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Peasants and the Great Leap Forward

Marissa Warren

INTRODUCTION

Countries following Marxist ideology have typically showed a disinterest of the peasantry and sometimes even outright hostility. When it came to revolutions within these Marxist countries, the peasantry was typically forced following their government's demands. These countries used their peasantry, always on the government's own terms. That is, they never asked the peasantry what could be done for them, but rather simply demanded the peasantry follow them. China, prior to the "Great Leap Forward," suffered through a civil war, putting a new Party in charge of the government. This government chose to include peasants in their revolution and promised them what they desired in return. Due to this new function and ideology in leadership, collectivization within China was a relatively resistance free movement. This paper will focus on five political factors implemented within China just prior to their collectivization movement that will be used to explain the lack of resistance within China compared to Russia.

PRIOR TO COLLECTIVIZATION

To argue the case of five political factors being responsible for the lack of resistance in China's collectivization period, we must first examine how the peasants were treated up until that point. In both China and Russia, Marxist ideology was pertinent, and Karl Marx (1818-1883) did not believe the peasants could start their own socialist revolution. He considered their cultural horizons barbaric and idiotic due to the fact they were isolated from the main currents of civilization.¹ Marx stressed the idea that peasants were incapable of organization and concerted action and thus could never lead themselves to a socialist revolution.² Marxist countries then interpreted this message to mean the proletariats were the only social class able to create the environment for a socialist revolution. Of course, the peasants still had to be willing to be led by the proletariats to succeed.

Both Lenin and Stalin viewed peasants as a difficult barrier to economic modernization.³ They didn't believe they could be an asset to the revolution; they were instead an obstacle the country had to collectively overcome. Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), on the other hand, believed Marx had not really set a clear definition of who the peasants were and their role in society. Mao, seeing the number of peasants within the country, decided to make the peasantry the biggest force in his revolution.⁴ Both Russia and China attempted to adhere to Marxist ideology, but China's revolution took the peasantry and made them the majority force.

¹ Claudio J. Katz, "Marx on the Peasantry: Class in Itself or Class in Struggle," *The Review of Politics* (1992): 61.

² Katz, "Marx on the Peasantry," 63.

³ Claudio J. Katz, "Karl Marx on the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Theory and Society* (1993): 373.

⁴ Asok Sen, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* (1984): 50-66.

For the Great Leap Forward to commence, the CCP had to overcome the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). The CCP was founded in 1921 by Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao as a soviet style communist Party and operated as a separate Party from the KMT, attempting to gain power and support for a new communist country. In 1922, the KMT and the CCP created the first United Front to end the reign of warlords throughout China. The CCP used the KMT to spread communism through their greater numbers, while the KMT hoped to control the communists. In the end, their goals diverged, resulting in a civil war in China.

Beginning in 1927, the CCP and KMT for the next ten years actively fought each other for power. During this ten year period, the KMT managed to suppress the CCP, and remained in control of China. It was during these years that the ideas of Mao rose to popularity within the CCP. He believed the peasantry within China was “a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back.”⁵ With these ideas in place, the CCP fought for power by promising the peasants extensive land reform and punishment of cruel landlords.⁶

In 1937, civil war within China was brought to a standstill with the need for a second united front in order to combat the incoming Japanese forces. The CCP and KMT were to work together, but Mao demanded the communist’s red army keep their autonomy, and the KMT would only give requests not orders.⁷ The CCP used the second Sino-Japanese war as a means to expand their power and influence. While the KMT fought hard at the front, Mao ordered his forces move in behind the Japanese lines and set up local governments.⁸ Mao would then begin land reform in these newly acquired territories and incorporate the peasantry into their battles.⁹

The united front displayed by the KMT and CCP during this time was used to legitimize the Communist Party in the eyes of the peasantry.¹⁰ Peasants believed they had suffered at the hands of the Japanese and wanted to fight. Prior to the war, the peasants had no interest in politics, but during the war the CCP stressed the importance of Nationalism and thus completely disregarded the dedication to Nationalism displayed by the KMT.¹¹ The peasantry found the communists to be the most competent organizers of the resistance, and due to the low casualty numbers compared to the KMT at the time, they also believed the CCP was winning the war.¹²

The peasantry especially applauded the communists’ use of guerilla warfare in fighting the Japanese, and they found this type of warfare successful, believing they could defeat the Japanese with it. Mao believed that “in a war of revolutionary character, guerilla operations are a

⁵ Mao Zedong, *Report on the Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan, March 1927*, From The Selected Readings of Mao Zedong (Foreign Language Press, 1971), 1.

⁶ Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power; The Emergence of Revolutionary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 2.

