the authority of the Kuomintang government.

The Communist alternative to the Kuomintang response to China’s internal struggles focused around organizing and addressing the needs of the masses. The ideology of the Communists coalesced around the ultimate aim of social revolution with

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<sup>3</sup> Pepper, 16.

<sup>4</sup> A thorough account of the confused and corrupt practices of the Kuomintang during the period immediately following the defeat of the Japanese can be found in Suzanne Pepper’s text, *Civil War in China*. Of particular interest is the account of reconversion of enemy properties in Shanghai.

power in the hands of the workers and support from the rural masses.<sup>5</sup> As noted earlier, the initial strategy of the Communists in the War of Resistance against Japan was to mobilize the countryside to fight the Japanese, while pursuing a policy of social reform. The Communists, unlike the Government, were able to increase their strength amongst the peasants while fighting the war. Utilizing the war as a base to broaden their popular support, the Communists success can be attributed to “their social and economic policies; the relative competence and integrity with which those policies were being implemented; and the discipline of the Communist armies.”<sup>6</sup> The most significant and revolutionary of the policies pursued by the Communists during the civil war years was that of land reform.

Land reform was the key element of one of the greatest social revolutions in history, the Chinese Civil War. As early as 1927, Communist leader Mao Tse-tung was calling for a peasant movement to overthrow the feudal agrarian elements of rural society. In Mao’s essay, “Investigation into Peasant Movement in Hunan,” he noted that “the peasants attack as their main targets the local bullies and bad gentry and the lawless landlords, hitting in passing against patriarchal ideologies and institutions, corrupt officials in the cities and evil customs in the rural areas.”<sup>7</sup> But while addressing the needs of the peasantry, the Communists faced the same task of pacifying the cities as did the Kuomintang forces. In terms of furthering its agrarian policy of rural land reform while maintaining neutrality and winning the support of the urban middle forces the

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<sup>5</sup> James Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History 1912-1949*, (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 148.

<sup>6</sup> Pepper, 201.

<sup>7</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “Investigation into Peasant Movement in Hunan,” *Selected Works*, (New York: International Publishers, 1954), 1:23.

“correct political line was not capitulation, but rather ‘developing the progressive forces, winning over the middle forces and isolating the diehards.’”<sup>8</sup> The Communist Party would not surrender to political ideologies other than its own, and to achieve its aim of a socialist revolution the Party sought to incorporate the politics of the middle forces with its own. An analysis of the urban response to rural land reform is possible through the examination of articles that appeared in the urban press, the official writings of Kuomintang, Communist, and third party officials, and other primary documents during the period of the civil war (1945-1949).

An examination of existing documents from the time period leads one to conclude that each political party politicized the land reform movement to put forth its own agenda and adapted the land reform movement to sustain each of the parties own identities and strive for internal peace. The magnitude of the concept of land reform and the complete overhaul of an agrarian system, which had existed for nearly two thousand years, was bound to bring significant changes across political, social, and cultural fronts. The actualization of land reform and the implementation of rural land policies by the Chinese Communist Party sparked a vigorous response across all fronts; within the media of the time emerged a consensus of opinion that land reform was necessary. The argument thus became one of a political nature and mirrored a convergence of ideas as to whether the reality of land reform could be accomplished; in its wake the question emerged as to which political agenda would ultimately prevail. One can trace the evolution of land

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Lutze, “The Battle for the Middle Forces: United States Relations with the Chinese Communist Party, 1947-1948” (Master of Arts thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1989), 42-3.

reform through the urban responses and see how ultimately the Communist policies succeeded in winning the revolution and the support of the urban middle forces.

### **Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Land to the Tiller**

Before examining the Communist approach to land reform it is important to provide an overview of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People and the impact that his call for "land to the tiller" would have on the concept of land reform. Dr. Sun Yat-sen was a Nationalist and founder of the Chinese Republic. He promoted the initial calls for revolution in the early 1900's and was dedicated to eliminating the threat of imperialism and the corruption of Chinese government. Revolution gained more support following the Boxer Rebellion and in 1911 when the city of Hupeh fell to the Revolutionists the defeat of the Manchu government would follow in only one hundred days. Sun's initial goal of a revolutionary take over of the government had been accomplished. Following the revolution, Sun chose to "devote himself to the task of educating the people to an understanding of the fundamentals of democracy."<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Sun's aims would be superseded by the government and policies of Yuan Shih-kai and the completion of the revolution was postponed until Chiang Kai-shek assumed power in 1926.

It would be a mistake to assume that Sun's years of study and promulgation of his democratic ideologies were wasted following the revolution and its subsequent dissipation. Sun's Three Principles of the People "constitute the basic ideals and policies of the [nationalist] Revolutionary movement."<sup>10</sup> Significant to the topic of this paper and

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<sup>9</sup> Sun Yat-sen, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, (Republic of China: China Publishing CO., n.d.), vi.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.



the ultimate basis for land reform policies on both the Communist and Nationalist sides were Sun's ideas concerning land reform.

One of the main goals of the Three Principles of the People was to accomplish land reform. Sun commented that "[t]he process of social change...begins with the landowners." and although China broke away from the feudal system, "because of the lack of industrial and commercial progress, social conditions are," just about the same as they were in the feudal era.<sup>11</sup> Sun continued by stressing that the "plan which we are following is simple and easy—the equalization of landownership."<sup>12</sup> By having the government take back the land redistribute it Sun gave credence to his slogan land to the tillers. Based on this concept the Communist embarked upon a land reform movement that would play a significant role in China's social revolution. The Kuomintang would also boast its adherence to Sun's principles, although in practice and ideology Chiang Kai-shek differed substantially from his predecessor, Sun Yat-sen.

### **The Communists and Land Reform**

The most significant advancements in the revolution were the land reform policies of the Communist Party. Mao Tse-tung and the Communists sought to unify the masses, beginning with the peasants and then form a united front with the urban workers. The complexities of the land reform movement, however, are substantial and it is important to examine the process involved in implementing the rural land policies. To fully understand the character of the rural land reform movement one must examine the Communist's approach during the Japanese occupation and leading up to the Party's policies during the Civil War.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 173.

One can generalize that China's feudal agrarian system was comprised of five basic components. The landlord class comprised the highest strata of rural society. Landlords owned the land, did not work in the fields, and relied upon hired labor. Rent and interest collection were the landlords main sources of income. Rich peasants worked in their fields, but were fortunate enough to have surplus property, implements, and income. Often rich peasants employed hired labor, collected rents and profited from interest on loans they had issued. The middle peasants worked their own land and made enough to sustain an average standard of living. Some middle peasants were able to use hired labor, although often times they did so only during the busy times of year. Poor peasants owned only a small plot of land and often no farming implements. Poor peasants took out loans and paid rent to the landlords and rich peasants; often they had to hire themselves out as laborers. Hired labor completed the five basic divisions in China's feudal rural society. Hired workers owned no land or implements and relied on selling their labor power to maintain a living.<sup>13</sup>

There were significant differences between the distribution of land and wealth between landlords and poor peasants and one can assume that the circumstances also varied across the many faceted regions of China. It is within this framework and during the war of resistance against Japan that the Communist Party chose to pursue a "moderate" program of rent and interest reduction and progressive taxation. Acknowledging that the conditions facing the rural areas in China were not universal, the wartime policies of the Communists focused on weakening the feudal elites. If the

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Lutze, Class Lecture, (History 300 Modern China: Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, IL, March 9, 2001).

ultimate goal of destroying feudalism was to be realized the Communist Party had to pursue a more rigorous course of action. The end World War II and the subsequent reaction of the rural masses, in particular the poor peasants, would serve as the base form which the Party was able to implement the first of a series of more thorough land reform methods.

The tensions between landlords and their tenants were at an extreme in 1945. Fei Xiaotong, a non-Communist anthropologist, keenly observed that

those in the landlord class who have been depending upon income from rents must sooner or later be eliminated. Landlords who themselves cannot cultivate the land can only rent their land out to others. Yet this piece of land will not feed both the landlord and the tenant at one and the same time. The landlord cannot find a way to eliminate the tenant and get income...[and] the tenant can cultivate the land without the assistance of the landlord.<sup>14</sup>

Fei's description was accurate and the Communists realized the volatile nature of class conflict in the rural regions that he referred to. The Communist Party was reluctant to disregard its previous policy of rent and interest reduction in favor of outright confiscation of landlord's property, however. The exhausted state of the people following the defeat of the Japanese indicated apathy towards war and violence. If the Communists were to seize landlords' holdings and foster conflict with the Nationalists, they risked losing the support of the middle forces that desired peace. The Communist Party thus decided to pursue its wartime rural policy of rent and interest reduction. Mao continued to emphasize uniting the

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<sup>14</sup>Fei Xiaotong, *China's Gentry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 119. Fei will be discussed in greater detail later on in the paper. His observations are significant in that he represents a voice of the middle forces.

masses in a vigorous campaign against the landlord class stressing that rent and interest reduction must be pursued with sincerity and support. Interesting to note, however, is that Mao also acknowledged “this movement would surely involve excesses...but as long as the excesses resulted from genuine mass struggle, they could be corrected later.”<sup>15</sup> Mao’s mention of excesses stems from the fact that peasants had already begun to seize land; the class conflict had boiled over into open aggression.

The defeat of the Japanese created a struggle for local power. Many local officials had collaborated with the Japanese and when Japanese withdrew they abandoned their offices. The peasants spontaneously attacked those remaining traitors, many of whom were also landlords. In addition to anti-traitor sentiments, the areas that had been liberated from the Japanese earlier in the year called for “the consolidation and development of the fruits of the wartime rent and interest reduction campaigns.”<sup>16</sup> The Communist Party chose to respond to the peasants needs with a directive in December of 1945. In the old liberated areas the directive that called upon officials to re-examine the rent and interest reduction campaign and increase production. In the newly liberated areas the Party wanted the masses to launch an anti-traitor campaign, the settling of accounts movement and rent reduction. Settling of accounts itemized each grievance against a landlord and sought compensation for the landlord’s exploitation. The campaign in the newly liberated areas was known as the speak bitterness campaign and in certain

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas Lutze, “China’s New Democratic Revolution: Complexities of the Anti-Fuedal Struggle 1945-1949,” (Houston, Texas: Southwest Conference of Asian Studies, October 2000), 9.

areas the settling of accounts resulted in the equal distribution of land and an end to the land problem.

