

EVALUATING CHINA'S RURAL POLICIES: 1949-1989

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Although China's revolution was a rural one, the policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 1949 have not been as favorable to China's farmers as one might have expected from a band of peasant revolutionaries. Agricultural policy suffers from a serious urban bias, so that the principle underlying agricultural policy has been urban industrialization at the expense of the countryside.

The countryside's problems have been compounded by recurrent fluctuations in rural policies between two divergent approaches to its development. Instead of giving a full evaluation of rural development policies under the CCP, the following analysis addresses some critical issues of rural development — economic growth, peasant political participation, equality and the modernization of the countryside — in order to provide a preliminary appraisal of the successes and failures of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as we note its fortieth anniversary.

OVERALL STRATEGIES AND POLICY DEBATES

Since 1949, Chinese agricultural development has fluctuated between two polar strategies or approaches to rural development. One primarily tried to impose an ideological vision upon the countryside; the other favored leaving the peasants to fend for themselves.

Based on the Maoist model of development, or what I call "agrarian radicalism," the first strategy sought to move rural society to higher stages of socialism and eventually communism, through the strengthening of collective and state institutions.¹ Mao Zedong's slogan of "one, big; two, public" reflects this viewpoint rather succinctly. Moral incentives and rewards replaced material incentives as the mechanism for mobilizing peasant labor. Only by suppressing private property, private markets, and nonagricultural enterprises — except for rural industry — could inequalities be avoided and the peasants' "petty bourgeois" value system be destroyed. Much of this labor was to be organized in a form of guerrilla-warfare economy whereby fields were terraced, irrigation canals dug and mountains moved. Regional and local self-reliance in grain and industrial production was demanded. Imbued with a high degree

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1. A more complete discussion of this strategy can be found in David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968-1981* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

of utopianism, this “great leap” mentality believed that shifts to higher stages of socialism, the destruction of the private sector and economic development through labor mobilization would trigger explosive changes in productive relations that could promote rapid economic growth. Radical policies were, more or less, in effect in 1955–1956, 1957–1959, and 1964–1978.

An alternative strategy, introduced at the outset of the reform period in late 1979, reflected policies launched immediately after land reform in 1956, and between 1960 and 1962 when China tried to cope with and recover from the great famine. This more benign development strategy focused primarily on letting the rural areas develop with little state interference and investment. It accepted the household, not the collective, as the basic and most rational unit of agricultural production by advocating private farming with collective ownership of land. The driving forces behind economic development were material incentives, free markets and inequality, which served as a short-term incentive for people to work hard. Commercialization of agriculture needed regional and household specialization, comparative advantage and the interregional transfer of goods. Some advocates of this strategy believed that the market had almost mystical powers, that freeing the individual spirit could boost production almost as much as Maoist great leaps.² Reform policies dominated during 1954, 1956, 1960–1963, and 1978–1989.

Between these two polarities exists a third line of rural development that borrows heavily from both strategies but which supports the continuing role of the plan and the bureaucratic hierarchy as the critical allocator of resources and the guarantor of planned development. For advocates of this view, the private sector supplements the collective economy.³ This study will examine the impact of the two most extreme policies — the reformist and Maoist strategies.

A CONTINUING URBAN BIAS

The overall dilemma for the CCP was how to bring about economic modernization and improved living standards in a society that was 80 percent rural and in which agriculture was the most important part of the economy.⁴ Chinese society in 1949 was not the modern, urban, industrialized society Marx predicted as the homeland of his socialist revolution. Therefore members of the CCP were primed ideologically to support rapid industrialization. Since the inception of China's First Five-Year Plan, the state has allocated limited funds for rural development, channeling the bulk of investment into industrial

2. Advocates of reforms, however, still demonstrated their urban bias and their recognition of the need to feed the urban sectors. They thus continued to press the peasants to sell grain to the state at state-determined prices.