⁷ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: the unknown story* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 203.

⁸ David S.G. Goodman, “Reinterpreting the Sino-Japanese War: 1939-1940, peasant mobilization, and the road to the PRC,” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2013): 170.

⁹ Goodman, “Reinterpreting the Sino-Japanese War,” 178-179.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

necessary part” in winning.¹³ By the end of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1945, the peasantry had six years of communist led anti-Japanese guerilla victories, which in turn strengthened the communists’ perceived leadership abilities.¹⁴ The second Sino-Japanese war is recognized as the CCP’s true rise to power, even though they wouldn’t officially come to power until 1949.

In 1946, the united front of the KMT and CCP officially collapsed, and the parties were once again at war. By this time, the KMT had lost most of its momentum, and the power shifted to the communists. The KMT controlled more of the industrial areas of China, while the CCP controlled most of the countryside. When the CCP began taking more of the industrial sectors, the KMT quickly lost their ability to fight, and the CCP proclaimed China a communist government on October 1, 1949.¹⁵ That December, the leader of the KMT Chiang Kai-Shek and some of the remaining nationalists fled to Taiwan. The CCP had officially rid themselves of the KMT and acquired control over the Chinese government.

THE SOVIET UNION: A COMPARATIVE CASE

Stalin’s collectivization of the rural Russian countryside began in 1928. The collectivization in the Soviet Union was in no way a voluntary movement but rather a government sanctioned order. For the peasants, collectivization was seen as a second serfdom and complete destruction of their way of life.¹⁶ Following the implementation of collectivization the nation suffered the closing of churches and markets, desecration of religious objects, animal slaughtering, and peasant riots.¹⁷ The peasantry, already naturally distrustful of the government due to past experience, were even more so when the atheist communists came to power and were most definitely not ready to receive or accept orders from their new government when there was no trust between them.¹⁸

The peasantry revolted to an even greater extent due to how they were treated by government and local officials. Bolshevik leaders would requisition grain in a ruthlessly thorough way, often leaving little to nothing for the peasants’ survival.¹⁹ Due to pressures from both above and below, communist officials often enacted outrageous repressions, arrests, and violent actions against the peasantry in order to gain compliance.²⁰ A new ideology spread throughout the countryside: “You don’t participate, you don’t live.”²¹ By 1930, the “kulaks,”

¹³ Mao Zedong, *Selections from On Guerilla Warfare (1937)*, From On Guerilla Warfare, (University of Illinois Press, 2000), 2.

¹⁴ Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism*, 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ Viola, Danilov, et al. *The War Against the Peasantry, 1927-1930: The Tragedy of the Soviet Countryside* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2005), 319.

¹⁷ Lynne Viola, “Collectivization as a Revolution,” In *The Stalin Revolution* (Houghton Mifflin: Boston and New York, 1997), 112.

¹⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford, 1994), 37.

¹⁹ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

²¹ Viola, “Collectivization as a Revolution,” 121.

those individuals who refused to give up their grain, were seen as the major problem with collectivization. Thus began dekulakization, which in turn affected not only the kulaks, but also the entire countryside.²² This new special resettlement policy for kulaks resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and an equal number of runaways.²³ By ridding the country of some of its hardest workers, the Soviet Union also suffered a loss in their food production, ultimately leading to a severe famine and killing around seven million people between 1932-1933.²⁴

The peasantry refused to take threats to their way of life lying down. They participated in both indirect and direct violent forms of resistance. Many peasants, unable to hide their grain, just disposed of it or even destroyed it.²⁵ Some peasants participated in illegal grain transfers, massive hoardings, and the slaughtering of their own livestock. Between 1928 and 1933, the numbers of cattle in the Soviet Union fell by half.²⁶ Peasants often abstained from work altogether. In a letter to Pravda from a collective farm in Kaluga Okrug, one man writes, “You can take from us today, but tomorrow there’ll be nothing to winnow because we won’t want to get it ready.”²⁷ Some members of the peasantry tried to peacefully present their problems but were met with force and disinterest, which led to increasing violent action taken against the oppressors. Peasants often committed arson, lynching and assaults on local authorities, burned crops, and destroyed property.²⁸ By 1935, an estimated eleven million people were dead, and five million perceived kulaks were in labor camps.²⁹

Mao and the CCP looked to the Soviet Union for how to not only construct their party, but also handle the peasantry. They saw the bloody and violent reaction of the peasantry to the Bolsheviks during their collectivization movement and opted for another method. The Chinese communists learned from the Soviet Union that force and manipulation are not effective ways of swaying the peasantry to their side. They instead focused on gaining the support of the peasantry through incentives and perceived comradeship.

