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Retrieved on July 17th, 2022 from medium.com/@Itmechr3/peasants-and-the-great-leap-forward-c7b4d1465d62.

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The 1949 victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Guomindang (GMD) marked the emergence of a fundamentally new kind of Communist party, one based not in the struggles of the urban proletariat of the 2nd and 3rd International parties that preceded them but in a radicalized, anti-colonial peasantry. These new Communist parties could fundamentally be characterized as developmentalist, seeking to turn their extensive peasant base into an industrial workforce through big push industrialization, with varied and usually limited degrees of success. The Chinese case is particularly indictive of the problems and contradictions these growing movements faced as they took power. Increasingly unbound from the peasants who put them in power, the Chinese communists reversed the 1927 transformation that had turned urban cadres into peasant guerrillas and created a regime of grain extraction to fuel their industrial ambitions. The Chinese peasantry, for their part, remained overwhelmingly supportive of both the communist project and the CCP itself even as the various stages of collectivization fundamentally transformed peasant agriculture and virtually eliminated petty commodity production in the service of an increasingly extractive regime. But the Chinese Communists were never able to overcome their initial material conditions, and without sufficient industry to modernize agriculture nor sufficient agricultural output to fully industrialize its cities, the Party was faced with a crisis of urban discontent. The CCP's response to this crisis, a further intensification of its extractive regime in the countryside, would tear the communist project apart even as it re-solidified Party control, replacing mass rural popular support with a regime of terror that would lead to the horrific famines of 1960 as the party suppressed independent peasant attempts to feed themselves while extracting an ever-increasing amount of grain from an already small harvest. The forms of everyday peasant resistance observed James C. Scott cannot even really be treated here as resistance, ideological or not, they were simply a survival

mechanism utilized by an increasingly exploited peasantry. The Party, now in the grips of the anti-Rightist campaigns, was in no mood to make such distinctions and thus, amidst the utter destruction of the peasant sociality and their unique methods of survival, died the communist project, dead at the hands of the very cadres who had left the cities to build it so long ago.

The China inherited by the CCP at the end of the Civil War overwhelmingly rural. Such a statement, while obviously true to the most casual observer and reinforced by statistics — only 2% of the population of China could be described as "workers and employees" until the early 50's — obscures the specificities of Chinese rurality and the unique mode of commodity production it contained (Chuang 42). Rather unlike the European countryside during the development of capitalism, the Chinese countryside never saw a concentration of capital in towns and cities and instead maintained a highly decentralized mode of commodity production along the lines of what can essentially be thought of as rural estates, though the actual power of the land-owning class had been diminishing for several centuries as a result of changes to Ming and later Qing monetary policy (Chuang 18–24). In such a context, Chinese peasants functioned almost as much as artisans as they did traditional farmers, with widespread handicrafts and petty commodity production powering much of the rural economy. The basic structure of these villages would change little during the GMD's disastrous attempts to knit together a national economy nor the succeeding invasions and civil war, leaving the CCP to manage this unwieldly array of proud small-scale rural producers. CCP planners faced a conjoined problem in the wake of the Chinese Civil War. The small amount of existing Chinese industrial production had either collapsed almost entirely due to fighting in Chinese cities during both WWII and the Civil War or was simply inaccessible in the GMD or British territories of Taiwan and Hong Kong (Chuang 69). Worse still, the only industrial belt even approaching the technological sophistication of the industrialized West, the Japanese-constructed man-

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urban cadres. The peasantry, after all, had achieved communal self-control over and organization of the means of production. They had undergone the first stages of collectivization into mutual aid societies willingly, and resistance to the unwieldly final stage of communes stemmed largely from the accompanying transfer of decision making from the peasants to party officials. Even grain concealment was simply an attempt to keep the communist system functioning (by keeping the peasants who were the core of both the rural and industrial economies alive) in the face of the increasingly boneheaded decisions about extraction levels of the urban cadres. It is thus possible to conceive of a model of peasant communism in which the preservation of self-control over production, slightly lower levels of grain extraction, and fairer allocations of industrial goods to the countryside would be able to keep both the peasantry and the CCP inside of the communist project. But the Party conception of communism became inseparable from the expansion of state control. Their free meal program would be enforced at gunpoint, collectivization and control over the means of production invariably became party control over production, and any deviance from the Party's program would be treated as political resistance. The resulting campaigns of terror, humiliation, and eventual starvation broke the communist movement. Squabbles in the city over power and ideology would continue for decades, but without the support of the peasantry, there could be no new China. The death of the communist project would ironically come at the hands not of the GMD or an American invasion, but from the Communist Party itself, whose commitment to power overwhelmed its commitment to the program it was established to enact.

