

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA WHO SHOULD OWN THE LAND?

A Unit of Study for Grades 8-10

SUSAN MEISLER
DAVID WAKEFIELD



NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

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INTRODUCTION

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

The National Center for History in the Schools has developed the following collection of lessons for teaching with primary sources. Our units are the fruit of a collaboration between history professors and experienced teachers of United States History. They represent specific “dramatic episodes” in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning-point in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow’s history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, and literature from the period under study. What we hope you achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to have your students connect more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: 1) Unit Objectives, 2) Correlation to the National History Standards, 3) Teacher Background Materials, 4) Lesson Plans, and 5) Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above,

focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for grades 8–10, they can be adapted for other grade levels. The teacher background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific “dramatic moment” to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The lesson plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories, and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

China is approximately the same size as the United States but has over four times the population. Because Western China is primarily mountainous and arid, only 11% of China's land is arable. In addition to this shortage of arable land, floods and droughts make starvation an ever-present danger. It is not surprising, therefore, that in most parts of China the common afternoon greeting is not "Hello" or "How are you?," but "Have you eaten yet?"

This unit begins by examining the problem of rural poverty in China in the 1940s. A variety of solutions attempted by the Chinese government between the mid-1940s and the present all aimed at the improvement of peasant living standards in the countryside. Because 80% of China's people are peasants, the Chinese Communist party saw the necessity of altering orthodox Marxism from an urban to a rural focus. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the government embarked on a program of land reform to obtain political support from poor peasants. In 1956 the government shifted dramatically to a system of communal land ownership similar to that which existed in the Soviet Union. After many twists and turns marked by both natural disasters and political upheavals, the government began in 1980 a new phase of private land ownership called the "Family Responsibility System."

This unit examines the above progression of events. **Lesson One** dramatizes the inequality of land ownership between the gentry and peasant classes. **Lesson Two** documents Mao Zedong's realization that peasant support was necessary to gain political power and describes the initial stages of land reform. **Lesson Three** explains how peasant life was altered by the establishment of the communes. **Lesson Four** describes the partial return to private management of land. Whenever possible, the student will assume the role of the peasant to dramatize and make relevant the choices that were faced. He or she will also evaluate the benefits and shortcomings of the different systems of land ownership.

Finally, the question of land ownership does not concern China alone. For the overwhelming majority of the world's population, farmers and peas-

ants, the problems of land ownership and increasing agricultural production remain critical. This kind of study is especially needed by the majority of American students for whom the problems of agriculture have little direct meaning.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit is appropriate for a world history course or an area studies course. It covers the period from the 1940s to the present. In a world history course it might be placed in the context of the land problem that is critical in the 20th century in countries throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. It might also help clarify the revolutionary processes in those areas that have peppered much of the history of the 20th century. In an areas studies course, it could be presented as an extension of a geographic introduction to China which emphasizes the problems of a vast population and a limited amount of arable land. (An outline map has been provided at the end of the Teacher Background Materials for this purpose, and for further use throughout this unit.)

Ideally students should understand the differing assumptions of capitalist and communist economies regarding private property and the ownership of land. During the half century of Chinese Communist Party rule, different solutions have been attempted to the problem of who should own the land. In other areas of the world, that same question is still being asked, and one needs only to follow current events in Latin America, Asia and Africa to realize that many peasants continue to endure the struggle for survival.

III. CORRELATION TO THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR WORLD HISTORY

The People's Republic of China: Who Should Own the Land? provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 9**, "The Twentieth Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes." Lessons within this unit help students explain how the Communist Party rose to power in China between 1936 and 1949, **Standard 1B**.

This unit likewise integrates a number of specific Historic Thinking Standards including: utilize mathematical and quantitative data; analyze cause-

and-effect relationships; interrogate historical data by uncovering the social, political, and economic context in which it was created; and, evaluate alternative courses of action.

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. The student will become aware of the inequality of land ownership in China prior to 1949.
2. The student will understand why the communist revolution in China was peasant rather than proletarian based.
3. The student will be able to identify the variety of solutions attempted during different periods under communist rule to the problem of how best to improve the living standard of the peasant.
4. The student will evaluate the different approaches to land ownership taken by the Chinese government.

V. LESSON PLANS

1. Who Owns the Land?
2. Eating Bitterness, Speaking Bitterness: Gaining Peasant Support for the Communist Revolution Through Land Reform
3. The People's Communes: Two Points of View
4. The Family Responsibility System: The Return of Individual Household Management

VI. INTRODUCTION TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: WHO SHOULD OWN THE LAND?

Traditional China in Qing times (1644-1912) was characterized by gross inequalities in land ownership. A small percentage of gentry and landlords owned large amounts of land which they rented to poor peasants in return for rents which averaged 50% or more of the harvest. Over the course of Chinese history, peasant discontent periodically exploded, such as in the massive Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) which laid waste to much of southern and central China. Despite these periodic upheavals, once the rebellions ended, the same system of private property in land was reestablished and the related problem of unequal land ownership emerged once again.

The Revolution of 1911 led by Sun Yat-sen destroyed the Qing state, dethroned the last emperor, Puyi, and started China on the march to modern government. The 1911 Revolution did not, however, resolve the problem of unequal land ownership and peasant poverty. When the leadership of the revolution was hijacked by the warlord Yuan Shikai, all hope of progress toward land equalization vanished, and the revolutionary forces under Sun Yat-sen retreated to Canton to regroup. There the revolutionaries organized the Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang or the KMT). The revolutionary program of the KMT was the Three People's Principles, and under the third principle of people's livelihood, the KMT supported the ideal of land equalization. While reorganizing in Canton, Sun Yat-sen also entered into an alliance with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP organized in 1921) called the First United Front.

In 1927 the First United Front split when Chiang Kai-shek, who had emerged into leadership of the KMT following the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, turned on the CCP, killed thousands of communists, and drove the CCP leadership into remote mountains of southern China. The bloody split between the KMT and CCP was mirrored in a split on land policy. Though the KMT maintained on paper its commitment to the Three People's Principles and land equalization, the KMT did little to implement changes in land ownership and became increasingly aligned with city elites and rural landlords. The CCP, by contrast, while on the defensive in the countryside and in order to build political and military support among the peasants, launched a land reform program that took land from landlords and rich peasants and redistributed it to poor and landless peasants.

From the Xian Incident in 1936 (when Chiang Kai-Shek was captured and held hostage in order to negotiate peace with the Communists) through the end of World War II, the KMT and CCP was reunited. This time they formed the Second United Front in order to fight the Japanese invaders. As part of the political conciliation between the two parties, the CCP renounced land reform in the geographical areas it controlled militarily. But once the Japanese were defeated and the Second Civil War (1945-1949) broke out, the CCP returned to its land reform policies and began expropriating landlord land once again. Throughout the period of the Second United Front and Civil War, the KMT failed to address the land problem. In 1949 the People's Liberation Army of the CCP defeated the KMT armies, and on October 1, the CCP founded the People's Republic of China. The KMT fled to Taiwan and established the Republic of China there.

From 1948 to 1952 the CCP carried out its land reform policies, and the Agrarian Reform Law was promulgated first in 1947 and then in revised form in 1950. During this period the countryside of China was transformed. Fully 700 million *mu* (1 *mu* equals 1/6 of an acre) of land was taken from landlords and given to 300 million peasants. Landlords and rich peasants lost land, poor peasants and landless laborers gained land, and middle peasants were least affected. This was land equalization on an unprecedented scale, though it is important to note that the land was still in private, family hands. The process was supposed to be carried out peacefully, but in fact it often turned quite violent as poor peasants vented their anger on the landlords.

From 1953 to 1957 the CCP moved beyond mere redistribution of land. In line with socialist ideals, in order to prevent the reemergence of classes of landlords and poor peasants, and in order to increase agricultural production, the CCP began a drive toward agricultural collectivization. Under CCP guidance, the peasants increasingly pooled tools, worked together during planting and harvest seasons, and even began to pool the land. These collectives were called Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives, and by the end of 1956, 96% of peasant households were in some form of cooperative. There were between 760,000 to 800,000 cooperatives across China, and they averaged 160 families, or 600 to 700 persons, in size.

In 1958 the CCP decided to enlarge the collectives and move further along the road to communal ownership of land. As part of Mao Zedong's

visionary if misguided attempt to catapult China into the industrial age in the Great Leap Forward of 1958, the Agricultural Producers Cooperatives were consolidated into large administrative structures called People's Communes. By the end of 1958, 98% of China's peasant families were in 26,000 communes. Commune administration became the local government which regulated resources, set work schedules, and operated banks, schools, nurseries, and retirement homes. All land, houses and livestock were owned by the commune. In the early 1960s the size of the communes was reduced somewhat, and they grew in number to 74,000.

Thus for the twenty year period from 1958 to 1978, the Chinese countryside was administered and controlled through the commune structure. Labor on the commune was performed in groups called production brigades and production teams which farmed the consolidated fields collectively. Peasant remuneration was on the basis of a day's work. For each day's work a peasant received a set number of "work points" (usually 10 for men and 8 for women). At harvest time, after deduction for taxes and expenses, the remainder of the harvest was divided into shares based on the number of work points each peasant had accumulated during the year. The system was egalitarian and very secure, and was thus called the "iron rice bowl" since a person could not be fired and income was essentially guaranteed. The negative sides of the communes were several: the vast scale of agricultural administration made for bureaucratic errors and wasteful use of precious resources; the egalitarian "work points" form of payment provided little incentive for doing a good day's work, since all a peasant had to do was show up and go through the motions to receive the full 10 work points.

By 1979 the weaknesses of the People's Communes had become urgent problems to CCP leaders such as Deng Xiaoping, who emerged as the dominant political figure after Mao Zedong's death in 1976. In 1979 Deng took the first steps toward abolishing the People's Communes and began returning the land to individual peasant families for private management through the household responsibility system. Land was still collectively owned, but was farmed by individual peasant families. After a family fulfilled its contractual quota to the state, it was free to sell the surplus on the market for a profit. The responsibility system thus encouraged peasants to work hard to boost the land's productivity.

A NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

ROMANIZATION

Since Westerners began to talk about China and the Chinese, they have sought to develop systems which accurately use roman letters to represent the sounds of Chinese. For most of the 20th century the most commonly used system was the Wade-Giles system. Most of the articles contained in this packet use this system. Since 1979, however, the PRC has used the pinyin system. Most Western authors and periodicals are now using this system. Below is an effort to help you pronounce Chinese words and names using these systems.

(adapted from Charles Hucker, *China's Imperial Past*.)

