

Non-People in the People's Republic
'Landlords' and 'Rich Peasants' under Maoist State
Socialism



Mark A. Czeller
University College
University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
Trinity Term, 2022

Table of Contents

Abstract	IV
List of Figures	V
List of Tables	V
Note on the use of characters and <i>pinyin</i>	VI
Note on units	VI
Acknowledgments	VII
Introduction	1
1 The 'Feudal Landlord Class' and its Destruction	19
1.1 Revolutionary Strategy and Social Reality	20
1.2 From Anti-Japanese Resistance to the Civil War: Moderation to 'Leftist' Excess, and the 1948 Equilibrium	33
1.3 Landlords as Non-People: The People's Democratic Dictatorship	40
1.4 Post-1949 Land Reform: From Moderation to Radicalism, Again	43
2 Landlords and Rich Peasants in the 'Class Status System'	51
2.1 Landlords, Rich Peasants, and the Us-Enemy Divide	53
2.2 Permanence	68
2.3 Heredity	81
3 'Surveillance and Transformation'	91
3.1 From Land Reform to Collectivization	94
3.2 The Great Leap and the Expansion of Surveillance	100
3.3 The Return to Class Struggle and the Fengqiao Model	112
3.4 Ideals and Realities of Transformation	117
3.5 Concluding Thoughts	132
4 'Class as Caste'? The Social Status of Landlords and Rich Peasants	134
4.1 The Construction of Boundaries and Their Partial Fading	136
4.2 Class Education and Essentialism	145
4.3 Class Education and Social Exclusion	151
4.3 The Consequences of Class Education	159
5 'Drawing a Clear Line': The Children of Class Enemies	164
5.1 Filial Emotion as Political Failing	164

5.2	Seeking to ‘Draw a Clear Line’	175
5.3	Rejecting the Party, Choosing One’s Family	183
6	Class Enemies, Property, and the Revolutionary Order	190
6.1	Property Rights from New Democracy to the Aftermath of the Leap	192
6.2	Property Claims as Threats to the Political Order	204
6.3	<i>Fangong Daosuan</i> and Socialist Legality	214
6.4	Epilogue	219
	Conclusion	221
	Appendix 1: The Demography of Non-People	229
	Appendix 2: Findings from Wuwei County (1965-66)	231
	Bibliography	236

Abstract

For some thirty years, a substantial minority of the Chinese population was excluded from the political and moral community of the People. The largest number of non-People were the only literal ‘class’ enemies in the People’s Republic: those labelled ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ during land reform by reference to their socioeconomic position in rural society before the revolution. This thesis is a political, cultural, and social history of this group. It approaches the ‘landlord-rich peasant question’ as a single subject, one which originated in the 1920s, was central to politics, culture, and social life in the Mao era, and which, in a number of sometimes unexpected ways, continued well into the Reform era.

Existing scholarship is unanimous that class labels were a hugely important feature of political and social life in the Mao era. This thesis argues that the categories of landlord and rich peasant were more central among ‘bad’ labels than most scholarship has appreciated, and that those identified as landlords and rich peasants by the CCP bore much of the human cost of the three-decade long centrality of the divide between the People and their enemies in Chinese political and social life. It also shows, however, that the permanence and heredity of these labels observed under late Maoism was not part of a consciously designed system: during the early People’s Republic, a significant minority of class enemy labels were removed, and many young people from such families were able to find a place in the new society.

The eventual permanence and heredity of class enemy labels was instead the outcome of a contingent historical process, with major turning points in 1957 and especially 1962. These features always remained in tension with ideological and policy commitments to reform and non-heritability, which the Party maintained even as it carried out a systematic campaign to re-stigmatize class enemies after 1962. In post-1962 China, where the narrative of ‘class struggle’ permeated political and social life, ‘reform’ tended to become little more than a justification for a series of coercive and demeaning practices, and non-heritability the grounds for forcing those from class enemy families to demonstrate that they had come to hate their own parents. But when Chinese political life was redirected away from class struggle after 1978, the Party could proclaim that it had completed its mission of reforming class enemies, and that the mistreatment of their children and grandchildren had been a violation of policies that the Party had been committed to all along.

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. A rightist falling off the precipice separating the 'enemy' and 'us'	59
Figure 2.2. Types of landlords during co-operativization (1)	70
Figure 2.3. Types of landlords during co-operativization (2)	71
Figure 2.4. The early removal of labels from Overseas Chinese landlords (in 1955) as represented in the Red Guard press	79
Figure 3.1. 'Landlord element Zhu Cunran reporting on his labour to the Security Committee.'	109
Figure 3.2. 'Equal pay for equal work'	126
Figure 4.1. Covers of children's books on the evils of the landlord class published during the Socialist Education Movement	143
Figure 4.2. Film poster for <i>By the Jian'gan River</i>	147
Figure 6.1. Cover of a comic book based on the play <i>Inspecting the Chair</i>	207

List of Tables

Table 1.1. State Statistical Bureau's 1980 estimate of distribution of land before land reform	22
Table 1.2. Treatment of landlords in Guangdong	47
Table 2.1. Proportion of landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries admitted to co-operatives as full members in 1956-57, by province	72
Table A1.1. Proportions among the four-type elements	229
Table A2.1. Types of changes involving four-type element labels in Wuwei County	232
Table A2.2. Gender ratios of four-type element label changes in Wuwei County	233
Table A2.3. Gender ratios of landlord and rich peasant label changes in Wuwei County	234

Note on the use of characters and *pinyin*

I use characters in the main text to provide the Chinese original of particular words and phrases. In the footnotes, the titles of primary sources are first given using characters, followed by my translation in square brackets. *Pinyin*, the official romanization system of the People's Republic, is used in the main text when I use Chinese words in untranslated form, always in italics. In the footnotes, I use *pinyin* for Chinese bibliographic information about primary sources. I adhere to the standards of the 'Basic rules of the Chinese phonetic alphabet orthography' (GB/T 16159-2012), and therefore capitalize each word in proper nouns consisting of more than one word (e.g. Renmin Chubanshe), as well as the geographical feature name following the geographical proper name (e.g. Fujian Sheng).

Note on units

The standard unit of land in China is the *mu* 亩, which is approximately equivalent to one sixth of an acre, or 0.0667 hectares.

Acknowledgments

The intellectual journey that led to this doctoral thesis began in Beijing in 2015, when, as a summer exchange student at Peking University, I read Philip Huang's seminal 1995 article on the representative and objective realities of rural class struggle in the Chinese revolution. At the time, I had no training in history, and a limited command of Chinese that I had developed through weekly classes. That I was able to acquire the language proficiency required to carry out research in Chinese is thanks to the pioneering series of textbooks and audio tapes edited by John DeFrancis. I would therefore like to begin by acknowledging my debt to these two scholars, without whose work it is unlikely that I would have embarked on this project in the first place.

My largest intellectual debt, however, is to my supervisors. Henrietta Harrison's dedication to her students is phenomenal, and I consider myself extremely fortunate to be among them. I have benefitted immensely from her tireless engagement with my work. Stephen Smith has been unfailingly generous ever since I first got in touch about the possibility of doctoral research on the fate of landlords and rich peasants after land reform. He has provided guidance, encouragement, and criticism throughout this process—and, when I lacked running water in the middle of the winter, with a place to stay. I am hugely grateful to both of them.

I have benefitted from the advice and assistance of many people while preparing and carrying out my doctoral research. I was fortunate to get to know Jeremy Brown and Daniel Leese while I was preparing my PhD applications, and have benefitted greatly from their advice and feedback over the years. Many thanks to Jennifer Altehenger for her generous comments as one of my confirmation examiners, and for very helpful subsequent conversations. I am also grateful to Stephan Feuchtwang, Rana Mitter, Michael Schoenhals, Vivienne Shue and Patricia Thornton for comments and conversations in the early stages of my doctoral work. Thanks to Yang Long for sharing documents, and for help with applying for the programme that enabled me to spend part of my second year based at Fudan University. I am grateful to the Confucius Institute Headquarters for its Sino-Foreign Joint Research PhD Fellowship, and especially to the Wolfson Foundation for its generous Postgraduate Scholarship in the Humanities.

My time in China was cut short by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the five months I was able to spend there were hugely valuable. I am grateful to Jin Guangyao for acting as my supervisor at Fudan, and for providing invaluable advice and assistance. My research has

benefitted in many ways from the activities of Cao Shuji; here I would like to thank his generosity in making sources available to me. I am grateful to Li Tian of the Fudan Contemporary Chinese Social Life Research Centre, whom I had the good fortune of meeting already during my MA; although I have not used material from the collection in this thesis, the experience of working with it was extremely valuable. Thanks are due to Wu Baolei, as well as Dalí the cat, for making me feel at home in Shanghai. Thank you to the many fellow students at Fudan whose company made my stay so enjoyable. Special thanks are due to Qiu Xinyang for inviting me to southwest Fujian and introducing me to the wonders of Hakka culture, and to Stefanie Scheller for many conversations, both in Shanghai and later in Hamburg.

The Maoist Legacy Project directed by Daniel Leese has made Freiburg a key destination for students of PRC history, and I have had the good fortune of visiting on a number of occasions over the years, and of becoming friends with scholars working there. Puck Engman's work has been a source of inspiration since the early stages of this project, and he has provided many incisive comments on draft work. Thanks to Damian Mandzunowski, Amanda Shuman, Lara Yang, and Zhang Man for their friendship over the years, and special thanks to Lara for organizing a virtual peer review group during the lockdown year, which created a much-needed sense of community and shared purpose. It was through this group that I got to know Dayton Lekner, to whom I am grateful for inviting me to join the *Revisiting the Revolution* translation project, for very helpful comments on draft work, and for inspiring me to jog up and down hills in the final stages of writing.

As a result of the pandemic, I only returned to Oxford in my final year. Due to a highly fortuitous coincidence, I had the opportunity to spend this year living aboard the narrowboat Foxglove II, at the magical Walton Bridge Moorings. I am very grateful to Hannah Theaker for making this possible, as well as for being a constant source of wisdom and support throughout the PhD, together with my other *shijie*, Joyce Chou and Amanda Zhang. In addition to the joys of the boat and the moorings, my sanity during this year was ensured by the comradeship of Tom Barrett, Tom Burnham, Chen Yinglei, Chen Zhifeng, and Scarlett Ng. Harriet Evans, whom I had the good fortune of meeting near the beginning of my intellectual engagement with China, has been a consistent source of encouragement, wisdom, and wonderful company. I am also very grateful for the friendship of Ran Guangpei and Zhang Lisheng, and the friends I made in London and Hangzhou during my MA: Chen Dalong, He Yu, Menelik Lee, Francesco Papani, and Zhang Hongming.

Thanks to the friends with whom I first visited China in 2013, Harrison and Gwijde, and to Nicka and Otto, all of whom have provided inspiration and companionship over the years. Costanza has been my partner through this entire journey, intellectual and otherwise, and I cannot begin to express how grateful I am for this fact. Words are likewise insufficient when it comes to my parents and sister, for decades of unconditional love and support.

Introduction

For some thirty years, a sharp, state-instituted boundary between the People and their enemies framed political and social life in China. A significant minority of the Chinese population was excluded from the ranks of the People and subjected to the People's Democratic Dictatorship, by reference either to their pre-revolutionary socioeconomic status or political activities, or to political or ordinary crimes committed after the revolution. The shorthand for non-People¹ for most of the Mao era was the 'four/five-type elements 四/五类分子', the types of which were always listed in the same order: landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad [element], and, when it was five, rightist.² This thesis is about how the distinction between the People and their enemies operated with respect to the first two, a group which made up the majority of non-People throughout the Mao era, and the only group whose members were excluded from the People by reference to their past economic status.³ I argue that, to an extent not sufficiently appreciated, those identified as 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' by the CCP bore much of the human cost of the three-decade long centrality of the us-enemy divide in Chinese political and social life.⁴

Few have conveyed the importance of the narrative of rural class struggle to the entire Chinese revolution as powerfully as Philip Huang. In his seminal article on the topic, Huang argued that the official discourse of rural class struggle, in which landlords and rich peasants were the primary villains, was not only central among discourses of class during the Mao era, but was 'predominant among all discourses in political and cultural life as a whole.'⁵ Huang traced how the Manichean narrative of rural class struggle as a battle between the forces of good and evil was canonized during land reform despite the many disjunctions between this narrative and social reality, how this narrative was re-enacted during the Socialist Education Movement (1963-66), and how the Cultural Revolution involved the application of the 'language, rituals, and mental habits' of rural class struggle

¹ 'Non-People' is not a direct translation of a Chinese term; it is a convenient way of referring to a concept that was expressed in Chinese using terms like 'target of dictatorship 专政对象', 'class enemy 阶级敌人', and 'four/five type element 四/五类分子'. It was coined by Michael Schoenhals ('Demonising Discourse in Mao Zedong's China').

² To reflect the linguistic structure of the original phrase (地富反坏(右)四(五)类分子), I use the words 'landlord', 'rich peasant', 'counterrevolutionary' and 'rightist' as adjectives describing types of 'element', parallel with 'bad'. I discuss the emergence of this phrase during the second half of the 1950s in Chapter 2.

³ See Appendix 1, 'The Demography of Non-People'.

⁴ My understanding of the 'us-enemy' binary here and throughout does not rely on or form the part of a Schmittian argument about the nature of 'the political' in general (this is in contrast to Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics*); it is instead a reflection of the discourses and practices of the Mao era.

⁵ Huang, 'Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution', 126.

to a significantly broadened and even more nebulously defined range of enemies.⁶ Recent scholarship has deepened our understanding of the process of land reform, but it remains the case that, as the leading PRC scholar Yang Kuisong has pointed out, there has been little research on the fate of those who were the targets rather than the agents or beneficiaries of this revolutionary social transformation.⁷ Focusing on land reform itself, Yang raised, but did not set out to answer, the question of how and why the targets of the rural revolution and their descendants continued to face exclusion for decades after they were deprived of the property by reference to which they had been labelled class enemies in the first place.