The campaign, however, was not without its faults. Often times it was hard to convince the villagers to initiate the speak bitterness movement. Cadres had to convince the peasants that they should reconsider their fears and trust the effectiveness of the new campaign. When the peasants were finally persuaded to speak, the cadres were confronted with yet another challenge. It was difficult to distinguish between who was and was not a traitor. Traitors were often the landlord's assistants and the elites had commissioned them to serve in the Japanese puppet governments. These assistants became the instrument through which anti-resistance campaigns were organized and resources for the Japanese troops were gathered. Thus it became obvious that the first recipients of the peasant's anger during the Anti-Traitor and speak bitterness campaign would be these assistants. Ultimately, the Party would promote condemning the assistants for their actions and stress that the real blame should be placed on the landlords that forced them to collaborate with the Japanese.

Despite the often violent and excessive actions of the poor peasants the new campaigns were successful in acknowledging the extent of landlord exploitation and the resentment that had grown amongst the peasants. As the misdeeds of the landlords became public knowledge so to did the realization that the peasants' civil and moral rights had been violated. The peasant vigorously pursued the policy of "settling accounts." The landlords faced criticism from multiple peasants; soon their "accounts" owed to peasants exceeded their assets and "land was thus confiscated, not as policy, but

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 10.

as payment for debt.”<sup>17</sup> The concept land to the tiller was being realized through the actions of the masses.

Under this premise, the Communist Party embarked upon a revision of the rural land system. As the peasants demanded land, the Communist Central Committee decided to alter its previous wartime policy of rent and interest reduction, and address the peasants demand for land that had become apparent in rural movements. The party’s goals are clearly outlined in the 1946 publication of Liu Shaoqi’s “Directive on the Land Question” generally known as the May 4<sup>th</sup> Directive. Liu details eighteen points through which the land reform policies were to be carried out.

The directive calls for the Party to “firmly support the demands of the masses as they realize the principle of ‘land to the tiller’ by taking land from the landlords.”<sup>18</sup> Confiscation and redistribution of land would be formally organized and implemented by the Party. Only the land of collaborators was subject to confiscation; other measures were adopted to deal with non-traitor landlords. There were four other methods of land reform that were being simultaneously conducted in 1946 by the Communist Party. Suzanne Pepper outlines them as:

- (1) direct confiscation applied primarily to the property of Japanese and their collaborators, but also to black lands and land acquired through mortgage foreclosures; (2) the sale of landlord holdings to tenants and others; (3) a land contribution movement; and (4) the equal redivision of village land and property.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>18</sup> Liu Shaoqi, “Directive on the Land Question,” *Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi*, (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), 373.

<sup>19</sup> Pepper, 277.

It was under these guidelines that the party instituted its rural land policies in the liberated areas.

In areas where the Communist Party had not secured control, the wartime policy of rent and interest reduction was the only policy that was carried out. The Party's policy in the non-secured areas was deeply entrenched in their belief that the middle peasants should not become targets of the land reform movement. The Directive called for Cadres to give "proper consideration...to the livelihood of middle and small landlords," they were to be treated differently from "big landlords, evil gentry and local tyrants."<sup>20</sup> Communist policy of maintaining the support the middle forces was largely tied into their efforts to always consider the needs of the middle and rich peasants. The Directive stresses the need to bring the middle peasants into the struggle and not alienate their interests. According to the directive, "[s]olving the land problem in the Liberated Areas with a population of over 100 million will help substantially to consolidate these areas and promote the nationwide movement towards democratization."<sup>21</sup>

The land reform policies of the Communists continued to vary even with the pronouncement of the May 4 Directive. Once again the varying condition from region to region affected the policies implementation. In old liberated areas there were no more collaborators and in some cases land had already been redistributed. In addition to the varying conditions regionally, within each region differences arose amongst Party officials concerning how to interpret and implement the seemingly "please all" directive.

It is within this context that what became known as "rightist" deviations appeared.

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<sup>20</sup> Liu Shaoqui. 372.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 377.

Cadres were accustomed to the rent and interest reduction campaign and were slow to understand and adopt the new policy. Others were fearful of Nationalist attacks and the repercussions of government victory. Still others were confronted with personal conflicts; some cadres were from landlord and rich peasant background and had become cadres to preserve their family's interests.

Conversely, there were cadres who energetically engaged in land redistribution and found that there was not enough land to give to the poor peasants. As a result a series of gaps existed in the distribution process. Compounding the growing inequality was the armed and often violent opposition of landlords to the new policies. Reports of cadres being murdered by landlords became more prevalent and subsequently evoked a stronger response amongst the peasants. Some cadres were criticized for siding too strongly with the "peasant line." Deviating from the Party's aim of uniting with the middle peasants and neutralizing the rich peasants, brought with it more violence and potential for threatening the Communist's support in the countryside. The middle peasants, and on a lesser scale, the rich peasants, played a significant role in ensuring the success of land reform. The "leftist" deviations of energetic cadres proved to be a significant concern of the Party and threatened to jeopardize the success of the land reform movement.

Ultimately, the policies set forth in the May 4<sup>th</sup> Directive were aimed at destroying the existing patterns of land tenure and transfer of the ownership of land to the peasants who tilled it. Initial urban responses to this directive were limited. An editorial comment published in the *Sin Wen Pao* claimed that "Nationalist troops have recently captured an important secret Communists document...[t]his document was a directive



concerning the land revolution.”<sup>22</sup> The article went on to outline the policy set forth in the Communist’s directive. The editorial quoted Dr. Phillip Fu, aide to U.S. Ambassador John Leighton Stuart, who claimed that the “matter of unifying the land system in China should be the problem that should first be solved.... The differences between these two parties are due to this fundamental problem.”<sup>23</sup> The article outlined the government’s approach to land reform as that which is advocated in the “Principles of the People’s livelihood of the Three People’s Principles” and also the Kuomintang’s adaptation of the land policy advocating “land to those who till it.”<sup>24</sup> The article calls upon the government to reform the land system and warns that if it is not accomplished “it will greatly affect the ruling power of the Kuomintang.”<sup>25</sup> This initial realization by the Nationalist government that land reform was the key to winning the revolution and sustaining political power came at a time when the Communists were already strengthening their base of support by means of a land revolution. Further reports indicated a variety of measures were taken to promote land reform as the answer to domestic strife. A news extract from the Communist New China News Agency in Peiping reported that in areas where land reform had been accomplished “the Communists Northeastern Administrative Committee approved a 4,500, 000, 000 farm loan...and the principle work of the Commission” was to lead an agricultural production campaign.<sup>26</sup>

In December of 1946 another article appeared in the Communist New China

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<sup>22</sup> *Sin Wen Pao*, “Reform of Land System,” Shanghai, September 4, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> New China News Agency, “Communist Northeast Commission Approves Farm Loan,” Peiping, December 21, 1946 (CPR).

News Agency (Peiping). The article, "Communists Enforce Land Reform Through Purchasing of Landlords' Land," indicated that the Communist's multi-faceted policy was successful. Landlord Tang Shen-kun was quoted in the article as being "very satisfied with issuance of public bonds which helped the poor to purchase land...and made compensations for the landlord."<sup>27</sup> The other forms of land reform, including the sale of landlords' holdings, were merely experimental policies aimed at devising a system of uniform land reform measures. These measures also played a significant role in the Communist Party's defense strategy. Mao declared in October 1946 in his essay "A Three Months' Summary" that:

The experience of these three months had proved that the peasants stood with our Party and our army against the attacks of Chiang Kai-shek's troops wherever the Central Committee's directive of May 4 was carried out firmly and speedily and the land problem was solved radically and thoroughly. The peasants took a wait-and-see attitude wherever the "May 4<sup>th</sup> Directive" was not carried out firmly or the arrangements were made too late, or wherever this work was mechanically divided into stages or land reform was neglected on the excuse of preoccupation with the war. In the coming few months all areas, no matter how busy they are with the war, must resolutely lead the peasant masses to solve the land problem, and on the basis of the land reform, make arrangements for large-scale production work next year.<sup>28</sup>

Mao was accurate in his assessment of the peasants support for the Communists land reform policies. The settling of accounts that occurred shortly after the war was generally followed by efforts to redistribute the land and property and eventually culminated in the Party's formal policy as set forth in the Outline Agrarian Law.

The CCP Central Committee issued a formal directive on October 10, 1947. The Outline Agrarian Law authorized a systematic land reform program aimed at completely

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<sup>27</sup>New China News Agency, no title given, Peiping, December 26, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>28</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "A Three Months' Summary," *Selected Works*, 4: 116.

abolishing the landlord class and equalizing land ownership. The Law provided a definite set of principles to guide the expropriation and redistribution of land. According to Mao, the new law reaffirmed the principles of the May 4<sup>th</sup> Directive, but also “explicitly corrected a certain lack of thoroughness in that directive.”<sup>29</sup> The lack of thoroughness stems from the directives “please all” approach and the excesses that were generated as a result of implementing the directives policies.

The 1947 document is revolutionary in that it calls for the elimination of landlordism rather than just the abolition of landownership. The significant points of the Law include: (1) Abolition of landownership rights of landlords; (2) Cancellation of all debts incurred in rural areas prior to present agrarian reform; (3) Abolition of landownership rights of all ancestral shrines, temples, schools and other corporate entities; (4) Equalized redistribution of all landlords’ land, livestock, agricultural implements, houses and grain to those who till; (5) Allotment of land to landlords, Kuomintang government and army officers and men and their relatives (excluding traitors and war criminals) on an equal basis with the peasants; (6) Grant of land deeds to individuals; (7) Free management of the land allotted to each individual; (8) Establishment of *hsiang* (large group of villages) as the unit for land redistribution; (9) Execution of the reforms by village peasant associations, and committees elected by them and by peasant congresses; (10) Establishment of people’s tribunals composed of peasants’ representatives and government appointees to punish any who violate the Law; (11) Exemption of merchants’ and manufacturers’ properties and enterprises from

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<sup>29</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “The Present Situation and Our Tasks,” *Selected Works*, 4: 164.

redistribution.<sup>30</sup> Unique to the Law was the realization that local conditions varied across China and to accomplish any sort of national overhaul of the land system the Party gave broad powers to locally elected peasant associations and governments.