Vowels

Wade-Giles/Pinyin

a/a	ah as in father
e/e	uh as in but, sometimes eh as in wet: men rhymes with pun but yen rhymes with pen
i/i	ee as in keep
ih/i	something like i in shirt (include part of the r which follows): chi'ih sounds like church
o/o	aw as in paw, except in ko, k'o, ho, h'o and o when it is uh as in but
u/u	oo as in goo, except yu when it is like yogurt
u/u	as French u or German u

Diphthongs

ai/ai	rhymes with shy, lai sounds like lye
ao/ao	rhymes with now, ch'ao sounds like chow
ei/ei	rhymes with stay, lei sounds like lay
ia/ia	rhymes with German ia , liang is one syllable: lyahng
ieh/ie	rhymes with yeah, lieh is pronounced lyeh
iu/iu	varies between yogurt and youth , liu might be Leo or Lew
ou/ou	rhymes with know, lou sounds like low
ua/ua	wah as in suave
ui/ui	rhymes with way, sui sounds like sway
uo/uo	waw as in walk

Consonants

This is where the two systems differ most. Consonants are not always voiced. In Wade-Giles this is indicated by an apostrophe [']. If the consonant is followed by ['], it is aspirated. In Pinyin spelling indicates the difference.

l, m, n, ng, r, s, sh, and w are pronounced as in English.

ch'/q	as in cheat
k'/k	as in king
p'/p	as in put
t'/t	as in top
ts'/c	as in its
tz/c	as in its
ch/j	as j in job or as ch in church (e.g. chih/chi)
k/g	as g in got
p/b	as b in but
t/d	as d in dog
ts/z	as dz in adze
tz/z	as dz in adze

Examples

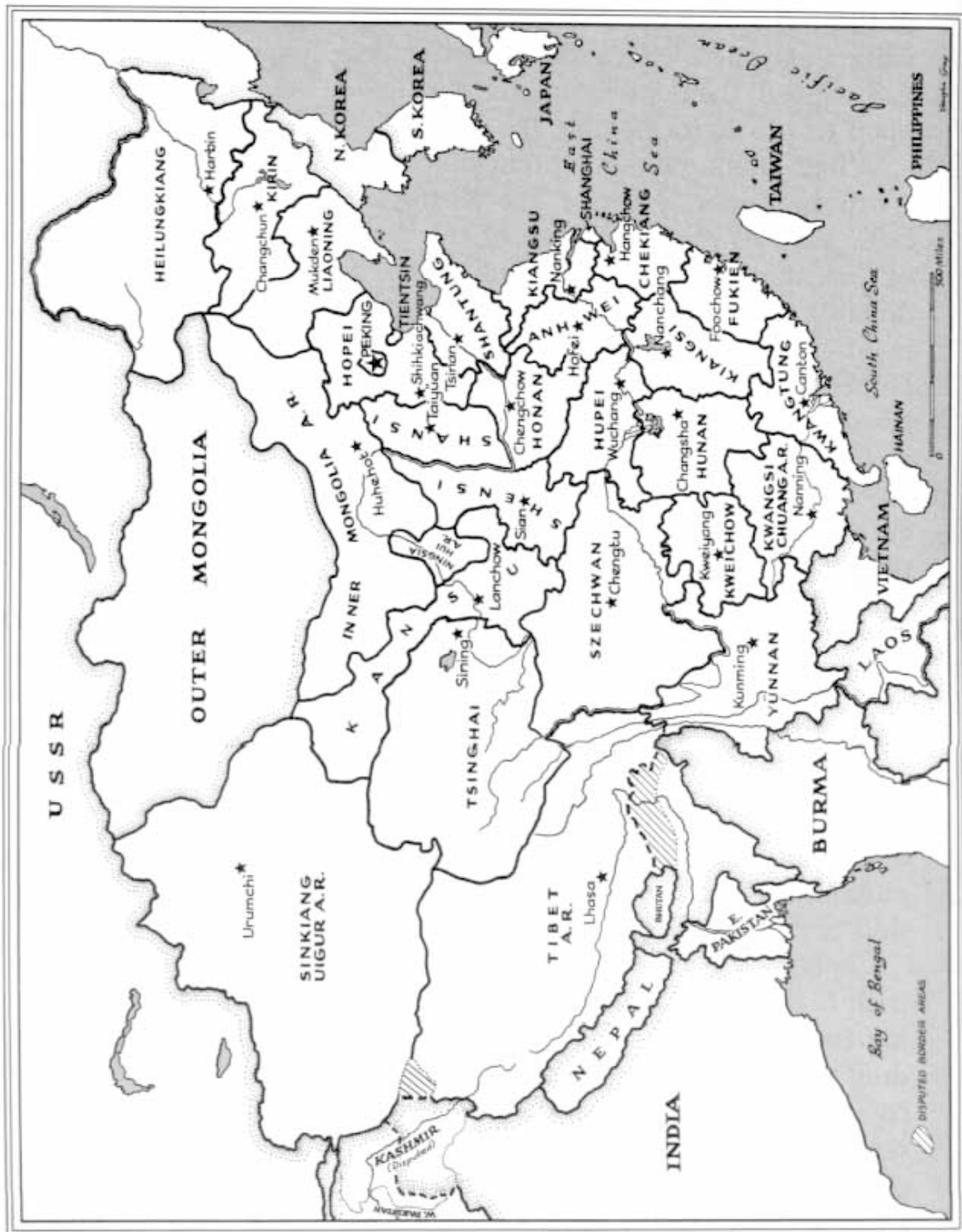
Pinyin

Deng Xiaoping
Zhou Enlai
Mao Zedong
Beijing
Nanjing
Taipei
Qainlong
Qin Shi Huangdi

Wade-Giles

Teng-Hsiao-p'ing
Chou En-lai
Mao Tse-tung
Peiching (Peking)
Nanching (Nanking)
Taipei
Ch'ien-lung
Ch'in Shih huang-ti

OUTLINE MAP OF CHINA (ca. 1970)



Source: Deirdre and Neale Hunter, eds. *We the Chinese: Voices from China* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972).

CHINA IN 1996



Courtesy of the Perry-Casteñeda Library public domain map collection
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html

DRAMATIC MOMENT

THE LIFE OF A PEASANT IN LONG BOW VILLAGE

China's system of landholding in the 1930s illustrates the historic inequities between different classes. Landlords and rich peasants who made up only 10% of the population occupied 55-65% of the land. The remaining 90% of the population had to subsist on what was left. Although the gentry of Long Bow village lived far better than the poor peasants, the lack of arable land combined with the ever-present danger of starvation meant that all classes had to protect their crops.

The extremes to which never-ending vigilance had to be carried was demonstrated most clearly when the crops began to ripen. Then every family, whether landlord, middle peasant, or tenant, had to maintain guards in the fields day and night.

Toothless old grandfathers and children in split pants hardly big enough to carry a stick stood eternal watch against thieves. To protect these pitiful sentries from the sun at noon and the dew before dawn little shelters of kaoliang stalks or mud bricks mushroomed suddenly on every plot and strip. For weeks at a time almost half the population of every community lodged overnight in the fields, each family keeping an eye on all the rest.

Thus both prosperous and poor peasants were forced to expend their often exhausted energies on a guard duty that was sheer waste from the point of view of society, but that meant the difference between life and death to every cropper. Any strip left unwatched was almost sure to be looted by some half-starved family trying to stay alive just a few more days until its own poor crops matured.

William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, 1966 by permission of Monthly Review Foundation.

LESSON ONE

WHOEVER OWNS THE LAND, EATS

A. OBJECTIVES

1. The student will be able to describe the plight of the poor peasants prior to 1949.
2. The student will be able to distinguish between the different rural classes.
3. The student will use both primary sources and literature to understand the lives of the peasants.
4. The student will experience the logic of “whoever owns the land, eats.”
5. The student will examine the problem of rural poverty and suggest a more equitable system of land ownership.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. As the students walk into the classroom, hand each of them a color-coded slip of paper which will designate them as belonging to one of five classes: landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and landless agricultural laborers. (No further explanations are necessary at this point.)
2. Using the definitions below taken from the Agrarian Reform Law of the People’s Republic of China, define for the students the categories of peasants and landlords. Explain that the criterion used in this categorization was not wealth or landownership per se, but exploitation—that is, who exploits the labor power of others. Explain which color denotes which class:
 - a. *Landlord*: A person who owns land, but does not engage in labor, and who depends on the exploitation of others for his means of livelihood. Exploitation includes renting land, lending money, and hiring labor.

- b. *Rich peasant*: A person who generally owns all of his land, or owns part of his land and rents the rest from others. A rich peasant may exploit other peasants by hiring wage laborers, renting out land or lending money. Unlike a landlord, however, a rich peasant works some of the land himself.
 - c. *Middle peasant*: A person who owns some land which he cultivates while the rest is rented, depends mainly on his own labor for a living, and does not exploit others. A middle peasant may be exploited by having to pay land rent or loan interest.
 - d. *Poor peasant*: A person who may own part of his land, but often owns none at all, and must rent land to cultivate. A poor peasant is exploited in terms of land rent, loan interest or having to sell his labor to landlords and rich peasants for periods of time.
 - e. *Landless agricultural laborers*: A person who owns no land and who must sell her or his labor to others.
3. Share **Document A**, *The Ownership of Land* with students. Locate Zhejiang province and then explain that you will use it as the basis for dividing up landownership among the different classes.
- a. If there are 30 students in a class, 23 (77%) would be designated poor peasants, or landless hired laborers. Assuming that the desks represent land, they will “occupy” only 6 desks (20% of the land.)
 - b. Five students (17%) would be designated as middle peasants, so they would occupy 6 desks (19% of the land.)
 - c. One student (3%) will be a rich peasant and (s)he will occupy 2 desks (8% of the land).
 - d. The one remaining student (3%) will be the landlord and will occupy 16 desks (53% of the land.)

Since land is the basis of food production, whoever owns the most land is going to be the best fed. Divide the food (candy) according to the number of desks to illustrate the point.

4. To further dramatize the consequences of this inequity, read to students from **Document B**, a selection from William Hinton's *Fanshen*. Show students Shanxi (Shansi) on the map, where Long Bow Village is.
5. In class, allow the students to discuss in their groups what changes, if any, should be made in the land ownership situation.
6. Discuss the following issues:
 - a. Contrast the lives of landlords and rich peasants with that of poor and middle peasants.
 - b. How does the selection about "crop watching" demonstrate the importance of the harvest?
 - c. In what ways were poor peasants exploited by the rich peasants and landlords?
7. Either in class or as homework, ask each student to list up to five changes that should be made given his/her class perspective. At the beginning of the next class, have the students assemble in random groups and try to come up with a unified solution to the problem of unequal land ownership. This should prove difficult!

C. EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Use the selection from General Zhu De, "Exploitation of the Peasants" (**Document C**), as the basis for a diary entry that might have been written by a poor peasant.
2. Use the chart in **Document A** to draw three circle graphs showing land distribution in Shanxi (Shansi), Guangdong (Kwangtung), and Kiangsi (Jiangxi) provinces. Locate the three provinces on the map.

D. VOCABULARY

exploitation
peasant
landlord
gentry
cultivation

millet
maize
Fanshen
subsistence

E. EVALUATING THE LESSON

1. Informal evaluation through class discussion.
2. Students will write a short paragraph (quickwrite) explaining and describing the condition of the peasant.
3. Use any of the “Extended Activities” listed above.

THE OWNERSHIP OF LAND
(Primary Source)

These figures are from a report in the 1930s¹

Province	Landlords		Rich Peasants		Middle Peasants		Poor Peasants	
	% families	% land	% families	% land	% families	% land	% families	% land
Chekiang	3	53	3	8	17	19	77	20
Shansi	.03	25	2	5	68	61	30	9
Kwangtung	2	53	4	13	12	15	74	19
Kiangsi	6	47	6	18	20	21	68	15

Generally speaking, for the whole of China, landlords and rich peasants, forming about 10% of the population, occupied 55% to 65% of the land. If you do not wish to accept these figures, there are those made some years ago by the National Land Commission of the Chiang Government. This commission, investigating conditions in eleven provinces, found that 1500 big landlord families owned on an average over 333 acres per family . . . the average ownership of over 700,000 peasant families in the same districts showed the average to be 2.6 acres.

¹C. Brown and T. Edwards, *Revolution in China 1911–1949* (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1983)

**A DOCUMENTARY OF REVOLUTION
IN A CHINESE VILLAGE**
(Primary Source)

Based on the author's personal observations, the description of Long Bow Village in Northern China depicts the impoverished state of Chinese peasants in 1948.

Counting noses among the 200-odd families one could ordinarily tally up about a thousand persons altogether. This meant that on the average there was one acre of land for every man, woman, and child.² The crops from this one acre, in a good year, were ample for the support of a single person, considering the very low standard of living that prevailed. But the poor who rented land or worked out as hired laborers got less than half the crops they tilled, while the rich got the surplus from many acres.

... The fields were divided into countless narrow strips and plots, each one owned by a different family. Land was so valuable that the peasants found it necessary to build stone walls as high as 15 feet to hold back a few feet of earth and make it level.