COUNTER-ARGUMENT

One counter-argument to this claim acknowledges the fact that, regardless of the CCP’s attempts to win the peasantry over with grand promises and incentives, ultimately the Great Leap Forward resulted in the Great Leap Famine from 1958-1962, killing millions of people. Prior to the Great Leap Forward, the CCP enacted five political factors believed to both help the overall resistance to the collectivization of agriculture and reap rewards for the peasantry. Unfortunately,

²² Viola, Danilov, et al., *The War Against the Peasantry*, 212.

²³ *Ibid.*, 275.

²⁴ Jonathan Lewis and Philip Whitehead, *Stalin: A time for Judgement* (New York: Random House, 1990), 65-67.

²⁵ Robert William Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivization of Soviet Agriculture 1929-1930* (1980), 85.

²⁶ Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Harvard University Press, 1970), 541

²⁷ Anonymous, *Letter to Pravda on collectivization in Kaluga Okrug (1930)*, From *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (Yale University, 2000).

²⁸ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 170.

²⁹ Lewis and Whitehead, *Stalin: A time for Judgement*, 80.

in the years following 1958, these five factors most definitely did not benefit the peasantry and in fact directly resulted in millions of reported deaths. The peasants were promised opportunities, such as the right to self-determination and the opportunity to both join and leave the collectives voluntarily. Toward 1958, however, the CCP and Mao grew more concerned with how China faced in relation to other countries and wanted to not only catch up with countries like Britain and America, but also surpass them. They became obsessed with how productive and strong they appeared to the rest of the world, so that in the end they ultimately forgot about their own people's well-being.

By 1958, the idea of volunteer collectives had disappeared, and the government followed Stalin's model of forced collectivization.³⁰ Mao and members of the CCP believed they could increase both their agricultural and industrial sections simultaneously and thus needed more peasants in the collectives to not only produce grain, but also work backyard furnaces to create steel.³¹ Once the peasants' free choice to stay in the collectives was revoked, their incentives began to change as well. They could no longer back out if someone else in the collective were not doing adequate work. Thus, when one member of the collective began to fall behind, it trickled down to other members within the collective.³²

When there is less incentive to work, production decreases as well. Unfortunately for local authorities, the communist Chinese government prized efficiency. To appear successful, local authorities would inflate their numbers on production, which in turn only increased the rate of procurement within the collectives as well. To meet procurements, the local militias tore through villages searching for hidden grain and confiscated everything from the local peasantry.³³ The government grew so focused on being the best that they denied what was happening in their own country not only to the world, but also themselves.

To save face with the rest of the world, Mao and the CCP refused to accept any loans, receive help, or even defer payment during the famine.³⁴ Instead, they made their export production the most important aspect of the country. Mao and members of the CCP were obsessed with their export markets and thus, even during widespread famine, continued to export most their grain. Grain exports were the most important thing to the government in 1960, and farmers were put further down the list of people to receive surplus grain.³⁵

³⁰ Justin Yifu Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959-1961," *Journal of Political Economy* (1990): 1241.

³¹ Lillian M. Li, "Food and Famine under socialist rule, 1949-1990s: The Great Leap Famine, 1959-1961" In *Fighting Famine in North China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 357.

³² Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis," 1242.

³³ Frank Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine: the history of China's most devastating catastrophe, 1958-62* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 117.

³⁴ Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine*, 111-113.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

Farmers lost control of not only their land and harvests, but also their work schedules.³⁶ The peasantry began working constantly to keep up with grain procurement rates while simultaneously battling famine and disease. Due to the policy on communal dining halls, peasants no longer had private plots to grow food, and when famine struck there was nothing left for them to fall back on.³⁷ Farmers were left to fend for themselves, while the ranks of the privileged workers within the city swelled.³⁸ For survival, the peasantry began tearing down their houses and other buildings to provide not only nutrients for their soil, but also a new source of food.³⁹ In Hunan, forty percent of houses were destroyed by 1960, leaving a large majority of their population without shelter from the elements.⁴⁰ Accounts of cannibalism ravaged the countryside, and human flesh was sold on the black market for a good price.⁴¹ Due to the eating of unnatural things, many people became sick, and disease was rampant. This led to a collapse of health care services within the countryside, something promised to the peasantry since the CCP first came into power.⁴²

By 1960, over a million people were dead due to the widespread famine throughout the Xinyang region.⁴³ Other reports included one in four people, in a local population of half a million, dying in Guangshan.⁴⁴ Mao's response to the famine crisis involved telling the peasants to eat less if starvation was an issue.⁴⁵ Mao believed that "when there is not enough to eat, people starve to death. [So] It is better to let half of the people die so that the other half can eat their fill."⁴⁶ Of course due to the policies surrounding the nation at this time, the half that was chosen to starve to death was the peasantry. According to archival evidence, an estimated forty-five million people died in the Great Leap Famine from 1958-1962.⁴⁷ Despite this treatment, the peasants in China revolted against collectivization to a lesser extent than the peasants in the Soviet Union under Stalin, due, in part, by the way the peasantry was handled up until the point of famine.