Frank C. Lee, a non-Communist Chinese journalist, published an article immediately following the promulgation of the Draft Agrarian Law. He noted that a report on the success of the Law was premature, however, “a brief review of the agrarian reforms that have already taken place in the Communist dominated areas indicates that most of the measures in the program had been initiated months before it was announced in its present form.”<sup>31</sup> Lee solidified the Party’s concern over the spontaneous movement to settle accounts that had begun with the end of World War II. Peasants confronted local landlords, many of whom collaborated with the Japanese, and sought revenge. The Communists were able to use the Japanese incursion and formulate a realistic program and strong leadership base to support the desires of the peasants. William Hinton gives an excellent summation of the rural land reform movement and the rural response in his text *Fanshen*.<sup>32</sup>

The urban response to the 1946-1947 land reform policies indicated a general

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<sup>30</sup> The summary of the Outline Agrarian Law was drawn from the Basic Program of the Chinese Agrarian Law, passed by the nationwide Agrarian Conference of the Chinese Communist Party, September 13, 1947. The Law was publicly issued on October 10, 1947.

<sup>31</sup> Frank C. Lee, “Land Redistribution in Communist China” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 21, No.1, (1948), Pacific Affairs University of British Columbia, Database online, Available from JSTOR, 22.

<sup>32</sup> William Hinton’s *Fanshen*, an account of revolution in a rural Chinese village, has become an essential tool for analyzing the effects of civil war in the Chinese countryside. The in-depth analysis of the mobilization of peasants under the Communist line and the subsequent organization of rural class struggle are set in the context of the events that occurred in Long Bow village. Hinton’s portrayal of the rural situation in Communist liberated areas is essential to grasping the magnitude of Communist land reform policies.

approval for the Communists policies. An article published in March of 1946 indicated that “after the Communists explained to them that they are asked to observe the Communist policy of reducing the land interests, etc. It was reported that satisfactory results have been obtained by all who have applied.”<sup>33</sup> These successes were reported before the formal promulgation of the Outline Agrarian Law.

A negative review of the Communist land reform movement was issued in a November 1947 publication of the *Hua Pei Jih Pao*, a KMT newspaper.<sup>34</sup> The article claimed that the first task of the Communists “was massacring and looting...next, the Communists dealt with the so-called wealthy people...[and] it is said that next the Communists would deal with the womenfolks.”<sup>35</sup> This is the only instance where it is suggested the reform efforts by the Communists weren’t taking place at all. Rather, according to the Kuomintang, the Communists were merely slaughtering the people. A pro-Communist radio broadcast made from the Communist Hsin Hua station in December of 1947 indicates that the Communists protected the peasants from hostile activities and those specifically anti-revolutionary in nature. The article noted that the

Shansi-Chahar-Hopei people’s liberated area promulgated an order...accepting the ‘Fundamental Principles of the Chinese Land Law’ as the Land Law of the border area...a joint proclamation, strictly prohibit[ed] all anti-revolutionary acts tending to destroy land reforms and guaranteeing the farmers in the border area to thoroughly rehabilitate themselves.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, “Refugees Returning to Communists Areas,” Peiping, March 23, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>34</sup> The translator of this particular article notes in parentheses that the article is a KMT/MOI organ.

<sup>35</sup> *Hua Pei Jih Pao* (KMT MOI), “Refugees from Shihchiachuang,” Peiping, November 30, 1947 (CPR). Actually printed on December 3, 1947

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Consulate, Peiping, China, *Translations Radio Broadcasts of Communist Hsin Hua Station*, North Shensi, December 1, 1947.

Overall, the initial efforts at land reform were covered in the press because of the radical social revolution that they sparked. Reports of the success of the land reform movement failed to indicate, however, the excesses and errors that grew out of the same movement.

Party directives and the attitudes of cadres and peasants were often in conflict. Communist officials had hoped that by actively answering the rural demands of the peasants that the masses would support the Communists and form the backbone of the Communist's rural army, ultimately to unite and support the proletariat. This support did not come as easily as the CCP officials had hoped. Suzanne Pepper offers four reasons for the reluctance of the peasants to participate and the challenges faced by the cadres in addressing the needs of the people and maintaining their support.

Pepper first notes that the peasants were not willing to leave neither their newly gained land nor their families to participate in the war against the government. Their reluctance to join the Red Army was compounded by the increase in attacks by Kuomintang forces in the liberated areas. The peasants had a genuine fear of losing their land and more significantly their lives if the government were to successfully defeat the Communists. Finally, the cadres lacked understanding of the Party's intentions and thus the ability to resolutely dedicate themselves to the tumultuous rural situation.<sup>37</sup> The cadres saw land reform in a much different light than their superior Party officials. Cadres faced a dual dilemma in that most of them were of landlord or gentry class origin and had never entertained the thought of destroying feudalism, let alone distributing land to the poor peasants. Cadres also "recalled that landlords had helped them during the anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Pepper, 293.

Japanese resistance...the old cadres entertained no genuine class hatred.”<sup>38</sup> The political line of the Party, to evoke mass resistance against the oppression of feudalism with the ultimate goal of a socialist revolution, was misunderstood, and the significance of the peasant movement in defeating the Kuomintang not considered

The Party needed to clarify its intentions and the cadres had to overcome their own doubts and “make the peasants understand that they would be able to keep their land only if they were willing to fight for it.”<sup>39</sup> The Party also had to acknowledge that they suffered from a loss of military security both within the liberated areas where land reform had been carried out and in the areas where land reform had not been accomplished. In the areas where land reform was in progress the Communists created their own enemy within, the landlords. The threat created by the landlord class was one of the motivations behind the radical and often excessive attempts to carry out land reform. The second threat came largely from Kuomintang advances against Communist liberated areas.

The conflict in this case was two fold. Militarily, in the face of KMT aggression, the Communists choose to adopt a policy of withdrawal rather than confronting a superior military force. The retreat policy forced the peasants to submit to government forces. The peasants became disillusioned and “were reluctant to restore the peasant associations, or to form new militia units, or even to attend an open meeting, so little faith did they have in the staying power of the Communists.”<sup>40</sup> The preeminent fear of the peasants concerning the possibility of government revenge contributed to the low morale of the peasants in regards to Communists victory and their role in the struggle. In areas

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>40</sup> Pepper. 303.

were land reform had not been carried out the Communists had no base from which to draw support.<sup>41</sup>

To combat the potentially fatal implications of losing peasant support, the Communists abandoned their policy of retreat and returned to a military strategy that had served their needs in the past, guerilla warfare. Not only did the party advocate guerilla warfare, they also called for the simultaneous carrying out of land reform.

A pro-Communist urban response to land reform, with a particular concentration on the print news media, was almost non-existent. A radical upheaval was taking place in the countryside, compounded by a savage civil war, famine, and near economic collapse and there was scant attention paid to these issues by some of the most prominent news organs.<sup>42</sup> The few articles pertaining to land reform and indirectly the policies of the Communists were appeals to “[refrain] from adding to the burden of the farmers...[and] to confiscate the wealth of those who got rich because of excessive profits.”<sup>43</sup> An editorial published in the *Wen Hui Pao* in Shanghai in July of 1946 suggests that the Communists reform policies may be the right answer, but ultimately the correct policies need to come from a unified government. The author called for a careful examination of “the political and economic systems in the CP-controlled areas to see if they are more sound and more progressive...so as to decide whether they should be

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<sup>41</sup> Suzanne Pepper gives an excellent summation of the problems facing the Communists as a result of the land reform campaign of 1946-1947. Much of the above was drawn from her assessment of the situation in Chapter 7 of her text *Civil War in China*.

<sup>42</sup> By prominent news organs I am referring to the U.S Consulate General translations of newspaper articles in Shanghai, Beijing, Tientsin, Taiwan, and Nanjing. In addition to the print, translations of radio broadcasts from North Shensi Hsin Hua Station are also lacking a response.

<sup>43</sup> *Shih Shih Hsin Pao*, “We appeal on Behalf of the Rural Communities,” Shanghai, June 20, 1946 (CPR).



retained or discontinued.”<sup>44</sup> The media seemed to be advocating a political solution to the Kuomintang and Communist dispute, rather than reporting the actual events. They were politicizing the issue rather than dealing with the every day realities of land reform. The lack of coverage in the press suggests that the Nationalist government may have intentionally censored or suppressed reports pertaining to the most radical years of land reform. During my research it has occurred to me that there may have also been a selective process of translations by the United States so as to represent the Nationalist view rather than the successes of the Communists.<sup>45</sup>

Land reform was actively being pursued across broad areas of China, and in the process it came to the attention of the Chinese Communist Party that certain errors and excesses existed in its implementation. The first reports of a need to alter the existing land reform policies, however, did not come from media reports of Communist tactics; rather, it stemmed from the internal summations of the Party. A shift in the land reform policies of the Communists can be detected unofficially in early 1947 and with more official backing in late 1947.

The National Land Conference that took place in September of 1947 had already recognized a need for change and called for a concerted Party rectification campaign. It acknowledged rightist errors and advocated a policy of rectification that centered on

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<sup>44</sup> *Wen Hui Pao*, “What is Wrong with the Situation?” Shanghai, July 10, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>45</sup> Support for this argument may be drawn from the United States reaction to the Dixie Mission. The Dixie Mission was a group of United States soldiers sent to Yenan in 1944 to see if the Communists had effective measures to defeat the Japanese. Their positive assessment of Communists strengths, including their land reform policies, prompted their prompt withdrawal from China and removal from their official military positions by the United States government. The U.S. pursued a specific agenda in China that was pro-Chiang Kai-shek and anti-communist no matter what the circumstances were (Taken

reforming the work style of cadres and eliminating impurities in class composition that had resulted from the excesses of the first rectification campaign. Regional conferences were held and plans on how to engage in a second classification campaign were laid out. The Party took an approach in which errors within the party were subject to public criticism, beginning a trend in Communist rectification campaigns that would resurge again in party politics most notably in 1957.<sup>46</sup> William Hinton notes that the rectification campaign of 1947 was characterized by

careful preparation [that] made the second classification far more precise and scientific...with their newly acquired knowledge of the principles involved in class analysis, both cadres and peasants were able to probe more deeply than before into every aspect of village affairs.<sup>47</sup>

In December of 1947 Mao made a report before the Conference of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party addressing the current direction that the rural land reform movement needed to take. The speech was broadcast from the Communist Hsin Hua Station in North Shansi. He detailed the Party's policy and reiterated it was "to rely on the poor peasants, to consolidate our union with the middle peasants and to exterminate the feudalistic and semi-feudalistic exploitation system of the landed class

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from a class lecture [Hist. 300, Modern China] given by Dr. Thomas Lutze at Illinois Wesleyan University on March 12, 2001).