3. For a discussion of the “three lines,” see Dorothy J. Bolinger, *Chinese Business Under Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

4. Three years after the CCP had taken control of the mainland, agriculture's share of the GNP was 56.9 percent, with 27.8 percent for light industry and 15.3 percent for heavy industry. See *Zhongguo tongji nianjian, 1984* (Chinese Statistical Yearbook) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1984), 18.

growth.⁵ From 1957 to 1987, by suppressing the prices of agricultural produce and inflating the prices of industrial products, the state expropriated over 600 billion Chinese yuan from the peasants for urban development and industrialization.⁶ Unable to borrow much from the West or the Soviet Union, China found the capital for industrialization in the countryside.

Marxist ideology views peasants as a regressive class. Peasants were to be remolded in order to restrengthen China in a new communist form, but regular shifts between different rural development strategies did not help them. Under the radical strategy, peasants built an agricultural infrastructure with an effective irrigation system. Moreover, Deng Xiaoping's early reforms in 1978-1981 dramatically increased the state price for agricultural produce. However, all state leaders have responded to the demands of the urban sector which poses the real threat to their rule. Regardless of ideological bent, China's rulers have refused to make long-term commitments to the rural sector, calling instead for a self-reliant countryside that depends on self-exploitation, not the national budget.

An evaluation of the two strategies requires exploration of three specific issues — economic growth, local democracy and participation, and the promotion of equality — and their implications for modernization of the countryside and the improvement of living standards.

AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

How do you achieve growth? How do you motivate peasants to produce? While many books written in the 1970s applauded the radical strategy's success at motivating peasants, the moral incentives of the radical era had limited utility. During the Great Leap Forward (1957-1959), which was the earliest effort to introduce radical policies, peasants, believing that the millennium might be near, worked to exhaustion.⁷ During the brief peak of the Maoist cult in 1968-1969, when central and local leaders created a milieu of activism which was rewarded materially and politically, peasants were motivated to work hard for the love of socialism and Chairman Mao.⁸ The vision of Mao's peasants working for socialism was, however, somewhat fraudulent. Many localities that reported using moral incentives in the 1970s already secretly had reintroduced material rewards. What about the vaunted cooperative spirit of the Chinese peasant heralded during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)? Interviews conducted in 1981 by the author suggest that neighboring villages were somewhat willing to demonstrate a socialist spirit of cooperation, especially when the harvest was late, but there was no real

5. See Carl Riskin, *China's Political Economy: The Quest for Development since 1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 53-60, especially 56.

6. Development Institute, "Peasants, Markets and Innovation of the Institution," *Jingji yanjiu (Economic Research)* 1 (January 1987): 1-16.

7. Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 48.

8. Jonathan Unger, "Collective Incentives in the Chinese Countryside: Lessons from Chen Village," *World Development* 6 (1978): 583-601.

voluntary, long-term assistance between them. The rural bureaucracy had to organize this assistance. Moreover, much of the spontaneous mass mobilization that was the hallmark of radical policy came about through the threat of coercion, rather than direct coercion. In some localities, officials "killed chickens so the monkeys could see" what would happen if they did not volunteer. Local officials beat landlords, accusing them of fomenting unrest by resisting radical policies. Under such conditions, who dared resist? Rural construction projects were organized under a quota system, with each unit responsible for digging up a certain amount of earth; people could not go home before fulfilling the target. The disincentives of the Communist system, derived from a work point system that failed to discriminate significantly between hard workers and free riders, were compounded by a pricing system which forced collectives to sell grain to the state at artificially deflated prices. Poor prices and a lack of comparative advantage made collectives produce at a collective subsistence level.

The passing of the Maoist spirit of selflessness has allowed many cadres to become more predatory in their behavior. Thus peasant mass activity focuses on economic grievances, such as the high price of agricultural inputs and cadre corruption.