The People's Republic was of course not the first state to use categories derived from Marxist class analysis as ascriptive labels, and to exclude the bearers of a subset of these labels from the political community: three decades before Mao explained that the PRC would be a People's Democratic Dictatorship, a system began taking shape in the Soviet Union that likewise disenfranchised and stigmatized 'class aliens', as well as political enemies, located in the territory of the new state. Sheila Fitzpatrick has argued that what emerged under the guise of 'class' policies is best understood as a Soviet version of the old *soslovie* system from Tsarist times, which grouped people into hereditary categories that determined their relationship to the state.⁸ Neither consciously designed nor ideologically consistent with Marxism, it developed, Fitzpatrick suggests, due to both the cultural force of the *soslovie* model and the regime's need to produce an intelligible order that distinguished its supporters and its enemies—and, in the process, contributed to creating them. Nearly a decade before Fitzpatrick, Jean-Francois Billeter had in fact made a very similar argument about the 'class status system' in China under Mao—a system that, when Billeter was writing, had only just been dismantled. For Billeter, too, a new system of social status had developed in an unplanned manner, one which retained Marxist language but which, with its apparently permanent and hereditary categories that mixed socioeconomic, political, and moral-legal factors, sat very uneasily with Marxist theory. For Billeter, too, historical templates of hierarchical ordering by the state combined with the Party-state's need to render society legible, first and foremost with respect to the axiomatic truth that it was divided between friends and enemies of the revolution.⁹

⁶ Ibid., 139.

⁷ Yang, 'The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question', 105-106. The exception is the pioneering English-language scholarship from the 1980s, discussed in detail below. I review scholarship on land reform in Chapter 1.

⁸ Fitzpatrick, 'Ascribing Class'.

⁹ Billeter, 'The System of "Class Status"'.

The parallels between the Soviet and Chinese approaches to class are many, but there are also major disanalogies, of which the most important, for the purposes of this dissertation, is the greater centrality of rural class enemies in China. For the Bolsheviks, the constituents of the us-enemy binary were the antagonists in the transition from capitalism to socialism: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Defining all of their enemies as 'bourgeoise' meant that this category became a highly unorthodox 'amalgam of pre- and postrevolutionary social groups,' including members of the old nobility, former capitalists, private traders whose activities were legalized under the New Economic policies (1921-27), and the wealthier stratum of the peasantry ('kulaks'), with the old intelligentsia as the symbolic leader of the bourgeoisie as a whole.¹⁰ The Chinese Communist Party proceeded very differently. For the CCP, the basic constituents of the us-enemy binary were not Marxist classes, but the more capacious conceptual pair of the People and their enemies. When, on the eve of the founding of the PRC, the community of the People was delineated, it was defined as including 'the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie.'¹¹ It bears emphasizing that the national bourgeoisie, which, in practice, came to mean all capitalists who chose to stay on the mainland after the Communist victory, was unambiguously defined as part of this four-class alliance making up the People, and was allocated one of the four small stars surrounding the large star—the CCP—on the Chinese national flag.¹² This did not mean that there weren't important distinctions among these groups—the working class was the 'leader', and the worker-peasant alliance the 'foundation', of the new state—but the category on the 'us' side of the 'us-enemy' binary was nevertheless designed to be a highly capacious one.¹³

There was of course a theoretical edifice justifying the CCP's approach: it was not yet carrying out a socialist revolution, but a New Democratic one, the targets of which were imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and feudalism. The enemies to be subjected to dictatorship were thus 'the running dogs of imperialism, that is, the landlord class and bureaucrat-capitalists, as well as the representatives of those classes, the Guomindang reactionaries and their accomplices.'¹⁴ Since the 'bureaucrat-capitalist class' was made up of precisely those who left the mainland with the GMD, in practice, non-People were those

¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks*, 32.

¹¹ '中国人民政治协商会议共同纲领' [Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference] 1949.9.30, *RMRB*.

¹² Regarding the symbolism of the stars on the flag, see Leighton, 'Cadres, Capitalists, and Culture', 241. On the demography of the national bourgeoisie, see Engman, 'Shanghai's Dispossessed', 50.

¹³ Smith, *Thought Reform*, 52-3.

¹⁴ Mao, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', *SW*4, 417-18.

identified as ‘counterrevolutionaries’ on account of their involvement with the GMD or a whole host of other organizations, and those designated as ‘landlords’ during land reform: the latter about four million households (3.79% of rural households), with a population of over 20 million people. Moreover, after a brief interlude of neutrality from 1949 to 1953, ‘rich peasants’ – a further 3.2 million households with a population of over 20 million – also became targets of the People’s Democratic Dictatorship.¹⁵ In this way, many – though not, as I shall discuss below, all – members of 6-7 percent of rural households were designated as non-People by reference to their socioeconomic status.

As Chapter 1 will trace in some detail, the notion that all those designated as landlords were economically part of a single ‘feudal landlord class’ whose treatment as enemies could be politically and morally justified was a fiction that the CCP embraced primarily for reasons of revolutionary strategy. As for rich peasants, by the CCP’s own definition, their activities were at least partly capitalist in nature, but they were never extended any of the symbolic or material benefits that the urban capitalist population was. This reflected a fundamental bifurcation in the CCP’s approach to rural and urban society: it was only counterrevolutionary or criminal behaviour in urban areas (whether current or past) that could lead to enemy status, whereas one’s position in the rural economic order was in itself sufficient to merit such exclusion. The causes and especially the consequences of this bifurcation will appear throughout this thesis.

Fitzpatrick writes that the outcome of ‘the marriage of ascription and Marxist class [was] stigma,’ and that those disenfranchised in the Soviet Union had become “‘untouchable.’”¹⁶ The analogy with caste has been made in connection with Maoist China too. In his pioneering study based on interviews in Guangdong, Jonathan Unger argued that land reform era classifications came to form a system of ‘caste-like rigidity’ in rural China, with many of the features of caste discrimination: ‘outcaste status’ applied to entire families, and it involved social exclusion and the requirement to perform demeaning tasks that symbolized ‘polluted status.’¹⁷ Many village studies that cover the Mao era, regardless of geography or of the author’s overall attitude to the Maoist project, write of a system of

¹⁵ My statistics for landlords and rich peasants are based on a 1980 estimate by the State Statistical Bureau reproduced in *JDZX*, 410. See Appendix 1 for discussion of the demography of non-People.

¹⁶ Fitzpatrick, ‘Ascribing Class’, 755. An important point to note here is that formal discrimination ended with the new ‘Stalin’ Constitution of 1936; but, Fitzpatrick suggests, ‘policies of destigmatization were neither wholeheartedly recommended by party leaders nor systematically implemented by officials at the local levels’ (ibid., 758-761). See also Alexopoulos, *Stalin’s Outcasts*, 176-84.

¹⁷ Unger, ‘The Class System in Rural China,’ 122, 124.

permanent and hereditary stigma against those with bad class labels.¹⁸ While there was a cultural template for the existence of pariah groups in the late imperial period, such groups were a very small minority, and imperial support for discrimination against them had been withdrawn by the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁹ More broadly, while the imperial Chinese state had stressed the importance of hierarchical social relations and endorsed principles of collective guilt, and notions of continuity through the patriline were deeply embedded in popular thought, it nevertheless stands out that late imperial China did not have rigid, hereditary social hierarchies like the caste system in India, the *soslovie* system in Tsarist Russia, or the estate system in pre-revolutionary France.²⁰ There was, famously, a privileged ruling class constituted by those who had passed the imperial examinations, but central to the ideology of this system was that entry into the elite was meritocratically determined and open to everyone regardless of social background.

The emergence of a system of permanent and hereditary stigma appears even more paradoxical in light of the fact that the Party-state's ideology and policies explicitly rejected both of these features. The Bolsheviks had already grappled with a similar set of problems: on the one hand, there was little Marxist justification for considering someone's past rather than current socioeconomic status to be the primary determinant of their class identity, much less to consider it a trait that their children would inherit; but on the other hand, revolutionary justice and vigilance militated against forgetting the pre-revolutionary past. In the Soviet Union in the 1920s, 'current social position, former...social position, and parents' social status' were all considered relevant, but without any agreement on the relative importance of these factors.²¹

The policies on class labels formulated by the CCP during and immediately after its rise to power were considerably more systematic than those of the Bolsheviks, for reasons that are revealing about the nature of the CCP's revolutionary project. The Party was more precise on the question of permanence because, in the course of a single political campaign—land reform—it both created the landlord class as a social category while destroying it as an economic category. Unlike noble landowners in Russia, 'landlords' had not been a distinct social group in pre-revolutionary China; but unlike the kulaks, who were

¹⁸ Chan, Madsen, and Unger, *Chen Village*, 16; Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, *Revolution, Resistance and Reform*, 54-55, 72-73; Gao, *Gao Village*, 153-54, 169; Hinton, *Shenfan*, 452; Huang, *The Spiral Road*, 45-47, 146; Potter and Potter, *China's Peasants*, 54, 57; Ruf, *Cadres and Kin*, 77.

¹⁹ Unger, 'The Class System in Rural China', 128; Smith, 'Class', 203; Kuhn, 'Chinese Views of Social Stratification', 22-23.

²⁰ Kuhn, 'Chinese Views of Social Stratification.'

²¹ Fitzpatrick, 'Ascribing Class', 756.

‘liquidated’ more than a decade after the October Revolution, the CCP’s rise to power led to the destruction of whatever material foundations there were for considering ‘landlords’ a separate class, and soon did so for ‘rich peasants’ too.²² This simultaneous process of social creation and economic destruction meant that the CCP could not avoid addressing the question of how long these stigmatizing labels would last after the disappearance of their material foundation, and it did so very explicitly: the 1950 Decision on Assigning Class Status specified that those landlords who ‘completely obeyed the government, worked hard in agricultural production or other activity, and did not engage in any reactionary behaviour’ for five years after land reform could have their class status changed to reflect whatever their actual occupation was. For rich peasants in pre-1949 land reform areas—who had already been expropriated—just three years were enough.²³

On the issue of heritability, in addition to the Marxist ideological commitments it shared with the Bolsheviks, and the more distinctly Maoist emphasis on the transformability of consciousness, the CCP also had more practical reasons for not treating class enemy status as heritable. As I shall argue in chapter 1, ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’ families were generally downwardly mobile members of the late-imperial elite, businesspeople, or, probably most often, farmers who had managed to obtain a surplus due to some combination of agricultural skill, demographic factors, and commercial activity. Among the rural or semi-rural population, it was primarily such families who were able to have their children educated, a fact that is reflected in the background of the CCP’s leaders: Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Deng Xiaoping all came from moderately prosperous rural families that would, if land reform had taken place at the time, been classified as landlords or rich

²² For the argument the rural Russia prior to the revolution was characterized by ‘proto-class’ conflict to a much greater extent than was rural China, see Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China*, 164-66. There was of course an elite social group in late imperial China, the ‘gentry 绅士,’ that, while defined more by degree-holding than by land ownership, often depended on land rent, and was culturally quite distinct from the peasantry (though a sharp distinction between the ‘gentry’ and the ‘peasantry’ is also a simplification; see Harrison, *The Man Awakened from Dreams*, 3, 142-44). But the gentry in a strict sense was just one part of the broader late imperial local elite (Esherick and Rankin, ‘Introduction’, 12); and the composition of local elites only became more complicated after the abolition of the examination system in 1905 and the fall of the Qing in 1911. The degree-holding gentry ceased to exist as a coherent unit, and the socioeconomic trajectory of its members varied considerably. Prasenjit Duara has famously argued that the loss of elite cultural and moral authority and the increased extractive ambitions of the Republican state jointly led to the dominance of a new class of political entrepreneurs, or ‘local bullies’ in popular terms, in rural society (Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*). These people often became the CCP’s first targets, but not even all those designated ‘evil tyrants’ by the CCP truly fit this description, much less the entire ‘landlord class.’ In sum, there was no coherent elite group in Chinese rural society in the late imperial and Republican periods corresponding to the CCP’s ‘landlord class’, much less to the combined ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’ classes. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

²³ ‘Decision on Class Status’, 3.11.

peasants.²⁴ When the CCP came to power, China remained a country with a fairly low literacy rate, and so the educated offspring of ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’ families were seen as too valuable a resource to be wasted by constraining them to the countryside and forcing them to do agricultural labour, as their parents generally were.²⁵ Accordingly, the 1950 Decision on Class Status distinguished ‘class status 阶级成分’ from ‘family background 家庭出身,’ and specified that unless they were already in charge of household affairs, all those under the age of 18 or who had been studying were to be assigned a family background and not an individual class status during land reform.²⁶

Both Billeter and Unger clearly recognized that the permanence and heredity of class labels observed under late Maoism was in tension with official ideology and policy. This is particularly evident with respect to heredity, since the official rhetoric of the 1960s and 70s was replete with the slogan that ‘greater weight is placed on individual performance [than family background] 重在表现’ – despite, or perhaps partly because of, the fact that it did not reflect actual practice.²⁷ On the issue of permanence, Unger and especially Billeter were less clear, probably because the late-Maoist discourse that was most familiar to them very rarely included this point. It was Richard Kraus, in his careful and detailed monograph on the development of Maoist thinking and policy on class conflict, who noted that ‘the impression conveyed by...land reform documents is that members of the defunct landlord class would soon cease to be distinguished from other rural people,’ and Kraus remains among the few scholars to have noted the evidence that the promise to remove labels after 3-5 years was implemented on at least some scale. However, due to the limited evidence available,

²⁴ Mao’s father was a poor peasant who, by Mao’s own description as related to Edward Snow, gradually raised himself to the status of a rich peasant through saving and commercial activity (Snow, *Red Star over China*, part 4, chapter 1). Liu’s father inherited 60 *mu* of land, of which he worked 30 *mu* himself and rented out the rest (‘刘少奇年谱 (修订本) 第一卷’ [*Liu Shaoqi Chronicle (revised edition)*, vol. 1] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2018), 1). This would have made him a rich peasant. At the height of his fortunes, Deng Xiaoping’s father owned 40 *mu* of land and many mulberry trees, and he was actively involved in local affairs, including a position as head of the county police office and as the head of the local Elder Brothers Society. Due to conflicts with local powerholders, he had to escape, and the family’s fortunes gradually declined (‘邓小平年谱 第一卷’ [*Deng Xiaoping Chronicle*, vol. 1] (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2020), 1). Had the revolution taken place at the height of his career, there is a good chance he would have been executed as an ‘evil tyrant.’