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ufacturing belt in occupied Manchuria, was systematically looted into uselessness by the USSR to rebuild their own factory system as they pulled out of the region at the end of WWII (Heinzig 101). Chinese agricultural production had likewise been shattered by nearly 40 years of war, and the existing decentralized infrastructure was barely sufficient for supporting the current rural population, much less creating an industrialized economy. The CCP would thus be caught in a trap that would define the socialist era. To industrialize the Chinese economy past a certain point would require an immense surplus of grain, but that surplus could only be extracted with a modern agricultural system that would require massive infrastructure and manufacturing improvements impossible with the needed grain (Chuang 69). Their solution would be to extract grain surpluses from a decidedly pre-modern system of peasant farming collectives, which would serve as the backbone of the Chinese economy while it used foreign investors to develop its capital intensive urban (Chuang 48–49). But this fundamental contradiction of the Chinese socialist system remained unresolved until the entire system exploded during the Great Leap Forward (GLF), sending the socialist project into a death spiral from which it never recovered.

Until the Chinese Civil War, the general received wisdom of peasant revolutions was that the peasantry is interested in land redistribution and little else, and thus can quickly, as in the Russian example, turn into the shock troops of counter-revolutionary armies. The Chinese peasantry that finally put the CCP in power, however, was not the peasantry of the Vendée. The Chinese revolution differs from older models of socialist and peasant revolutions because of the CCP's roots in the pan-class anti-imperialist alliance of the Second Sino-Japanese War, an alliance which was maintained in part in the post-war industrial cities because of the CCP's need for technical knowledge but quickly collapsed in the CCP controlled northern villages during the Civil War (Chuang 47). The origin of the solidification of CPP-peasant relations in anti-imperialism adds another degree

of ideological connection between peasant and communist beyond mere improvements of material conditions. The CCP was able to expertly construct and mobilize a new form of Chinese nationalism, and as anti-imperialist war gave way to civil war, the CCP's deep understanding of village hierarchies allowed them to mobilize incredibly effective anti-landlord campaigns that further entrenched peasant support especially in the northern villages. What's more, the Chinese revolutionaries were stunningly successful in their land reform efforts, deftly managing to avoid the intense counterinsurgency waged in the Soviet Union while simultaneously redistributing 42% of its arable land to individual peasant holdings and completely destroying the power of the landlord class (Naughton 65). Yet as the revolution turned to the process of state building, its cadres increasingly became urban cadres, disconnected from the peasants who had put them into power. Once separated from the peasantry, the social revolution took on the characteristics of authoritarian socialist revolutions described by the legendary Russian anarcho-communist Pyotr Kropotkin in his *The Conquest of Bread*. Kropotkin deserves more recognition than he is traditional given (that is to say any recognition at all) for his remarkably accurate analysis of the course of urban revolutions disconnected, in one way or another, from the countryside. Grain requisitions to feed the urban workers, Kropotkin believed, would cause the peasantry to view the revolutionaries as exploiters, and thus they would withhold their grain unless they received the actual material benefits of the revolution itself in the form of previously inaccessible commodities, which would bind their current improvement in material conditions to the fate of the revolutionary project and thus increase the intensity of labor in the production of surplus grain (Kropotkin 99–104). As the urbanization of leadership cadres solidified, the CCP would take precisely the opposite course of the one Kropotkin recommended. The CCP instituted grain requisition to fill quotas at low fixed prices, and in turn set high prices for manufactured goods, which

concealment was supported by local cadres, who recognized, unlike their urban superiors, that concealment was the only way to actually ensure the survival of the peasants, to whom the cadres still, even in the midst of arrogant GLF reforms, had personal ties. The full-scale repression of peasants and cadre members alike who engaged in grain concealment, then, would mark the irrevocable blow that shattered beyond repair the ties between the CCP and the peasantry. The CCP, probably seeing harvest companies and their perceived cooption of local administration, began to see grain concealment as an overtly political act instead of an act of survival, which triggered the usage of the anti-Rightest movement to purge local administrators and inflict public humiliation on the peasants. In one famous case in Da Fu, a CCP official furious that a few pigs had been fed on communal land to ensure there would be a small amount of meat for Chinese New Year's ordered every communally owned animal in the village slaughtered and the meat destroyed, demonstrating that not even astoundingly powerful and universal cultural expectations would stand in the way of Party control over production (Thaxton 187). Frankly from my own cultural experience with the food cultural surrounding Chinese holidays it is a testament to the power of the CCP's security apparatus that a full-scale revolt did not break out then and there out of horror at the violation of ritual custom and at the humiliation of seeing communal animals pointlessly murdered in a temper tantrum. But the CCP's transformation in an occupying power the very countryside that had once put them into power was already complete. The intense surveillance regime, the shattering of communal and cultural bonds, and raw scale of intrusion into peasant life; none of the steps the CCP had taken could be reversed, and so the Chinese Communists, in their quest to accelerate the transition to full communism, destroyed the communist project itself.