Peasants responded swiftly and rationally to the reformists' material incentives. In the first decade of the PRC, grain output rose steadily. But bad weather and state expropriations, based on misplaced optimism, decimated local storage houses and precipitated as many as forty-three million deaths by famine in the early 1960s.⁹ Agricultural policy during the decade of the Cultural Revolution was far less disastrous; excluding 1968 and 1972, grain production grew from 1960 through 1976.¹⁰ But a careful analysis of the data of that period shows that the CCP's overemphasis on grain self-sufficiency, which did ensure continued growth in grain production, undermined the development of other crops and suppressed living standards. Nicholas Lardy demonstrates how the "grain first policy" introduced in 1965 and then reinforced in 1969-1970, undermined decades of sugar production in Fujian Province and cotton production in Shandong Province.¹¹ In wealthy Jiangsu

9. Thomas P. Bernstein, "Stalinism, Chinese Peasants and Famine: Grain Procurements During the Great Leap Forward," *Theory and Society* Vol. 13 No. 3 (May 1984): 339-378. According to one Chinese official who was given the task of checking local records, nine million people died in Sichuan Province, and eight million in Anhui Province. Research by this Chinese scholar calls into question the previously accepted figure of twenty-three million.

10. *Nongye nianjian, 1980* (Chinese Agricultural Yearbook), 34.

11. See Nicholas P. Lardy, *Agriculture in China's Modern Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Province, where grain production was promoted vigorously, peasants lacked cooking oil for their food. Although Dwight Perkins shows continued growth rates during the Cultural Revolution decade, development was highly skewed.¹²

Responding to changes in relative prices and grain price increases introduced in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the output of all crops rose dramatically in the early years of the reforms and continued to increase for those crops, such as oil-bearing crops, tobacco and tea, whose relative prices remained favorable. With the transfer of formerly collective fish ponds, orchards or tractor teams to private hands, many families took the plunge into private business, increasing output and efficiency. But social pressure arising from peasant support for egalitarianism and a fear of impending class polarization caused many families to close their businesses and withdraw from production after making quick profits.¹³ Such activities reinforced commonly held views of rural entrepreneurs as speculators.

The favorable results of the market strategy came undone by mid-decade. With an increase in input costs and a drop in relative prices, grain production has stagnated since 1984. Today the state is unable to pay for the more limited amount of grain that it purchases. While production of economic crops has continued, the real growth sectors of the rural economy are industry and various nonagricultural endeavors. Farmers have abjured from reinvesting in land and agricultural infrastructure. Similarly local governments prefer to use what funds they do have for industrial, not agricultural, development. As a result, China on its fortieth birthday faces a grain crisis that threatens to undermine many of the successes of the market-oriented strategy.

MODES AND LEVELS OF PEASANT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Did these two strategies give rise to differing levels of political participation? According to Joan Nelson, participation is the "efforts of ordinary people in any type of political system to influence the actions of their rulers, and sometimes to change their rulers." It may include agenda setting, changing policies or adjusting them during the implementation stage.¹⁴ According to this definition, Chinese peasants have had greater opportunity to participate under reformist programs than under radical ones.

Mobilization campaigns associated with radical policies involved mobilized (as opposed to autonomous) participation, and placed peasants and local officials under severe constraints. External pressures to demonstrate policy conformity intensified during political campaigns because policy resistance could become a "class error" and therefore punishable under terms of the "dictator-

12. Dwight Perkins, "China's Economic Policy and Performance During the Cultural Revolution and its Aftermath," in *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 15, *Revolution within the Chinese Revolution*, eds. John K. Fairbank and Roderick L. MacFarquhar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

13. David Zweig, "Prosperity and Conflict in Post-Mao China," *China Quarterly* 105 (March 1986): 1-18.

14. Joan M. Nelson, "Political Participation" in *Understanding Political Development*, eds. Myron Weiner and Samuel P. Huntington (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1987), 104.

ship of the proletariat.” As a result, policies issued from the center were implemented quickly nationwide. Looking at collectivization in 1955-1956, Vivienne Shue shows that while violence was not used, the peasants’ choices — whether or not to join the collectives — were constrained tightly by a government that manipulated taxes, agricultural inputs, propaganda and all non-violent means at its disposal to pressure peasants to enter the collectives. While Shue stresses the importance of the persuasive, rather than coercive measures, free choice was not an option.¹⁵ Mark Selden, long a supporter of the view that Maoist policies involved, rather than coerced, the peasants, now accepts that peasants were forced into joining collectives.¹⁶ Once peasants were forced into collectives, mechanisms for control — including job assignments, grain rations, off-farm employment and the role of the local militia — were strengthened.¹⁷ Thus local cadres in 1959-1960 delivered grain to the state while the peasants went hungry. In the late 1960s, peasants of Guangdong Province were forced to level bamboo groves and plant rice on newly terraced fields. Political pressures during radical campaigns forced legions of cadres and peasants to implement policies that hurt their economic interests. According to John Burns, under these conditions peasants had to couch their concerns in economic terms, and could not voice their political interests.¹⁸ They could also rely on passive resistance: grumbling, stealing, foot-dragging, etc. — what has been called the “weapons of the weak.”¹⁹ While these techniques involved a form of participation, they were less influential or meaningful and did not have a very direct impact on policy making.