²⁵ See ‘中共中央转发安子文同志关于劳动就业问题的综合报告’ [Party Centre circulates comrade An Ziwen’s comprehensive report in the issue of labour and employment], 1952.8, *CCPM*, for a very direct statement of this.

²⁶ ‘Decision on Class Status’, 3.9.

²⁷ It is not uncommon to come across suggestions to the effect that the ‘bloodline theory’ of the early Cultural Revolution was the more-or-less official position, but this is clearly incorrect; as a number of scholars have pointed out, the bloodline theory was highly unorthodox, especially in its most quasi-biological formulations (Billeter, ‘The System of “Class Status”’, 133; Schoenhals, ‘Demonising Discourse’, 475; Smith, ‘Class’, 213). See Chapter 2, 2.3, ‘Heredity’, for extended discussion of these issues.

together with the accounts of Cantonese emigrants who denied that this had ever taken place, Kraus concluded that this was a very limited phenomenon.²⁸

Billeter, Kraus, and Unger all suggest that the basic cause of the system of permanent and hereditary stigma observed under late Maoism was the continued centrality of the discourse of 'class struggle' after the socialist transition, which was cemented by Mao at the Tenth Plenum in September 1962.²⁹ This thesis finds considerable support for the contention that 1962 was a decisive turning point. I argue that the foundations for continued stigma against 'landlords', 'rich peasants' and their families were systematically established during the Socialist Education Movement, as a key element of the Party's response to the failure of the Great Leap. While this response, which involved a combination of the continuous re-narration of the pre-revolutionary evils of class enemies and the stoking of paranoia about their malicious designs in the present, worked up to a point—and, as Unger argues, provided certain emotional and symbolic benefits to the good-class peasantry in a context where the Party had few material advantages to offer—it marked a major development in the process through which Party discourse became detached from the lived realities of rural residents. But perhaps its most insidious consequence was its re-establishment of the idea, first systematically disseminated during land reform, that ordinary moral norms were not applicable when it came to the treatment of those labelled class enemies. This played a major role in the widespread physical violence of the subsequent years, both against rural class enemies and their children, and, as Philip Huang has argued, against the Cultural Revolution's wide range of new enemies as well.³⁰

At the same time, this thesis also argues that the promise of de-labelling that the Party made in 1950 was implemented on a considerably larger scale than prior scholarship has appreciated, and that the nominal aim of the Party's policies towards class enemies consistently remained that of transforming them into members of the People. On the one hand, this meant that, well before the end of the Mao era, a non-negligible proportion of those labelled landlords and rich peasants during land reform ceased to be considered 'enemies' at the bureaucratic level. On the other hand, their status as non-enemies always remained conditional, and the Party's rhetoric of reform served to justify a series of coercive and demeaning practices that came to form a regular part of the life of most rural class enemies.

²⁸ Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*, 51-53.

²⁹ For a more recent statement of the importance of 1962 as a turning point with respect to the treatment of class enemies, see Smith, 'Class', 213-15.

³⁰ Huang, 'Rural Class Struggle', 127.

Sources and Methodology

The source base for this thesis is fairly eclectic—necessarily so given that it aims to offer a political, cultural, and social history of an issue that affected tens of millions of people throughout China for more than three decades. My starting point, which convinced me to attempt such a geographically and temporally wide-ranging project, is that it is both possible and worthwhile to trace the national level political and cultural history of the landlord-rich peasant question in greater detail than the pioneering scholarship reviewed above was able to. The existence of a fairly unified set of national-level policies and discourses is why I think it makes sense to carry out a China-wide study of this nature; correspondingly, the fact that non-Han areas were dealt with by the CCP under a related but distinct set of policies and discourses means that they fall outside the scope of this thesis. In terms of political and bureaucratic history, this thesis relies to a great extent on material collected under the aegis of the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Universities Service Centre for Chinese Studies, particularly the *Database of the History of Contemporary Chinese Political Movements* edited by Song Yongyi. I have generally relied on a combination of this database and the full-text searchable *People's Daily* database to establish the basic facts about official policy and discourse. I have found further essential material in internal journals (particularly those from the public security system), gazetteers, semi-openly published documentary collections, and, in a few important cases, through either the online grey market or through fortunate and temporary access in county archives.³¹ For cultural history, I have relied to a large extent on the fact that most of the widely distributed cultural products of the Mao years—journals, propaganda booklets, films, and play scripts—are easily accessible, many having been digitized, and most being available in copious quantities through online marketplaces.

The foregoing should make clear why it is possible to deepen our understanding of the bureaucratic and discursive history of the landlord-rich peasant question in the Mao era, but what exactly is to be gained by doing so? I am of the view that reconstructing the logic of

³¹ I have marked the last of these as coming from 'A' County Archives, as the archivists in the county in question would not want it known that they made it possible for me to consult these documents. The documents concerned are from the provincial level, and I can provide photos upon request in which the stamps of the county archive are redacted. I plan to make these sources available through a suitable platform, such as Jeremy Brown's PRC History Source Transparency Project (www.sfu.ca/prchistorytransparency.html).

Maoist bureaucracy and propaganda is in itself a valuable contribution to historical knowledge, and that is one major aim of this study. I am particularly interested in the historical ontology of class enemy labels in Maoist bureaucracy and culture, in what Ann Laura Stoler describes as the ‘identification of *mutating* assignments of essence and its predicates in specific time and place.’ As Stoler notes, the concept of an ‘essence’ would seem to imply ‘stability and fixity,’ and yet as she argues with respect to the Dutch colonial ontology of racial kinds, ‘such “essences” were protean, not fixed.’³² This instability is even more pronounced for the Maoist ontology of class, which, on the one hand, had a tendency to see classes ‘*a priori* as substances’, and individuals as ‘attain[ing] a meaningful existence only by belonging to a class’, but which at the same time was committed to the notion that humans themselves were transformable.³³ Through a close reading of bureaucratic and propaganda documents, this thesis seeks to trace these tensions in the ontology of class enemies as they developed over the Mao era.

That being said, this thesis is ultimately motivated by a desire to shed light on the human consequences of the CCP’s decision to designate a large minority of the Chinese population as class enemies. How much can an inquiry that sets out from bureaucratic and propaganda documents tell us about what these labels meant for the tens of millions of people who were affected by them? I believe that the answer to this question is ‘quite a lot,’ for reasons to do both with the power of modern states in general, and with the immense transformative and pedagogical ambitions of the Maoist state in particular. Without minimizing the distance between ambition and reality, I would maintain that to understand how this state talked to itself about its projects, and how it wanted its citizens to think and feel in relation to these projects, is to understand some of the most important forces shaping the lives of ordinary people in the Mao era.³⁴ Indeed, I would suggest that a deeper understanding of these forces can open up lines of inquiry about people’s experiences that might otherwise remain obscure. This is especially so when, as in the case of this thesis, it has not been possible to carry out oral history interviews.³⁵

As important as I believe it is to ‘map the grain’ of Maoist narratives, both internal and public, I also think it is important to try to go beyond them: to try to understand what kinds of things happened that were not part of these narratives, and to discover and include voices

³² Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 4.

³³ Billeter, ‘The System of “Class Status”’, 158.

³⁴ On the archives as ‘a record of the state talking to itself,’ see Hershatter, ‘Notes from the alleyway’, 110.

³⁵ I was hoping to carry out at least some oral history interviews during my research stay in China, but my stay was cut short (from the planned 10 months to 5 months) by the Covid-19 pandemic.

other than those of the PRC's leaders, its bureaucracy and the producers of its official culture.³⁶ There are three kinds of sources that have enabled me to do this. The first and perhaps most straightforward are the excellent village studies covering the Mao era written by historians and anthropologists, which I have mined for details on the lives of those affected by landlord and rich peasant labels. The second are reports produced by the Maoist bureaucracy at various levels that describe events at the grassroots in a non-idealized manner, and sometimes directly quote ordinary people. In addition to the kinds of official sources cited above, I have relied especially on reports produced during the Socialist Education Movement in Neixiang County, Henan Province, that are stored at the Centre for Social History at Shanghai Jiaotong University.

Of course, relying on such sources to get at social reality is hardly a straightforward matter, even if one believes, as I do, that there is a coherent (if not necessarily clear) distinction between social reality and idealized narrative, since the Maoist bureaucracy did not neatly divide its documents between them.³⁷ Aminda Smith has recently criticized a method of reading Maoist documents which proceeds by assuming that records which reflect negatively on the Party-state are inherently more likely to be true than those which reflect positively on it, arguing that we should 'treat positive and negative evidence symmetrically.'³⁸ I would suggest that the way to think of this is not in terms of 'positive' and 'negative' evidence—as Smith argues, some 'negative' phenomena, particularly misbehaving local officials, were very much part of 'the Party-state's own narrative about its governance'³⁹—but rather in terms of correspondence with the kinds of narratives that the Party-state was promoting. The Maoist state was highly susceptible to cycles in which narratives that the leadership was favourable to were reproduced and reinforced via bureaucratic incentives, arguably to an even greater extent than most other states.⁴⁰ For this reason, I would argue that there is good epistemic justification for treating with greater caution claims that accord with official narratives than those that do not, even when 'both

³⁶ On the importance of 'mapping the grain' before attempting to read against it, see Smith, 'Long Live the Mass Line', 799.

³⁷ Proximity to the 'grassroots' is an important, if imperfect, indicator. This thesis relies on few sources that are truly from the 'grassroots', partly due to difficulties in finding them, and partly because I judged that I could not justify spending the time required to read handwritten documents at this stage. This is a direction in which I plan to develop my work in the future. On whether it makes sense to think of our work as trying to deepen our understanding of social reality, or 'what actually happened', compare Brown, 'PRC History in Crisis and Clover', 697-98, with Lanza, 'Introduction: The Politics of (Maoist) History', 681.

³⁸ Smith, 'Long Live the Mass Line', 801.

³⁹ Ibid., 785.

⁴⁰ The most well-known and disastrous example of this of course was that which took place during the Great Leap Forward. See Walder, *China under Mao*, 159-69, for a very clear statement of this dynamic.

claims come from the Party-state's own archival record.⁴¹ This is generally how I have tried to proceed, but I have sought to make my methods and assumptions as transparent as possible, and to be clear when I am trying to establish something about social reality rather than about the Party-state's narratives.

The third kind of source I have relied on to try to get closer to social reality, and especially the experiences of those affected by landlord and rich peasant labels, are memoirs. Since the 1990s, some of those whose parents, grandparents or other relatives were designated as landlords or rich peasants during land reform have written about their own and their families' lives. Class labels vary from being central to the narrative, an important element, or only one among numerous threads. I have been able to find these memoirs via keyword searches on *Duxiu*, something that until very recently would not have been possible. A second major source of memoir material are the remarkable online journals collecting reminiscences about the Mao-era, of which one in particular, *The Five Black Types Recall the Past* 黑五类忆旧, focuses specifically on recollections by or about people who were politically stigmatized. Of course, memoirs are narratives about the past rather than direct windows onto the past itself, and are written in particular political contexts and with certain objectives. For the memoirs this thesis relies on, the relevant context is that, on the one hand, the Maoist framework of class struggle and us-enemy conflict had been abandoned and partially discredited, but on the other hand, the dispossession of and three-decades long 'dictatorship' against landlords and rich peasants had not been re-evaluated, nor were its targets offered any material or moral restitution. To the extent that these memoirs have an objective in common, it is that of providing a record of the hardships and injustices faced by the author and their family, or of the 'class enemies' that the author was acquainted with. This makes it more likely that certain kinds of experiences—viz. those of hardship and injustice connected to class labels—are recorded in these memoirs, which I have kept in mind when relying on them to try to establish general patterns.

This thesis treats landlord and rich peasant labels as a single subject, an approach that is arguably both too broad and too narrow. It is too broad because, as will be clear at various points in what follows, 'landlords' were at the centre of the Party's narrative about the evils of pre-revolutionary rural China, and those classified as 'rich peasants' were initially not targeted during post-1949 land reform. It is too narrow because, as indicated at the outset, the shorthand for non-People for most of the Mao era included, in addition to landlords and rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists, and this group of

⁴¹ Smith, 'Long Live the Mass Line', 798.

‘four/five-type elements’ were generally dealt with as one unit by the public security system, and often referred to as ‘class enemies’ in ordinary usage. It may be true that the first two were the only *class* enemies in a literal sense, but if ordinary usage and the public security system—and, as I shall discuss in Chapter 2, Mao himself—did not care about such terminological precision, what is the scholarly justification for doing so? It could also be argued that another logical way of distinguishing among non-People, namely whether they were excluded from the People by reference to pre- or post-revolutionary factors, would place most ‘counterrevolutionaries’ next to landlords and rich peasants.

These are all important considerations, but, as I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, it is nevertheless the case that there was a distinct ‘landlord-rich peasant question’ that can be traced from the 1920s, through the Mao era, and into the 1980s and 90s. Rich peasants were in a neutral position for a brief period, but they became ‘enemies’ again shortly after land reform, and in subsequent discourse, landlords and rich peasants frequently appeared side-by-side.⁴² On the relation between landlords, rich peasants, and other non-People, there can be no doubt that many of the issues addressed in this thesis—notably, the permanence and heredity of labels, the public security system’s project of surveillance and reform, and the issue of children having to ‘draw a clear line’—affected those labelled counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists as well. My justification for nevertheless focusing only on landlords and rich peasants is twofold. First, those labelled landlords and rich peasants together made up by far the majority of non-People (see Appendix 1, ‘The Demography of Non-People’). Second, the way the other categories were defined, and how their exclusion from among the People was justified, were importantly different, and raise a number of issues that require separate study.⁴³ ‘Counterrevolutionaries’ occasionally appear in what follows, as this label was sometimes combined with those of ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’, but I believe the bureaucratic logic and the discursive role of this label is sufficiently complex and distinct to justify considering it a separate topic.