It is not wise, perhaps, but certainly possible to speculate that there was, from the outset, a fundamental difference in the understanding of the communist project between the peasantry and the

of the countryside that would see state power and legitimacy to be maintained through force instead of through ideological hegemony. But as the grain shortages wore on, even local officials and militia members, who themselves relied on grain theft to feed their families, became increasingly unwilling to actually crack down on crop thieves because the practice is both incredibly widespread and the only thing that is keeping the peasants alive (Thaxton 179). To stem the tide of grain thefts, which the CCP mistakenly believed to be the source of the grain shortages, the Party resorted to beating would-be grain thieves to make examples of them and began widespread campaigns of public humiliation through self-criticism session (Thaxton 179). Public humiliation, long a tool used by the Party to channel structural criticism of the economic system into factory management and landlords, was rapidly becoming a means of suppressing independent peasant activity. These humiliation sessions severely damaged the pride that the CCP had consciously built up in the peasantry as part of the CCP's post-war mythology and strained already weakening CCP-peasant relations.

The most common, and probably most misconstrued method of peasant resistance was the practice of grain concealment. Concealment was unique because, as Thaxton describes, it "occurred at three levels: the individual farm household, the harvest company, and the village, or production brigade, itself" (Thaxton 185). Unlike other forms of individual resistance, grain concealment relied on the very structures the CCP had set up in order to manage production, which explains in part why the CCP's eventual crackdown would be so harsh, and why it would fall directly under the anti-Rightest campaigns. Concealment took a variety of forms, ranging from hiding extra land from the Party's maps and using the grain to buffer supplies to harvest companies falsely reporting dead people as still needing food to outright theft of collected grain by harvest leaders, which would then be added to bread to increase the size of loafs as individual cooking was banned (Thaxton 185). The complicity of communal dining halls speaks to the extent to which grain

caused manufacturing to appear highly profitable and served as the revenue basis for the new Chinese state (Naughton 60). Even a cursory examination of this system reveals that the actual basis of the economy was laundered grain surpluses extracted from the peasantry both directly through price fixing of grain and through price inflation of manufactured goods. This, in essence, was the secret double exploitation at the very heart of the new Chinese miracle. And the period from 1952–1957 really could be considered an industrial miracle, industrial production increased 17% a year, and agricultural efficiency improved, if more modestly, through the creation of small-scale communal fields that comprised the so-called lower stages of collectivization (Naughton 68). The contradictions of the Chinese system were further obscured by the mass movement of around 2 million peasants from the countryside to the cities, many of whom were able to get a college education for the first time in their family's history (Naughton 68). This growth was brought about by the intensification of surplus extraction from the countryside and a hardening urban rural divide. In order to bolster urban industrial production, the CCP's nationalization campaigns eliminated almost entirely the old handicraft system of production and fed that population into either the cities or direct agricultural labor (Chuang 69). We can mark this rapid transformation of the Chinese economy as the creation of the formal urban rural divide. The nearly 300-year-old system of decentralized petty commodity production was in a matter of years supplanted, at least in theory, by centralized commodity production in the industrializing cities (Chuang 69).

But in 1956 the regime had begun to go into crisis. Discontents over the treatment and pay of young and migrant workers relative to their older coworkers and the entrenchment of an expanding bureaucracy led to the massive strike costal strike wave of 1957, the members of which took to the streets "chanting 'Let's Create another Hungarian Incident!' and threatening to take the conflict all the way 'from district to city to Party central to Communist