Although no level ground roads and paths led out through the fields, no hill fields could be reached with a cart, and farm implements had to be light enough for one man to carry. The plows, harrows, seeders, and other equipment used were all light enough to be picked up with one hand and were made entirely of wood except for the point of the plow itself. All of these implements, although in use for centuries, were still only supplementary to the main tool, the hoe, handed down almost unchanged since prehistoric times. The hoe used in Long Bow was a great iron blade weighing several pounds and fastened to the end of a stick as large as a man's wrist. This tool, which was designed to turn soil and sod, was also used for the delicate work of thinning millet and weeding corn.

The crops grew only on what was put into the soil each year; hence manure was the foundation of the whole economy. The chief source of supply was the family privy, and this became, in a sense, the center of the household.

²The acres mentioned here and throughout the text of the unit are English acres, each being equivalent to six Chinese *mu*.

Long Bow privies were built in the form of a deep cistern, topped with timber, or stone, and provided with a single narrow slot at ground level for both deposition and extraction. Here night soil in liquid form accumulated all winter. Legendary in the region were the landlords so stingy that they would not allow their hired men to defecate in the fields but made them walk all the way back to the ancestral home to deposit their precious burden. Other landlords would not hire local people on a long-term basis because local people were wont to use their own privies while a man from outside used that of his employer.

Animal manure, together with any straw, stalks, or other waste matter, was composted in the yard. So highly was it valued that old people and children constantly combed the roads and cart tracks for droppings which they scooped up and carried home in baskets. This need to conserve every kind of waste and return it to the land was responsible for the tidy appearance of the streets and courtyards even though the walls were crumbling and the roofs falling in. Nothing, absolutely nothing, was left lying around. Even the dust of the street was swept up and thrown on the compost heap or into the privy, for village dust was more fertile, by far, than the soil in the fields.

The clothes that people wore and the food that they ate were all products of the village land. Even the gentry, who possessed for festive occasions silks and satins imported from the South, donned for everyday wear the same homespun cottons that served to clothe their servants and their tenants. Though styles did evolve over the centuries, the basic workday clothing changed little. In summer everyone wore thin jackets and pants of natural cotton bleached white or dyed blue or black with indigo. Long Bow women liked to wear white jackets and black pants, but this was by no means universal . . .

In cold weather everyone wore clothes padded with cotton. These made people look twice as big as they really were and provided warmth in two ways, first by the insulation of the thick layer of cotton and second by the lice which made themselves at home in the seams. Since the padded clothes could not be washed without taking the lining out — a major operation — it was almost impossible to get rid of lice from day to day. Their constant biting and the interminable scratching that accompanied it generated a fair amount of heat. On any warm day in winter a large number of people could always be found sitting in various sunlit corners with their padded jackets

across their knees. There they hunted the lice, picked them out, and crushed them expertly between their thumbnails.

Children under five were exposed from below in all weather because their padded clothes were not sewn together at the crotch. The slit, which ran upward from just above the knees to a point a little below the tip of the backbone, was very convenient when nature called but was drafty in winter. It must be said, however, that the children didn't seem to mind at all and ran about in the bitterest weather just as if they were all sewn in like their elders.

... Shoes were also made of cotton cloth but, because the soles consisted of many layers sewn through and through with hemp thread, they were as tough as any leather and lasted from four to six months even with hard wear on the mountain roads. Only the women had no need for such heavy shoes. Their feet were bound, the toes bent under, and the bones stunted so that they formed a crushed stump not more than two or three inches in length. Women walked as if on stilts. They could not run at all. Yet widowed women among the poor often had to work in the fields from dawn until dark. Foot binding came to an end almost everywhere in the period between the two world wars but even in 1945 young girls with crippled feet could still be found in the mountain counties of Shansi.

The food eaten in Long Bow was very simple. Since maize was the major crop everyone ate corn dumplings, called keta, in the morning, and corn meal mush, or noodles made of corn at noon. At night they ate millet porridge with a few noodles in it. After the wheat harvest in July everyone ate noodles for several days, but this was considered quite a luxury and only the most fortunate carried the custom on into August. These same families were the only ones who ate three meals a day throughout the year. Most people cut down to two meals, or even one when winter set in. Thus undernourished they moved about as little as possible and tried to conserve their strength until spring.

In addition to the cereal grains people ate salt turnip all year round, cabbage when they had it, and other vegetables such as eggplant, scallions, chives, and wild herbs in season. But these were simply garnishment to the main dish which was always corn, millet, or wheat. The big problem facing

the peasants over the years was not to obtain some variety in their diet, but to find anything to eat at all. They often had to piece out their meager harvest of grain with bran, chaff, wild herbs from the hills or even the leaves from the trees or tree bark as the ch'un huang (spring hunger) set in. Each day that one survived was a day to be thankful for and so, throughout the region, in fat years and in lean, the common greeting came to be not "Hello" or "How are you?" but a simple, heartfelt "Have you eaten?"

The following are only a few incidents culled at random from the life stories of peasants with whom Hinton talked.

- There were three famine years in a row. The whole family went out to beg things to eat. In Chinchang City conditions were very bad. Many mothers threw newborn children into the river. Many children wandered about on the streets and couldn't find their parents. We had to sell our oldest daughter. She was then already 14. Better to move than to die, we thought. We sold what few things we had. We took our patched quilt on a carrying pole and set out for Changchih with the little boy in the basket at the other end. He cried all the way from hunger. We rested before a gate. Because he wept so bitterly a woman came out. We stayed there three days. On the fourth morning the woman said she wanted to buy the boy. We put him on the k'ang. He fell asleep. In the next room we were paid five silver dollars. Then they drove us out. They were afraid when the boy woke up he would cry for his mother. My heart was so bitter. To sell one's own child was such a painful thing. We wept all day on the road.
- I almost starved to death. One day I lay on the street. A cart came along. The driver yelled at me to move. I was too weak. I didn't care if he drove over me or not. He finally had to drive around me.
- During the famine we ate leaves and the remnants from vinegar making. We were so weak and hungry we couldn't walk. I went out to the hills to get leaves and there the people were fighting each other over the leaves on the trees. My little sister starved to death. My brother's wife couldn't bear the hunger and ran away and never came back. My cousin was forced to become a landlord's concubine.

- I and the children worked for others thinning millet. We got only half a quart of grain. For each meal we cooked only a fistful with some weeds in it. The children's stomachs were swollen and every bone in their bodies stuck through their skin. After a while the little boy couldn't get up. He just lay on the k'ang sick with dysentery and many, many worms, a whole basin full of worms crawled out from his behind. Even after he was dead the worms kept coming out. The little girl had no milk from me, for I had nothing to eat myself, so, of course, she died.

People could not speak of the past without weeping. Nor could one listen to their stories dry-eyed. Yet, as the details piled up, horror on horror, one's senses became dulled. The barbarity, the cruelty, the horror of the old life was so overwhelming that in time it ceased to shock. One began to take for granted that worms crawled from dying children, that women and children were bought and sold like cattle, that people were beaten to death, that they fought each other for the leaves on the trees. The impossible took on the aura of the commonplace.

The most terrible thing about the conditions of life in Long Bow in those days was not any single aspect of the all but universal misery; it was that there was no hope of change. The fearful tragedy played and replayed itself without end.

William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966) by permission of Monthly Review Foundation

EXPLOITATION OF THE PEASANTS (Primary Source)

The first excerpt comes from the recollections of General Zhu De; the others are accounts given thirty years later to a Swedish writer in a village in Shaanxi Province.

Most of Kiangsi is mountainous, and the crops are poor. The landlords took as much as 70% of the crop as rent, and most peasants had to borrow from them at high rates of interest each year, so that they and their sons and their sons' sons were bound by debt in perpetual servitude to the landlords. The peasants were so poor that they sopped up every drop of fat in cooking pans and could afford to buy only a handful of salt at a time. They would dissolve a pinch of salt in a bowl of water and dip their bits of vegetable in it when they ate. They were gaunt, half-naked, and illiterate, and lived in dark, insanitary hovels in villages surrounded by high mud walls which had only one gate.

. . . we did not have our own land. We rented it. For three generations, we rented the same land. . . . People hated the landlords, but there was no way of getting round them. "As long as we have our daily food", people said, "we must do as our masters say. They own the land and the oxen." Wang (the landlord) was called "Wang the Bloodsucker." Everybody owed him money. As long as you owed him money, you could not get permission to leave the village in order to look for another landlord who perhaps gave better terms. . . . The landlords ate up people's work.

What happened was that every year we had run out of corn and had to borrow from the landlord, paying the loan back after harvest. The interest varied a bit from year to year, depending on what sort of harvest it had been. The lowest interest was when we borrowed 300 jin and repaid 390, and the highest was when we borrowed 300 and paid back 450. The worse things were for us, and the worse the crop, the higher the interest we had to pay. In that way, the landlord always gained. . . He always won. When we had paid our rental, our debt and the interest on it, there was not a great deal left.

C. Brown and T. Edwards *Revolution in China 1911-1949* (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1983). Reprinted with the kind permission of Heinemann Publishers.

LESSON TWO

EATING BITTERNESS, SPEAKING BITTERNESS: GAINING PEASANT SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION THROUGH LAND REFORM

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To define revolution and tell why Mao Zedong felt it was necessary.
2. To define land reform and explain how it was achieved.
3. To be able to place land reform in the historical context of the struggle for power between the Communists and Nationalists.
4. To explain why Mao Zedong needed peasant support in order to defeat the Nationalist armies.
5. To appreciate the chaos that accompanied the process of land reform.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Students assemble in groups of 4–5 to compare their solutions to problems of peasant poverty. (If each student maintains a social class point of view, the solutions will differ.) Record the student generated options at this point, but make no value judgments. Hopefully the options will range from maintaining the status quo, to making some attempts at reform, and finally to making a complete land revolution.
2. Give the students the background information which puts the lesson in context. This can be done by either having students read the **Background Materials (Document D)**, or by lecturing selectively from the information in the materials.

Sample Questions for Discussion of Background Materials

- a. What do you think is meant by the political slogan “land to the tiller”?
- b. Consider. How did the beliefs of Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek differ?

- c. What is a civil war? What two groups were fighting for control of China in the 1940s?
- d. Define land reform. Explain how Mao Zedong used this policy to gain support for his fight against the Nationalists.
- e. What do you think is meant by a “Kangaroo Court”? Would you like to be tried in this way? Why or why not?

3. Homework Assignment

Share with students **Document E**. This historical resource illustrates the importance of the peasant in the Chinese Communist Party’s struggle for supremacy over the Nationalist (Kuomintang) armies.

- a. Use your knowledge about Marxism to explain why the Communist Revolution had to be peasant-based.
 - b. What is a revolution? When can it be justified, if ever?
 - c. Explain how this marching song shows the tactics the Communists would use to win the peasants over to their side.
4. After the discussion, the students will be ready to read **Document F**, “Stone Village,” a case study which dramatizes the difficulties the communist cadres faced in persuading frightened and intimidated peasants to overthrow despotic Landlord Wang.
5. Students might then debate whether land reform was pure, cruel robbery, or a necessity to prevent the landlord from continuing to exploit the peasants.
- a. Give the students 5–10 minutes to write down their position and reasons to support it.
 - b. Ask for volunteers (2 from each side) to debate the issue in front of the class.
 - c. After presentation of preliminary arguments and rebuttals allow the audience (class members) to ask the debaters to defend their positions. (Volunteers might be given this material the day before to allow for more preparation.)