Gender does not run through this thesis systematically as a category of analysis. The intersectionality of hierarchies in the Mao era is a complex question in general, and, I would argue, particularly complex in the case of landlord and rich peasant labels.⁴⁴ This is because, unlike a number of problematic identities in Maoist China, including ‘counterrevolutionary’,

⁴² See Chapter 2, 2.1, ‘Landlords, Rich Peasants, and the Us-Enemy Divide’, for detailed discussion.

⁴³ Recent scholarship has significantly deepened our understanding of the two post-revolutionary categories (i.e. ‘bad element’ and ‘rightist’); see Yang, ‘How a Bad Element was Made’; Brown, ‘A Policeman, His Gun, and an Alleged Rape’; Cao, ‘An Overt Conspiracy’.

⁴⁴ See Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China*, for the application of this framework to Chinese society in the Mao era.

‘bad element’, and also ‘capitalist’, landlord and rich peasant identities were not primarily conceptualized as applying to a male head of household who had separate ‘dependents 家属,’ including his wife.⁴⁵ The categories of landlord and rich peasant were initially applied to entire households, and while the Party was concerned not to label children, students, and those with other jobs as class enemy ‘elements 分子’—that is, targets of the People’s Democratic Dictatorship—there was no comparable concern about the wife of the head of the household, unless they had recently married into the family.⁴⁶ Where counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and capitalists were all labelled by reference to activities outside the household, landlords and rich peasants were labelled by reference to the ‘exploitation’ that they carried out as part of the functioning of the household, in which wives were therefore also directly implicated. The result of this was that, while the ‘default’ landlord or rich peasant was still the male head of household, the wife of a landlord or rich peasant was much more likely to become an ‘element’ herself than, for example, the wife of a counterrevolutionary. This is indicated by the frequent appearance of female landlord and rich peasant elements in both internal and public discourse, particularly from the Socialist Education Movement onwards (see Appendix 2 for some preliminary statistical evidence). As will be clear from examples in each chapter of this thesis, it is not possible to make any straightforward distinction between male and female roles in official policy and discourse concerning landlords and rich peasants. These are issues that I plan to explore more systematically in future work; the key point for the purposes of this thesis is that, bureaucratically, discursively, and in practice, women were themselves frequently ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’, and not ‘just’ the wives or dependents of landlords and rich peasants.

Finally, a note on chronology and periodization. The Cultural Revolution does not appear in this thesis as a distinct ten-year period, as I believe this periodization obscures both the exceptional nature of the years from 1966 to about 1970, and the continuity between the 1970s and the Socialist Education Movement (SEM) period (1963-66). The Red Guard movement and factional conflict period (1966-67) unleashed a wave of chaotic ransacking of houses and beating of people that, for the most part, was a departure from the post-land

⁴⁵ On capitalist housewives, see Leighton, ‘Capitalists, Cadres, and Culture,’ chapter 3, and Feng, ‘Between Class Struggle and Family Loyalty.’ The CCP’s policies and discourses concerning the family members of counterrevolutionaries is a topic that awaits study. Diamant cites examples of the wives of counterrevolutionaries having affairs while their husbands were in labour reform camps; see *Revolutionizing the Family*, 195; 254.

⁴⁶ The main exception concerned those from ‘non-exploiter’ families who had spent less than three years living at the same standard as the landlord family they had married into; see ‘Decision on Class Status’, 13.2.

reform norm, even as it was inspired by the intensifying rhetoric of class struggle of the foregoing years. The subsequent period of repression (1968 until about 1970) involved state-sanctioned forms of violence of which landlords and rich peasants were frequently the targets, in the context of the ‘Cleansing the Class Ranks 清理阶级队伍’ and the ‘One Strike, Three Anti 一打三反’ campaigns. This often seems to have been in the form of more violent versions of the organized ‘struggle’ that had been regularized in the past.⁴⁷ There were, however, cases of systematic murder, notably in Dao County in Hunan in the summer of 1967, and then in Guangxi, where landlords, rich peasants, and others were targeted as part of a murderous campaign to repress the faction that had lost out in the provincial power struggle.⁴⁸ What I wish to stress is that following the reestablishment of state power and the initial repression, for rural class enemies, there was a gradual return to the pre-Cultural Revolution status quo in roughly the form it had taken during the Socialist Education Movement. For this reason, I believe that the ideology and policy of the SEM years basically established the framework for how landlords and rich peasants were dealt with for most of the 1970s, something that is obscured if the entire period until 1976 is referred to as part of the Cultural Revolution.

Overview

Chapter One provides the background for the rest of the thesis by tracing how the Party arrived at the key elements of its narrative about pre-revolutionary rural China, establishing the ways in which this narrative was at odds with social reality, and showing that the Party’s decision to impose this narrative was the outcome of a series of choices about revolutionary strategy. Through land reform, a number of falsehoods—that ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ had owned 70 to 80 percent of the land, which they had acquired through some combination of treachery and violence—were canonized as foundational truths. Land

⁴⁷ By this I mean the kinds of examples referred to in Chan, Madsen, and Unger, *Chen Village*, 145-46, and Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, *Revolution, Resistance and Reform*, 146. This ‘institutionalized cruelty’ (ibid.) certainly did often lead to death (see He, ‘Death of a Landlord’, for a case precipitated by the Cleansing of the Class Ranks campaign), but it was not deliberate murder of the kind discussed below.

⁴⁸ Walder, ‘Anatomy of a Regional Civil War.’ In this article, Walder argues that the murder of the members of politically stigmatized households in Guangxi can be directly connected to the factional repression that was taking place at the same time, and is therefore better understood as a kind of state repression than as communal violence (the latter interpretation having been argued for in Su, *Collective Killings*). A similar interpretation is provided by Song Guoqing (“Healing the Wounds?”, 57-61), but Song argues that a direct line can be drawn from the killings in Dao County (Hunan) in the summer of 1967 to the subsequent killings in Guangxi. It should be noted that the earliest instance of systematic murderous violence against old class enemies during the Cultural Revolution took place in August-September 1966 in Daxing County, on the outskirts of Beijing (see MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 128-31).

reform itself, which in the official narrative involved the masses rising up to overthrow their oppressors, in practice involved many far more sordid elements, notably the widespread use of physical violence against small-scale landowners with the intention of forcing them to hand over arbitrarily determined quantities of grain and other property.

Chapter Two addresses directly the paradox of the class status system: that class labels apparently became permanent and hereditary even though the Party's policies at the time of land reform plainly stated that they would be neither. I seek to explain this paradox through a close reading of official policy and discourse. I show that the Party never came to understand class labels as either permanent or hereditary, as there was neither any ideological nor practical justification for doing so. Instead, the tendency towards the permanence and heritability of class enemy labels is best understood as a by-product of the continued centrality of 'us-enemy' conflict in the People's Republic after the transition to socialism. I trace how the framework of binary conflict involving landlords and rich peasants was used by the Party during two major crises, rural unrest in 1957 and the failure of the Great Leap. In both cases, Party leaders realized that this framing was insufficient to understand and respond to these crises, but the initial reliance on this framing strongly reinforced the salience of class enemy labels, and was followed, in 1962, by a return to class struggle as the master narrative of political life. In the second part of the chapter, I trace how Party discourse and policy grappled with the tensions and contradictions resulting from, on the one hand, the continued centrality of struggle between the People and their enemies, and on the other, the Party's commitment to the idea that class enemies could be transformed, and that class enemies' children could not be held responsible for their family background.

Chapter Three investigates how the Party-state understood and carried out its self-appointed mission of transforming class enemies from 'exploiters' into members of the working People. I show that this developed into a major project of the public security system, the aim of which was to turn rural society into a panopticon in which the actions, words and even thoughts of all four-/five-type elements could be perfectly monitored. The reality certainly fell short of this ambitious goal, but involved the creation of a set of institutions and practices—a combination of open and covert surveillance, regular education and admonition meetings, having to report back on one's work and thought, and public evaluation—that became important features of everyday life in rural China under high socialism. While eventual inclusion among the People was always proclaimed as the objective of these measures, the entire programme of reform was premised on a series of assumptions—that class enemies were guilty exploiters who had to seek redemption and

learn how to toil, that the CCP was leading the residents of rural China towards prosperity, and that class enemies themselves could live dignified lives contributing to socialist construction—that were frequently in conflict with people’s actual experiences. As a result, reform more often led to ritualized performances of guilt, repentance and gratitude than they did to the genuine internal transformations described in idealized narratives.

Chapter Four turns to the social status of landlords and rich peasants in the Mao era, asking whether comparisons to caste or even race made by some scholars are useful ways to understand the stigma associated with landlord and rich peasant labels. I argue that, although discourse and policies against permanence and heritability mean there are strong disanalogies, it is nevertheless true that Party propaganda and policy about class enemies had two features in common with archetypal forms of naturalizing discrimination: at the abstract level, a discourse of an underlying shared essence, and at the practical level, the aim of exclusion from ordinary social interaction. These features first emerged during land reform, as part of the CCP’s programme to destroy existing structures of power in rural China. While the Party was certainly successful up to a point, there is evidence that the salience of class labels in ordinary life was fading by the early 1960s. The essentialization and social exclusion returned with even greater force during the SEM, and had a direct causal role in the widespread violence against class enemies and their families that characterized the early years of the Cultural Revolution; but, I suggest, it is doubtful that it was actually incorporated into the thinking of the majority of people who lived around and knew those labelled as class enemies.

Chapter Five moves from the village to the family level, exploring the conflict between filial norms and emotions and the Party’s expectation that the children of class enemies ‘draw a clear line’ between themselves and their families. This expectation was closely tied to the CCP’s policy that class enemy status was not directly heritable, and, as this chapter argues, it significantly limited the extent to which that policy could have a liberating effect on the children of class enemies, who were, paradoxically, expected to both provide for their parents in old age, while also demonstrating that they viewed them as enemies. Particularly from the SEM onwards, it became necessary to visibly ‘draw a clear line’, which could involve having to send elderly parents to the countryside, or to participate in the ritual of class struggle by providing evidence about their ‘crimes.’ There were those who came to see themselves as on the side of their family in a conflict against the Party, but this was very difficult to conceal, as ever more personal documents became the targets of politicized scrutiny.

Chapter Six turns to the issue that was the basis of classifying people as ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ in the first place: property. Land reform involved the confiscation of many kinds of property other than land, and some of it, notably housing and furniture, continued to belong to individuals and families even under the collective economy, and so were the kinds of things that those dispossessed during land reform could hope to regain, short of the change of regime that they were often accused of hoping for. These kinds of property could thus become the focal points of accusations of the distinctive PRC crime of *fangong daosuan*—of seeking to undermine the entire revolutionary order by reversing part of land reform. Through one family’s decade-long attempt to establish their ownership of a house and the political scandal it led to, this chapter explores how entitlement to property intersected with the two central divides of the Mao era: between the People and their enemies, and between the urban and the rural. The chapter concludes by considering how former class enemies’ claims on property were dealt with in the 1980s and 90s, after class struggle ceased to be the organizing principle of Chinese political life.

1 The ‘Feudal Landlord Class’ and its Destruction

The meaning of ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’ labels in the Mao era is inseparable from the Party’s narrative of what pre-revolutionary rural society was like, and how it was transformed through land reform. This narrative, which was disseminated as a set of unquestionable truths for three decades, proceeded roughly as follows. Pre-revolutionary rural China was characterized by a system of ‘feudal exploitation’, which was the root cause of China’s poverty and inability to resist imperialism. This system was based on a hugely unequal distribution of the most important productive resource, land. Landlords and rich peasants, about 8 percent of households and no more than 10 percent of the population, owned 70 to 80 percent of the land. They ruthlessly extracted most of the agricultural surplus and used it to live extravagant, wasteful lives, while the majority of the rural population, which carried out almost all of the labour, lacked even the most basic necessities. In feudal China, it was impossible to become a rich peasant, much less a landlord, through frugality, hard work, or even legitimate commercial activity; ownership of surplus land was based on a combination of political power, violence, and fraud. It was therefore both necessary and just to treat all members of the ‘landlord class’ as enemies during land reform, to execute the ‘evil tyrants’ among them, and to mobilize the masses to engage in righteous struggle against their exploiters and oppressors.¹

This narrative became hegemonic during land reform (1946-52), and was systematically reinforced and taught to a new generation during the Socialist Education Movement (1963-66). This chapter provides essential background to the rest of the thesis by demonstrating that there were major and obvious contradictions between this narrative and social reality, that the Party chose to impose this narrative onto society despite these contradictions, and that the decision to do so is best understood as a contingent outcome of a series of choices about revolutionary strategy. The basic argument—that the Party’s narrative about rural

¹ Some of the most vivid versions of this narrative from the early PRC can be found in land reform exhibition materials, such as 中南区土地改革展览会 Central-South Region Land Reform Exhibition (ed.), ‘中南区土地改革的伟大胜利’ [The Great Victory of Land Reform in the Central-South Region] (Wuhan: Zhongnan Renmin Wenxue Yishu Chubanshe, 1954), and 华东军政委员会土地改革委员会 Land Reform Committee of the East China Military-Administrative Committee (ed.), ‘上海郊区、苏南行政区土地改革画集’ [Collection of Images of Land Reform in the Suburbs of Shanghai and the South Jiangsu Administrative Region] (Shanghai, 1952), as well as the film directed by Jiang Yunchuan 姜云川 and Ye Hua 叶华, ‘伟大的土地改革’ [The great land reform] (Beijing: Beijing Dianying Zhipianchang, 1953). The amount and variety of such material exploded with the call to carry out ‘class education’ following the initiation of the Socialist Education Movement in 1963, and this was when many of the archetypal ‘evil landlords’, such as Liu Wencai, become nationally famous. See Guo, ‘The Social Construction and Deconstruction of Evil Landlords’, for an account of the career of the ‘evil landlord’ in Mao and post-Mao era culture, and Ho and Li, ‘From Landlord Manor to Red Memorabilia’, for an in-depth account of Liu Wencai and his ‘rent collection courtyard.’

China forced a complex reality into a simple and inaccurate Manichean scheme—is far from new.² The contribution of this chapter is to provide an updated version that integrates the findings of the most recent scholarship on the socioeconomic structure of pre-revolutionary rural China, and on the development of CCP policy and discourse on land reform. I also rely on the contradictions between Mao’s original observations and subsequent propaganda as a way of rendering the argument more vivid.