Yet mobilization campaigns in the late Mao era did not prevent local cadres from responding to peasant interests and advancing their own. Recent studies show that state control over the countryside in some realms may have weakened in the late 1960s and 1970s.²⁰ Most radical policies in this period occurred in spurts, or “policy winds” allowing local officials in parts of rural China to resist or undermine many of their most negative aspects.²¹ If they could avoid implementation for a few months, the policy pressures often dissipated, but if the locality became an experimental site for the campaign, or was near a

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15. See Vivienne Shue, *Peasant China in Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). In fairness to Shue, collectivization in the Soviet Union was much worse than in China. For the earliest statement of this see Thomas P. Bernstein, “Leadership and Mass Mobilization in the Soviet and Chinese Collectivisation Campaigns of 1929-1930 and 1955-1956: A Comparison,” *China Quarterly* 31 (1967): 1-47.
 16. Mark Selden, “Cooperation and Conflict: Cooperative and Collective Formation in China’s Countryside” in *The Transition to Socialism in China*, eds. Mark Selden and Victor Lippit (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1982): 32-97.
 17. Jean Oi, “Communism and Clientelism: Rural Policies in China,” *World Politics* Vol. 37, No. 2 (January 1985): 238-266.
 18. See John P. Burns, *Political Participation in Rural China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
 19. See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). An interesting example is the peasants’ passive resistance to the one-child policy which involves not registering girls. Nevertheless during peak periods of birth control campaigns, the CCP has imposed serious penalties, such as tearing down peasant homes, in order to ensure policy compliance.
 20. For the broader theoretical argument, see Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
 21. See Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism*.

city or town where radical influence was great, resistance was difficult. However, through fear and intimidation, local cadres ensured that the resources mobilized during this era expanded the economic and political power base they controlled, such as rural factories and bureaucracy, creating a new local ruling class.

The end of organized coercion under the reforms enabled peasants to express their views more openly. Reform leaders sent many research teams to the countryside in the late 1970s to investigate peasant attitudes toward decollectivization before instituting the policy; this real use of the "mass line" allowed peasants to influence national policy.²² Chinese press reports suggest that decollectivization in many parts of China resulted from a coalition of central reformers and peasant activists who pressured local officials to accept the policy. In rural Nanjing, a commune introduced decollectivization without informing city officials. But coercion has been part of the reform movement as well. Higher-level officials forced many rural localities which preferred to maintain collective agriculture to decollectivize; only in this manner could local leaders prove to the reformers that their localities were in step with the new policy directions.²³ In early 1981, suburban officials in Nanjing complained of pressures from higher officials to abandon collective farming. But overall, peasant influence on policy making and implementation has been greater under the reformist regimes.

Reformist and radical tendencies in the CCP supported land reform because it destroyed traditional authority relations of subservience between peasants and landlords, ended the property base of the landlord class, and ensured CCP support among millions of new landholders and rural cadres.

Elections also serve as an important mode for peasant participation and have been more significant under reformist regimes. Before the 1979 introduction of a formal election law, elections were a much less frequent affair. According to Burns, between 1966 and 1976, probably about 50 percent of the villages in China held regular elections although many were dominated by the choices of higher level officials who chose candidates who would listen to the commune

22. David Zweig, "Context and Content in Policy Implementation: Household Contracts and Decollectivization, 1977-1983," in *Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China*, ed. David M. Lampton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 255-283.