FIVE POLITICAL FACTORS

In China, the collectivization movement that sprung up during the Great Leap Forward was met with little opposition from the peasants. According to Yu Liu, this lack of resistance can be explained by five political factors within China prior to collectivization. These factors include: land reform, the socio-political classification system, the control of social mobility, the

³⁶ Ibid., 128.

³⁷ Li, "Food and Famine," 357.

³⁸ Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine*, 192.

³⁹ Ibid., 168-169.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 169.

⁴¹ Ibid., 321.

⁴² Ibid., 275.

⁴³ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Chang and Halliday, *Mao: the unknown story*, 392.

⁴⁶ Dikotter, *Mao's Great Famine*, 134.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 325.

leadership within the rural Chinese Community Party system, and the nature of the political discourse that surrounded agricultural collectivization.⁴⁸ This paper will argue that the lack of resistance in China was greatly dependent on the CCP's relations and incorporation of the peasants in the community prior to collectivization, compared to the seclusion and violence impacting the peasantry in the Soviet Union.

LAND REFORM

Land reform within China was created to change peasant's old ideologies of family and clan so they would be more submissive to authority.⁴⁹ The CCP hoped that by showing the peasants their support and fighting for their opportunities, the peasants would submit to them in gratitude. The land reform ultimately took away land from landlords and rich peasants and distributed it amongst the other poor and middle peasants. The CCP believed the process of land reform needed to be gradual and controlled to, as Mao put it, "minimize any feeling that their (the peasant's) mode of life is being changed all the sudden."⁵⁰ So to gain the peasant's trust, the CCP first gave the land to the peasants and then slowly took it away again. They began collectivization in four steps:

First, they gave the land to the peasants. Second, they created mutual aid teams that the peasants operated. Third, they created elementary co-ops that involved land/animals collectively being owned, but the peasants received income based on their labor efforts. Lastly, they created the advanced co-ops where dividends were discontinued and members received income solely on their labor contributions to the collective farm.⁵¹

Essentially, they gave peasants the land they wanted and then slowly proceeded to take it away.

In the Soviet Union, the peasants had already been through a collective era and found it only made them work harder for smaller income.⁵² They were also already operating on a system that allowed only a few privately-owned lands, while also working collectively on other farms. Land reform worked so well for China in dissuading the peasants from rebelling because they gave the land back to the peasants before taking it away. Whereas in the Soviet Union, the

⁴⁸ Yu Liu, "Why did it go so high? Political mobilization and agricultural collectivization in China," *The China Quarterly* (2006): 733.

⁴⁹ Guo Wu, "Speaking bitterness: Political education in land reform and military training under the CCP," *Chinese Historical Review* (2014): 5.

⁵⁰ Mao Zedong, *The Question of Agricultural Cooperation (1955)*, From Sources of Chinese Tradition: 1600 Through the Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

⁵¹ Zhun Xu, "The achievements, contradictions and demise of the rural collectives in Songzi County China," *Development and Change* (2015): 341.

⁵² Alec Nove, "Incentives for Peasants and Administrators" In *Soviet Agricultural and Peasant Affairs* (University of Kansas Press: Lawrence, 1963), 52.

peasantry viewed the government, and especially Stalin, distrustfully and found they simply wanted to take their land away for their own purposes.⁵³

The CCP wanted the peasants involved in the land reform process as much as possible, to help them realize their power and recognize the Party as allowing them this opportunity. It encouraged peasants to speak out about their grievances and become more educated about the power they had been granted. Many peasants chose this opportunity to lash out at the landlords who they had previously worked for. In Huanghuang County, a work report showed 5,184 speakers called out landlords and expressed some type of wrongdoing that had been inflicted upon them.⁵⁴ Mao and the CCP began to emphasize the peasant community differences from the higher classes.⁵⁵ This in turn encouraged the peasants to take their lives into their own hands and fight back against their “oppressors.” The Party wanted the peasants to be involved in the violence on landlords to really brand them as Mao supporters and thus instill a fear of retribution at the hands of Chiang Kai-Shek should they ever oppose the CCP.⁵⁶ At its core, land reform was instituted in China to create obvious class distinctions.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CLASSIFICATION