<sup>46</sup>Party rectification would again be carried out under the banner of the Hundred Flowers Movement, in an attempt to open society to discussion, thought, and criticism. Mao had hoped to invoke large numbers of people to discuss the weaknesses of the Soviet style in an attempt to generate enthusiasm for socialism and ultimately communism. This was followed by a series of Party purges and rectification movements leading to the Cultural Revolution.

<sup>47</sup>William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966), 435.

and the old-style rich peasants.’<sup>48</sup> On the heels of correcting rightist errors came a shift in policy in January of 1948 that focused on rectification of leftist deviations. This new policy seemed to be a formulation of ideas that had developed at different times in different provinces and coalesced in an official acknowledgement of Party error. Mao would later note that the problems had stemmed from

the partial but fairly numerous encroachments on the interests of the middle peasants, the damage done to some private industrial and commercial enterprises and the overstepping in some places of certain lines of demarcation in the policy for suppressing counterrevolutionaries.<sup>49</sup>

The encroachment on the rights of the middle peasants was seen as a formidable error. Concessions had to be made to the middle to broaden Communist support.

Mao came out with an intra-party directive on January 18, 1947, which set the new guidelines for land reform. He acknowledged that both rightist and leftist errors existed. Each deviation was to be addressed on the basis of the situation in which it thrived. Leftist errors now prevailed as the dominant concern of the party.<sup>50</sup> One report from a Taiyuan paper, with a Nationalist military slant, indicated that the rectification campaign was “bloody struggles against wealthy villagers and landlords and Communist cadre members.”<sup>51</sup> Hinton’s documentary included an account of the Party’s rectification

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<sup>48</sup> U.S. Consulate General, Peiping, China, “The Present Situation and the Tasks before the Chinese Communists Party,” in *Translation Radio Broadcast of Communist Hsin Hua Station*, North Shansi, January 3, 1948.

<sup>49</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “On the September Meeting-Circular of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” *Selected Works*, 5: 271.

<sup>50</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “The Present Situation and Our Tasks,” *Selected Works*, Vol. 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Taiyuan Wan Pao* (Gen. Yen His-shan), “Communist ‘Struggles’ increasingly violent,” Peiping-Tientsin, January 22 1948 (CPR).

campaign in rural areas. There were no reports of brutality in this phase of redistribution and once the rectification policies were begun, things reportedly ran smoothly.<sup>52</sup>

The Central Committee issued another official policy, Directive on Land Reform and Party Rectification Work in the Old and Semi-old Liberated Areas, in February. The Directive modified Article Six of the Agrarian Law concerning the equality of land redistribution and maintained that the needs of the poor would still be the primary concern of the Party in areas where land reform had not been completed. Article 6 had originally stated “all land of landlords in the villages, and all public land...together with all other village land, in accordance with the total population of the village... shall be unifiedly and equally distributed.”<sup>53</sup> The revision of Article 6 included a provision protecting the rights of the rich and middle peasants ensuring “their houses and properties should not be touched,” but their land could be confiscated to meet the needs of the poor.<sup>54</sup> A more systematic guideline for conducting land reform was also set forth. The directive addressed how to handle redistribution in terms of varying types of property and what measures to take in areas where land had already been distributed. The Party maintained the rectification policy and broadened its span from the rural areas to include towns, factories, and various organizations. Upper level Party officials were entrusted with carrying out the campaign.

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<sup>52</sup>William Hinton’s text *Fanshen* gives a detailed description of the rectification process in parts IV and V.

<sup>53</sup>Basic Program on Chinese Agrarian Law Promulgated by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1947 as printed in Appendix A of William Hinton’s text *Fanshen*, 615-18.

<sup>54</sup>Supplementary Measures for Carrying Out the Basic Program on Agrarian Law, Draft Promulgated by Hopei-Honan-Shansi-Shantung Border Region Government on Dec. 28, 1947, as printed in Appendix B of William Hinton’s text *Fanshen*, 619-22.

The question of the middle peasants had been addressed and at least in areas where land reform had been accomplished a concerted effort to unify with the middle peasants had begun. Mao made a speech in April of 1948 that expanded upon the erroneous treatment of the middle peasants and that also acknowledged the success in the revolution would only come after the correction of other serious errors that had taken place. The errors he outlined did not deal directly with the middle peasants; rather, they were “leftist” deviations focused mainly on encroachments made on landlords and rich peasants. In addition to these errors Mao commented on the notion of absolute equalitarianism. Mao noted

[w]e support the peasants’ demand for equal distribution of land in order to help arouse the broad masses of peasants speedily to abolish the system of land ownership by the feudal landlord class, but we do not advocate absolute equalitarianism.... There is a kind of thinking now current in the countryside which undermines industry and commerce and advocates absolute equalitarianism in land distribution. Such thinking is reactionary, backward, and retrogressive in nature.<sup>55</sup>

He justified his position by reiterating that this shift in policy was essential to the success of the Communist revolution. The policy line had not changed. In regards to agrarian reform, Mao stated that the Party will “rely on the poor peasants, unite with the middle peasants, abolish the system of feudal exploitation step by step and in a discriminating way, and develop agricultural production.”<sup>56</sup> The revolution’s ultimate aim was the industrial transformation of society through the development of production, beginning with land reform.

Mao pointedly commented that

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<sup>55</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “Speech at a Conference of Cadres in the Shansi-Suiyuan Liberated Area,” *Selected Works*, 5: 235-6.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 235.

[t]he development of agricultural production is the immediate aim of the land reform. Only by abolishing the feudal system can the conditions for such development be created. In every area, as soon a feudalism is wiped out and the land reform is completed, the Party and the democratic government must put forward the task of restoring and developing agricultural production, transfer all available forces in the countryside to this task, organize cooperation and mutual aide, improve agricultural technique, promote seed selection, and build irrigation works-all to ensure increased production....The abolition of the feudal system and the development of agricultural production will lay the foundation for the development of industrial production and the transformation of an agricultural country into an industrial one.<sup>57</sup>

The character and nature of Communist land reform was not only a social upheaval in the countryside, but one that had significant implications for urban industrialization and the modernization of China. The Communist's land reform policy would not shift again until after their victory against the Kuomintang. It is now important to address the Kuomintang response to calls for land reform and the Communist land reform policies and the general demands of the urban public in terms of an agrarian social revolution. An examination of the Nationalist's policies concerning land reform and their development and change in terms of the Communists policies was clearly portrayed in urban media. Both pro-Kuomintang and anti-Nationalist parties pleaded with the government to address the rural issue.

### **The Kuomintang Response**

The agrarian problem had existed long before the onset of World War II, dating back to the 1920's. Two arguments have generally prevailed in the assessment of the agrarian situation. The first emphasized the exploitative relationship between the landlords and the tenant farmers and in the urban and rural spheres of the economy; the

second argument focused on agricultural technology.<sup>58</sup> The Kuomintang's land policy during World War II was non-existent. The government focused on resisting the Japanese before addressing the needs of the masses. A basic policy of rent reduction had been set forth in the Land Law of 1926. A more in depth policy was formulated in 1930, later to be revised to reduce rent further and eventually advocate the transfer of land to those who tilled it (the revision occurred in 1937). Ironically, "between 1937 and 1942 landlords increased their holdings in Szechuen from 65 to 70 per cent...[and] many corporations were organized in 'Free China' for the sole purpose of speculating land."<sup>59</sup> Little effort was made in the area of rent reduction. News articles printed in 1945 called for the Kuomintang to address the needs of the rural areas immediately. A Shanghai paper urged the

Chinese Government to carry out, with a firm determination, a policy of agrarian reform so as to serve the purpose of post-war demobilization, instead of being discouraged by the hindrances of such reactionary influences [reference to Communist land reform policies].<sup>60</sup>

The issue of demobilization seems to be the main concern of the author of this text, yet the mention of land reform as necessary, and reference to the Communists indicated that agrarian reform in reality and not just in concept was becoming a prominent issue. Many of the articles published in 1945 also indicated that the public hoped for peace and an end to all hostilities. A Kuomintang editorial published in December felt that "a black shadow had been cast by the problem of the Communists" and that it was necessary for

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 237-8.

<sup>58</sup> Ramon H. Myers, *The Chinese Peasant Economy: Agricultural Development in Hopei and Shantung, 1880-1949*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 13-24.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, 26.

them to concede to government demands and policies.<sup>61</sup> This article went on to further discredit Communists policies by condemning the Communists phrase “liberated areas” in favor of the government view that the entire country was liberated by the Nationalist victory over Japan. The government had failed, however, to liberate the peasants by not aggressively pursuing land reform.

The Kuomintang chose to advocate its rural policy following the end of the war and at a time when serious devastation in the countryside had already occurred. The nature of the rural situation was mentioned infrequently, but one article did address the devastation apparent in rural Hunan. It was reported that “in addition to this heavy [government] taxation, there is also famine, the decrease in labor available and the rise in food prices” making the phenomenon of “cheap land but expensive food” a harsh rural reality.<sup>62</sup> The Kuomintang set forth its answer to these pleas for help at the Chinese Agricultural Association conference held in October of 1946.

The 1946 Conference provided the opportunity for the KMT to publicly present its policies. The fundamental measures advanced by the KMT were “that improved techniques of agricultural production would solve China’s problems in the countryside.”<sup>63</sup> The commitments to rent reduction and Sun’s principle of land to the tiller were set forth at an earlier meeting, the Political Consultative Congress in January of 1946 and again in the Government’s 1946 Land Law. The convening of the Political

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<sup>60</sup> *Chien Sien Jie Pao*, “Agrarian Reform as Solution,” Shanghai, September 17, 1945 (CPR). Parenthetical addition my own.

<sup>61</sup> *Min Kuo Jih Pao* “Let’s Assume the standpoint of the Masses in North China to Talk About the Problem of the Communists,” Peiping-Tientsin, December 12, 1945 (CPR).

<sup>62</sup> *Sin Wen Pao*, “The Exhausted Rural Districts in Hunan” by Shih Yen, Shanghai, June 6, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>63</sup> Pepper, 230.