6. Return to the options discussed in Lesson Activity #1. Has anyone changed his/her mind? Why? Why not?

C. Extended Activities

1. Research and explain:
Did Chiang Kai-shek have a program to make the system of land holding more equitable?
2. Compare and contrast the American Civil War with the Chinese Civil War. Consider both the issues that were fought over as well as the outcome.
3. Use the information from **Lessons One** and **Two** to draw cartoons explaining "Eating Bitterness" and "Speaking Bitterness."
4. Read **Document G**, the Agrarian Reform Law of 1947 and explain in your own words how the Chinese Communist Party proposed to divide the land among the different classes of villagers.
5. Research how land reform has been used in at least one other region of the world. Assess the extent of its success.
6. What is a revolution? When might it be justified? Give examples using any of the following: the American Revolution of 1776, the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917.

D. Vocabulary

imperialist	revolution
tyrant	piculs
gentry	cadre
provocation	tumult
rural	"we must overturn"
liberated	kangaroo court

E. Evaluating the Lesson

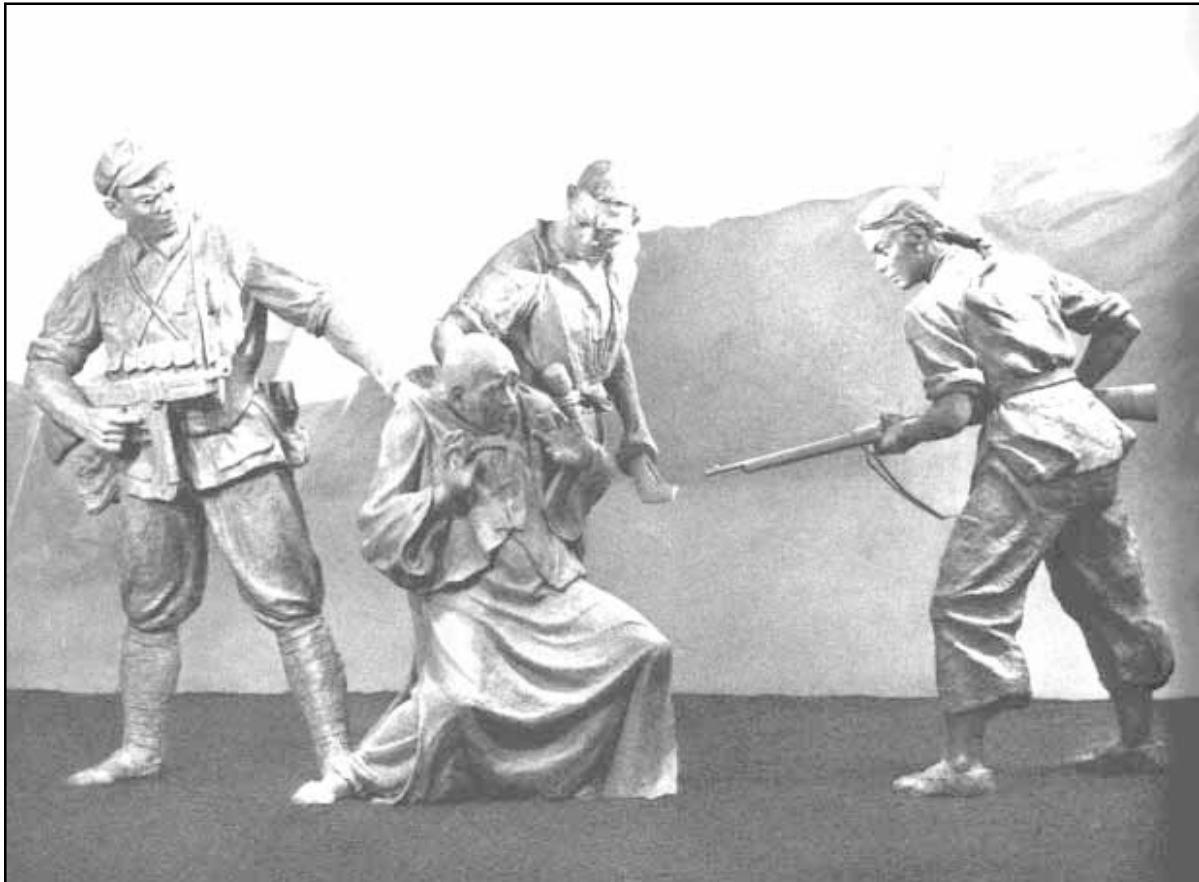
1. Informal evaluation through class discussion of essential understanding of the problem of inequity of land distribution and the range of solutions which existed.
2. Write a short speech to the poor peasants of a village urging them to overcome their fear and get rid of the landlords.
3. Write an editorial in which you react to this statement: "Given the conditions of the time, the practice of land reform was the only reasonable alternative and was essentially fair."
4. Write a short essay predicting whether Mao Zedong's land reform policies of 1947 would be successful in the long run. Why or why not?
5. Write a short paragraph explaining what you think happened after the landlord's land was divided among the peasants.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON LAND REFORM

Since ancient times the Chinese peasant was exploited by landlords, bandits and government officials. At the same time ideas of equalizing land ownership existed as well. The Taiping Rebellion (1857–1864), the utopian vision of Sun Yat-sen, and the land programs of Mao Zedong are only three examples of attempts to fulfill the dream of returning "land to the tiller."

Mao Zedong consciously harvested peasant support for the communist revolution by promising land reform. He used the peasants' hunger for land combined with their hatred of the oppressive landlord class to gain support in the Civil War between the Chinese Communist Party, led by Mao, and the Nationalist (Kuomintang), led by Chiang Kai-shek. Though interrupted by the Japanese invasion in the 1930s and then by World War II, this civil war lasted for almost a quarter of a century. The policy of land reform—taking the land from the rich and dividing it among the landless peasants—served two purposes. Not only did it promise an equitable form of land ownership, it also gained recruits for the Communist Party's Red Army. Without peasant support, the communist victory in 1949 would have been impossible.

Land reform in action was often violent. Well-trained communist organizers, called cadres, entered villages and attempted to arouse the peasants' political consciousness by encouraging them to "speak bitterness." In publicly denouncing how they had been abused by the landlord and wealthy peasant classes, the peasants' fury mounted. In what could be called "kangaroo courts," landlords were often tried without being allowed to defend themselves, and were often sentenced to death. At least one author has called this process unkind, heartless, and an "unprecedented act of robbery." As you read the description of land reform as it occurred in Stone Village, think about whether the end of land equalization justified the violent "means."



The landlord Liu Wen-tsai is captured by the soldiers and the rebelling peasants.

Source: *Rent Collection Courtyard: Sculptures of Oppression and Revolt*, (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1968). Reprinted with kind permission of Foreign Language Press, Peking.

DOCUMENTS FOR PEASANT REVOLUTION (Primary Source)

I. Conditions in the Countryside

China is a Rural Nation. The writer, Li Dazhao, was a leading Communist in the 1920s.

Our China is a rural nation, and her peasants comprise the majority of the labouring classes. If they are not liberated, then the whole of the nation will not be liberated.

II. Mao Zedong's Belief in Peasant Revolution

... For the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time ... several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. ... They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulate and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly ...

The main targets of attack by the peasants are the local tyrants, the evil gentry and the lawless landlords ...

Countless thousands of the enslaved—the peasants—are striking down the enemies who battered on their flesh. What the peasants are doing is absolutely right; what they are doing is fine. ... They fine the local gentry and local tyrants, they demand contributions from them. ... People swarm into the houses of local tyrants and evil gentry ... slaughter their pigs and consume their grain. ... At the slightest provocation they make arrests, crown the arrested with tall paper hats and parade them through the villages, saying, "You dirty landlords, now we know who you are." Doing whatever they like and turning everything upside down, they have created

a kind of terror in the countryside. This is what some people have called “going too far,” or “exceeding the proper limits in righting a wrong.” Such talk may seem plausible, but in fact it is wrong. First, the local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords have themselves driven the peasants to this. For ages they have used their power to tyrannize over the peasants and trample them underfoot; that is why the peasants have reacted so strongly ... Secondly, a revolution is not a dinner party . . . A revolution ... is an act of violence by which one class overthrows another . . .

Without the poor peasants there would be no revolution. To deny their role is to deny the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. . . .

III. *To March At Their Head and Lead Them*

A marching song written by General Zhu De

You are poor, I am poor
Of ten men, nine are poor
If the nine poor men unite
Where then are the tiger landlords?



Mao Ze Dong
Library of Congress

STONE VILLAGE
(Primary Source, Literature)

*Harvest every year, but yearly nothing
Borrow money yearly, yearly still in debt.
Broken huts, small basins, cracked pots;
Half an acre of land, five graves.*

Ever since the Ch'ing Dynasty, Ma revealed, his family had been poor tenants, renting land and never having any of their own. Every year, he raised eight *piculs* of millet and every year he had to give four of these *piculs* to Landlord Wang. He could afford no medicine for his wife, whom he feared was dying. Two years before, his father had died and he had not been able to buy the old man a coffin, but had to wrap him in straw. Now he was thirty-five and he was still poor and it looked as if he would always be poor. "I guess I have a bad brain," he would say in summing up the reasons for this poverty.

Then the cadres would ask "Are you poor because you have a bad brain or because your father left you no property?"

"I guess that's the reason: my father left me no property."

"Really is that the reason?" asked the cadres. "Let us make an account. You pay four *piculs* of grain every year to the landlord. Your family has rented land for sixty years. That's two hundred forty *piculs* of grain. If you had not given this to the landlord, you would be rich. The

reason you are poor, then, is because you have been exploited by the landlord."

They would talk like this for hours and Ma would finally acknowledge that he was exploited by the landlord. Then he would say: "What can I do? Everyone looks down on me. When it's mealtime, the landlord eats inside the house, but I must eat outside, standing up. I am not good enough. Everyone looks down on me."

"And why is that?" said the cadres. "That is because you have no money and because you have no money you have no position. That is why we must overturn so that everyone can have an equal position and no man will look down on another."

Ma agreed that the landlords had to be overthrown before there could be any happiness for the poor, but he was only half convinced of his own statements. There was yet a long distance between words and action and the weight of two thousand years of tradition lay ever heavily on Ma as on most Chinese peasants....

[Ma Chiu-tze became the Revolution in Stone Wall Village. But he needed help, so on the sixteenth day of the cadres' stay in the village, Ma brought three of his friends into the cave, including the old farmer Original Fortune Lee. However, it was feared that news of their talks had reached the ears of Landlord Wang; a few days later Original Fortune Lee was found murdered.]

After the murder of Original Fortune Lee the people went about in terror and shut up again like clams. Even those who had attended the second meeting now said: "We haven't begun to struggle with the landlord, but one of us is gone already."

The cadres were very much surprised by the murder. They thought they had been too careless and had not placed enough belief in the peasants' fears. They also thought a hand grenade might be thrown at any time into their meeting cave. Their biggest fear, however, was that the peasants would give up the overturning movement altogether. Therefore they decided to hold a memorial meeting in honor of Original Fortune Lee, and by this meeting to mobilize the people.

On the stage opposite the Three Sects Temple, where semi-religious plays were held during festival times, the cadres placed pictures of Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, and General Chu Teh, Commander-in-Chief of the

Communist-led Eighth Route Army. Beside these pictures they placed strips of paper saying: WE SHALL TAKE REVENGE FOR THIS PEASANT.

That same day a mass meeting was called in a great square field south of the town, not far from the river. About eighty people came to complain against Wang, while the rest of the village watched — among them Wang's wife and daughter.

In the course of the morning and afternoon, the crowd accused the landlord of many crimes, including betrayal of Resistance members to the Japanese, robbing them of grain, forcing them into labor gangs. At last, he was asked if he admitted the accusation.

"All these things I have done," he said, "but really it was not myself who did it, but the Japanese."

He could not have chosen worse words. Over the fields now sounded an angry roar, as of the sea, and the crowd broke into a wild fury. Everybody shouted at once, proclaiming against the landlord's words. Even the nonparticipating bystanders warmed to something akin to anger.