In the first part of this chapter, I review the genesis and empirical basis of three key aspects of the official narrative. The first is the claim that about 10 percent of the population owned 70-80 percent of the land. The second is the notion that there were distinct social classes, ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’, that made up nearly 10 percent of the rural population. The third is the claim that anyone who had enough land to qualify as a ‘landlord’ must have obtained it through illegitimate means (or inherited it from someone who had done so). In the second part of the chapter, I trace the process of civil war land reform (1946-48) to demonstrate how the Party moved from the differentiated understanding of the ‘landlord class’ that prevailed from the War of Resistance until early 1947, in which being a member of this class did not necessarily mean being an ‘enemy’, to its subsequent approach of what Yang Kuisong has aptly termed ‘undifferentiated demonization.’³ In the third part, I review the process of post-1949 land reform (1950-52), showing that it involved a large amount of violence, and that its targets were not only pre-revolutionary powerholders, but also small-scale landowners with little to no political involvement. This, I argue, was part of, and made possible by, the CCP’s exclusion of all those classified as ‘landlords’ from the scope of those whose treatment was regulated by ordinary moral standards.

1.1 Revolutionary Strategy and Social Reality

The Distribution of Land in Pre-Revolutionary China

² Versions of this argument are made in Billeter, ‘The System of “Class Status”’, 138-45, Huang, ‘Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution’, Yang, ‘The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question’, and most recently, DeMare, *Land Wars*. It should be noted that this argument, and the other arguments made in this chapter, do not intersect directly with debates in development economics concerning the advantages and disadvantages of redistributive land reform in China (classic works in this vein are Wong, *Land Reform in the People’s Republic of China* and Lippitt, *Land Reform and Economic Development in China*).

³ Yang, ‘The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question’, 164.

From its first appearance to the Chinese public in 1947 until its gradual abandonment in the 1980s, the CCP consistently maintained the following claim about the distribution of land in pre-revolutionary China: 'the general situation is that landlords and rich peasants, who make up no more than 10% of the rural population, own about 70-80% of the land, relying on this to ruthlessly exploit the peasants.'⁴ This claim was introduced in Mao's November 1947 speech on 'The Present Situation and our Tasks,' restated in Liu Shaoqi's widely publicized 1950 report on land reform, and repeated throughout educational and propaganda material thereafter.⁵ The earliest known appearance of a comparable claim is in Mao's 1936 interview with Edgar Snow, in which he claimed that in the mid-1920s, as secretary of the Peasants' Committee of the KMT, he had been 'in charge of collecting statistics for areas throughout twenty-one provinces':

Our investigation showed astonishing inequalities...Usurers and landlords were about 10 percent of the population. Included in the 10 percent also were rich peasants, exploiters like the militarists, tax-collectors, etc.

The 10 percent of the rich peasants, landlords, and usurers together owned about 70 percent of the cultivated land...

The figures I quote are the average for the whole of China, which we investigated at that time, when there were workers in the Peasants' Committee compiling figures for twenty-one different provinces. These statistics were of course suppressed after the counterrevolution...⁶

It is not clear if the 21 province investigation referred to here by Mao had ever taken place, nor do these statistics appear in any of his known writing from those years.⁷ Moreover, as Li Fangchun has discovered, there is direct evidence that in 1936, Mao could not have believed

⁴ Liu Shaoqi, '关于土地改革问题的报告' [Report on the Question of Land Reform], 1950.6.30, *RMRB*.

⁵ Mao, 'The Present Situation and Our Tasks', 1948.12.25, *SW4*, 164; Liu, 'Report on the Question of Land Reform.' These figures were conveyed as undisputed fact by William Hinton in *Fanshen*, although he could not fail to note that inequality was drastically lower in Long Bow village (*Fanshen*, 27). Hinton's uncritical acceptance of the picture of rural China described in the first paragraph of this chapter led him to compare the role of land reform in the Chinese Civil War to that of the Emancipation Proclamation in the American Civil War (*Fanshen*, 8). In his 2005 *Through a Glass Darkly*, a critique of American views of the Chinese revolution in general, and specifically the work of Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, Hinton repeated this analogy, and extended it to the discrimination against landlords, rich peasants, and their descendants after land reform, in response to Friedman et al.'s portrayal of it as unjust and irrational (68-69, 74-77). As is plain from these and other comments of his (see e.g. *Through a Glass Darkly*, 22), Hinton remained committed to the idea the pre-revolutionary rural China was characterized by a system not dissimilar to European feudalism. Although the CCP's exaggerated figures on inequality in land ownership were questioned primarily by strongly anti-communist authors during the Cold War (e.g. Walker, *China under Communism*, 129-32), the inapplicability of the concept of feudalism in anything like its original sense was evident, for example, to the Christian socialist Richard Tawney (*Land and Labour in China*, 63-64).

⁶ Mao, 'Interview with Edgar Snow on Special Questions', 1936.7.23, *MRP4*, 289. The figures appear in Snow, *Red Star over China*, part three, 'Basic Communist Policies.'

⁷ Mao, 'Interview with Edgar Snow on Special Questions', 289 fn. 5.

these figures represented a plausible national average.⁸ One of Mao's most trusted advisers on agricultural issues, Wang Guanlan 王观澜, who was the head of the Land Commission of the Soviet Government and the head of the Party's Agricultural Committee at the time, was also interviewed by Edgar Snow just a week after the interview with Mao cited above. His comments are recorded in Snow's *Random Notes on Red China, 1936-1945*.

[Wang] said estimates generally applied to most provinces south of the Yangtze in which the Reds operated, but *since overall statistics had never been gathered* [emphasis mine], he could only give a range of averages within his knowledge. He was sure that his estimates for Kiangsi [Jiangxi], which showed eight to ten per cent of the population owning from forty to fifty per cent of the land, applied pretty generally in the more densely populated and rich farming areas.⁹

In other words, the best information available to Mao in 1936 was that even in the more unequal southern provinces, ten percent of the population owned at most half of the land; a national average could therefore only be lower than that, and certainly not in the 70 percent range. This could only have become clearer over the subsequent decade, as CCP leaders obtained further information about the situation in the areas under their control. For example, a 1941 report on the Jin-Cha-Ji border region by Peng Zhen, which Mao considered exceptionally good and had reprinted, referred to a survey of 25 villages in 9 counties which found that landlords were 3 percent of the population and owned 9 percent of the land, with a further 17.5 percent owned by rich peasants.¹⁰

A thorough review of the literature on the actual distribution of land in pre-revolutionary rural China is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I would nevertheless like to summarize some of the key findings. Based on inferences from data the Party collected during land reform, the State Statistical Bureau (SSB) produced a revised estimate in 1980, which was initially kept for internal reference, as it differed so much from the orthodox 70-80 percent figure.¹¹ The revised figures are:

Table 1.1. State Statistical Bureau's 1980 estimate of distribution of land before land reform

	Percentage of households/population	Percentage of land owned

⁸ Li, 'What Does It Mean to "Explain Antiquity?"', 17-18.

⁹ Snow, *Random Notes on Red China*, 37; the date of the interview is indicated at 34.

¹⁰ Li, 'What Does It Mean to "Explain Antiquity?"', 18.

¹¹ *JDZX*, 410.

Landlords	3.79/4.66	38.26
Rich peasants	3.08/4.75	13.66
Landlords plus rich peasants	6.87/9.41	51.92

Since the late 1980s, these have been the standard figures in official narratives of land reform. These narratives concede that the Mao-era figures were exaggerated, while maintaining that the target of CCP land reform was nevertheless an unjust and economically irrational ‘feudal system of land ownership.’¹² These figures are also very close to the estimates made by Joseph Esherick based on a mathematically complex treatment of tenancy figures from the Republican era, particularly for landlords: 4 percent of households and 39 percent of the land (his estimate for rich peasants is higher, at 6 percent of households and 17 percent of the land). Esherick of course does not believe this shows pre-revolutionary China was ‘feudal,’ but he does believe it proves that tenancy was a major phenomenon and China was not a ‘nation of smallholders.’¹³

While it is hard to fault Esherick’s careful conclusion, both his and the SSB’s figures have two problematic assumptions built into them. First, land owned by lineages, temples, schools and other corporate bodies—which in provinces like Fujian and Guangdong amounted to some 30% of all cultivated land—is simply added to the ‘landlord’ total, on the assumption that such organizations were no more than ‘instruments of the landlord class.’¹⁴ However, this understanding is far too simplistic.¹⁵ Second, they take no account of the fact that not all tenancy was equal—many ‘tenants’ were actually the owners of what were known as ‘surface rights’, which amounted to a kind of permanent, tradeable, low-rent tenancy right that allowed for subletting. When the CCP encountered such arrangements during land reform, which were common in the commercialized areas of east and southeast China, it simply treated subsoil owners as ‘landlords’ and surface owners as ‘tenants.’¹⁶

¹² Du, *China’s Land Reform*, 3-4; Guo, *Research on the Peasant and Land Questions*, 47-48. Du Runsheng, who headed the Central-South Region’s Land Reform Committee, had in fact reported to the Party leadership in the first half of 1950 that based on their data, landlords and rich peasants together owned at most 50 percent of the land (See Gao, *A New Theory of the Land Tenancy Relation*, 10-11).

¹³ Esherick, ‘Number Games’, 405-407.

¹⁴ Esherick, ‘Number Games’, 408 fn. 8.

¹⁵ See Cao, ‘Differentiation in Land Rights and Class in China’s Southeast’, 70-77, for the argument that such land should be understood unambiguously as collectively owned and serving collective functions; but even if one factors in considerable corruption and elite influence, this is still a long way from simply equating such land to that which was privately owned.

¹⁶ How the CCP dealt with these issues in Southern Jiangsu, where surface rights were very common, is analyzed in Cao and Liu, *The Structure of Land Rights*, 107-124.

There isn't yet a scholarly consensus on how to incorporate these facts into an aggregate assessment of pre-revolutionary inequality in land ownership, but their implication is clearly that the SSB's and Esherick's figures are too high.¹⁷ Recently, Long Denggao and He Guoqing have argued that data from land surveys conducted during land reform, which is available for some but not all provinces, and which do not appear to have been fed into the SSB's estimate, indicate considerably lower numbers even without thoroughly taking into account communal land and surface rights. They estimate that the wealthiest 10 percent owned about 30 percent of the land in eastern, south-eastern, and south-central China, and about 20 percent in northern China.¹⁸ One scholar has recently put forward the hypothesis that, with communally held lands and surface rights taken into account, land inequality in eastern and southern China might not have been all that different to the level in northern China: 'with the exception of parts of the Northeast and Sichuan, where political factors had a large effect, it may be that the distribution of land rights in both northern and southern China was quite equal.'¹⁹

While debate on these issues is likely to continue for a long time, it seems safe to conclude that the wealthiest ten percent of rural society owned closer to a third than a half of land in southern China, and closer to a quarter in the north. I have phrased this in terms of percentiles rather than the categories of 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' to indicate that these cannot be used uncritically for purposes of analysis. According to the definitions developed by Mao in 1933 and adopted throughout China after 1949, 'landlords' did not engage in agricultural labour and relied on land rent and other ways of exploiting the peasantry to make a living, while rich peasants did engage in agricultural labour but earned over 15% (later modified to 25%) of their income from exploitation through labour hiring or other means.²⁰ However, the claim that about 8 percent of rural households (or up to 10 percent of the population) were 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' according to these definitions was not an empirical finding, but an assumption made for reasons of revolutionary strategy. To see that this is the case, we must briefly review how the CCP's—and especially Mao's—conceptions of the nature and demographics of the 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' classes developed.

¹⁷ Cf. Gao, *A New Theory of the Land Tenancy Relation*, 9; Gao estimated that landlords were about 5 percent of the population and owned around 36% of the land, but notes that his estimate could not separate out publicly and communally owned land from the landlord total.

¹⁸ Long and He, 'Examining and Explaining the Distribution of Land Rights on the Eve of Land Reform', 159.

¹⁹ Liu, 'Method and Evidence: Rethinking the Question of the Distribution of Land Rights in Modern China', 59.

²⁰ Mao, 'How to Analyze Classes', 1933.10.10, *MRP4*, 546-49; 'Decision Regarding Certain Questions in the Agrarian Struggle', 1933.10.10, *MRP4*, 550-67.

The Origins of the 'Landlord' and 'Rich Peasant' Classes

The peasant movements of the 1920s in which Mao and other CCP organizers were involved were mobilized against targets defined primarily using the popular category of 'local bullies and evil gentry 土豪劣绅', an amorphous conceptual cluster that combined economic, political, and moral elements.²¹ In Philip Kuhn's words, it was 'neither a formal status designation nor a rigorously defined category of social analysis, but a popular term of opprobrium which hardened into a political slogan.'²² Arriving at a properly Marxist definition of the targets of the rural revolution was difficult, as rural society, which the CCP insisted on calling 'feudal', had very little common with European feudalism.²³ Land had been freely bought and sold for centuries, and there was no stratum that derived all or most of its income from rent on agricultural land by virtue of its position in a status hierarchy.²⁴ The tradition of partible inheritance, moreover, ensured that family wealth rarely remained intact for more than a few generations.²⁵

In the version of Mao's 'Analysis of All the Classes in Chinese Society' that appears in his *Selected Works*, which begins with the famous leading question on distinguishing enemies and friends, Mao identifies the classes that are 'completely opposed to the objectives of the revolution' as 'the landlord class and the comprador class'; these are followed by the middle bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the semi-proletariat, and the proletariat.²⁶ This would suggest that, already in early 1926, Mao had a clear conception that there was a single 'landlord class' that was a primary target of the revolution, on a par with the comprador class that derived its wealth from the service of imperialism. And yet, if we consult the original, we find that Mao had no such conception: he wrote of the 'the big bourgeoisie 大资产阶级' as the implacable foes of the revolution, a category that contained, in addition to the

²¹ Smith, 'Class', 210.

²² Kuhn, 'Local Self-Government under the Republic', 287.