Consultative Conference (PCC) seemed to make the concept of democratic rule more concrete with the decision on the part of KMT, CCP, and minority party delegates to support a cease-fire. The Kuomintang was also urged to pursue a more active land reform policy by the United States. The U.S. issued a report calling for the abolition of tenancy along the lines set forth in the Nationalist Law. An editorial, in response to the China-United States agricultural mission, published in Shanghai in August 1946, noted “a prerequisite for agricultural development in China is the realization of democracy and the promotion of local self-government...[and a revision of] the policy of a 25% reduction in rental rates.”<sup>64</sup> The failures within the government’s land reform policy were realized within the first post-war year of their implementation. The tenancy reforms suggested by the U.S. agricultural specialist would go unheeded by the Nationalist government.

The KMT land policy would vary little in concept as the civil war progressed, but the motivations and implementation of land reform would change significantly in response to the Communist land reform policies. The changes in Kuomintang policies and the motivations behind them are most clearly indicated in the urban press’s response to the need for agrarian reform during the civil war years.

A strong faith in the power of the Nationalist government to help the rural areas was evident in the first half of 1946. A Kuomintang editorial appearing in January optimistically claimed that “we [the people] can infer that our government authorities are resorting to all possible amicable means in which to put an end to the internal strife” by

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<sup>64</sup> *Ho Ping Jin Pao*, “How to Improve Chinese Agriculture,” Shanghai, June 27, 1946 (CPR).

having faith in the tasks set forth by Chiang Kai-shek in his New Year's Day address.<sup>65</sup>

The article outlined the two main tasks as being the "reconversion and relieving of the people from their sufferings...and secondly, to realize the democratic constitutional administration and restore political power to the people as soon as possible.

The occupation of areas of Manchuria by Communist troops further aggravated the tense political situation and the question of land reform. An article in the Kuomintang newspaper, *Ho Ping Jih Pao*, indicated that

after hearing the report made by President Chiang Kai-shek before the PPC session, the CP is fully aware that the Government and people definitely will not recognize the so-called "Democratic Joint Army" and the "popularly elected government"<sup>66</sup>

that had been established in Manchuria. The Communist invasion of Manchuria indicated that the Chinese Communist Party was seeking to broaden its base of support and expand upon a policy for the Northeast that was outlined in Mao Tse-tung's essay "Build Stable Base Areas in the Northeast." Mao outlined a program in Manchuria that supported the basic Party line of arousing the support of the masses to struggle for and solve their problems, with the ultimate goal of laying a foundation to defeat the Kuomintang.<sup>67</sup> It is significant to note that this essay was written in December of 1945, prior to the PPC. The Kuomintang response to the Northeast issue was to accuse the Communists of "all kinds of ugly and stupid propaganda" and of trying to "split up the

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<sup>65</sup> *Chian Sian Jih Pao*, "Minimum Requisites for Restoration of Political Power to the People," Shanghai, January 3, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>66</sup> *Ho Ping Jih Pao*, "Intrigue and Trickery of CP," Shanghai, April 10, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>67</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "Build Stable Base Areas in Northeast," *Selected Works*, 5: 81-5.

Northeast, [and] overthrow the National Government.’<sup>68</sup> The government failed to address the social issues that were being raised and fleshed out by the Communist forces. The Communists have also made evident at this point that negotiations for peace with the Kuomintang were not part of their political agenda. Most of the complaints that were generated from the CP’s occupation of Manchuria came from KMT organs that politicized the issues rather than addressing the social revolution that was taking place in Communist controlled areas. The *Chung Yang Jih Pao* (KMT organ) concluded that the “Communists are bent on the total destruction of China.”<sup>69</sup> These undocumented claims put the government in a position highly susceptible to criticism, and a shift in the urban response to government policies was evident by April of 1946.

The *Ho Ping Jih Pao*, for example, had previously vested its interest in its faith in the government to provide effective relief for the agrarian sectors of China. An April publication of the same paper featured a definite shift in their views of the government. The article condemns the CNRRA, a government relief agency, for promising to supply peasants with an adequate means for survival but instead “their promise remains an uncashable check....[How is it that] in the Communist-controlled Central China Military District [people] can get large amounts of relief funds and supplies?”<sup>70</sup> Questioning the policies of the Kuomintang was becoming a popular theme in the urban press.

Many of the attacks centered around the collection of land taxes in kind. One account of the collection of land tax in the *Wen Hui Pao*, questioned why “the

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<sup>68</sup>*Ho Ping Jih Pao*, “Diagnosing the Mania of the CP,” Shanghai, April 13, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>69</sup>*Chung Yang Jih Pao*, “The New Offensives of the Communists,” Nanjing, May 20, 1946 (CPR).

Government has required the people to help as much as possible in the matter of the levy of farm tax in kind and of the purchase of military provisions” when the peasants are poverty stricken and bound by the surging interests rates.<sup>71</sup> The author would go so far as to say “all the measures taken by the Government have the peasants as the sole object of exploitation.”<sup>72</sup> At this point, when attacks against the Government were increasing, the Kuomintang had begun to pursue a military offensive against Communist Liberated Areas.

In July of 1946 the Kuomintang attacked the Communists in Kiangsu. The Government forces moved “eastward [and] penetrated the *hsien* towns along the Grand Canal which bisected the Communists area.”<sup>73</sup> The Kuomintang was able to take over many local administrations and reestablish government control. Kuomintang victory, however, came with a price. Initial reports of the Government offensive were characterized by claims that the generals and their troops were pursuing their own policies as opposed to the official guidelines set forth by Chiang and his officials. At the same time the Communists decided to abandon their retreat policy and launched a counter offensive that undermined the weak political policies in the KMT recovered areas.<sup>74</sup>

Another formidable task facing the government grew out of the opposition that they faced in the rural areas. The almost non-existent implementation of rural land reform

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<sup>70</sup> *Ho Ping Jih Pao*, “Large Areas of Land Left Uncultivated in Central Hupeh: Agricultural Implement Relief Remains an Uncashable Check; Poor Peasants Have No Right to Enjoy Agricultural Loans,” Shanghai, April 18, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>71</sup> *Wen Hui Pao*, “Bumper Crops are not Necessarily a Blessing to the Peasants,” Shanghai, August, 24, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Pepper, 299.

by the Government had caused deep rifts within rural communities. Pepper summarizes an article in the *Ta Kung Pao*, a urban paper, that concluded “that the Government’s only objective in its dispute with the CCP is to regain the power to govern; all else is left unattended.”<sup>75</sup> This seemed to support the earlier reports of the failings of the Kuomintang to address the needs of the people, and its primary concern with political victory. Similar accounts of the Government advance into the Hopei-Shantung-Honan area were also reported. It is significant to mention at this point that articles did appear in the urban press concerning the successful recovery of Communists occupied territories by KMT forces. Prevailing within these texts, however, was a definite call for the government to implement policies that are obviously drawn from Communists directives.

An article in the Shanghai press reported that the peasants would be able to retain the right to till the land they had received from the Communists; the landowner, however, retained official rights to the property. This compromise was seen as the best solution, yet the conflicts that would naturally arise in implementing land to the tillers were not addressed.<sup>76</sup> An article in the *Wen Hui Pao* concerning the recovered areas indicated the influence of Communist policies on Government tactics even more clearly. The author notes that “if real land reform is to be carried out, it must be clearly stipulated that a land lord may retain only the land which he tills himself....It will be remembered that the equitable distribution of land and the principle of land to those who till it” are the pillars

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 299-300.

<sup>76</sup> Paper’s name and article’s author not given, “Two Problems in Newly-recovered Areas Urgently Requiring Attention: The Land Problem and the ‘resistance currency’ problem”, Shanghai, October, 1 1946 (CPR).

of the Government's reform policies.<sup>77</sup> This diverges from the official policies of the Kuomintang, which advocate technological advancements in the rural areas and some efforts at rent reduction.

The aggression continued to escalate between the Kuomintang and the Communists, yet there were limited references to the crisis in the 1947 editions of the papers. The *Chieh Jih Pao*, a Kuomintang paper, briefly mentioned a "new" government land policy issued at the end of 1947 that called for "a 33 percent reduction in farm rent to counter Communist intrigues of land reformation."<sup>78</sup> The article did not address the nature of the "intrigues". The author may have been referring to the shift in Communist policy that was taking place in regards to incorporating the needs of the middle peasants, some rich peasants, and even landlords in late 1947 and formally in January of 1948. One can assume that the efforts to implement this increase in rent reduction went unheeded, like the previous attempts at Government reform. A more noticeable shift in the Kuomintang's response to Communist policies is evident in the early months of 1948.

Land reform was completely ignored by the press until April of 1948. Articles from the early part of the year were attacks against Mao Tse-tung with specific reference to his address "The Present Situation and Our Task." In response to Mao's essay the *Chieh Jih Pao* (KMT) newspaper characterized the policies of the Communists as a "dictatorship by a group of ruffians for democratic government and aggression through power politics for liberation." Mao's essay addressed the need to turn "back the wheel of counterrevolution- of U.S. imperialism and its lackey, the Chiang Kai-shek bandit

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<sup>77</sup>, *Wen Hui Pao*, "The Land and Monetary Problems Facing the 'Pacification Areas,'" Shanghai, October 25, 1946 (CPR).

gang...[and pursue the] extinction for Chiang Kai-shek's twenty-year counter-revolutionary rule."<sup>79</sup> He also stressed the need to reinforce the policy set forth in the October 1947 manifesto of the People's Liberation Army that included the call to

unite workers, peasants, soldiers, intellectuals and businessmen, all oppressed classes, all people's organizations, democratic parties, minority nationalities, overseas Chinese and other patriots; form a national united front; overthrow the dictatorial Chiang Kai-shek government; and establish a democratic coalition government.<sup>80</sup>

This policy would be carried out through the land revolution, the subsequent increase in production, and the ultimate goal of industrialization. The policies hardly seem to indicate the use of power politics; rather they address the demands of the people for unification and social revolution. Mao was accused by Kuomintang organs of following "on the heels of Stalin in starting and organizing the Communist International in Europe by trying to set up a Communist International front of a like nature in Asia" with the ultimate goal of combining the two.<sup>81</sup> Mao, saw the New Democratic Revolution in China as an inspiration to oppressed nations and also as a tool of "assistance to the oppressed people now struggling in many countries in Europe and the Americas."<sup>82</sup> But a formal call for a united Comintern was never made. In March the attacks against Mao and the Communist "bandits" continued, this time stressing the need to "scent out the

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<sup>78</sup> *Chieh Jih Pao* (KMT CC Clique), "New Land Policy Adopted in North China to Fight the Communists," Peiping, December 1947 (CPR).