Then above the tumult of the crowd came a voice louder than the rest, shouting: "Hang him up!"

The chairman of the meeting and the cadres were disregarded. For all that the crowd noticed they did not exist.

The crowd boiled around Wang and somewhere a rope went swishing over a tree. Willing hands slung one end of the rope around Wang's waist. Other eager hands gave the rope a jerk. Wang rose suddenly and came to a halt in mid-air about three feet above the earth. And there he hung, his head down, his stomach horizontal and his legs stretched out—a perfect illustration of what the Chinese call a “duck's swimming form.”

About his floating body, the crowd foamed, anger wrinkling their foreheads and curses filling their mouths. Some bent down and spit in the landlord's eyes and others howled into his ears.

As he rose from the ground, the landlord felt a terror which mounted higher as his position became more uncomfortable. Finally, he could bear it no longer and shouted: “Put me down. I know my wrongs. I admit everything.”

The spite of the crowd, however, was not so easily assuaged and they only answered the landlord's pleas with shouts: “Pull him up! He's too low! Higher! Higher!”

After a while the anger of the people abated and cooler heads counseled. “If we let him die now, we won't be able to settle accounts with him” Then they allowed him to come down for a rest.

At this point, the wife of Original Fortune Lee came up close to

Wang and said in a plaintive voice: “Somebody killed my husband. Was it you?”

Wang's face which had grown red from hanging in the air slowly was drained of all color. “No, I did not do it,” he said.

“Tell the truth,” said the crowd. “You can admit everything to us and nothing will happen. But if you don't tell us the truth, we will hang you up again.”

“No, it was not me.”

These words were hardly out of his mouth before someone jerked on the rope and the landlord flew into the air again. This time the crowd let him hang for a long while. Unable to bear the pain, Wang finally said: “Let me down. I'll speak.”

Then, between sobs and sighs, he told how he and his son had seized Original Fortune Lee as he was walking home from the meeting, tied his hands together, held his head under water until he was dead and then had thrown him in the river, thinking he would float away.

A cry of rage went up as Wang finished speaking.

“You've already killed three of our men in the war,” said Liu Kwang. “That could be excused. But now your own life can never repay us for the crimes you've done.”

Three days after this meeting, the whole village breakfasted early, and shortly after sunrise, seven hundred men and women, including

visitors from neighboring villages, many armed with pig knives, hoes, sickles, swords, and spears went out to the large field south of town where the landlord was to be killed. The cadres had written down Wang's crimes on large pieces of paper and these, hanging by ropes from the trees, now fluttered in the breeze.

"Traitor Wang Chang-ying killed three militiamen and one active farmer of the village," said one.

"Sinful Landlord Wang grafted money and grain during the War of Resistance," said another.

"Wang Chang-ying shifted the tax burden onto the people and looted the village," said a third.

A shout went up from the crowd as Landlord Wang was led onto the field. Three guards marched him, pale and shaking, to a willow tree where he was bound up. With his back against the tree, the landlord looked once at the crowd but quickly bent his head toward the ground again.

A slight shiver of apprehension went through the audience. They could not believe their enemy was helpless there before them. He was the lamb led to slaughter, but they could not quite believe they were going to kill him.

Ma Chiu-tze stepped before the crowd and called for attention. "Now the time has come for our revenge," he announced in a trem-

bling voice. "In what way shall we take revenge on this sinful landlord? We shall kill him."

As he said this, he turned around and slapped Wang sharply across the face.

The crack of palm against cheek rang like a pistol shot on the morning air. A low animal moan broke from the crowd and it leaped into action.

The landlord looked up as he heard the crowd rushing on him. Those nearest saw his lips move and heard him say: "Two words, two words please."

The man closest shouted: "Don't let him speak!" and in the same breath swung his hoe, tearing the clothes from the bound man's chest and ripping open the lower portion of his body.

The landlord gave one chilling shriek and then bowed his head in resignation. The crowd was on him like beasts. Their faces had turned yellow and their eyes rolled. A big farmer swung his pig knife and plunged it directly into the landlord's heart. His body quivered — even the tree shook — then slumped, but still the farmer drew his knife in and out, again and again and yet once again.

Landlord Wang was quickly dead, but the rage of the crowd would not abate.

The field rang with the shouts of maddened people.

“It is not enough to kill him.”

“We must put him in the open air.”

“We must not allow him to be buried for three days.”

But such convulsive passions do not last long. They burn themselves out. Slowly, the anger of the crowd cooled. The body of the landlord might rot in the open air and it was better that his wife and daughter be allowed to get him.

That evening, as the sun was going down behind the mountain, the landlord's wife and daughter brought a mule cart slowly across

the field to where their husband and father lay. They wept no tears, but silently lifted the mutilated body into the cart and drove away.

Few saw them come and few saw them go. And no one said a word. For there was nothing left to say. The struggle against the landlord was ended.

Stone Wall Village had turned over.

Source: Franz Schurmann and Orville Schell, *The China Reader: Communist China* (New York: Random House, 1967). Reprinted by permission.



The land reform movement was often violent. Here a landlord is executed.
National Archives

**BASIC PROGRAM ON CHINESE AGRARIAN LAW PROMULGATED BY THE
CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY, 1947
(Primary Source)**

The following is the full text of the basic program on Chinese Agrarian Law promulgated on October 10th by the publication of the program.

Resolution:

China's agrarian system is unjust in the extreme. Speaking of general conditions, landlords and rich peasants who make up less than ten percent of the rural population hold approximately 70 to 80 percent of the land, cruelly exploiting the peasantry. Farm laborers, poor peasants, middle peasants, and other people, however, who make up over 90 percent of the rural population hold a total of approximately only 20 to 30 percent of the land, toiling throughout the whole year, knowing neither warmth nor full stomach. These grave conditions are the root of our country's being the victim of aggression, oppression, poverty, backwardness, and the basic obstacles to our country's democratization, industrialization, independence, unity, strength and prosperity.

In order to change these conditions, it is necessary, on the basis of the demands of the peasantry, to wipe out the agrarian system of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation, and realize the system of "land to the tillers." For 20 years, and especially in the last two years, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese peasants have obtained enormous achievements and rich experiences in carrying out land reform. In September of this year, the Chinese Communist Party convened a nationwide agrarian conference, and at the conference did detailed research into conditions of the Chinese agrarian system and experience of the land reform, and enacted the basic program on the Chinese agrarian law to serve as a proposal to the democratic government of all areas, peasants' meetings, peasants' congresses and their committees. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party is in complete accord with the basic program on agrarian law, and is furthermore publishing it. It is hoped that the democratic governments of all areas, peasants' meetings, peasants' congresses, and their committees will discuss and adopt this proposal, and furthermore will work out concrete methods appropriate to local conditions, to unfold and thoroughly carry through a nationwide land reform movement, completing the basic task of the Chinese revolution.

Central Committee Chinese Communist Party— October 10, 1947

Basic Program:

Article 1: The agrarian system of feudal and semi-feudal exploitation is abolished. The agrarian system of “land to the tillers” is to be realized.

Article 2: Landownership rights of all landlords are abolished.

Article 3: Landownership rights of all ancestral shrines, temples, monasteries, schools, institutions and organizations are abolished.

Article 4: All debts incurred in the countryside prior to the reform of the agrarian system are cancelled.

Article 5: The legal executive organs for the reform of the agrarian system shall be the village peasants’ meetings, and the committees elected by them; the assemblies of the Poor Peasants’ League and organized and landless and land-poor peasants of villages, and the committees elected by it; *ch’u hsien*, provincial and other levels of peasants’ congresses, and committees elected by them.

Article 6: Except as provided in Article 9 Section B, all land of landlords in the villages, and all public land, shall be taken over by the village peasants’ associations, and together with all other village land, in accordance with the total population of the village, irrespective of male or female, young or old, shall be unifiedly and equally distributed; with regard to the quantity of land, surplus shall be taken to relieve dearth, and with regard to the quality of land, fertile land shall be taken to supplement infertile, so that all the village people shall obtain land equally; and it shall be the individual property of each person.

Article 7: The unit for the distribution of the land shall be the *hsiang* or administrative village equivalent to *hsiang*. But *ch’u* or *hsien* peasants’ associations may make certain necessary adjustments between various *hsiangs*, or equivalent administrative villages. In areas where the district is extensive and the population sparse, and for the purpose of convenient cultivation, comparatively small units below the level of the *hsiang* may be taken as units for the distribution of the land.

Article 8: Village peasants’ associations shall take over the landlords’ animals, agricultural implements, houses, grain and other properties, shall further expropriate the surplus animals, agricultural implements, houses, grain and other properties of rich peasants; and these shall be distributed to peasants lacking in these properties, and to other poor people, and furthermore an equal portion shall be distributed to the landlords. The property distributed to each person shall be his personal property, thus enabling all the village people to obtain proper materials for production and for life.

Source: William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). Reprinted by permission of Monthly Review Foundation.

LESSON THREE

THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES: TWO POINTS OF VIEW

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To detect bias in written material.
2. To be able to distinguish between private ownership and communal ownership of land.
3. To explain why privately owned plots were abandoned in favor of the commune system.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the commune system that existed between 1958 and 1978.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Read the parable "The Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains" (**Document H**). Ask the students what the story represents. Have students complete the discussion questions on **Worksheet 1**.
2. The teacher should use selected information from the **Background Materials (Document I)**, "People's Communes" to give the students basic background information about the commune system. Do not explain that the commune system was eventually abandoned until the conclusion of the lesson. (Sample questions for discussion are provided at the end of the lesson.)
3. Explain that students will read a case study, a description of a selected commune.
 - a. Give half of the class the article "The Nightmare of Life in China's Communes" (**Document J**). Give the other half of the class **Document K**, "From Poverty to Prosperity: Jianming. A Thriving People's Commune." Students should not be told that they are being given different materials!

- b. After reading the article, the students should complete **Worksheet 2**.
 - c. Ask the class members to share their impressions of the article that they have read. It should become clear that the authors represent two different points of view.
- 6. Define bias. Discuss techniques students should use to critically evaluate source materials. Obvious examples are the titles of the articles, visual materials, and descriptive adjectives. Ask the students to brainstorm other ways in which an author's bias might be detected.
 - 7. Draw an editorial cartoon showing one or both points of view about the commune system.

C. Extended Activities

- 1. Use two different social studies texts to compare treatment of the same subject.
- 2. Debate the pros and cons of commune living.
- 3. Research the operation of communal farms (kolkhoz and sovhoz) in the Soviet Union. How are they similar/different from Chinese-operated communes from the same period (the 1960s)?
- 4. Write a letter to the editor explaining why the commune system should be continued or abolished.
- 5. As a group project, draw a mural of a Chinese commune.

D. Sample Questions for Discussion of Background Materials

- 1. From the communist point of view, give at least two reasons why it was necessary to adopt new agrarian reform policies.
- 2. Describe how a people's commune operated.

3. If you were a Chinese peasant, would you want to live in a Chinese commune? Why or why not?
4. Why was the commune system abandoned?

E. Vocabulary

Iron Rice Bowl
People's Commune
Marxist orthodoxy

The Great Leap Forward
production brigade
incentive

F. Evaluating the Lesson

1. Informal evaluation through class discussion.
2. Completion of **Worksheet 2**.
3. Explain the significance of each of the vocabulary words.
4. Ask the students to list ways in which the daily lives of peasants had changed as a result of the shift to communes.

THE FOOLISH OLD MAN WHO MOVED MOUNTAINS

(A Folktale)

Many years ago there was an old man who lived in Northern China. People called him the Foolish Old Man of North Mountain. His house faced south and beyond his doorway stood the two great peaks, Taihung and Wangwu, which blocked his view.

So one day he called his sons together and told them he wanted to get rid of the mountains. They each took a shovel and with great determination, they began to dig up the mountains.