²³ The difficulty of figuring out where China fit into the Marxist scheme of historical development is reflected in the 'debate on social history 社会史论战' that developed in the late 20s and early 30s, the classic account of which in English is Dirlik, *Revolution and History*; see Smith, 'Class', 207, for a concise explanation of what was at stake in these debates.

²⁴ These points are made forcefully in Zhao, *The Distribution of Land Rights in Traditional China*, 1-9.

²⁵ This is a very well-known point; see Long and He, 'Examining and Explaining the Distribution of Land Rights on the Eve of Land Reform', 161, for a concise statement of the inheritance system as a 'negative feedback mechanism' preventing the concentration of land.

²⁶ Mao, 'Analysis of All the Classes in Chinese Society', 1926.3, SW1, 13.

compradors, 'big landlords', 'bureaucrats', and 'warlords.'²⁷ An example of a 'big landlord' was Zhang Zuolin, who also appeared in the category of 'warlord.' Mao estimated that the entire 'big bourgeoisie', including its 'appendage', the 'reactionary intellectuals', numbered one million people (these figures were all excised from the *Selected Works* edition, under Mao's supervision).

So where, in this original scheme, were the millions of families that ended up being identified as constituents of 'the landlord class'? Many of them were in Mao's second category, the middle bourgeoisie 中产阶级. In the revised version of the text, this category was composed solely of those who came to be classified as the 'national bourgeoisie' – the owners of banks and enterprises that were not closely linked to foreign capital, who had become members rather than enemies of the People in the New China – but in the original, the other half of this category were 'small landlords.'²⁸ This group vanished without a trace in the *Selected Works* edition. Yet even this entire 'middle bourgeoisie' (i.e. 'the banking, industrial, and commercial class who own Chinese capital' and the 'small landlords' together) was estimated by Mao as being at most one percent of the population, or four million people, whereas some four million *families* with over 20 million people were eventually labelled as 'landlord', and a similar number as 'rich peasant.'²⁹ Many of those who ended up being labelled landlords, and almost all of those labelled rich peasants, were people who, in Mao's original scheme, would have been among the upper stratum of the 'petty bourgeois 小资产阶级': 'owner peasants, small merchants, master handicraftsmen, and the lower levels of the intellectual class.'³⁰

How did 'big landlords' and 'small landlords' become one social class? Mao's initial impetus for shifting the focus from large- to small-scale landowners was straightforward enough: it was not possible to carry out a revolution by focusing on the former, as there weren't enough of them. Mao stated this plainly in August 1927:

The question of small landlords is the central problem of the land question. The difficulty is that, if we do not confiscate the land of the small landlords, then since there are many localities where there are no big landlords, the peasant associations would have to cease their activity.

²⁷ Mao, 'Analysis of All the Classes in Chinese Society, 1925.12.1, *MRP2*, 250-52.

²⁸ Mao, 'Analysis of All the Classes', *MRP2*, 252.

²⁹ Mao, 'Analysis of All the Classes', *MRP2*, 254; *JDZX*, 410.

³⁰ Mao, 'Analysis of All the Classes', *MRP2*, 254-255.

Hence, if we wish basically to abolish the landlord system, we must have a certain method for dealing with the small landlords.³¹

The Party's eventual decision to reify a single landlord class and treat all of its members as enemies when it carried out nationwide land reform was still far in the future, but already by this point a fundamental issue became clear: a land revolution in China would not get very far by targeting a small number of large-scale landowners, and would have to target a large number of small-scale landowners.

The category 'rich peasant' did not exist in Mao's original class analyses. This category was a translation of the Soviet term *kulak* that was first introduced into Chinese by Qu Qiubai in 1926.³² The notion of the *kulak* class was itself far from precise in the original Russian context: it came into use in the early 20th century in reference to village usurers and traders, but also came to be applied to 'strong' peasants who farmed large tracts of land with hired labour, and were seen as embodying the forces of capitalist development in the countryside.³³ The Russian countryside had changed considerably during the revolution and civil war, with many of the most plausibly 'capitalist' producers having disappeared, but the term was still applied to the wealthier stratum of the peasantry during the 1920s, particularly those who became more prosperous during the New Economic Policy (1921-28) period.³⁴ No precise criteria were ever formulated for identifying *kulaks*, but this did not prevent Politburo from announcing, in December 1929, that they would be 'liquidated as a class.'³⁵ This was the culmination of a 'leftward' shift that had already been underway since 1928, and had been communicated to the CCP in the summer of 1929 by the Communist International via an 'extremely blunt letter on the peasant question,' which explained that any vacillation about the enemy status of rich peasants was unacceptable.³⁶ As a result, accusations of upholding 'the rich peasant line' became a major element in subsequent intra-Party conflicts. Thus, when the term 'rich peasant' entered Chinese in the mid-1920s, it did so as an imprecise concept that would soon become the keyword in a series of political struggles.³⁷

³¹ Mao, 'Statement Regarding the Resolution on the Struggles of the Peasants', 1927.8.7, *MRP3*, 32.

³² Meng, 'Parties, Politics, and Policies', 77.

³³ Lewin, 'Who Was the Soviet Kulak?', 121-22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 124-125, 139.

³⁶ Schram, 'Introduction: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1927-1930', xlii.

³⁷ Meng, 'Parties, Politics, and Policies', 85-90. The Jiangxi Soviet period, including the Party's land policies and the conflicts around the 'rich peasant line', was the subject of much important work from the second half of the 1960s, made possible to a significant extent by the collection of primary sources from the period that Chen Cheng 陈诚, a KMT general and later ROC vice-president, had acquired while directing the campaign against the CCP in the 1930s,

In the initial years following his retreat to the countryside in 1927, Mao did not apply himself to trying to produce exact definitions of the categories ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’, as the land policies formulated under his direction operated by equalizing land holdings on a per capita basis, such that those being dispossessed would end up with whatever share the size of their family entitled them to. In one sense, Mao’s approach during this period (1928-30) was very ‘leftist’, as he considered essentially everyone with a surplus a target of expropriation.³⁸ On the other hand, this policy also meant that there was no need determine the class status of each family, only to ensure that each family had no more than the amount of land it was entitled to. For precisely this reason, Mao’s approach subsequently came under attack from the ‘left’: the Returned Student leadership criticized it as a ‘non-class’ policy, and adopted instead a policy of ‘no land to landlords and poor-quality land to rich peasants.’³⁹

It was the introduction of this policy—which did not originate with Mao, and which he subsequently criticized as part of the ‘Wang Ming left-deviationist line’—that actually first made it necessary to devise a set of criteria for identifying ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ on a family-by-family basis.⁴⁰ Beginning in early 1933, the Central Committee ordered a large scale ‘land investigation’ movement and put Mao in charge of it, and it was in this context that he produced the two documents, ‘How to Analyze Classes’ and ‘Decision on Some Questions in the Agrarian Struggle’, that were republished in mostly unchanged form in late 1947 and adopted in 1950 (with some additions) to guide the designation of class status in much of China.

‘How to Analyze Classes’ defined a landlord as ‘a person who owns land, no matter how much, does not engage in labour himself, or only engages in supplementary labour, and

and which the Hoover Institute microfilmed in 1963 (Wu, ‘The Kiangsi Soviet Period’; Waller, ‘Review’, 157); these works include Hsiao, *The Land Revolution in China*; Hsu, *Political Mobilization and Economic Extraction*; Kim, *The Politics of Chinese Communism*; Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition*.

³⁸ In 1928, he referred to the ‘intermediate classes’ as constituted by ‘small landlords’ and ‘owner peasants’, and even wrote that ‘in the countryside, where clan organizations prevail, the most troublesome are not the despotic gentry, but the intermediate classes’ (Mao, ‘Report of the Jinggangshan Front Committee to the Central Committee’, 1928.11.25, *MRP3*, 103-4). When this text entered the *Selected Works*, that sentence was removed, and ‘owner peasants’ was systematically changed to ‘rich peasants.’ In his Xunwu Investigation of 1930, Mao no longer used the term ‘intermediate classes’, but by ‘rich peasants’, he meant ‘a kind of peasant who is relatively rich, and is normally called an owner-peasant or middle peasant’ (‘Xunwu Investigation’, 1930.5, *MRP3*, 377-78), and in his land policies of this time, he called for the confiscation of their land (see ‘On the Problem of Rich Peasants’, 1930.6, *MRP3*, 433-449, where he calls the middle peasants with a surplus—those later called ‘prosperous middle peasants’ 富裕中农—the ‘newly rich peasants’). See also Schram, ‘Introduction: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1927-1930’, xxxiv, l, liii-livl.

³⁹ Schram, ‘Introduction: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1931-1934’, lxv-lxvi.

⁴⁰ Ibid., lxvi-lxx; for Mao’s subsequent critique, see ‘In Refutation of the Third “Left” Line (selected extracts)’, 1941, *MRP7*, 828-829.

lives specifically from exploitation.⁴¹ It went on to specify the collection of land rent as landlords' primary form of exploitation, but added that landlords could also derive income from moneylending, labour hiring, and industrial or commercial activity. Rich peasants were defined as people who 'have more and better instruments of production and more liquid capital [than average], and engage in labour themselves, but...always rely on exploitation for part their livelihood or even, in the case of some, for the greater part of their livelihood.' Their primary form of exploitation was usually hiring long-term labourers, but they, too, could rent out land or collect interest on loans, and in some cases did not hire labourers at all.⁴² In many cases, these definitions did not make it possible to distinguish between landlords and rich peasants, because the meaning of 'supplementary labour' (as opposed to primary labour) was not specified. Nor did it make it possible to distinguish rich peasants from prosperous middle peasants, since the latter, a sub-type of the firmly non-enemy group of 'middle peasants', also 'practice[d] exploitation to some extent.' The meaning of 'supplementary' and 'primary' labour, and the amount of exploitation that made someone a 'rich peasant' (15% of income, a figure that was later raised to 25%), were both defined in the 'Decision' adopted at the same time.⁴³

These documents were only in effect until the spring of 1934, when, under the pressure of KMT encirclement, the practice of 'calculating class 算成分' was criticized as offering an opportunity for class enemies to counterattack.⁴⁴ Even while in effect, Mao's guidelines can't have been followed very rigorously, since the 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' uncovered during the land investigation movement had, on average, just about enough land for their subsistence.⁴⁵ As Stuart Schram writes, 'many of these cases involved individuals or families whose unusual career trajectories or financial profiles fell foul of the complex, often mechanically interpreted regulations that had been issued to guide the movement.'⁴⁶

Despite their limited effect at the time, these documents marked a major development in process by which 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' were transformed from imported quasi-Marxist concepts to categories that could actually be applied, in a relatively systematic way, to Chinese social reality. They did not reappear, however, until late 1947, when radical land

⁴¹ The words 'no matter how much' were removed when this text became part of the 1950 'Decision on Class Status' (and also when the text entered the *Selected Works*, see *SW1*, 137), as the Party had introduced the category of the 'small land rentier 小土地出租者.' See below for further discussion of this category.

⁴² Mao, 'How to Analyze Classes.'

⁴³ Mao, 'Decision Regarding Certain Questions', 550-52.

⁴⁴ Huang, *Tensions and Limits*, 304.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 297-298; Schram, 'Introduction: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1931-1934', lxix.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

reform was underway, and indeed spinning out of control.⁴⁷ Nor, in the intervening decade and a half, did Mao or other CCP leaders make public pronouncements on the distribution of land in China as a whole; the only known exception is Mao's 1936 interview with Edgar Snow. In his 1939 speech 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party,' Mao did refer to an estimate that landlords and rich peasants together made up about 10 percent of the rural population, but it was in his speech on 'The Present Situation and Our Tasks' of December 25th 1947, and the resolution on the publication of the Outline Land Law of two days later, that the thereafter standard figure—that eight percent of households or ten percent of the population owned 70-80 percent of the land across China—first appeared.⁴⁸ There does not seem to be any documentary evidence about the process that led to this being decided on as the official, public figure to accompany land reform propaganda. Li Fangchun suggests that, given its contradiction with the figures available to the CCP leadership, these numbers can only be understood as the outcome of political considerations about strengthening propaganda in favour of land reform.⁴⁹ To put it more directly, Party leaders knowingly portrayed inequality as much greater than they knew it to be to make the necessity of revolutionary land reform seem indisputable.

While Li's argument is concerned with the figure for the amount of land owned by landlords and rich peasants, I would also extend it to the figure for the proportion of households and the population that were 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' in the first place. Recall that, according to Mao's criteria, these were families that did not engage in agricultural labour and lived primarily from the direct exploitation of the peasantry (landlords), and farmers who earned more than 25% of their income from exploitation (rich peasants). But neither Mao nor anyone else had evidence that 8 percent of households or 10 percent of the population actually met these criteria.⁵⁰ I would suggest that these are best understood as a combination of targets 指标 and limiting figures 控制数. Such figures, which would become an essential tool of CCP campaigns, served a dual function: on the one hand, they were meant to ensure that the Party did not end up targeting too many people, but on the other hand, they also ensured that a certain minimum number of targets *would* be found:

⁴⁷ Yang, 'A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP's Land Reform Policies', 69-70.

⁴⁸ Mao, 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party', 1939.12.15, *MRP7*, 289; Mao, 'The Present Situation and Our Tasks'; '中国共产党中央委员会关于公布中国土地法大纲的决议' [Resolution of the Central Committee of the CCP on publicizing the Outline Land Law], 1947.12.28, *RMRB*.

⁴⁹ Li, 'What Is It to "Explain Antiquity"?', 19.

⁵⁰ It is not clear that any survey was carried out before land reform that used these class criteria; Mao's own detailed investigations, in Xunwu and Xingguo counties, were carried out before he formulated them, and it is clear that many of those he described as 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' in those investigations would not have met his later criteria (Guo, *Research on the Peasant and Land Questions*, 50-52).

any cadre under whose leadership the results fell too far below the limiting figure would find themselves accused of ‘right-deviation.’⁵¹ In a pattern that would be repeated again and again in CCP campaigns, the proportion of those who were categorized in various ways was defined in advance rather than arrived at through the meticulous application of the Party’s complex policy guidelines.