<sup>79</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks," *Selected Works* 5:157.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>81</sup> *Hua Pei Jin Pao* (KMT MOI), "A Review of the World Movement in the Light of the confession of Bandit Mao Tse-tung," Shanghai, January 6, 1948 (CPR).

<sup>82</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks," *Selected Works*, 5:158.

mainstay of the bandit forces and have it exterminated.’<sup>83</sup> The main goal of the Government at this point seemed to have been the elimination of the Communists, with little focus on the elimination of social, political, and economic forces impeding the growth of modern China.

The government aptly described their policy as opposite to the approach they took against the Japanese. Instead of “settlement of a military campaign [with the Communist Party and the risk of] international sympathy and support [being] reduced and weakened” if a settlement would have been reached, the Party sought to destroy the Communists without negotiations.<sup>84</sup> The government openly acknowledged that it would have been more willing to settle with the Japanese, then with the Communists and would thus avoid the possible loss of foreign aide to the Nationalist government. Politics once again prevailed over the needs of the people as the prevalent theme of Kuomintang policy. Land reform would reemerge as a prominent issue in the middle of 1948 with the promulgation of a new approach by Kuomintang General Fu Tso-yi.

General Fu Tso-yi theories concerning land reform marked a pivotal shift in the Kuomintang’s implementation of their land reform policy. An editorial by the General in *Ping Ming Jih Pao* outlined the two tasks facing the Kuomintang government. The first was to attack the enemy; the second task was “consolidating our interior situation (or, to use shocking words, preventing a collapse from within).”<sup>85</sup> He called upon the government to address the needs of the people and then engage in an effort to mobilize

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<sup>83</sup> *Peiping Jih Pao* (Kuomintang), “It is to ‘Exterminate’ the Bandits, Not to ‘Prevent’ the Bandits,” Peiping-Tientsin, March 21, 1948 (CPR).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> *Ping Ming Jih Pao* (General Fu Tso-yi), “Striking Blows at the Enemy and Consolidating Our Interior Situation,” Peiping-Tientsin, March 23, 1948 (CPR).



the masses to win the anti-Communist campaign. A realization on the part of some officials that the Communists were at least pursuing an effective strategy to meet the needs of the masses and mobilize in defense of their cause is apparent.

The land problem was heralded as the preeminent issue facing the Government. *Hsin Min Pao* a pro-Kuomintang paper clearly stated, “the Communists Party had achieved much success in handling the [land] problem.”<sup>86</sup> The land problem was essential and if dealt with successfully, the masses could be easily mobilized to support a military cause. General Fu Tso-yi apparently advocated a distinctly Chinese Communist policy of “restricting wealthy farmers, protecting middle-class farmers and assisting poor farmers” yet its implementation took on the distinct character of weak and shoddy leadership by Kuomintang officials.<sup>87</sup>

The program called for two distinct policies, one for areas previously occupied by the Communists and another for those always under Government control. The program called for the recovery and redistribution of lands seized during the Communist struggles. All those who participated in the recovery of land would receive land and the amount they received would be

according to actual requirements of individuals concerned...a reasonable equalization of land properties shall be sponsored [including land not affected by the struggle movement]. Last of all the government shall purchase (surplus) land and reallocate it [and] a cooperative production method shall be adopted in the redistributed farms.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> *Hsin Min Pao* (Pro-Kuomintang) “The Solution of the Land Problem,” Peiping-Tientsin, May 25, 1948 (CPR).

<sup>87</sup> *Peiping Jih Pao* (Kuomintang), “Outlines of Land Reform Program Drawn Up,” Peiping-Tientsin, June 3, 1948 (CPR).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

The policy in areas where the Communist presence was not felt would still pursue rent reduction with the ultimate aim of redistribution. The land program also stipulated that to receive property you had to participate in the recovery movement and help to suppress Communist forces. Anyone “who after the recovery of the locality” is still willing to “collaborate and work for the bandits will have their land properties and other assets confiscated.”<sup>89</sup> The foundation of the General’s concept bears a strong resemblance to Communist policies, both in its aim of land distribution and the means through which they sought to mobilize the poor, middle, and wealthy peasants.

An article that appeared in *Cheng Yien Pao* a Kuomintang backed paper, actually advocated a socialist revolution. It noted that

[a] unique feature of the Chinese Revolution is that, while it want [sic] to develop Capitalism, it aims also at bypassing Capitalism and achieving Socialism. The only effective means of solving this self-contradiction consists of State ownership of industries, limitation of capital, and equitable distribution of land advocated by the late Dr. Sun Yat-sen....Therefore, if the Kuomintang wants to restore its original character which it had in the late Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s days...it must carry out, not just a Capitalist democratic revolution, but rather a Socialist proletarian revolution. If it wants to do so, it must represent the interests of the mass of laborers and farmers first, and its social basis must be the laborers and farmers.<sup>90</sup>

It calls upon the Kuomintang to transcend social and class distinctions and become the party that can incorporate all areas in to a unified revolution. The Communist Party in China had been pursuing this policy during the anti-Japanese war as well as intensifying its efforts to promote a socialist revolution during the years immediately following the

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<sup>89</sup> *Hua Pei Jih Pao* (KMT MOI), “New Land Policy Mapped Out by Hope Govt [sic],” Peiping, June 8, 1948 (CPR).

<sup>90</sup> *Cheng Yien Pao* (Local KMT Organ, Connected with Wu Shao-shu), “Problems of Social Basis and of Cliques and Faction,” Shanghai, *n.d.* (CPR).

defeat of the Japanese. The shift of Communist policy in 1949 to addressing the needs of the cities marked the incorporation of a successful rural movement into the overall plan for revolution. The suggestion for a proletariat revolution on the part of Kuomintang supporters suggested a concession to the victory of the Communist cause, in terms of what it had accomplished while the civil war was going on.

Official Kuomintang policy varied little from its initial tasks as set forth in their 1937 Land Law. A noted shift in the necessity of land reform as a tool for winning the revolution is evident, however, as the war progresses. Communist policies were addressed and adapted to meet the political needs of the Kuomintang in a last ditch attempt to maintain political power. The middle forces played a significant role in the ultimate defeat of the Kuomintang and in the promulgation of public sentiment that suggested the Government was failing. An examination of the role of the middle forces and their responses to rural land reform will provide the final component of the response that the land reform movement generated in the cities.

### **The Middle Forces Respond**

The middle forces in China represent the interests of a variety of political forces that have developed ideologies and risen to a certain level of public stature. The Republican Period of China (1912-1927) saw the rise and fall of a variety of interest groups and marked the beginning of the development of more sound political groups. It is in this era that the

the fires of radical youth protest associated with the New Culture Movement of 1915 and the May Fourth Movement of 1919 conjoined with

the inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution to give rise in 1921 to the birth of the Chinese Communists Party.<sup>91</sup>

In addition to the Communist Party, the China Youth Party, and the “Third Party” that grew out of the Kuomintang in 1927 were significant political players. Other organizations of prominence would evolve and such parties as the: All-China General Trade Union, the Chinese Anti-Imperialist/Anti-Fascist League, and the Shanghai Labor Group Coalition appeared in the mid- 1930’s. Under the banner of resistance to Japan these groups were able to demand, “armed resistance to Japan based on mobilization of the Chinese people [and] the formation of an All-China Committee for National Defense”<sup>92</sup> It is evident that the ideas set forth in this policy are indicative of early attempts of the Communist Party to align with the middle forces.

Japanese aggression and failed efforts to pacify the divisions between the Communists and the Nationalists only intensified the concerns of the middle forces, who had hoped to utilize the peaceful coexistence of both groups as a means to express their political ideologies. The need for an organized body through which to expound on their ideas led several minority parties to organize the United National Construction League (UNCL) in 1939.<sup>93</sup> From the outset the UNCL had the backing of the Communist Party because of its aims in resisting Japan and forming a democratic coalition style government. Attempts by the UNCL to mediate the Kuomintang- Communist disputes

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<sup>91</sup>Thomas Lutze, “New Democracy: Chinese Communist Relations with the Urban Middle Forces, 1931-1952” (Ph. D diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996), 220.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 251 (The ideas set forth in the above quotation were drawn from an assessment of the Six Point Program proposed by the CCP on April 20, 1934. The directive was originally titled the “Chinese People’s Basic Programme for Fighting Japan”)

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 267.

only met with failure, and prompted the formation of the Federation of Chinese Democratic Parties in March of 1941.

The Federation outlined ten points all of which coalesced around “resistance [of Japan] to the end...end to one-party control over the State...establish real unity...[and] to protect the legitimate expression of public opinion.”<sup>94</sup> The policies advocated by the Federation spread in both influence and range of support. In September of 1944 to meet the growing demands of China’s democratic elements the Federation made membership open to individuals and changed its name to the Chinese Democratic League. The CCP and League shared many of the same aims and their ideas converged in the policies set forth in Mao’s “On Coalition Government.”<sup>95</sup>

The Democratic League would be the most important group that the Chinese Communist Party sought as an ally. Their independent character and inclusion of students, businessmen, and intelligencia made them an invaluable source when the Communists pursued the ultimate goal of a socialist revolution of the proletariat in the cities. Other groups and individuals did exist, however, and were also essential to the Communist’s plan for revolution. The other political parties represented a variety of interest groups, laborers, scientists, and intellectuals. These organizations “served to spread the influence of the DL....They also offered their leaders a platform from which they might speak and act independently of the League.”<sup>96</sup> These groups would take on a more significant role when the Democratic League was disbanded by the Kuomintang. In

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<sup>94</sup> Van Slyke, 174-5.

<sup>95</sup>The above assessment was drawn largely from Thomas Lutze’s research into the CCP and their relationship with League and the influence of Mao’s essay “On Coalition Government.” For an in depth and thorough analysis of the relationship an examination of Chapter 5 (in particular pages 278-340) in Lutze’s dissertation is recommended.

addition to these groups, the opinions of non-Communist and non-Nationalist individuals also had an impact on the role of the middle forces. One such individual was anthropologist Fei Xiaotong.

Fei was a western trained scholar who was best known for his illuminating book on life in a Chinese village, his reports on the development of agriculture and industry in southwest China, and a several articles addressing the gentry in Chinese society. A series of articles written by Fei in 1947 and 1948 to urban newspapers suggested his concern over the condition of China's agrarian system and the methods through which he felt the land issue could be resolved.