A Wise Old Man saw them busily digging away and he laughed at them. "How silly of you to do this," he told them. "It's impossible for you few to dig up these two high mountains."

The Foolish Old Man replied, "When I die, my sons will carry on; when they die, there will be my grandsons, and then their sons and grandsons, and so on until the job is done."

"High as they are, the mountains cannot grow any higher and with every bit we dig, they will be that much lower. You see, we *will* clear them away."

So, having answered the Wise Old Man, the Foolish Old Man and his sons went on digging.

Marie-Louise Gebhardt, *The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains* (New York: Friendship Press, 1969), pp. 100-101. Used by permission of Friendship Press.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *The Foolish Old Man Who Moved Mountains* is an old folk tale. Chinese leaders use it in their speeches. What would you say is the most important value held by the Foolish Old Man? The Wise Old Man? Which value would peasants be more likely to hold? Why?
2. What do you think is the point or moral of the tale? Do you think the peasants of old China would recognize the moral? Would the peasants of modern China? Explain.
3. Why do think Chinese leaders want their people to know this folk tale?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES

When the Chinese Communist Party first came to power in 1949, land was taken from rich peasant and landlord families, divided into small plots and distributed among poor peasants. In 1953, the Party began a more ambitious land program by taking a page from Marxist orthodoxy and ending all private ownership of land.

This more radical stage of landholding proceeded in two steps. At first, small privately-owned plots were converted into agricultural collectives. Peasants pooled their labor, land, livestock and farm implements in an attempt to raise the level of farm production to meet the needs of a growing population. In 1958, in an upheaval called the "Great Leap Forward," the collectives were merged together to form much larger units called People's Communes. By the end of 1958, 98% of the rural population belonged to these massive communes, each of which averaged 25,000 people. Mao Zedong's aim was to make each commune an independent unit, self-sufficient in grain production and operating small essential industries. Commune workers were subdivided into production brigades and production teams which accomplished specific tasks.

Commune leaders formed a mini-government of the commune area. They administered agricultural production, collected taxes and operated banks. Large dining halls were built so that women could work on farms without having to worry about preparing meals in the home. Nurseries for the young and retirement homes for the elderly freed parents from family responsibilities. On some communes, simple machines were developed to make farming easier. Other commune goals included soil improvement, water conservation, and better sanitation. One visitor observed that Chinese peasants were better fed, better housed, cleaner, healthier, and better educated than before the revolution.

On the other hand, those critical of the commune system labeled it an "iron rice bowl." Jobs and wages were guaranteed, providing peasants with little incentive to work harder. The government dictated nearly every aspect of crop production, and too much government interference resulted in mismanagement. Continuing population growth meant that per capita consumption of grain remained at roughly the same level in the 1970s as it had

been in the 1930s. The combined effects of mismanagement and drought in the 1970s resulted in serious food shortages. Hungry peasants became predictably hostile toward communist cadres.

It appears that Mao's demand for egalitarianism did not result in the economic growth and efficiency he had hoped for. Mao was forced to retreat from the full-blown commune structure established in 1958. In the 1960s the communes were reorganized into smaller units. By 1980 there were more than 50,000 communes averaging about 16,000 members. Replacing the highly centralized commune administration were small production teams of 30 to 40 families each. Family members received a fixed amount of work points for each day's labor. The production teams kept track of the work points earned by each member. At the end of the year, the commune totalled the work points of each individual and awarded grain allotments from the harvest based on the work points. With work point accounting based on the smaller production team, peasant incentive improved somewhat.



The poster reads: "Chairman Mao says, 'All our literature and art are for the masses of the people, and in the first place for the workers, peasants, and soldiers; they are created for the workers, peasants, and soldiers and are for their use.' "

THE NIGHTMARE OF LIFE ON CHINA'S COMMUNES

(Secondary Source)

Revelations from behind the Bamboo Curtain of the most frightful regimentation in history, which tears families apart, puts children in barracks, even regulates sex.

Of an evening the free citizens of Macao, the Portuguese island colony near Hong Kong, sit under the banyan trees and look across the West River with horrified fascination. For on the island of Lappa, only 600 yards away, China's Communist masters have established the 20th-century nightmare, a People's Commune. This is the New China in microcosm, and to see it in action boggles the mind.

Macao has been commune-watching for almost seven months now, ever since the day in late July when the 20,000 men and women of Lappa were suddenly herded out of their homes and into 50 long, low, bamboo barracks. The performance lasts from 5 a.m., when the first shrill whistle blasts are heard, until midnight, when the last platoon of weary workers stumbles back to the barracks. Nineteen hours a day, seven days a week, it goes on. Here is life-by-the-numbers — the most frightful regimentation in history.

In December Macao's commune-watchers witnessed an unscheduled act in the dreary drama. One day people were awakened by a sudden outburst of shouting across the water. Clearly they heard cries of, "We won't work any more!" Then they could see Communist troops dashing across the causeway which connects Lappa to the Chinese Mainland. Soon submachine-gun and rifle fire, punctuated by screams, filled the chilling dawn. Finally there was silence. There were few among Macao's Chinese that day who did not thank their ancestors for the good fortune which placed them on the free side of the river.

All over China the family-centered individualistic Chinese are being reduced to 653 million indistinguishable parts in a vast, inhuman machine. In a People's Commune the members eat, sleep, produce, act, think, even procreate, not as individuals but as an integrated social unit. When they start out for work in the morning — after reveille, gymnastics and a mess-hall breakfast — they march off in formation, under flags. India's Prime Minister Nehru recently described China as one big army camp. There

is military training for all — even the children drill with toy rifles.

When he joins a commune the peasant loses his land and everything else he owns. His tools, livestock, cooking pots and household furnishings he must “sell” to the commune (but without getting paid). Everything goes except the clothes he is wearing, and all further clothing is issued by the government. The family generally moves into segregated barracks where men, women, children and old folks live separately. The basic social unit is not the family but an all-male or all-female platoon of 20.

The first People’s Commune was set up last April in Honan Province as an experiment. By the end of August, China’s masters had started herding all of the nation’s half-billion peasants into communes — “to facilitate,” in the cynical words of Foreign Minister Chen Yi, “the emancipation of the human personality.” Now when the crops were in, the peasant could not putter around, mend the pigsty or rest. Instead he was marched off to build roads, tear down other people’s villages, construct barracks or melt cooking utensils down into pig iron so that the New China might meet its steel production goal for 1958.

The effect of all this regimentation on the individual can be heard at first hand in Macao from people

who have escaped and fled there.

Chang Hsi-lan, 23, ran away from a commune late last November because he “didn’t want to be an animal any more.” Chang had lived in the village of Kao Yeung in South China. The local Communist boss, Lee Tak, one day summoned everyone to a meeting and announced that the village, along with 19 others, was going to join a commune. “You will sell all your personal belongings to the commune,” he said, “and not worry about anything.” Some of the villagers tried to protest but Lee refused to allow discussion or answer questions.

Chang Hsi-lan, greatly disturbed, went to see his friend Tong Nanliang. While he was there a Communist appraiser came, looked at the Tong family possessions — three beds, several pots, bowls, tables, chairs and lanterns — and said the Tongs would be paid \$60 for them. When? “Someday,” the Communist said, and went away.

A few days later the villagers were awakened before dawn. As they assembled on a hill a short distance away, Communist cadres began removing everything from the 170 houses and loading it onto trucks. Then the Communists went methodically through the village, setting each hut afire. The people watched dumbly while their village disappeared.

Now Lee Tak told them to start walking toward the new commune, 23 miles away. The strong helped the weak, the sick were carried on improvised stretchers. Communist boss Lee made the trip by truck. It was almost dark when the villagers came to an open field on which sat seven newly built barracks. This was one of a dozen settlements in the Li Hing commune, which numbered some 10,000 members.

First, all children except tiny infants were taken from their mothers and sent to one of the barracks. Elderly people, like Tong's 60-year-old mother, went to another called "The Happy House." Women were placed in two barracks, men in the remaining three: 100 persons, or five platoons, to the barracks. Some of the older people were told that they would work preparing food; others were assigned to the nursery or to sanitary details. The young and strong, both male and female, would be workers. Assigned places in the three-tiered bamboo bunks, Chang and Tong went to sleep.

At 4:30 the following morning Chang was awakened by a police whistle. After roll call his platoon was made to perform calisthenics, run and do close-order drill carrying wooden rifles. At eight o'clock a breakfast of rice and shrimp sauce was brought to the parade ground and they were given 15 minutes to

eat. Then the whistle blew again. Platoons were formed into 160-man companies and marched to the fields.

They worked steadily until noon, when rice and vegetables were brought to the field. After the 15-minute lunch period work resumed and went on until 7:30, when everyone was marched back to the barracks. At the evening meal everyone ate in a state of dumb exhaustion. Afterward the whistle blew, the commune was marched back to the fields, where lights had been strung up, and wearily went to work again.

Finally at midnight they were marched to the barracks and told, "You have finished for the day." Husbands were warned to stay away from the women's barracks. Women were refused permission to see their children. Chang went to sleep. Four and a half hours later the whistle was blowing again.

And so it went, day in, day out, seven days a week. There were political meetings, sometimes three a week, and the people welcomed them as a chance to relax. But the only days off were national holidays, which were filled with parades, propaganda movies and more political meetings. There was never any privacy, unless you were married.

A married couple got to spend a few minutes together every other week. The barracks were cleared on Saturday night after the

evening meal, and if it was his Saturday, a man went to an assigned place with his wife. Afterward, she had to report to the health brigade, where the date and the amount of time spent together were recorded. As the long line of couples stood outside each barracks waiting their turn, there was no conversation or joking. It was a dreadful humiliation.

There was never enough to eat. People were told they could buy more food, but there was almost no money. (As a field worker Chang got \$1.20 a month.) As winter came near, commune members shivered in cotton jackets. Commune bosses promised winter uniforms but in late November they had not come.

Chang and Tong decided to escape. One dark night they slipped away to the river, stole a sampan and are now free.

When I met Tong Nan-liang after his escape with Chang, I asked him what his life had been like before the Communists took over. "We were poor and we had bad times," he said. "But there was usually enough to eat. Even if you starved you were with your family, people who loved you. Now all that is gone."

There is no denying that the Chinese Communists have made material advances. But for this progress the Chinese people have paid a price: the loss of their dignity as human beings.

James Bell, "The Nightmare of Life on China's Communes," *Life Magazine*, 1959. Reprinted with permission from Time Warner Inc.



Peasants loading a truck with cabbages at harvest time near Peking. Photo © 1981 by Liu Heung Shing/Contact Press.

FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY
JIANMING—A THRIVING PEOPLE’S COMMUNE
by Wang Kuo-Fan
(Primary Source)

The author is a people’s deputy to the National People’s Congress and Director of the People’s Commune in Zunhua County, Hebei Province.

Many people like to describe the people’s communes as a “rising sun.” I think it’s a good simile. What has been achieved since the establishment of people’s communes in my home county and elsewhere in the country in the last 12 months or so shows that the people’s communes really are like a rising sun, giving us greater strength and promising us a still more brilliant future in our national construction, particularly agricultural production.

I can still remember the kind of life we had when twenty-three impoverished households first got together and established our own co-operative, the Jianming Agricultural Producers Co-operative, in 1952. Landlords and rich peasants sneered at us and nicknamed our co-op the “Paupers’ Co-op.” The twenty-three households that joined were the poorest in our village. Seventeen among us actually begged for a living.

Since the establishment of the co-op, production has dashed ahead like a reinless horse as the country folk say. In 1952, the per *mu* yield of food crops in our co-op was 148 jin. By 1956, it was 340 jin. In 1957, it jumped to 402 jin. In 1958, it again went up to 488 jin. And it was during this big leap forward in agricultural production that we came to think of forming a people’s commune.