23. Jonathan Unger, "The Decollectivization of the Chinese Countryside: A Survey of Twenty-Eight Villages," *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 58, No. 4 (Winter 1985-1986): 585-606.

officials.²⁴ Yet the most important call for elections in that period occurred in 1962, when a more reformist program was introduced after the famine. After 1979, village level elections were more common, even though officials used these to get rid of opponents to reforms. These elections nevertheless offered referenda on local leadership. In a suburban village outside Nanjing, peasants rejected all the members of the Party committee when the members tried to get elected to the new management committee.

Finally, peasant collective action and protest against the state or other groups in society have increased in the reform period. During radical periods, intimidated peasants hesitated to confront a state that willingly used coercive mechanisms. No doubt, some reports and my own interviews tell of peasants attacking rural cadres in the mid-1970s who tried to destroy the peasants' private vegetable plots. Also, press reports at that time were much more guarded. But such overt action was far less frequent than secret efforts to undermine radical policies.²⁵

The current reforms have fostered overt collective action in several ways. According to Elizabeth Perry, the reforms undermined the role of local cadres, stimulated conflict among villages by redefining land and water rights, and allowed collective activities to assume a religious demeanor.²⁶ With the privatization of land, peasants have become much more concerned with the deliveries of agricultural inputs. As a result, reports from the countryside suggest that peasants have become even more aggressive in defending their interests.

The passing of the Maoist spirit of selflessness has allowed many cadres to become more predatory in their behavior.²⁷ Thus peasant mass activity now focuses on economic grievances, such as the high price of agricultural inputs and cadre corruption. In Hunan, peasants rioted over a shortage of fertilizer which was probably the result of cadre efforts to sell public goods on the private markets at huge mark-ups. Environmental policies may also become a more salient political issue leading to peasant protest. In Beijing, peasants rioted when an opened dam sluice poured polluted water into their fields. However, peasants also benefit greatly from polluting rural factories which may mute their willingness to make this an important issue. Nevertheless, peasant protest is on the rise, and events in Tiananmen may compound the extant problems.²⁸ In this sense, peasants are now living in a freer economic and political world, with greater freedom to be harrassed and exploited by cadres, and greater freedom to protect their own interests.

24. Burns, 87-121.

25. For an excellent account of how one village returned to private farming during the Cultural Revolution, even as it became a national model for radical policies, see Gu Hua, *Pagoda Ridge and Other Stories* (Beijing: Panda Books, 1985).

26. Elizabeth J. Perry, "Rural Collective Violence: The Fruits of Recent Reforms" in *The Political Economy of Reform in Post-Mao China*, eds. Elizabeth J. Perry and Christine Wong (Cambridge: Harvard Contemporary China Series, 1985), 175-194.

27. Jean Oi, "Commercializing China's Rural Cadres," *Problems of Communism* 25 (September-October 1986): 1-15.

28. See David Zweig, "Peasant Politics After Tiananmen," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1989): 633-646.

THE SEARCH FOR EQUALITY?

The radical strategy was always far more explicit in its goal to overcome a variety of inequalities — inter-household, inter-village, inter-regional and rural-urban — than the reform strategy. Reformers always talk of how everyone benefits from an increasing pie, even though some people get a bigger piece. Some policies pushed during radical periods — particularly those of regional or local self-reliance — undermined efforts to increase equality. Within units or localities that practiced self-reliance, equality increased; but among these units self-reliance prevented the exchange of resources, thereby exacerbating inequality.²⁹

Reformist and radical tendencies in the CCP supported land reform because it destroyed traditional authority relations of subservience between peasants and landlords, ended the property base of the landlord class, and ensured CCP support among millions of new landholders and rural cadres. Land reform also greatly reduced inter-household inequality in land and income, helping the poorest 57 percent of rural inhabitants to double their share of ownership of cropland and to increase by 50 percent the average cultivated area per family farm.³⁰ But land reform left a big gap between the incomes and landholdings of rich and poor peasants, so Mao and other radicals saw collectivization as another important levelling device. Within collectives, family size and the dependency ratio — the number of non-laboring versus laboring members in each household — was the major source of income variation. Especially between 1964 and 1978, when payment to commune members in some locations was based on hours worked rather than tasks performed, inter-household inequalities narrowed. Distributing a greater percentage of food grain for free also increased inter-household equality.