Fei's essay, *Rural Livelihood: Agriculture and Handicraft*, addressed the importance of a strong rural economy in terms of the economy and in fostering a productive relationship between the cities and the countryside. Fei noted that "[w]hen one comes to examine the economic decline of the country, what strikes one most forcefully is the system by which tenant farming is carried on."<sup>97</sup> He aptly assed the tenant landlord relationship as one that exploited the tenant farmer and forced peasants to "find other sources of income or go into debt."<sup>98</sup> The entire system of hired labor and tenant farming reflected a lack of organization and bad cultivation techniques.

To solve the agrarian crisis, Fei advocated redistribution of land. Although the farmers' holdings would only increase minutely, Fei felt that "the farmers...could live fairly well on what they themselves produced," without having to pay rent.<sup>99</sup> He noted

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<sup>96</sup>Van Slyke, 191.

<sup>97</sup>Fei. 110.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 113.

that land redistribution did not address the larger issue of overpopulation in the rural areas, however, it did provide for a minimum standard of well-being and dependence. Fei's observations stemmed not only from the emphasis on land reform during the civil war, but also from his own investigation into the rural economy of Yunnan. Prior to his statements concerning land reform in 1946, Fei had noted that the

natural environment is so poor that agriculture cannot provide them with a livelihood...the distribution of wealth is not even. There are rich people who possess a larger share of the income from the land. Therefore, the actual deficiency from many of the households [is substantial].<sup>100</sup>

Fei's report acknowledged that an overhaul of the agrarian system was necessary not only for the social welfare of the rural people, but also for the growth of a modern economy. Fei's contribution as a voice of the middle forces was significant and helped to lend credence to the Communist policies.

The response of the middle forces to the land reform policies of the Communists made an impact on the success of the revolution both in the countryside, but more significantly in the cities. An examination of the urban responses to land reform by the minority parties will complete the analysis of the urban response in general, provide an analysis of the democratic elements positions and ideologies, and make evident how each group sought to politicize their own agenda. Ultimately, the policies advocated by most middle groups aligned well with the advancements made by the Communists, thus securing the Communist defeat of the Kuomintang. It is important to realize, however, that the political ambitions of the middle forces were never fully put aside and unity politically was not advocated. The most important issue became the common elements

drawn from each party's policies and how they accentuated what the Communists were actually accomplishing.

The earliest documentation of a middle force response to the civil war called for a settlement to the Kuomintang and Communist disputes and it came in 1945 from the Democratic League. It was evident in the early stages of the civil war that the League advocated that the "[p]olitical administration in China...must be democratized in order to live up to the unanimous anticipations of the people."<sup>101</sup> There was no mention of land reform in 1945 on the part of most of the middle forces. Yet the concept of a united government that addressed the varying needs of the people, had been advocated by the Communists as well. Mao's "On Coalition Government" established the basis for unifying with minority parties by acknowledging that

an urgent need exists beyond all doubt for representatives of all political parties and groups of people without party affiliation to unite and establish a provisional democratic coalition government so as to carry out democratic reforms...thereby defeating the Japanese aggressors and liberating the Chinese people from their clutches.<sup>102</sup>

Thus the early focus on political unity rather than sustentative social issues was not an attempt to bypass the needs of the people, as indicated by some of the Kuomintang's responses, but rather an attempt to form a political system to address the needs of the people without war. Many parties, like the Democratic League, focused on the political issues of the time and predominantly the need to settle the Kuomintang/Communist

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<sup>100</sup>Fei Xiaotong and Chih-I Chang, *Earthbound China: A Study of Rural Economy in Yunnan*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 158.

<sup>101</sup>Chungking (by mail) "Chairman of China Democratic League Writes Letter to Chiang and Mao," Shanghai, October 3, 1945 (CPR).

<sup>102</sup>Mao Tse-tung, "On Coalition Government," *Selected Works*, 4:244.



disputes. Politically the motivation behind these responses is also an attempt by the middle forces to gain strength and support in their own right. A report from the vernacular press noted that the Communist Party's support of the Three People's Principles was "tactic recognition of the fact that the Kuomintang is a central guiding influence...and that they themselves will be willing to participate...as a minor political party."<sup>103</sup> This response, as well, indicated that the primary concern of the middle forces was a political resolution yet this author seems to advocate the Kuomintang as the superior political party.

Additional calls for the Communist Party to withdraw from conflict, in favor of Nationalist rule, came from a citizen organization, and were reported in the Republican Daily News. The organization claimed

those who attempt to break the national unification and to hinder the task of reconstruction will no doubt be abandoned and disliked by the people. At the moment when the Central Government is starting the work of rehabilitation...we earnestly hope that you will give up your prejudices and will stop attacking actions and cooperate with the Central Government.<sup>104</sup>

The need to end to all hostilities permeated the press at this time as well, indicating the exhausted state of affairs following the war of anti-Japanese aggression. A shift in the nature of the articles by the middle forces, however, was evident in late May of 1946. Addressing the politics of the parties was complimented by an effort to tackle the more real and concrete needs of the people.

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<sup>103</sup>“Vernacular Press Comments on Joint Communique of Results of Kuomintang-Communist Negotiations,” Shanghai, October 12, 1945 (CPR).

<sup>104</sup>*Min Pao Jih Pao* (Tientsin Republican Daily News), “Citizen Association Wire Mao Tse-Tung to Stop Civil War,” Peiping- Tientsin, November 29, 1945 (CPR).

An article that appeared in the Emancipation Journal of May 25, 1946 made a direct and outright attack on the government's land policies. It noted that

a comparison of the robbery of land by corrupt Kuomintang officials and the gratis distribution of land taken over by the Northeast democratic government to the poor farmers and hired workers on the farms will clearly show who is actually working for the benefit and welfare of the people.<sup>105</sup>

The rural land reform policies of the CCP and the democratic governments in the Northeast had definitely made an impression on the middle forces and highlighted the deficiencies in the Government's own policies. Calls to settle the Kuomintang and Communist dispute continued in 1946 yet this time they were characterized by distaste for the Nationalist government. An independent paper, *Hsin Min Wan Pao*, called for the opposing parties "to settle their differences, they should take into consideration the hopes and desires of the people...the party in power has paid little attention to the people's hopes and desires."<sup>106</sup> The need to focus on social issues was again made evident by the minority factions. A profound call to address the needs of the people was set forth in August of 1946 by the China Land Society.

The China Land Society's Chairman of the Board of Directors, Hsiao Cheng, set forth a guide for land reform that was published in the *Ta Kung Pao* (Shanghai). The policy called for a democratic government, but to achieve true unity it was necessary to engage in all out land reform. Article 3 called for adherence to Sun's principles of those who till the land shall own it and outlined seven steps for insuring its implementation.

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<sup>105</sup>The Emancipation Journal, "Who is Exploiting the People?" Peiping-Tientsin, May 25, 1946 (CPR).

The plan was set forth as follows: (1) all land (bought, sold, or received as a gift) must be tilled by the owner; (2) land not tilled by the owner is to be requisitioned by the government; (3) once requisitioned that land should be divided into farms and given to peasants to till; (4) the land must be paid for in increments over a 15-20 year period; (5) land loan certificates can be claimed for goods or their equivalent in money; (6) land loan certificates may be bought and sold, as well as exchanged for stock in government run companies; (7) all redistributed land should be managed under co-operative farms.<sup>107</sup>

The plan set forth a basic outline to carry out land reform in a manner that would ease the transition from a feudal agrarian economy. The plan also outlined the economic and political implications that a thorough land reform policy would bring about noting, “actual participation in politics by farmers should be achieved at the same time as land reform. And land reform will become the basis for the achievement of permanent national unification and true democracy in this country.”<sup>108</sup> The realization that land reform was necessary and a vital element to the revolution had become more apparent as the land reform campaign of the Communists intensified. Significant to note is that the China Land Society seems to have been a pro-Kuomintang middle force. Little information pertaining to the nature and ideologies of the Society was available, but a note at the end of the article mentioned that Hsiao Cheng was a close friend of Chen Kuo-fu, Vice-Minister of Economic Affairs. Regardless of their political orientation the Society made a profound appeal on behalf of the rural areas.

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<sup>106</sup> *Hsin Min Wan Pao* (Independent), “What are the Hopes and Desires of the People?” Nanjing, June 3, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>107</sup> *Ta Kung Pao*, “Land reform Urged: A suggestion to the Government from the China Land Society,” Shanghai, August 30, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

In the course of assessing the middle forces role in influencing the opinion of the people, an interesting article appeared in the *Sin Wen Pao*, advocating the “third parties” to enlarge. The article called upon the middle forces to enlarge their scope as well as their efforts to include “the real Third Parties [which] are the people, the people throughout the country.”<sup>109</sup> Advocating including the people in party affairs followed uniformly with the principles of democratic government. However, the article also called upon the Communist Party to realize “the true wishes of these Third Parties—the people throughout the country...[who] can no longer tolerate such a farce as the Communist-sponsored ‘People’s Assembly.’”<sup>110</sup> This attack against the Communist party mirrored an earlier attack made against the Kuomintang by the same news organ.<sup>111</sup> It is unclear as to which party this paper is affiliated with, the only consistent ideology it pursued was maintaining and improving the rights of the people. Another organization that promoted the civil rights of the masses was the China Peasant Party.

The China Peasant Party issued its manifesto in May of 1947. The six-point manifesto began with the primary goal of the Party “to win for the peasants status of master of the country, and to labor for political reforms as well as agricultural and rural improvements.”<sup>112</sup> Once again solving political disputes is the main focus, yet the obvious inclusion of land reform by a Peasant Party suggested that it saw a solution to the rural problem as necessary to attain a friendly political environment. The Party does make mention of its solution to the rural issue, with a pointedly anti-Communist flavor:

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<sup>109</sup>*Sin Wen Pao*, “Enlarge the Third Parties,” Shanghai, October 19, 1946 (CPR).

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup>*Sin Wen Pao* was also used as a source to document discontent with the Kuomintang’s politics and rural land policies. Refer to footnote 52 above.