Soon after the new commune was founded, it began to make its superiority felt. To begin with, it greatly enhanced our power to fight natural calamities.

The Advantages of the Commune

The former 33 farm co-ops, the predecessors of the Jianming People’s Commune, had altogether 50,000 *mu* of farmland, 4,873 households with a population of 26,000. But since each was doing things in its own way before they were merged into a single commune, they had only sunk 254 wells and excavated 38 small canals in the seven years between the end of 1949 and the close of 1956. Together with other water conservance works built still

earlier, they irrigated only 4,800 *mu* of land. Between the winter of 1957 and 1958, among other things we sank over 300 wells, excavated some 60 small canals, built 435 dams and more than 50 small reservoirs. The largest we built in that year can hold two and a half million cubic metres of water and irrigate 15,000 *mu* of land. With the completion of these projects, we are no longer at the mercy of floods and drought. I shall not go into the difficulties we faced in the course of its construction. What I want to say is that the construction of such a reservoir is only possible through the combined efforts of all the co-ops in the locality. We did this: with the help of other districts, we men and women of the 33 co-ops pooled the manpower, materials and technical strength at our disposal for the construction which was started in March last year. With more than 4,000 people from the various co-ops taking part in the construction, it was practically completed in September 1958. Actually it was a product of collective efforts organized in the communal form. After the official founding of our commune, several hundred people were again set out to construct the spill ways and the whole project was fully completed in the summer of this year. Immediately after its completion, it played a very big part in increasing this year's agricultural production. In addition to irrigation and flood prevention functions, it is also a source of aquatic products. The value of aquatic products raised this year is estimated to amount to one-seventh the total income of the commune, or an extra income of 100 yuan for every household in our commune.

Thanks to this new organizational form, we are now able to make more rational use of our manpower and consequently increase the efficiency of the commune members. Last autumn, in the thick of the harvest, we still managed to find enough men to sow 7,000 *mu* of wheat and deep plough 4,000 *mu* of land in a month. Spring ploughing this year was carried out in very dry weather but our 50,000 *mu* of farmland were cultivated in time. In June it took us only ten days to bring in the summer crops which usually took us 20 days in the past. With the establishment of nurseries and community dining-rooms, more than 2,000 women in our commune have been released from household chores.

Before the establishment of the commune, all the co-ops were preoccupied with farming activities for their own subsistence. They could not make good use of the different types of land they had, or exploit their natural resources properly. Only after our co-ops merged into a single commune were we in a position to develop farming, forestry, animal husbandry, side-occupations and fishery at the same time, while choosing the right tracts of land

for the right crops. This was unthinkable in the past. In the cold and hilly regions where the climate is suitable for growing nuts and trees, food crops were cultivated instead because of the need of the co-ops for grains. The former Jianming Co-op, too, had to grow sweet potatoes to feed its members although most of its land was ideal for groundnuts. This year we have completely changed the situation, extended the area for the growing of groundnuts, wheat, rice and maize.

Here I want to mention especially livestock breeding which owes its development mostly to the birth of our commune. Now that proper places are fenced in as pastures, the commune this year has 1,000 more sheep than the total number of sheep kept by the 33 co-ops in the past. The number of donkeys and horses increased by 12 percent and cattle by 46 percent. The increase in the number of these draught animals and the subsequent increase in manure have made meticulous farming possible. The greatest increase, however, is in the number of hogs, now averaging two and a half hogs per household.

Since the establishment of the commune plans are being mapped out for the exploitation of mineral ores, such as gold, silver, copper, iron, tin asbestos and mica which are found in abundance in our commune.

The Beginning of Mechanized Farming

The last twelve months also witnessed the start of mechanized farming in our commune, made possible because the commune has greater means to finance it and because large tracts of land of different co-ops have been brought under the unified direction of the commune authorities. A tractor usually costs around 10,000 yuan. Even an advanced agricultural co-op could hardly afford it. Since its birth our commune has bought five tractors with our own money and in January this year we set up our own machine and tractor station with 11 agricultural machines of different types, such as sowers, combine-harvesters, etc. In addition, our commune also owns 14 diesel engines, donkey engines and other engines which greatly ease the strain on manpower and lessen the intensity of labour. Last spring our tractors ploughed some 10,000 *mu* of land, doing the job usually done by about 4,000 men and 6,000 draught animals. This year, 2100 *mu* of our wheat fields were irrigated by power driven pumps which saved the labour power of additional tens of thousands of people. "Iron bulls now run all over the place but in the past our donkey had only three legs!" That is how our commune members express their sentiments.

To provide better conditions for mechanized farming and modern transport we have also worked out plans for the construction of inter-farm highways so that by next year a network of highways within the commune will link the various production brigades and units.

Industry, too, has come to the countryside with the founding of People's Communes, implementing the simultaneous development of industry and agriculture which is the policy of the Chinese Communist Party in socialist construction. While developing agriculture, the Jianming People's Commune has also embarked on industrial production directly serving our agricultural production. A few small oil-pressing ships, breweries, kilns for the manufacture of charcoal and bricks formerly operated by the co-ops, soon proved to be quite inadequate to meet the needs of the production activities of the commune, while two existing blacksmiths' and carpenters' co-operatives could only turn out some minor farm implements and things for daily use. During the big leap forward, we were in dire need of agricultural machines, chemical fertilizer, building materials which were not produced in our locality. While taking part in the nation's drive for iron and steel last year, our commune, with greater financial and material resources at its disposal, set up a plant to repair and make farm tools. In the first quarter of this year alone it produced more than 3,000 big and small farm implements, carts and wagons, repaired tractors, donkey engines and more than 260 other farm tools. Our own fertilizer plant has already gone into operation and will turn out altogether 1,690 tons of bacterial fertilizer before the end of this year. A cement works, a sugar refinery and plants to process food and fruits are now in the blueprint stage.

With the merger of dozens of co-ops into a single commune, it is also easier for us to organize coordinated work and emulation among the production brigades. A red flag emulation campaign for better field management, preparations for the planting of wheat and making compost was launched this autumn among the different production brigades and units. Never before were our people as enthusiastic as now. Today, most of our crop fields are free from weeds and insect pests. Food crops this year are 33 percent higher than last year.

We Live Better

Life in the commune is much better. Quite a few of our members have moved into new homes, some homes have bicycles and sewing machines and two villages in our commune have installed electric lights. The whole commune now has 55 primary schools and 3,600 of our 4,300 children under seven are under the care of our 101 nurseries or kindergartens. Our commune also has community dining-rooms in every production brigade and one home for the aged, one clinic, five health centers and six maternity wards.

Our members are confident in their future and feel that the road to happiness is the road charted by the Communist Party.

Source: Wang Kuo-Fan, "Jianming: A Thriving People's Commune," by *Peking Review*, 42:19 (17 Nov 1959).



Lei Feng as a young boy studying the virtues of Maoism.
Mao used Lei Feng, the “model revolutionary,” in many of his ideological campaigns to urge citizens to be selfless and dedicated.

Source: Library of Congress

Document Analysis Worksheet

I. Type of Document: (Check one)

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Map | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Press Release | <input type="checkbox"/> Photograph or |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Magazine Article | | Drawing |

II. Date(s) of document:

III. Position (Title):

IV Author (or creator) of the document:

V. For what audience was the document written?

VI. Document information: (There are many possible ways to answer A-D.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. Did the author have a bias? List any judgmental words that were used in the article.

C. List two things the document tells you about life in China at the time it was written.

D. Write a question that you would like to ask the author.

LESSON FOUR

THE FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM: THE RETURN OF INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to differentiate between the commune system and the family responsibility system and give examples of both.
2. To define and give examples of both a command economy and a free-market economy.
3. To describe how the responsibility system encouraged individuals to work harder.
4. To predict how increased prosperity and education will change the life of China's young people.
5. To explain the relationship between capitalist speculation and commodity production.

Note to the Teacher

The Family Responsibility System is not synonymous with capitalism. The essence of capitalism is private ownership of property. In China, almost all farm land except for state farms is collectively owned by rural communities. Privately owned land is limited mainly to rural residential plots, usually with a small vegetable garden. Village councils allocate collectively owned land to individual farmers. What has changed is the organization of labor—or how the state-controlled land is farmed. Under the responsibility system, land is managed and worked by private individual households but these households do not own the land. So it is collective ownership with individual family management.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Use the **Background Materials** on the responsibility system as the basis for a lecture or as a student resource. Discuss, using the background questions as a guide.
2. Have the students read **Document L**, “Wang Xin’s Road to Prosperity” and answer the questions on **Worksheet 3**. Discuss.
3. Encourage the students to brainstorm the logical consequences which appear inherent in the responsibility system. The teacher might use a “web format.” Encourage students to think of long range as well as short range effects. For example:
 - a. more money
 - b. better standard of living
 - c. mechanization
 - d. people leave the farm to find jobs in the city
 - e. cities become crowded

Or have the students brainstorm on the theme: *If you were a farmer, in what ways would you spend your newly earned profits?*

4. Having developed a web of possibilities, have the students write a news article for the *China Daily* describing Wang Xin’s village in the year 2000. This could also be a group project with each person describing a particular aspect of village life.
5. Debate the positive and negative effects inherent in the responsibility system.

C. EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Use **Document M** to make a bar graph showing increased agricultural production between 1952 and 1987.

2. Draw a comic strip entitled “A Chinese Peasant Becomes Wealthy.”
3. Pretend that you are Mao Zedong—risen from the dead! Write a letter to the editor criticizing the new class of capitalist speculators and the “Family Responsibility System.”
4. Make an illustrated timeline showing China’s agricultural reforms from 1947 to the present.
5. Use the *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature* to find recent articles describing life in the Chinese countryside. Briefly summarize what you have learned.
6. Research the latest government policies toward agricultural reforms. Has the government altered its policy in any way? Explain.
7. Find information about Deng Xiaoping’s “Four Modernizations” program. In addition to agriculture, what sectors of the economy were decentralized?

D. SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. Why was the family responsibility system begun?
2. In what ways is the responsibility system different from the commune system?
3. In what ways is the responsibility system different from the U.S. farm economy?
4. Is the problem of “red eyes” serious? give reasons for your opinion.

E. VOCABULARY

Background Reading

command economy
free-market economy
responsibility system
quota
material incentives
socialism

Wang Xin Selection

hectare
dividend
agricultural cooperative
"leftist thinking"
"capitalist speculator"

F. EVALUATING THE LESSON

1. Informal evaluation through discussion.
2. Define and give the significance of important vocabulary terms.
3. Pretend that you are a 60-year-old peasant. Write an essay describing how your life has changed over the years. What kind of future do you predict for your children?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE “FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM”

During the twenty year period of Mao's closely regulated policies (1957-1976) agricultural output had grown only minimally and the standard of living in the countryside remained low. When Mao Zedong died in 1976, his successor Deng Xiaoping shifted the egalitarian policies of his predecessor in a more capitalist direction. Deng has moved away from a command economy toward a limited free market system. Since peasants continue to comprise the foundation of the Chinese economy, it was important to begin radical reforms in agriculture first. China had to import large amounts of food to feed her growing population.

Because the lack of incentive for increased agricultural production was thought to have had its roots in the restrictive commune system, Deng decided to reinvigorate the rural economy by loosening controls and providing greater material incentives. Over the next five years, the Responsibility System allowed the peasant to assume full responsibility once he had negotiated a contract which promised a quota or fixed amount of produce to the commune in exchange for the use of the land. By 1984, 98% of farm households had come under the responsibility system.