The CCP made land reform about fighting unjust landlords and creating a strong “we” versus “them” mentality among peasants.⁵⁷ Once land reform took effect, this created a whole new socio-political classification. According to Guo Wu, creating land reform and speaking out about its purpose allowed for six major developments within the Chinese peasantry:

- (1) It made peasants understand the landlord class and know who they should oppose;
- (2) it enlightened poor peasants and awakened their class consciousness;
- (3) it alienated peasants from landlords by drawing a line between them;
- (4) it was a good method of peasant self-education;
- (5) it helped establish an intellectual foundation for the mass’s execution of the Party’s policies; and
- (6) it made cadres realize feudal society and promote class sentiments.⁵⁸

The Party encouraged the peasants to share their stories and sent work teams into the community to gain their trust. These teams worked alongside the peasants and became a part of their family, ultimately leading the peasants to trust them and tell them their stories.⁵⁹ From there, meetings were set up for the peasants to tell their stories by the masses. The Party constantly reiterated the class differences and created different class enemies for the peasantry to fight.⁶⁰ In short, the CCP won support by challenging the current rural power relationship and giving power to the

⁵³ Lin, “Collectivization and China’s Agricultural Crisis,” 290.

⁵⁴ Wu, “Speaking Bitterness,” 11-12.

⁵⁵ Mary Wright, “The Chinese peasant and communism,” *Pacific Affairs* (1951): 263.

⁵⁶ C.M. Chang, “Mao’s Stratagem of Land Reform,” *Foreign Affairs* (1951): 551.

⁵⁷ Wu, “Speaking bitterness,” 7-8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁰ Liu, “Why did it go so high?,” 735.

peasantry.⁶¹ Of course, once the rural social power had been destroyed, peasants no longer held organizational ground for any social resistance.⁶²

Naturally, the Soviet Union also attempted to divide their peasantry on class distinctions but did not succeed to the same extent as China. The Soviet Union attempted to divide class by creating the “kulaks” and telling the poor peasants that the reason they are suffering is because of this richer class. However, the Soviet Union did not realize the respect the “kulaks” received within the countryside or their positive roles in that society.⁶³ The Mir within the Soviet countryside was still playing a large role between 1922 and 1927, and the “kulaks” carried a lot of weight within that structure.⁶⁴ The “kulaks” were viewed as hard workers, and when the Bolsheviks purged them from the countryside many of the villages took a hit in productivity.⁶⁵ Finally, the Soviet Union drastically underestimated the peasantry’s ability to band together when all its economic and cultural practices were threatened.⁶⁶

Both countries knew they needed to divide the peasantry to have someone to fight besides their government. The CCP looked at what transpired in the Soviet Union, saw they had underestimated the power of the peasantry and did something different. Within China, the Party gave the peasantry a clear enemy: the landlords. They completely changed up the power structure within the countryside, unlike in the Soviet Union where the Mir was still heavily influential, thus making “kulaks” heavily influential. They also hadn’t previously experienced the collective farms as had the peasantry in the Soviet Union. Of course, the peasantry within the Soviet Union had a taste of what the collective farms did to the countryside overall and knew that joining together would be the best approach in maintaining their livelihood.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

The social mobility of the peasantry was also hindered prior to collectivization through the state controlled purchase and sale of grains and the establishment of the hukou, or household registration. The Chinese government implemented the Central Purchases and Central Supply system because of grain deficits and their loss of control over grain supplies.⁶⁷ They hoped by instituting this system they would once again gain control over grain production. With this system, the government purchased all surplus grain at a set price and resold it to the peasants who needed it in the spring.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, though successful, the implementation of the system was not smooth, and many of the peasants did not receive the grain they needed. By not

⁶¹ Ibid., 21.

⁶² Liu, “Why did it go so high?,” 753.

⁶³ Moshe, Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization* (The Norton Library: New York, 1975), 76-77.

⁶⁴ Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 85-86.

⁶⁵ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 30-31.

⁶⁶ Viola and Danilov, *The War Against the Peasantry*, 320.

⁶⁷ Robert Ash, “Squeezing the peasants: Grain extraction, food consumption and rural living standards in Mao’s China,” *The China Quarterly* (2006): 969.

⁶⁸ Huaiyin Li, “The first encounter: Peasant resistance to state control of grain in east China in the mid-1950s,” *The China Quarterly* (2006): 145.

meeting these needs, the government failed in its promises to improve the peasant farmer's living conditions.⁶⁹ As a direct result, many peasants couldn't move because they faced starvation.⁷⁰

The hukou within China hindered the mobility of the peasantry, as it required peasants to acquire special permission to leave the rural area. In 1951, the Ministry of Public Security, through the "provisional regulations on urban hukou management," legally insisted that individuals gain official permission to migrate from their homes.⁷¹ When collectivization was about to begin, the government deliberately enforced and strengthened this regulation in anticipation of a large group of people wanting to migrate.⁷² Though many peasants did not even try to migrate at the onset of collectivization, the regulation successfully kept rural peasants in their rural sector.