International'" (Chuang 88). While these strikes and abortive urban uprisings would be largely contained by a combination of the CCP's strong relations with older and higher paid workers and direct state repression under the anti-Rightist campaign, the CCP began to look for other options to quell discontent. Worse still, the limited existing Chinese manufacturing capabilities hit a bottleneck in 1957, which caused the Party to divert more peasants away from food production into mass-scale infrastructure and manufacturing projects, with disastrous results (Chuang 92). Their solution would be the infamous Great Leap Forward. The full effects of the GLF on the Chinese economy, while fascinating, are sadly outside the scope of this paper. We can, however, briefly note that the GLF marks an incredible decentralization of the Chinese economy (which would eventually, through a crisis of over-speculation, throw the whole system into crisis) and that the powerful welfare apparatus set up for urban workers would require a further intensification of extraction from the peasantry (Chuang 96–98). In the countryside, the GLF would mean the rapid completion of stage 5 of collectivization, which would consolidate land into the full-scale commune structure, dramatically increasing the amount of land in a single collective unit and moving of control of decisions about production out of the hands of peasants and into the hands of CCP appointed commune leaders (Thaxton 119). These new communes were a radical departure from the mutual aid societies of the earlier second phase of collectivization, which had mostly entailed small-scale pooling of land, tools, and work animals into more efficient units roughly based along village lines (Thaxton 89). These mutual aid societies were essentially self-managed and seemed to have been broadly popular as a means of increasing agricultural efficiency while maintaining both traditional peasant control over production and fulfilling the new ideological commitments of communism (Thaxton 90–91). But the GLF marked a hitherto unknown process of intrusion of the state and the Party into peasant life, one that would dismantle the elements of peasant society at the same

village at precisely the time peasants were relying in invisibility to survive. Thus, the CCP's enforcement mechanism would be enhanced dramatically by the increased surveillance. In some cases, such as in the systematic attempts to wipe out begging as a means of subsistence, surveillance was essentially effortless as a result of other state centralization. Begging began to decline dramatically at the beginning of the GLF for two reasons. One was total disappearance of town markets, to which begging was intimately linked, and the other was the era restrictions on private food ownership and the movement of all food consumption to the collective dining halls, which allowed the party to pick out beggars by simply checking which houses had chimney smoke coming from them (Thaxton 176–177). The cadres' vision of communism was becoming increasingly indistinguishable from its enforcement mechanisms, a realization that was not lost on the beleaguered peasantry.

One of the most widespread methods of resistance was grain theft. The prevalence of grain theft should be viewed as a sign of the desperation of the peasantry, who traditionally took incredible pride in not engaging in the same kinds of crop theft that define their interaction with warlords and even the GMD (Thaxton 177–178). But deprived of their means of subsistence, peasants quickly saw no other choice as food control tightened and allotments plummeted to starvation levels even where grain was available. Fueling grain theft was a major problem of Chinese political economy. While urban surpluses were largely still controlled by the state, who were thus able to redistribute surpluses across the lines of the urban communes, there was no such mechanism for the supposedly self-sufficient rural communes. The solution was grain theft. In 1960 these thefts start to take on the specter of armed uprising, with ex-PLA soldiers taking raiding bands to other villages and engaging in outright armed conflict with local militias (Thaxton 178–179). Village watches and the frequent appearance of local militias were the beginning of an unprecedented militarization

Resistance to the Great Leap Forward emerged, not as Kropotkin would predict in widespread rebellion, but in a Scott-esque flurry of everyday resistance which at its height occasionally escalated into armed conflict between bands of peasants trying to raid grain depots and state troops. It may seem odd that peasant struggles never reaching full-scale insurrection the way urban workers would in 1966, especially considering that it was the peasantry that starved in famine of 1960 and urban workers never faced such a calamity. To understand why what was probably the most militant peasantry anywhere in the world never took up arms against the CCP, we need to understand the construction of the Maoist military state in the countryside. Specifically, we must trace how the state reacted to forms of peasant subsistence, and the apparatus it constructed to stop them. Foot dragging is one of the oldest historic forms of peasant resistance, and one of the first to migrate to the factories with the development of the urban proletariat. But in the increasingly Maoist countryside, foot dragging took on a desperation rarely seen in factory or field. A major part of the GLF was an intensification of peasant labor on a dramatically reduced grain allotment, which caused peasants to begin to literally collapse from exhaustion in the fields (Thaxton 159). In response, peasants began to sneak off to the edges of collective fields to get some sleep, and in the process began a cat and mouse battle with the Party, who would harshly discipline anyone who left the fields during work hours (Thaxton 159). The search parties set up by the Parties to find people sleeping in the fields were a dramatic departure from previous peasant-CCP relations, which had hitherto never required such a dramatic surveillance apparatus. That surveillance apparatus would be key in suppressing another time-honored method of peasant resistance, attempting to flee areas of food shortages (Thaxton 164). The hukou system was constructed in large part to prevent the starving peasantry from fleeing into the city. Household registration drastically expanded the legibility of the peasant