As a result of these reforms agricultural productivity continued to rise. As farms became increasingly mechanized and efficient, less time was spent in the field. Non crop sideline activities such as handicrafts, fishing and livestock production, and work in rural industry, helped to increase cash income. Products are sold on the free market or at county fairs. The improved standard of living was reflected in new brick homes, and more consumer goods such as TV's, furniture and colorful clothing. In 1987, one California newspaper reported that some farmers led an “ownerlike life” and several earned over 10,000 yuan (2,500 dollars). For most farmers, however, modernization may mean only limited amounts of electricity and running water. Purchases might be limited to radios, bikes or rubber tires on carts.

The Responsibility System presents new challenges for the Chinese government. With fewer price controls, crops have become more expensive, and inflation has occurred. Secondly, there is less incentive to adhere to

population control policies since more farm workers still mean higher productivity. Will China's continued population growth, now at 1.13 billion, cancel out gains in crop yields? Still another problem has been the growth of inequality. In rural areas, this problem has been referred to as "red eyes," those peasants who have watched their neighbors become rich, but have not prospered themselves. Under the "iron rice bowl system," workers were promised employment and equality; under the responsibility system unemployment and inequality have contradicted the communist promise of an equal society.

Despite the above problems, the successes of the Responsibility System appear to promise a brighter future for China's peasants. The government's challenge is to strike a middle ground between socialism and the free market system.



Deng Xiaoping
Gerald Ford Library

WANG XIN'S ROAD TO PROSPERITY (Primary Source)

Wang Xin is just one farmer who survived Mao's policies and benefited from Deng's move away from a command economy toward a free-market system. In 1984, *The Beijing Review* reported that Wang Xin's family was one of the 22 wealthiest in China.

There is a long story behind my family's prosperity. My family's history is closely linked with the history of the Chinese society. So let me start my story with the rise and fall of the country.

In 1941, I was born to a poor peasant family in Pinggu County. At the time, my family had 10 members from three generations, but we had no farmland at all. My grandpa and his brother had to work for the landlord. My father and his brother wove at home and traded their coarse cloth at the market for some food. While peddling their handmade cloth, they had to be alert and evasive to avoid being forced to bribe the police.

One winter day, my grandpa's brother had two fingers bitten off while feeding cattle for the landlord. The landlord simply dismissed him when he discovered that he was no longer useful. This made our lives even worse. My grandma had no other way to earn money but to pick wild jujubes in the mountains, which were ground up and mixed with wild herbs to make something like a bun.

At the time, my grandparents and parents wanted to work hard and get rich. Their desire, however, was merely a dream.

Bright Dawn

In 1949 New China was founded and we peasants became masters of the country. Land reform was carried out, with feudalism land ownership abolished and farmland returned to the tillers. All the 300 peasant families in my village got shares of farmland, averaging 0.2 acres per person. For us peasants, this really meant something to live on.

During the land reform, the landlords' surplus rooms were confiscated and the extra rooms were distributed among the poor. My family moved from a three-room thatched house into a tile-roofed house with seven rooms. Though only a small child at the time, I clearly remember how happy the peasants were.

In 1951 the agricultural collectivization movement got underway in my village. We first got organized into mutual-aid production teams and then into elementary agricultural co-operatives, pooling our land and sharing the dividends. In 1956 we switched to the advanced agricultural co-operatives and put our farmland into public ownership. The principle of "to each according to his work" was followed. The removal of land boundary stakes made it possible to develop a unified farming plan on a larger scale and created favorable conditions for water conservation projects and agricultural mechanization.

With the land under public ownership, all the villagers met to discuss how to use their farmland and how to distribute the income. This was completely different from preliberation days when we had no land at all.

During those years, since everyone worked hard and the government provided the co-operative with preferential loans and farm tools, production grew rapidly. The grain output, for instance, grew from 2,250 kg per hectare [1 hectare = 2.47 acres] before 1949 to 4,225 kg in 1956. I remember my family got more than enough wheat that year. We lived quite well during those years.

In July of 1957, our village was hit by a hailstorm. With crops ruined, old people worried that they would have to go begging as they had in the past when natural disasters struck. But when the government heard about our problems, it exempted us from agricultural taxes for that whole year, shipped in grain seeds and potato seedlings and urged us to tide over the difficulty while developing production. By relying on the collective strength of the village and everybody's hard work, no one ran short of food.

In 1957 something important happened to me. I was enrolled in the county's middle school after I graduated from the primary school in my village. Before me, for generations all my family had been illiterate.

Twists and Turns

In 1958 we got organized into the people's commune, which brought about some desirable changes, but also resulted in some baffling developments.

A people's commune usually consisted of several villages (a village was usually an advanced co-operative). To see many people working on a vast expanse of land was really a spectacular view. Soon after the founding of the people's commune, a tractor station was set up to oversee ploughing and sowing.

The year of 1959, however, was chaotic. Some people said we had arrived at real communism. All the people in my village ate at the same canteen, free of charge. We produced hundreds of thousands of kilogrammes of sweet potatoes. But nobody wanted them. The result was that all the potatoes rotted in the fields. Some people were prone to boasting and exaggeration. There was a 0.13 hectare [.32 acre] plot of farmland by my middle school. About 2,500 kg of wheat seeds were sown and people said it would yield 100,000 kg. But, in reality, it produced only 250 kg (because far too many seeds were sown). Though the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party later criticized this mistake of being boastful and exaggerating, much of the wealth had already been wasted. The negative impacts of such actions were felt for years.

The people's commune authorities also gave some arbitrary and impractical orders. Our village had a piece of land which should have been planted with soybeans. Some cadres of the people's commune, however, ordered us to grow carrots. Another piece of land which had already been planted with sweet potatoes was designated for soybeans. All these illogical orders resulted in sizeable losses.

It now becomes clear that the inclination to boast and give arbitrary orders came from "Leftist" thinking.

Of course, the people's commune did some good. The most visible improvements were the water conservation projects. I myself took part in building several big projects.

In 1960 I came back home after graduation from junior middle school. My family of 10 members was then broken up into several small ones. I moved in with my uncle and his wife. Peasants from surrounding villages were then building the Haizi Reservoir which would irrigate almost 10,000 hectares [247,000 acres], one-third of the county's total farmland. The builders, in addition to getting subsidies from the state, were paid in cash by the people's commune and received food rations. This made it attractive work and made it possible for the people's commune to mobilize enough people to build the big projects. The water conservation projects on which I worked are still benefiting the people.

I got married in 1962 and later had two sons and one daughter. More mouths need more money. I managed to increase the income for my family. The next year, I spent my spare time collecting firewood in the winter and growing melons on my family's private plot in the summer. The extra work brought in more than 400 yuan. Our life was pretty good.

In 1966, the chaotic "cultural revolution" began. I could no longer collect firewood or grow melons because these were seen as capitalist undertakings. We peasants, unlike workers who have regular wages, had to work in the fields or we would have had nothing to eat. So our agricultural production continued as usual.

In retrospect, my life improved steadily after I began working. But I always thought I could have done much better. I was held back. In 1969, I was elected deputy leader of the brigade in charge of sideline production. One day I bought some eggs from a state chicken farm in order to hatch chickens for the brigade. I sold some of the surplus eggs and made 100 yuan for the brigade. I was shocked when I was criticized for selling the eggs. I was labelled a capitalist speculator.

Affluence Begins

It is only in recent years that I have been able to work hard and grow prosperous without restrictions.

In 1979 I learnt from newspapers and broadcasts that the Party had adopted flexible policies in the countryside. The contract responsibility system, which

guaranteed more pay for more work, became popular in my village. The new policies allowed us peasants to become the real masters of agriculture and set us free to work hard and make more money. I wondered what I could do to get wealthy.

In 1981, I chose to raise chickens. I spent 380 yuan to buy 500 chicks. I was then a Communist party member and the brigade's deputy leader. What I did raised some eyebrows in the village, but it didn't affect my job. The policy supported me. I got rich by working hard. Nothing wrong. I earned 850 yuan that year.

I then expanded the scope of my chicken business. The state credit co-operative offered me loans and encouraged me to forge ahead. I read books and studied to learn how to raise chickens scientifically. I also learnt how to treat chicken diseases such as diarrhoea and typhoid fever. In 1982, I sold the state 6,000 chickens for 9,000 yuan. With my income from the brigade and other household sidelines, I earned a total of more than 10,000 yuan, a figure larger than my combined income for the previous 10 years. The county recognized my achievements and rewarded me.

The Party policy is to bring into full play everyone's enthusiasm for production. It creates more wealth for the country and provides a good life for the peasants. Being among the first in my county to get rich, I'd like to lead others to prosperity.

Wang Shuchen has eight family members, but only two are able men. They have had a hard time. I explained the Party's policy to him and asked if he would like to raise chickens, too. I lent him 580 yuan, saying, "Please use this money to raise chickens. If the chickens die, I won't ask for the money back." Because he was less experienced in raising chickens, I went to his home several times every day to help him write observation notes, make plans for buying chicken feed, keep balance sheets and cure chicken diseases. Last year Wang earned more than 5,000 yuan from his chicken business alone.

So far, I have encouraged 80 families to raise chickens. Last year alone, I lent the families 5,800 yuan free of interest. In addition, I took time to help them treat chicken diseases and teach them how to raise chickens. I was always available whenever I was asked.

My family's life has improved very much in recent years. However, I spent only 400 yuan buying a radio cassette recorder for my daughter to study a foreign language for her college examinations. Other than that, I have spent not a single penny for other electric appliances for my family. I'd rather spend my money expanding production. I bought a walking tractor that cost more than 3,000 yuan.

Not long ago, I was elected secretary of the village Party branch. Since the Party job took much of my time, my chicken business suffered. But it is worth it, because we are helping more people become prosperous.

I am now wondering how to boost enthusiasm even more so that we can turn our village into a village which specializes in chicken raising. We also want to develop other sideline business and to raise other livestock in order to make our village more competitive in commodity production. Our village cadres have decided that whoever comes up with a practical plan to make more than 10,000 yuan next year will be the first to get material assistance from the village.

Excerpt from Peter N. Stearns, ed. *Documents in World History: From 1500 to the Present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988). Reprinted by permission of Harper Collins.



Peasants at Xiaotian, a village at Shandong Province in eastern China, constructed a new school with the extra money they were able to earn under the family responsibility system. Reproduced with the kind permission of Beijing Review, China.

WANG XIN'S ROAD TO PROSPERITY WORKSHEET

1. Would Wang Xin have been classified as a poor, middle, or rich peasant in the 1940s? Tell why. (Refer to classifications in **Lesson One**.)

2. What do you think is meant by “to each according to his work?”

3. Why do you think “Bright Dawn” is a good name for the period from 1949-1957?

4. What changes might improved educational opportunities bring to peasants?

5. List the benefits and drawbacks of communal living. (Use one column for each.)

6. What do you think is meant by a “capitalist undertaking?” Why might the government disapprove of these business ventures?

7. How did the Contract Responsibility System change Wang's life?
8. Explain how Wang's position in the Communist Party enabled him to get rich.
9. Is this an unbiased account? Why or why not? Give reasons for your answer.
10. At the end of the story, Wang says that whoever comes up with a practical plan to make more than 10,000 yuan next year will be the first to get material assistance from the village. Can American farmers or businessmen receive similar types of assistance? Explain your answer.
11. The *Beijing Review* reports that Wang is one of the 22 richest peasants in China. His position is clearly exceptional. Ten years from now do you think that the majority of peasants will have a share in the prosperity that the responsibility system offers? Explain why or why not.

MAJOR FARM PRODUCTS (In Million Tons) (Primary Source)						
	<u>1952</u>	<u>1957</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1984</u> <u>1987</u>
Grain	163.42	195.05	194.43	304.77	320.56	407.31 402.41
Cotton	1.30	1.64	2.09	2.16	2.07	6.25 4.19
Oil-bearing Crops	4.19	4.19	3.62	5.21	7.69	11.91 15.25
Sugarcane	7.11	10.39	13.39	21.11	22.80	39.51 46.85

Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China*, 4th Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) Reprinted by permission.

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