To narrow inter-regional and inter-village inequality radical policy suppressed comparative advantage. A “grain first” policy prevented specialization in lucrative crops. Per capita income in traditionally wealthy areas such as Shandong Province, fell behind less well-endowed provinces, such as Jiangxi, as grain production brought few benefits. Nevertheless, while these policies narrowed the gap between growth rates among provinces, the absolute gap between provinces from 1957 to 1979 in terms of the gross value of agricultural output increased.³¹ Moreover, western China, which continually suffered a decline in per capita agricultural output between 1957 and 1979, kept falling behind the rest of the country. Restrictions on migration from poor areas (whose populations increased) expanded regional inequality, as did the limited economic interaction under the policy of self-reliance which prevented poor areas from finding new projects for their excess laborers.

To overcome inter-village inequalities, higher-level officials often redistributed resources from wealthier to poorer villages. One strategy was to unify the accounting systems of rich and poor villages and to distribute the average

29. Riskin, 224.

30. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

31. *Ibid.*, 231.

income to the peasants in the new larger unit. But resistance from wealthier units subverted such efforts.³² An easier strategy aimed at preventing suburban villages from using their preferred locations to prosper. During the radical period the *People's Daily* chastized villages for choosing crops or factory products based on market opportunities rather than national needs. Also, labor mobilization projects which terraced fields and built irrigation ditches during the winter narrowed inequality among neighboring villages. Other sources of inter-village inequality were harder to overcome.

The urban-rural gap, however, expanded during the Maoist era. While Maoist slogans supported the countryside, many concrete policies possessed a clear anti-rural bias, leading most analysts to argue that radical policies expanded the mid-1950s urban-rural gap. For Martin Whyte, the growth of small urban factories in the 1960s and 1970s gave employment to urban housewives and raised urban per capita incomes increasing the urban-rural gap from two to one in the early 1950s to three to one.³³ Another scholar argues that by 1976, the urban-rural income gap was six to one.³⁴

Attaining equality often comes at the price of political repression and stunted economic growth. The modernization of the countryside involves rural pollution, social dislocation — such as the shift of rural populations into urban slums — and psychological trauma.

But for all the unanticipated effects of the radical line on inequality, on many fronts the rural reforms have increased, rather than decreased, inequality. Regional inequality has expanded, as growth rates of the total production value (including both industry and agriculture) during 1980-1985 increased by 74 percent in the eastern area, 64.3 percent in the central area and only 61.4 percent in the western area.³⁵ Inter-household inequality decreased in the initial stages of the reforms, but appears to have expanded somewhat since 1983. Initially the reforms decreased the urban-rural gap by paying higher prices for agricultural crops, increasing rural specialization and expanding the scale of rural industry.³⁶ But the price scissors which expanded urban-rural

32. Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism*, 98-121.

33. Martin K. Whyte, "Social Trends in China: The Triumph of Inequality" in A. Doak Barnett and Ralph Clough, *Modernizing China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 103-126.

34. Thomas Rawski, "The Simple Arithmetic of Chinese Income Distribution," *Keizai kenkyu (Economic Research)* 33 (1982): 12-26.

35. *Beijing Review* 49 (December 8, 1986): 22.

36. See Riskin, chapter ten. Also see David Zweig, "Narrowing the Urban-Rural Gap," *International Regional Science Review* 1 (1987): 43-58.

inequalities during the Maoist era have reappeared under the reforms. Between 1980 and 1985, in a prefecture of Hunan Province, the buying power of fifty kilograms of rice dropped by about 50 percent in relation to steel, cement and diesel oil.³⁷ Since 1985, the rising costs of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, water and seeds, with little increase in grain prices, have exacerbated the urban-rural gap and led the peasants to produce a marketable surplus of grain only when forced.

MODERNIZATION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE: END OF THE PEASANTRY

Most Chinese peasants want to be urbanites. They hope the CCP will deliver them from the vicissitudes of weather, the drudgery of physical labor, and allow them to enjoy the benefits that society endows on urbanites such as secure and stable incomes, ample food, leisure time, and good health. They also want security from abuse by local officials and interference from the state.