Within the Soviet Union, three factors affected attempts at keeping the rural countryside in place. First, between 1928 and 1932, Russians poured into urban areas. The expansion of industrialization was under way and thus created a surplus of new urban employment opportunities.⁷³ The communists believed there was a surplus of people in the rural populations and that ultimately industrialization would draw the surplus out, thus creating no reason to worry about lack of rural workers.⁷⁴

The second reason for rural mobility was due to Stalin's "dizzy with success" article, published in 1930, which resulted in one-third of peasants leaving collectives.⁷⁵ Stalin realized how much discontent was present in the country side and how strong the violent opposition was growing, so he decided to slow down the process.⁷⁶ He then shifted all blame to the local officials in each sector, claiming they had been overzealous in their efforts to get the peasantry to join collectives.⁷⁷

The final reason behind the Soviet Union's inability to keep its rural sector in place had to do with their lax use of the Internal Passport System. The Soviet Union, like the CCP later, attempted to keep its peasantry in place by issuing special passports that allowed those in the rural countryside to leave. The government enacted the Internal Passport System in 1932 to hinder the mobility of the rural sector.⁷⁸ Initially regulation was strict, but over time the system was deemed annoying, inconvenient, and counterproductive to increasing industrialization.⁷⁹ The

⁶⁹ Ash, "Squeezing the peasants," 981.

⁷⁰ Liu, "Why did it go so high?," 737.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 738.

⁷³ Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis," 81.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nirmal Kumar Chandra, "The Peasant Question from Marx to Lenin: The Russian Experience," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2002): 1937.

⁷⁶ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 300.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 311.

⁷⁸ Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis," 93.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 96.

rural workers knew they were not being given the benefits offered to urban workers, and so when they had the opportunity to leave they left en masse.⁸⁰

RURAL LEADERSHIP

Prior to collectivization, the CCP had also established a strong rural leadership amongst the peasantry and had managed to incorporate a large amount of Party members into rural China, while simultaneously recruiting many peasants to the Party. By contrast, in the Soviet Union, the communist Party was an alien and external force during collectivization, and had weak organization within rural sectors.⁸¹ The CCP educated and provided training for their leaders at the local levels, and they integrated discipline and rewards into the Party system. The CCP began by establishing branches at all administrative levels, work units, and schools.⁸² They sent in work teams to work and live with the peasants, gaining their trust and confidence.⁸³ Current Party members were thus instructed to sway village leaders to support the idea of collectivization.⁸⁴

To continue gaining more support and followers, the CCP organized mass movements and campaigns promoting mutual aid and continually recruited new activists.⁸⁵ The CCP did not attempt to force collectivization on the people in the beginning but rather found local activists and encouraged and incentivized them to rally their neighbors.⁸⁶ With the efforts of the current Party members and the new peasant members, the CCP was able to find, recruit, and train many peasants into leadership roles in rural China.

Effective leadership in rural China was also important in keeping the peasants happy during collectivization. To create effective and fair leaders, the CCP constantly set up trainings for activists in leadership and mass mobilization techniques.⁸⁷ The Party placed a heavy emphasis on orientation and training of local cadres in mobilizing the peasantry towards collectivization and implementing policy, while also supplying them with ideas on how to do so with persuasion rather than force.⁸⁸ During their training, the cadres were also instructed on some best practices for point system structuring, agricultural planning, and ways to distribute land and other resources.⁸⁹ The CCP wanted the new leaders to be able to get more peasants on board with collectivization, but they also wanted to make sure it was done in a way that wouldn't create discontent.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 149.

⁸¹ Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 53-54.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Thomas P. Bernstein, "Leadership and mass mobilization in the Soviet and Chinese collectivization campaigns of 1929-30 and 1955-56: A comparison," *The China Quarterly* (1967): 32.

⁸⁴ Bernstein, "Leadership and mass mobilization," 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁶ Liu, "Why did it go so high?," 738.

⁸⁷ Bernstein, "Leadership and mass mobilization," 10.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹ Xu, "The achievements, contradictions and demise," 349.