Mao’s Heretical Views on ‘Small Landlords’

Key to the concept of the unitary ‘landlord class’ that was disseminated after 1949 was that its members had all acquired their property through illegitimate means; later, and particularly from the Socialist Education Movement onwards, this opprobrium was also extended to rich peasants. This claim was necessary because it served to justify the Party’s choice, explained in greater detail below, to treat all landlords as ‘enemies.’ The connection is well illustrated by the following view, which appeared in a *People’s Daily* article in May 1951 as the first example of the subversive ideology of the landlord class that everyone was to eliminate from their thinking:

‘I completely agree with land reform in principle, but to go on, after redistributing their land, to curse them as exploiters, to struggle and settle accounts with them – this doesn’t seem very fair. Most landlords acquired their wealth through living frugally and working hard. They used the money they saved to buy land, so it constitutes their legitimate savings. If you don’t believe me, take a look yourself – profligate people don’t become landlords.’⁵²

This article didn’t actually offer any direct rebuttal of this view, simply labelling it as incorrect and a reflection of landlord ideology. Another article, on why the peaceful redistribution of land was not possible, was more direct:

It is necessary to recognize that landlords are one ‘class’... you cannot say this landlord is good, or that landlord is bad, because, just as the peasants say: ‘all crows are black.’ There is no such thing as a ‘good’ landlord, because no landlord became a landlord by means other than exploitation... exploitation is the intrinsic nature of the landlord class.

...

⁵¹ To my knowledge there is no general treatment of this phenomenon, but it appears regularly in scholarly work on CCP political campaigns; see, for example, Yang Kuisong’s observations on quotas for identifying counterrevolutionaries (‘Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries’, esp. 109), and Li Lifeng’s comments on the limited force of precise quantitative class criteria during Civil War land reform given that ‘the CCP’s class policies assumed that class exploitation and class opposition was everywhere, and in fixed proportions’ (Li, ‘The Method of Law and the Method of Lawlessness’, 86).

⁵² ‘坚决粉碎“地主之音”’ [Resolutely smash the ‘voice of the landlords’], 1951.5.26, *RMRB*.

‘The entire development of the landlord class is a bloody, evil affair. We can affirm without doubt that under a system of feudal exploitation, in a class society, one cannot become a landlord by relying on one’s labour.’

The ancients say: ‘He who seeks wealth cannot be benevolent; he who seeks benevolence cannot be wealthy.’

An evil tyrant who was struggled...himself admitted: ‘If you are not willing to kill the poor, you cannot become wealthy’ 杀不了穷汉，当不了富汉

This [sentence] thoroughly illustrates the nature 本质 of the landlord class.⁵³

These sentences were written in 1951 by Li Guangtian, a noted prose writer and Vice-dean of Studies at Tsinghua University at the time.⁵⁴ In the public culture of the Mao era, starting from land reform and even more so from the Socialist Education Movement onward, there were no ‘big’ or ‘small’ landlords, much less ‘good’ or ‘bad’ landlords, and becoming a landlord was invariably ‘a bloody and evil affair.’

The contrast with Mao’s own observations is remarkable. In his ‘Analysis of the Various Classes among the Chinese Peasantry and Their Attitudes toward the Revolution’ of January 1926, which to this day has never been republished in the People’s Republic, Mao could not have been clearer about how different large-scale landlords were from small-scale landlords, both in their numbers and how they acquired their wealth.⁵⁵ He described these two categories side-by-side, as the two classes above ‘owner-peasants’ (he did not yet use the concept of a ‘rich peasant’). Large landlords came primarily from ‘among the descendants of the former Qing dynasty bureaucracy and aristocracy and from the present-day bureaucrats and warlords’, and to a lesser extent ‘rich urban merchants who have bought land’; ‘there are very few who have raised themselves to the status of big landlords by their industrious cultivation of the land.’ These big landlords were ‘the deadly enemies of the Chinese peasantry.’ How many such deadly enemies were there? If big landlords were reckoned as

⁵³ 李光田 Li Guangtian, ‘为什么不能“和平分田”’ [Why is it not possible to “peacefully divide the land”?], *Xin Guancha*, vol. 2 no. 8, available in *CCPM*.

⁵⁴ As Philip Huang observes, ‘by the end of the Land Reform, millions of intellectuals had participated in actions and thoughts that turned class from its material meaning in Marxist-Leninist theory into a symbolic-moral meaning in the dramatic struggle of good against evil within every village.’ (‘Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution’, 125).

⁵⁵ In a recent article on Mao’s early class analyses, Cheng Yinghong specifically states that this text has not appeared in any official publication in the PRC (Cheng, ‘Was Mao Zedong’s Original “Class Analysis” Backed Up by Data?’); two recent articles by Chinese scholars that cite this text both cite the version in Takeuchi Minoru (ed.), *Mao Zedong ji* vol. 1 (Tokyo, 1976). See Li, ‘What Does it Mean to “Explain Antiquity”?’ 17; Meng, ‘Ideals, Strategy, and Practice’, 8-9.

those owning 500 *mu* or more, Mao thought they were about 0.1 percent of the rural population, or less than 350,000 people.⁵⁶

How did Mao characterize the ‘small landlords’, those with a few dozen or at most a few hundred *mu* of land, who would be vilified for decades as having obtained their property through cruelty and fraud? Mao wrote:

The small landlords are more numerous than the big landlords, numbering at least two million in the country as a whole. Most of them are owner-peasants who have raised themselves to this status by hard work, though some of them are urban merchants who have bought land, and others are the descendants of officials who have seen better days, or present-day petty officials.⁵⁷

It is no wonder that this text did not appear in Mao’s *Selected Works*, or anywhere else, for in the discursive universe of the Mao era, such claims were downright heretical.

1.2 From Anti-Japanese Resistance to the Civil War: Moderation to ‘Leftist’ Excess, and the 1948 Equilibrium

Following the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, the CCP pursued a national United Front, in the context of which it gave up its policy of confiscating land, and gradually settled on a policy of reducing rents and interest rates in the territories under its control.⁵⁸ Middle and small landlords and the ‘enlightened gentry 开明士绅’ were seen, together with the national (as opposed to the comprador) bourgeoisie, to be potential partners in the struggle against Japan.⁵⁹ The term ‘enlightened gentry’ seems to have first appeared in Mao’s 1939 essay on ‘The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party’; after noting that many among the ‘big landlords’ and ‘big bourgeoisie’ had capitulated and others were wavering, he added that ‘a good many of the enlightened gentry who are medium and small landlords...display some enthusiasm for the war, and are worth uniting with in the common

⁵⁶ Mao, ‘An Analysis of the Various Classes among the Chinese Peasantry and Their Attitudes toward the Revolution’, 1926.1, *MRP2*, 303-304.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁵⁸ Mao, ‘Urgent Tasks of the Chinese Revolution Following the Establishment of Guomindang-Communist Cooperation’, 1937.9.29, *MRP6*, 67; Mao, ‘The Various Policies That Should Be Carried Out in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas’, 1940.12.13, *MRP7*, 579; Mao, ‘Directive of the Central Committee of the CCP on Policy in the Current Situation’, 1940.12.25, *MRP7*, 601.

⁵⁹ Mao, ‘The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party’, *MRP7*, 294.

fight against Japan.⁶⁰ Beginning in 1941, the CCP even provided for political representation, in various symbolic and administrative bodies, for members of what were called the 'intermediate forces,' as part of its 'three thirds system.'⁶¹ As Mao explained:

In the struggle against the Guomindang diehards, the big comprador bourgeoisie must be distinguished from the national bourgeoisie, which has little or no comprador character, and the most reactionary big landlords must be distinguished from the enlightened gentry and the general run of landlords. This is the theoretical basis of our Party's endeavour to win over the intermediate sections and establish organs of political power on the 'three-thirds' system.⁶²

Throughout Mao's writings from this period, small and medium landlords are systematically distinguished from big landlords, to the extent that, when he wrote of the realization of 'land to the tiller' in his essay 'On New Democracy,' he referred only to the confiscation of the land of the 'big landlords'; elsewhere, too he referred to the 'big landlord class' and the 'big bourgeoisie' as the small elite at the top of Chinese society.⁶³ It will come as no surprise that when these texts entered the *Selected Works*, the character 'big' disappeared from in front of the word 'landlord.'

As Yang Kuisong has shown, in the immediate period following the defeat of Japan, the CCP had no intention of rapidly changing the differentiated approach to rural landowners that it had developed over the preceding years. At the Seventh Party Congress in April 1945, Mao declared that rent and interest reduction would first be spread throughout the country, with 'land to the tiller' being achieved gradually thereafter once 'appropriate methods' were found. Only land owned by the Japanese and 'major traitors' would be expropriated immediately after the war.⁶⁴ In May 1946, in response to reports that peasants had begun to seize land in the process of rent and interest reduction and 'settling accounts', the CCP issued a major internal directive calling for 'resolute support' of these actions; however, the majority of the directive was concerned not with further mobilizing the masses, but with ensuring that outright confiscation be applied only to major traitors and 'tyrants'.⁶⁵ Transferring property from small and middle landlords was primarily to take place through

⁶⁰ Ibid.; this passage remained in the *Selected Works* edition, but not the previous paragraph, in which he distinguished medium and small landlords in general from the big landlords.

⁶¹ Mao, 'On the Question of Political Power in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas', 1940.3.6, *MRP7*, 432-34; van Slyke and Schram, 'Introduction', lxv.

⁶² Mao, 'Conclusions on the Repulse of the Second Anti-Communist Onslaught', 1941.5.8, *MRP7*, 732.

⁶³ Mao, 'On New Democracy', 1940.1.15, *MRP7*, 343; Mao, 'Speech at the Assembly of Representatives of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region', 1941.11.21, *MRP7*, 840.

⁶⁴ Yang, 'How and Why the CCP Centre's Land Policies Changed in the Early Post-war Years', 68.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 70-72.

mutual agreement that followed upon rent and interest reduction and the 'settling of accounts.' Indeed, the document noted:

...the peasants have obtained land through the above means, and in the majority of cases have acquired written titles to the land from landlords, thereby fundamentally resolving the land problem by means very different to those used during the civil war [内战 i.e. the direct confiscation of the Jiangxi Soviet era]. Using the methods described above to resolve the land question enables the peasants to be in a position of reason and legality ...站在合法和有理的地位.⁶⁶

In other words, landowners were made to give up their land using a combination of means that did not involve outright confiscation, and therefore did not require defining them as enemies (I will return to the relation between confiscation and enemy status below). How this could take place in practice can be seen from Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden's description of the process in Wugong, Hebei:

The Geng leadership dispatched a small delegation to visit the five 'class enemies' [sic., this is an anachronistic usage of this term] to negotiate a quiet transfer of land and such property as livestock, tools, and sections of housing. The youngest son of the deceased landlord Li Jianting, nineteen-year-old Li Maoxiu, was at home to meet the peasant association representatives...

Maoxiu waited in the household courtyard for the delegation, which included two farmhands hired by the Lis. Treating teenager Maoxiu as the household head, the delegated declared that compensation was required to settle accounts for past 'exploitation.' He listened to the demands and accepted them. There was no violence. The festive delegates left accompanied by clanging gongs and booming drums...

The Lis were left 21 *mu* of land for the seven household members, an amount equal to per capita holdings of middle peasant households in 1946. They continued to live in one corner of the ample Li family courtyard, now shared with several poorer households. At a meeting following the confiscation, Li Maoxiu was praised for his cooperative attitude.⁶⁷

In June 1946, the leadership of the CCP began working out a programme of issuing government bonds in exchange for land, a policy which was implemented in some areas of

⁶⁶ '中共中央关于土地问题的指示' [Party Centre's directive on the land question], 1946.5.4, in Zhongyang Dang'anguan (ed.), *Jiefang zhanzheng shiqi tudi gaige wenjian xuanbian* (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1981), 4.

⁶⁷ Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*, 86-87.

the Shaan-Gan-Ning region and affirmed in a Central circular as late as February 1947.⁶⁸ The second half of 1946 even saw the publication of two positive landlords ‘models’ (that is, individuals exemplifying behaviours and attitudes to be emulated) in the CCP press: a professor who had persuaded his family to give away their land, and a former large landlord and Qing-era county-level examination graduate whose land had been redistributed when the CCP had arrived in Yan’an, who had since been making a living by running a farm on his remaining land and opening a shop in Yan’an town.⁶⁹

For reasons that remain contested, from the spring of 1947 onwards, CCP land reform underwent a process of radicalization, leading to a period of harsh violence and confiscation that was later deemed to have been excessively ‘leftist.’⁷⁰ During this period, it was frequent for well above 10 percent of the population to become the targets of confiscation, and the violence of this year led to the death of some 250 thousand people.⁷¹ CCP rhetoric on landlords during this period underwent a dramatic transformation. There was no longer any distinction made between large, middle, and small landowners, or between reactionary, ordinary, and politically progressive ones, nor was there any presumption against the use of physical violence. In April, Liu Shaoqi gave a speech to cadres in the Jin-Cha-Ji region in which he made the following comments:

The experience of Taihang shows that the elimination of feudal exploitation must be complete. As they put it: sweep the landlords out the door 让地主扫地出门, take away all of their land and property, make them beg for a week and have them carry three *dan* of manure... It is

⁶⁸ Yang, ‘A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP’s Land Reform Policies’, 23-33.

⁶⁹ ‘主动帮助农民翻身: 翟士贤献出大部田产, 武安县委号召干部首先响应这一行动’ [Proactively help the peasants to *fanshen*: Zhai Shixian hands over most of his land, the Wu’an County Committee calls on cadres to be the first to respond], 1946.9.2, *RMRB*; Zou and Yang, ‘The CCP’s Promotion of the “Zhang Yongtai Way.”’