It is our opinion that the way to improve rural economy is to lay stress on political reforms and on the enforcement of law and order so that the wealth and production of the farmers will not be illegally exploited no be concentrated in cities. At the same time, this does not mean to rob the rich farmers or petty landowners for the benefits of the poor peasants....Our first effort will be to enable the peasants...[and] through their own industry and economy, they may gradually improve their living conditions.<sup>113</sup>

It can be concluded that the China Peasant Party represented the interests of wealthy peasants and small landlords, rather than the middle and poor peasants. Its attack on distributing land to the poor is an open criticism of CCP practices, yet they offer no viable solution to the problems that faced the poor who comprised most of the peasant class.

How peasant industry and economy were developed and incorporated the needs of the poor is hastily brushed over in favor of advocating a policy that promoted production and industry. One must ask, how was the growth of production and industry possible without establishing a base for its growth? The Communists proposed and carried out a solution to the rural issue that allowed for industry and production to eventually flourish; addressing the needs of the poor peasants first and then unifying with the middle peasants and ultimately the rich peasants ensured that the Communist plan for production would succeed.

A significant gap in available material regarding the response generated by the middle forces in the cities is evident following the June 1947 publication of the above-mentioned article. The next media report concerning the views of the third parties came

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<sup>112</sup> *Ta Kung Pao* (Independent, Political Science Group), "China Peasant Party Issues Inauguration Manifesto," Shanghai, May 17, 1947 (CPR).

in January 1949. There was no suggestion in the newspapers that I analyzed as to why the middle forces' opinions were being omitted, but one can logically assume that the Kuomintang's restriction on the media in the last years of the civil war was responsible. On October 27, 1947 "the decision was taken to outlaw the [Democratic] League as accessory to the 'Communist bandits'."<sup>114</sup> This in effect silenced the minority parties who had often used the League as a base from which to voice their ideologies and political agendas.

The resurgence of news coverage of the middle forces came in 1949, albeit on a very limited scale. Two articles that appeared in the *Yi Shi Pao* ( a Catholic news organ) in January of 1949 were the only evidence that minority parties existed until the end of the civil war.<sup>115</sup> On January 19, 1949 an editorial was published in a Shanghai paper that expounded upon the ideas set forth by Chinese Catholics.<sup>116</sup> The poor are the focus of the article and

are truly the 'innocent people' who form the majority of the population. Yet these poor people are continuously being subjected to exploitation, oppression, threats, trickery and sacrifice. They are used as the tools for the struggle for poor, and at the same time are the objects of the fight for control.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Van Slyke, 199.

<sup>115</sup>This discrepancy in information may be attributed to the resources that were available for me to investigate.

<sup>116</sup>The role of the Catholic Church was presumably small in the over all politics of the civil war. However, a Catholic influence in atleast some rural villages is evident. William Hinton's documentary *Fanshen* includes a thorough analysis of the significant role the Church played in the village of Long Bow.

<sup>117</sup>*Yi Shih Pao* (Chinese Catholic Organ), "Let's See Who Are Really for the People," Shanghai, January 19, 1949 (CPR).

The article continued by accentuating the horrible conditions that the poor are subjected to and the corruption and inefficiencies that characterized the Government. The Communist's policies in the liberated areas are also mentioned (though the writer acknowledges that "our personal experience is lacking") and condemned as nothing more than "human-sea tactics...[and] a 'final reckoning' policy [that makes] many unreasonable changes in the social system, in the mode of living and in moral conceptions."<sup>118</sup> The concerns of the Church were that the civil war has made it difficult for it to proselytize. The Church's undocumented and unfounded criticisms of the Communists give the Church little credibility as being an unbiased source through which the people can be liberated.

A follow up article outlined eight demands of the people as interpreted by the Catholic Church and addressed land reform as being one of the principle means through which harmony could be realized. The Church advocated that basic civil liberties were a necessary component to peace. However, they feel that the "existing social order, including the family system, the present moral and ethical codes, must not be changed"<sup>119</sup> It is unclear as to how the tumultuous situation in China could be pacified by the Church without making a significant social upheaval. The mere suggestion in article seven of the Church's policies that the "principle of 'land to the tiller' must be realized" implicated a radical change in the existing social order.<sup>120</sup> Despite the anti-Communist rhetoric of the Catholic Church, the realization that land reform was necessary and that the principle of land to the tillers should be realized indicated that the land reform program of the

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> *Yi Shih Pao* (Chinese Catholic Organ), "Whether in War or Peace, the People's Demands Must be Considered," Shanghai, January 20, 1949 (CPR).

Communist Party had made an impression. The demands set forth in the article were the last indication by a middle force in the newspapers that I examined that felt land reform was necessary.

It is evident, even this late in the revolution that the struggle for prevailing political ideologies was still being waged. Ultimately, the middle forces saw as the only means to end the war indirectly, if not emphatically, the land reform policies set forth by the Communists. Mao's call for a coalition government inspired the third parties to support the party that would hopefully allow them to attain political independence.

The middle forces, regardless of their political aims were necessary components of the revolution to assure Communist victory. Thomas Lutze appropriately concludes that

politically these forces were an important part of the destabilization of the Nationalist government from within its own urban strongholds....Economically, they were to play a critical role immediately in the maintenance of production to support the revolution.<sup>121</sup>

It is evident by the responses the middle forces generated in the urban press that they were a prominent factor in destabilizing the Kuomintang control of the cities. Their open criticisms of Kuomintang policies and their realization that the policies being pursued by the Communists were turning over the existing social order, albeit not exactly as they would have done it, marked a turning point in the civil war and ensured that the revolutionary spirit magnified by the Chinese Communist Party was leading China in a positive direction.

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid.



## Conclusion

In March of 1949 Mao Tse-tung formally announced a shift in Communist policy that ended the focus on the rural areas. The statement was issued in his report to the Second Plenary Session at the Seventh Central Committee meeting. Mao concluded that “[t]he period of ‘from the city to the village’ and of the city leading the village has now begun.... The center of gravity of the Party’s work had shifted from the village to the city.”<sup>122</sup> Having accomplished the goal of mobilizing the peasants, the Communist Party saw its opportunity to mobilize the workers and lead the revolution of the proletariat. The Party was faced with a difficult task, one that required the Party itself to urbanize and adapt what it had accomplished in the countryside to what needed to be done in the cities. Although the countryside accounted for nearly eighty percent of the population, the cities contained the vital elements for production to flourish and for a socialist revolution to unfold. This task was made somewhat easier by what the Party had accomplished in the countryside through the land reform movement.

Land reform had abolished the feudal system of agriculture and made possible the overthrow of the rural elite. By destroying the political and economic power of the local landlord class, the Communist Party laid the foundation for a new order to emerge. Communist policies and ideologies were thus able to permeate the masses and provided the base from which the Communist Party could draw upon for political and military support. While struggling with rural issues the Party always maintained that ultimately

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<sup>121</sup>Lutze, Thomas D, “The Battle for the Middle Forces: United States Relations with the Chinese Communist Party 1947-1948,” 47.

<sup>122</sup> Mao Tse-tung, “Report to the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee.” *Selected Works*, 5:363.

the proletariat would lead the revolution and the peasant masses would provide the support needed to accomplish the revolution. It was in light of these goals that the urban response to the rural land reform movement was significant.

It is evident that all political factions that existed during the civil war realized the significance of land reform and what it meant both in terms of a social revolution and political power. The theme that prevailed in the urban responses to land reform focused more on the political implications of land reform and more specifically how each party could utilize the land reform movement to gain a popular base of support.

The Kuomintang addressed the rural social crisis with the popular slogan 'land to the tiller', but in actuality scant attention was focused on the masses. The primary goal of the Government was the elimination of the Communists. It was not until the policies of the Communist Party in the rural areas began to take hold and uproot the old ruling order that the Kuomintang realized that mobilizing the masses was necessary if they were to going to maintain political control. By the time the Government made an effort to address rural issues, they had already become an ineffective ruling body for the masses.

One can note the sharp changes in the implementation of the Kuomintang land reform policies that bear a strong resemblance to the practices already being implemented in the Communist liberated areas. The urban response, both pro-Kuomintang and anti-Kuomintang, indicated that the social revolution that had begun under the leadership of the Communists was necessary for both the growth of modern China and for the control of the government. Urban journalists called upon the Kuomintang to address the needs of the masses to alleviate the economic and social burdens they were facing and pro-Kuomintang papers also saw the need for the Government to maintain political control of

the country. As the political crisis facing the Kuomintang deepened, a shift in the urban response, even on the part of Kuomintang organs is noticeable, as the cries for democracy and political unity overshadow the call for the Government to maintain control.

The middle forces had little influence as far as implementing policy and practice are concerned yet their opinions and support were necessary for either the Kuomintang or the Chinese Communist Party to win the war. From the outset, the middle forces had been recognized as a key component of the Communist victory over the Kuomintang. The Communist Party had consistently advocated a coalition government and thus secured the cooperation of most minority parties and most significantly the Democratic League. The Kuomintang, however, made little effort to cooperate with the middle forces and was responsible for their suppression during the later half of the civil war. It is evident in the middle forces responses to the land reform movement that they were fed up with the Kuomintang and its failed attempts at social, political, and economic reform. The middle forces saw a chance to establish themselves as strong, independent political organizations by following on the heels of the Communist Party's practice of efficient politics and mobilization of popular support.

Although Communist ideologies were not always consistent with those advocated by the middle forces, the accomplishments made by the Communist Party were far greater than those by the Kuomintang, thus solidifying the middle forces hope for a coalition government. The middle forces also carried a significant amount of influence in terms of popular opinion, in particular those of the intelligencia, businessmen, students, and professionals, who comprised most of their organizations. Thus maintaining their support was critical for Communist victory.

The urban response to the rural land reform movement indicated that the Chinese Communist Party was effective in influencing the opinions of Kuomintang officials, anti-Government organs, and the middle forces. Although the ideologies and practices of the Communists were not always consistent with the goals of urban forces, the accomplishments they made had a significant impact on their influence in the cities. The urban newspapers saw land reform as an opportunity to politicize their own agenda, maintain their own identities and strive for internal peace. The actualization of land reform and the implementation of rural land policies by the Chinese Communist Party sparked a vigorous response across all fronts and forced a convergence of ideas as to whether once land reform was accomplished, which party would be able to maintain control. It is in that regard that one can conclude why the Communist Party was able to maintain control. They organized, implemented and successfully carried out a rural land reform movement that abolished the old order and laid the base from which their political ideologies could grow, thus maintaining their independence and broadening their base of support.

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