In the Soviet Union, Stalin believed industrial workers would be the best choice to lead collective farms because agriculture would eventually resemble industrial organization.⁹⁰ The Party made the collective structure, and, along with the working class, completely disregarded the peasantry.⁹¹ In addition to recruiting outsiders to lead collective farms, once leaders had been recruited to their posts they were often given basic, or even no, training.⁹² The peasantry did not respect these leaders due to their inefficiency and undereducation. They viewed these urban leaders as bureaucratic machines that didn't even understand the orders they were given, only there to carry them out.⁹³

The CCP created an effective rural leadership system through their ideas of discipline and rewards for leaders and knew that one of the ways agricultural problems manifested was through bad political leadership. When local cadres exploited or treated peasants poorly, the result was low morale and lack of work.⁹⁴ According to Pavel Osinsky and Jari Eloranta, historically, when peasants were unhappy and experiencing agrarian problems, what followed was an increase in opposition, resistance, rebellion, and violence throughout the countryside.⁹⁵ The CCP saw this occur in the Soviet Union, so to avoid this situation they employed practices to discourage local leaders from abusing their posts. The structure of the Party allowed for the confrontation and opposition of those in charge practicing immoral or unbecoming behavior.⁹⁶ The Party members displaying these attributes could thus be "purged" from the party and from their respective position of power, as well.⁹⁷

The rural leadership within the Soviet Union was often brutal, disrespectful, and selfish.⁹⁸ Local cadres not only threatened physical harm on the peasantry, but also embezzled collective farms funds, appropriated deficit goods, and failed to distribute goods.⁹⁹ Local leaders would also often coerce the peasantry into doing different tasks and labors outside of the collective farms without any kind of payment.¹⁰⁰ Local leadership often completely disregarded legal formalities or concerned themselves with appropriate behavior due to Party policies not encouraging enforcement of punishments.¹⁰¹ This phenomenon can be found in a report by a

⁹⁰ Viola, "Collectivization as a Revolution," 111.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁹² Lewin, *Russian Peasants*, 124.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Xu, "The achievements," 351.

⁹⁵ Pavel Osinsky and Jari Eloranta, "Why did the communists win or lose? A comparative analysis of the revolutionary civil wars in Russia, Finland, Spain, and China," *Sociological Forum* (2014): 323.

⁹⁶ Liu, "Why did it go so high?," 740.

⁹⁷ Thomas P. Bernstein, "Problems of village leadership after land reform," *Then China Quarterly* (1968): 6.

⁹⁸ Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis," 177.

⁹⁹ Viola, "Collectivization as a Revolution," 122-123.

¹⁰⁰ Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis," 179.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

man named M.P Kichigin from one of the collective farms. In his report, he discussed the behavior of a chairman in the kolkhoz, describing excessive drinking, assaulting women, pocketing money on transactions, and corrupting other leaders.¹⁰² The chairman had been reported multiple times, but nothing was ever done to rectify the situation. Stories and reports such as this one were not uncommon in the collective farms of the Soviet Union.

Another tactic used by the CCP to control local leaders was by incentivizing them. Those who did well in the Party and showed potential were given positions of leadership and other benefits, especially when they were poorer peasants.¹⁰³ The CCP wanted the poorer and middle class peasants to join the collectivization movement, so they incentivized them at every step. Those already in leadership positions could seek further promotions and benefits by displaying their intense loyalty in the Party.¹⁰⁴ Local leaders were also heavily motivated to push collectivization because it gave them more control over other peasants' lives and expanded their own opportunities.¹⁰⁵ So, by enforcing discipline and distributing rewards, the CCP managed to create a relatively uncorrupt rural leadership.

NATURE OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

The final political factor behind peasants' lack of resistance stems from political discourse surrounding agricultural collectivization. The CCP promised the peasantry collectivization would bring about benefits for not only the state, but also for the peasants. They also told the peasantry collectivization would be a volunteer effort and no one would force them to do what they didn't want to. The CCP believed discontent could be fought by persuasion and education rather than violence and punishment.¹⁰⁶ They hoped that by coaxing the peasantry into collectivization, they would get them to do what they wanted and most importantly, without any real resistance.¹⁰⁷

The promise of mutual benefits between state and peasantry also played a role in the discourse surrounding collectivization. The CCP did their best not to alienate the peasants as other political parties in the past had. Instead, they attempted to include and educate peasantry on the decision to collectivize.¹⁰⁸ They found that by promising the peasantry implementation of land reform and policies, improving agrarian production, and securing their fruits, they could peacefully encourage rather than force the peasantry into collectivization.¹⁰⁹ Mao believed by offering the peasantry something to better their livelihood,

They (the peasants) will break all the shackles that bind them and rush toward the road of liberation. All imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials

¹⁰² M.P. Kichigin, *Report of M.P. Kichigin on collective farm chairman in Central Black Earth Oblast*, From Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents (Yale University, 2000).