Their desires are simple yet complex. Attaining equality often comes at the price of political repression and stunted economic growth. The modernization of the countryside involves rural pollution, social dislocation — such as the shift of rural populations into urban slums — and psychological trauma. Can one organize capital construction projects to build and maintain the necessary economic infrastructure to ensure stable agricultural growth in a democratic way? Maoism used coercion and the reformists' autonomous households have not worked. How then should the Chinese government's efforts over the past forty years be evaluated?

State interference has been a double-edged sword. It has protected the peasants in times of famine, organized projects to prevent floods, increased land fertility and peacefully resolved many inter-village conflicts. Yet, between 1960 and 1962, state-induced famine killed millions. It compelled localities such as the Mongolian steppe to grow grain, contributing to serious soil erosion. Expropriating land from the countryside for urban development left the rural areas impoverished, as did the restriction of urban migration. Today, when the need exists to rebuild weakening dikes, the regime appears too weak to complete such projects.

Radical policies limited inter-household and inter-village inequalities, making China one of the most egalitarian societies in the Third World at the cost of suppressed living standards. Thus, one of the harshest critiques of Maoist socialism is the twenty years of stagnant incomes and food consumption from 1957 through 1979. Perhaps the threat of a foreign attack, which instigated rapid industrialization and the redeployment of an industrial base into China's heartland, can explain why the rural areas were forced to develop without state assistance. Perhaps a less bellicose Mao might have instigated less of a foreign threat from both the United States and the Soviet Union.

Even as it destroyed China's traditional ruling class, radical efforts to control peasant life created a new class of rural cadres who allocated field work,

37. Zhan Wu, "How Should We Approach the Fluctuations in the Production of Staple Farm Products?," *People's Daily*, 22 May 1989, 6 in *FBIS-CHI-89-107*, 6 June 1989, 82.

distributed state quotas, and controlled access to new jobs in rural industry. No doubt many cadres helped the rural areas, but Mao's rural order suppressed participation and prevented the growth of competing social and economic elites thereby increasing the coercive authority of "local emperors." Peasants may not value political participation itself, but they seek to influence decisions affecting their economic well-being. Because such efforts were risky and often had little impact, the Maoist era did not offer peasants real liberation.

The rural reforms also have had adverse effects. Economic freedom has not insured more political freedom. Although economic laws protect some economic activity, a legal consciousness has not developed. Rural elections are not so meaningful. The CCP still dominates the administration, though its reach into the villages has weakened. Leaders in rural towns may be more entrenched, particularly where private enterprises are limited. Rural corruption is rampant, and peasant protest is on the rise. The irrigation system is suffering. The health care system, which improved life expectancy for a quarter of the world's people, has deteriorated. Moreover, the division of farmland to the household has undermined efforts to modernize farming by expanding rural mechanization. Individual households do not have enough money or large enough farms to warrant expensive machinery, and the collectives' limited role leaves no organizational structure for mechanizing most of rural China.

Finally, the astounding pace of change in the past five years may explain the societal disruptions of the past year. The number of peasants shifting into the service or rural industrial sector has compressed decades of modernization into years, if not months. New links between rural enterprises and urban factories are becoming a significant part of the export sector. For a society with a tradition so opposed to change, this swirling of new forces cannot help but create a national psychological crisis.

Even with China's current grain crisis and its floating population of fifty million (which this fall could grow by another ten to twenty million), the reforms' successes still pose a major challenge to the Maoist strategy of development. Deng Xiaoping's rural reforms allowed approximately 16 percent of the globe's people to improve their housing substantially. In food consumption, disposable income, and the growth of factory jobs, the rural reforms have been singularly successful. While not everyone has benefitted, and a small proportion of the population actually has suffered negative growth under the reforms, many who were poor under Mao have improved their living standards while others have moved ahead even faster.

In the end, it is hard to give a definitive evaluation of the two different strategies since the full negative impact of the reformist program has not surfaced. In the short run, the reformist strategy has far surpassed the Maoist one in enlivening the countryside, improving living standards and bringing new information, technology and resources to the rural areas. But China's problems remain enormous and, since its inception forty years ago, the leadership is still searching for the most effective mix of national policies and local initiatives to meet the demands of the Chinese peasant.