time it destroyed the very collective modes of production that had been fundamental to peasant support of the communist project. State intrusion into peasant sociality, at its most intense, was not limited to production and descended into somewhat bizarre battles over how and where peasants could prepare and eat their meals. Here too the CCP cadres would ignore a crucial observation of Kropotkin about the sociality of food. In a seemingly moralist discussion of rights and force in relation to Kropotkin reveals a crucial contradiction in the schema of scientific management of small-scale food production, which in theory would demand the pooling of resources to create communal dining halls that would provide free food more efficiently (Kropotkin 110–111). What Kropotkin seems to have realized that the CCP did not is that forced communality and the deprivation of individual control of even something as seemingly mundane as eating resembles, in the minds of a fiercely independent peasantry with a strong cultural food tradition, the same modes of hierarchical sociality normally associated with conscription. The forceful intrusion of the state into a traditionally privately managed zone of production, consumption, and social life was as abhorrent to the Chinese peasantry as it was Kropotkin, who could not have imagined the lengths the CCP would go to ensure that their communal dining halls would be the only source of food available to the peasantry. In the areas controlled by the most radical Maoist factions, all grain was requisitioned directly from the fields by the commune and peasants were forced to use communal dining halls or else face intense public humiliation in self-criticism sessions and even being denied food entirely for a day (Thaxton 119). Local CCP officials in Da Fu, in one of the most extreme examples, literally began to collectivize utensils and loot homes for metal objects like locks to use for rural metal production (Thaxton 121). For several months, officials across China began to directly assault the village as the center of social life altogether by moving entire villages from their houses into tents in the fields (Thaxton 122). The village was thus abandoned

entirely in the first several months of the GLF, the physical centers of peasant life shifting to two sites of increasing Party control: the communal dining hall, where food was strictly controlled by Party officials, and the field, now regulated by a new labor regime dictated by Party officials. The physical spaces in which Chinese peasant ontology was developed were suddenly transformed or utterly abandoned. Having finally obtained control over their land and means of subsistence, the peasantry was suddenly subjected to a labor system that resembled nothing closer than the old system of Japanese conscription, and peasant attitudes towards the Party, who now appeared as the most intensely intrusive form of the landlords they had just overthrown, began to deteriorate. All of these changes coincided with actual mass conscription of what may have been 100 million peasants into irrigation and public works projects, decreasing the total amount of labor available to buffer the grain surpluses in an incredibly labor-intensive system of production (Chuang 79). Worse still, further labor was diverted into the infamous backyard steel production that dominate the Western conception of the GLF to this day, setting the conditions for the horrific famine that would sweep across rural — and I must emphasize that this was a rural, not urban, famine due to the immense display of state power used to maintain "surplus" grain extraction during the famine — China in 1960. Of course, the magnitude of the famine could have been mitigated had the CCP not collectivized the private plots used for peasant consumption as a final barrier to famine (Chuang 79). The result was one of the greatest horrors of the 20th century, a famine that permanently broke the intense bond between the Communist Party, the communist project, and the Chinese peasantry. If we turn for a moment to James C. Scott's work on the moral economy of the peasantry, the social experience of peasant exploitation is located not in absolute surplus extracted but in the experience of the decline of non-extracted grain yields below subsistence levels (Scott 22–23). The precarious Chinese system had been able to survive earlier disruptions to grain harvests

because despite the intense level of extraction because the maintenance of family subsistence fields had ensured periodic food shortages had never resolved themselves into famine. The collectivization of family plots was the absolute worst measure the CCP could have carried out, maximizing both the amount of peasant death and the lived experience of exploitation during a time of already precarious social and economic change. Interviews with the survivors indicate that it was a confluence of over-extraction, price inflation on manufacturing goods, and loss of control of production that would eventually cause the peasantry to rebel against collectivization itself, a process they had once constructed from the ground up (Chuang 158). As grain shortages became apparent, earlier policies of free food from the communal dining halls were replaced by a peasant grain allotment of half a jin (slightly over half a pound) per day, which is near starvation level even without hard labor requirements and was far below the socially mediated survival threshold under which peasants in Scott's theory would begin to experience oppression (Thaxton 186). The crisis was intensified by the hukou system, which restricted peasants from leaving their villages and set up parallel sets of property regimes between the urban workers who benefited from a newly constructed welfare state and rural communities, who were expected to eat out of their "iron rice bowl" constructed out of grain surpluses (Naughton 115). But prices of grain were held artificially low, created an intense class divide between rural and urban that persists to this day (Naughton 115). The inability of peasants to leave their villages as grain extraction intensified through the rationing system resulted in the starvation of peasants to feed the more militant urban proletariat. The system of household registration would require an immense police apparatus to enforce, a police state that would be constructed in the countryside in response to growing unrest as an increasingly exploited and now starving peasantry attempted to take back the means of their own subsistence, not as an act of political rebellion but to save their own lives.