¹⁰³ Liu, "Why did it go so high?," 734.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 740.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Li, "The first encounter," 161.

¹⁰⁷ Liu, "Why did it go so high?," 741.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 740.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, "The Chinese peasant," 258.

and bad gentry will meet their doom at the hands of the peasants. All revolutionary parties and comrades will be judged by them.¹¹⁰

He understood what the peasantry had to offer and found that, by offering material benefits and political patronage, the Party would receive recruits and logistical supports.¹¹¹ In short, the CCP believed they could bring about collectivization without force; they would instead persuade the peasantry to comply through benefits.

Incentives and benefits were viewed differently within the Soviet Union. The Party attempted to gain collectivization support by promising the peasants a generous supply of tractors and other machinery to accomplish their work quicker.¹¹² The peasants, however, saw the cost of the machinery repairs and found them to be more of a burden than boon.¹¹³ The rural countryside was informed they could increase their livelihood through collective marks, bonuses, prizes, special rewards, and other permissible incomes.¹¹⁴ In reality, however, the peasants were making little income and were disinclined to work harder, thus unable to actually ever receive these special incomes.

In both China and the Soviet Union, propaganda was used to explicitly sell the peasantry on collective farming. Stalin used it as a way of promoting the progress of the collective farms and claiming peasants were “flocking” to collectives.¹¹⁵ Mao followed in these same footsteps, claiming the process of collectivization was almost complete by 1951, when it was closer to 1953. The propaganda within the Soviet Union focused on presenting collectivization of agriculture as the solution to all of society’s problems.¹¹⁶ While in China, the CCP claimed the peasants were living in a utopian countryside cured from both ideological and physical problems.¹¹⁷ Both countries utilized the benefits of propaganda, but the CCP typically targeted their propaganda at the peasants and the benefits they would receive. While comparably, the Soviet Union often targeted collective leaders, stressing the consequences of not meeting procurement rates and getting peasants into the collectives at a decent rate.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, a discussion of five political factors explains why the Chinese peasants resisted less than the Russian peasants during their collectivization periods. Now we must look at the results in both countries to understand the impact of these factors on reducing resistance within China compared to the Soviet Union. As mentioned in the literature review, the peasants

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 262.

¹¹¹ Osinsky and Eloranta, “Why did the communists win or lose,” 323.

¹¹² Davies, *The Socialist Offensive*, 384.

¹¹³ Nove, “Incentives for Peasants,” 53.

¹¹⁴ Owen L. Dawson, “Agricultural Economy under the Communist Regime: Peasantry,” In *Communist China’s Agriculture: Its Development and Future Potential* (Praeger Publishers: New York, Washington and London, 1970), 26.

¹¹⁵ Viola and Danilov, *The War Against the Peasantry*, 118.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁷ Brian James DeMare, “Casting (Off) Their Stinking Airs: Chinese Intellectuals and Land Reform, 1946-52,” *China Journal* (2012): 115.

within the Soviet Union often resisted through not only passivity, but also incredible violence. If the famines that occurred following both collective drives are not considered, the Soviet Union had an enormous death toll from violence-based resistance compared to that of China.¹¹⁸

It should be noted there was also resistance within China during the Great Leap Forward, but it was comparably less extensive than its Soviet Union counterpart. The resistance within China has been described as small resistance occurrences in the forms of lack of cooperation and simply eating animals before they were to be collectivized.¹¹⁹ According to Huaiyin Li, the peasantry did not ordinarily participate in collective riots, but rather individualized bribing, threatening suicide, complaining, and building fake kinship relations.¹²⁰ Overall, the peasantry within the Chinese collective movement tended to threaten more subtle acts of defiance and acted on a more individualized effort to resist, whereas in the Soviet Union, the peasantry tended to join together in collective resistance, thus explaining the more widespread effect the peasantry had within the Soviet Union.

The Great Leap Forward lasted for a short period of time but had massive repercussions for China. This paper argued five political factors, implemented in China prior to the Great Leap Forward, had a tremendous impact on the resistance level to the collectives, while also arguing that, even with these policies aimed at supposedly helping the peasants, the direct consequence was a Great Famine which killed millions of people. This paper showed how implanting these factors reduced the level of resistance, compared to that of the Soviet Union, which was filled with large amounts of violent resistance. In closing, China's approach to integrating the peasantry into collective farms by utilizing persuasion and incentives allowed them much more control in combatting and eliminating resistance during collectivization compared to the Soviet Union.

¹¹⁸ Viola and Danilov, *The War Against the Peasantry*, 121.

¹¹⁹ Zedong, *The Question of Agricultural Cooperation*, 1.

¹²⁰ Li, "The First Encounter," 156.

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