⁷⁰ In the late 1970s, Tanaka Kyoko proposed an explanation of the ‘leftism’ of 1947 that saw it as an unintended consequence of a number of misperceptions by the Party leadership – most directly Liu Shaoqi, who was in charge of land reform work after the Central Committee split in March 1947, but also Mao, who was aware of and condoned Liu’s proposals (Tanaka, ‘Mao and Liu in the 1947 Land Reform’). Chen Yung-fa, by contrast, has argued that it was not the unintended consequence of a set of misperceptions, but the intended consequence of a political calculation by Mao (‘The Civil War, Mao Zedong, and the Land Revolution’). In short, Chen argues that Mao decided that the only way to extract sufficient resources for the CCP’s war effort was to mobilize the poor to engage in violent attacks on those with remaining wealth, even if this involved the systematic violation of the Party’s stated policies. Yang Kuisong finds Chen’s analysis entirely unconvincing, on the grounds that its major claims either lack evidence entirely, or are not borne out by the evidence cited by Chen (‘A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP’s Land Reform Policies’). Yang’s own account, while benefitting from a large number of newly available sources, tells a similar story to that of Tanaka’s. Yang strongly rejects any suggestion that the leftism of 1947 was by design, arguing that it was of a destructive kind that was harmful to the CCP’s own interests. The arguments made in this chapter do not depend in any direct way on the outcome of this complex debate, which is why I have decided not to introduce it in the main text.

⁷¹ Yang, ‘A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP’s Land Reform Policies’, 51, 99.

necessary to completely defeat the landlords, and only then to give them a bit of charity, for that is the only way they will feel grateful. In my view, this is the way it should be done.⁷²

This represented a completely different understanding of land reform to that which had prevailed among the Party leadership the previous year. Those designated as landlords were, without exception, to be completely expropriated and swept out of the community, and only then to be allowed back in as an act of grace. These messages set off a wave of beatings and killings; although Liu took measures to try to rein this in, these experiences did not prevent the unfolding of the same dynamics on a much larger scale the following autumn.⁷³ This is because a similar set of messages were communicated during and after the National Land Conference convened under Liu's leadership between July 17th and September 13th. Consider the comments made by Liu and Zhu De to a group of representatives from the Northeast shortly after this conference:

Liu: If all landlords counterattack 反攻, then it's no big deal to kill a few more of them – what's bad about killing a few thousand or a few tens of thousands of landlords? There's no harm in killing some more landlords and rich peasants who counterattack.

Zhu: The question is not whether to kill or not to kill, the question is whether we have enough military strength...[followed by a brief discussion of tactical questions about rear versus front areas]...These are policy considerations, but the point is that one should not pity landlords, one should not feel that having killed more landlords is something terrible 问题是精神上不要可怜地主，不要以为多杀了地主不得了⁷⁴

As for whether there were different kinds of landlords, consider the terms in which the Jin-Sui Region Peasant Association called for the overthrow of the landlord class in late September:

Accounts can be settled with all landlords – whether big or small, male or female, local or from another village, and including those that have hidden their wealth and pretend to be poor, or have disguised themselves as merchants or peasants. Landlords that have infiltrated the CCP, the government, or the Eighth Route Army, those that have infiltrated work teams, educational institutions, factories, state-owned stores, peasant associations or the people's militia – no

⁷² Cited in Yang, 'A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP's Land Reform Policies', 45, in turn citing Guo, *Research on the Peasant and Land Questions*, 513. Guo does not indicate where he accessed the text of this speech, only that it is titled 'Speech on the Question of Land Reform.' Given that Guo is a leading Party historian, there is little reason to doubt the authenticity of Liu's comments.

⁷³ Yang, 'A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP's Land Reform Policies', 49-57.

⁷⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, 57.

matter who they are, if they oppress and exploit the peasantry and the people want to struggle them, they can be taken away and struggled....⁷⁵

This document was commended by Liu Shaoqi, and was followed by the publication of similar documents in other regions.⁷⁶ In this way, virtually all moderating influences on the treatment of those identified as landlords disappeared.

Given the rhetorical context just discussed, together with the absence of any guidelines on how to determine class status, and the fact that those who clearly had much surplus land and wealth had already been expropriated by this point, what took place was a dramatic increase in the proportion of those targeted and the violence used against them. As indicated in the above quotation, the idea that there were large numbers of landlords in various kinds of 'disguise' waiting to be unmasked gained considerable currency, leading to attacks on both actual former landlords who had become middle peasants, merchants etc. in line with the model promoted by the Party just one year before, and on those who had never been genuine 'landlords' at all. One justification for such attacks was 'checking three generations 查三代' and identifying individuals with the 'highest' class status attributable to their parents or grandparents.⁷⁷

The danger of large-scale 'upward' classification seems to have been first recognized by Politburo member Ren Bishi, who in October 1947 suggested the reissuing of Mao's 1933 guidelines on identifying classes.⁷⁸ This was done at the end of November 1947—though with the proviso that these documents only be used for correcting excesses that have already occurred, rather than in a pre-emptive manner.⁷⁹ As Ren and Mao became aware of the scale of the violence and chaos, however, they appear to have become increasingly worried; as Yang Kuisong writes, 'they were deeply unsettled about the fact that the land reform movement had gone in the direction of chaotic beating and killing, the wrecking of the rural united front, and the destruction of [the Party's] own rural power base, which could lead in the dangerous direction of the Party isolating itself.'⁸⁰ On January 12th 1948, Ren Bishi made a speech at the enlarged meeting of the Front Committee of the Northwest Field Army titled

⁷⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 63; the text is also available in *CCPM* ('晋绥边区农会临时委员会告农民书' [Letter to the peasants from the Temporary Committee of the Peasant Association of the Jin-Sui Border Region], 1947.9.24).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁷⁷ '中共中央工委关于阶级分析的指示' [Party Centre Working Committee's directive on the question of class analysis], in *Jiefang zhanzheng shiqi tudi gaige*, 96; for a vivid account of this logic in action, see Crook and Crook, *Revolution in a Chinese Village*, 128-37.

⁷⁸ Yang, *A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP's Land Reform Policies*, 69.

⁷⁹ '中共中央关于重发《怎样分析阶级》等两文件的指示' [Party Centre's directive on reissuing the two documents on 'How to analyze classes'], in *Jiefang zhanzheng shiqi tudi gaige*, 91.

⁸⁰ Yang, *A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP's Land Reform Policies*, 77.

‘Some Issues in Land Reform’; this report would have considerable influence as it was widely distributed and published in the *People’s Daily* two months later.⁸¹ In it, Ren enumerated the many ‘left-deviations’ that had been taking place—misclassification upwards, encroachment on industry and commerce, hostility to intellectuals and enlightened gentry, and unchecked violence against struggle targets—and explained why they were in conflict with both Party’s principles and its strategies.

It was during these weeks in late December and early January that Mao made some of his longest known comments on how he understood the future of landlords and rich peasants after land reform. Since the Jiangxi Soviet period, Mao had been of the view that landlords and rich peasants should be promised an equal share of the land after their expropriation, and although the Outline Land Law of October 1947 had included this clause, it was clearly being widely violated, with the expulsion and killing of those classified as landlords and rich peasants taking place on a significant scale. As Mao had put it at a meeting of the Party Centre in December 1947:

The population of landlords and rich peasants [across China] is 36 million. Having eaten the flesh of a fish, the remaining bones can still be put to use...36 million is a lot of labour power, and cannot be cast aside lightly...

As leaders we must recognize that 36 million [people] are valuable and should be used. People belonging to the landlord class still have a role: currently they are a source of labour power, and in the future (after 5 years) they will be friends - they are candidates to become members of the proletariat. At present we must force them to reform, and in the future they will successfully reform.⁸²

At the meeting where Ren Bishi made his report, Mao commented:

As a class, landlords must be eliminated, but as individuals, they must be protected... That we want to abolish the property rights of landlords does not mean we don’t want them as human beings 废除地主阶级的私有制，并不等于连他的人也不要了. Landlords and rich peasants of the old type [旧式富农 i.e. those who did not become rich under CCP rule] are 10% of the rural population – 36 million people across the country. They form part of our society’s labour power, and [in this sense] are a kind of wealth 财富.⁸³

⁸¹ 任弼时 Ren Bishi, ‘土地改革中的几个问题’ [Some issues in land reform], speech made on 1948.1.12, printed on 1948.3.28, *RMRB*.

⁸² Mao, ‘在中央会议上的谈话—陈毅同志传达’ [Talks at the meeting of the Party Centre, transmitted by comrade Chen Yi], 1947.12, *MSWS 1943-49*, 102.

⁸³ Mao, ‘在西北野战军前委扩大会议上的讲话’ [Talk at the expanded meeting of the Northwest Field Army's Front Committee], 1948.1.15, in *Mao Zedong wenji* vol. 5 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), 22-23.

These statements can be considered representative of the equilibrium that developed after the leftist phase of 1947. Large-scale killing of landlords and rich peasants was to be avoided, it was important to ensure that they could survive after expropriation, and after three to five years of law-abiding labour, their class status could be changed. But the Party never returned to the approach pursued during the War of Resistance, reaffirmed in the 1946 May Fourth Directive, and generally maintained until early 1947, under which being a 'landlord' had not *ipso facto* meant being an enemy.⁸⁴

1.3 Landlords as Non-People: The People's Democratic Dictatorship

As the CCP swept to victory in 1949, Mao explained that the nature of the state that was to come into being was a 'People's Democratic Dictatorship': democracy for the People, and dictatorship against non-People. Who among the Chinese population were People, and who were not? Mao explained:

At the present stage in China, [the People] are the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These classes, led by the working class and the Communist Party, unite to form their own state and elect their own government; they enforce their dictatorship over the running dogs of imperialism—the landlord class and bureaucrat-bourgeoisie, as well as the representatives of those classes, the KMT reactionaries and their accomplices—suppress them, allow them only to behave themselves and not to be unruly in word or deed.⁸⁵

Why did the Party never return to its earlier differentiated approach, despite the considerable variation among people who would be labelled as landlords in terms of the amount and source of their wealth, their political orientation, and a host of other factors, all of which CCP leaders were perfectly aware of? In the absence of any direct documentary evidence, the best we can do is speculate based on the logic of CCP policy and discourse. I would suggest, following Philip Huang and Yang Kuisong, that this is best understood as a strategic choice. To introduce such differentiation publicly—to acknowledge, for example, that some landlords had acquired their property through hard work, weren't really

⁸⁴ This argument is inspired by Yang, 'The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question', 155-56. I explain below (fn. 85) why I was initially unconvinced by Yang's claim about the CCP's abandonment of differentiation, but then came to the view that a version of his claim is correct and very important.

⁸⁵ Mao, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', 417-18.

all that rich, had never done anything ‘reactionary’, or any other factors that made it seem unreasonable to treat them as enemies—would have imposed constraints on the CCP’s project to transform rural society. It was far more straightforward to insist that all members of the landlord class were enemies, for this pre-empted any objections about whether the treatment of any particular ‘landlord’ was fair. In its internal documents, the Party continued to distinguish between different kinds of landlords based on wealth and political orientation, but only as matter of tactics, not of principle.⁸⁶

The strategic nature of this choice is brought into sharper relief through a comparison with the largely contemporaneous developments in the Party’s policy towards urban capitalists, which have recently been traced by Puck Engman. As we have seen, both in Mao’s early analyses and throughout the War of Resistance, the bourgeoisie and the landlords were divided up in a parallel fashion, with large-scale owners of both urban and rural property identified as unambiguously reactionary, and medium- and small-scale owners identified as more ambivalent, and containing some actively progressive elements. With the bourgeoisie, this distinction of size and political inclination mapped onto a theoretical distinction between ‘comprador’ or ‘bureaucrat’ bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the ‘national’ bourgeoisie on the other. However, during the later stages of the Civil War, this distinction was reformulated to emphasize the ‘bureaucrat’ (rather than ‘comprador’) element, which in turn was presented as corresponding to affiliation with the Guomindang. The ‘big’ bourgeoisie was the ‘bureaucrat’ bourgeoisie, which in turn was the segment of the bourgeoisie with ties to the Guomindang leadership. It was only this segment of the bourgeoisie that was excluded from the community of the People and subjected to dictatorship—a segment that had no actual members in the People’s Republic, as it referred precisely to those who had left the mainland with the GMD.⁸⁷ Thus, in one fell swoop, and without having to rely on complicated and difficult-to-implement guidelines, the CCP had excluded the entire ‘landlord class’ from the community of the People, and included the entire PRC-resident bourgeoisie within it.

⁸⁶ The category of ‘enlightened gentry’ continued to exist (see ‘Decision on Class Status’, 2.7), and internal documents wrote fairly regularly of the need to distinguish between landlords based on the extent of their wealth and their willingness to co-operate, which is why I was initially unconvinced by Yang Kuisong’s contention that the Party never returned to its differentiated approach after abandoning it in early 1947. But the key point is that with the partial exception of ‘enlightened gentry’, this was seen as a tactical question against the background assumption that all landlords were enemies to whom the normal standards of justice and morality did not apply. This is best exemplified by the attitude taken towards violence against and suicide by small-scale landowners, discussed below. Whether any significant number of people were actually identified as ‘enlightened gentry’ during post-1949 land reform in a formal way is a question that remains to be researched.

⁸⁷ Engman, ‘Shanghai’s Dispossessed’, 42-50.

The connection between enemy status and the justification of harsh treatment can be further elucidated if we consider the CCP's choice of terminology. The Land Reform Law passed in June 1950 used two verbs to describe expropriation: 'confiscation 没收' and 'requisitioning 征收'.⁸⁸ In the Law, 'confiscation' was used exclusively to refer to landlord property, whereas 'requisitioning' was used for property belonging to any other person or institution (such as temples, schools, churches, businesspeople, and 'small land rentiers' – a category to which I shall return below). A collection of study materials on land reform published in late 1950 explained how to understand this distinction:

Here's a simple example to explain [the difference between confiscation and requisitioning]. When we sentence a war criminal, how do we deal with their property? Everyone knows that the answer is 'confiscation' and not 'requisitioning.' But what if the government wants to build a railway and needs to use the land along the path of the railway – assuming this land does not belong to the landlord class, imagine if we said to the local residents: 'the government wants to build a railway, so your land will be confiscated!' What crime have these residents committed? Clearly, this sentence is not reasonable, and [in this context] we could only use the term 'requisition.'

So 'confiscation' and 'requisitioning' involve two different kinds of political treatment 政治待遇, and are absolutely not the same in substance.⁸⁹

As this passage makes plain, the natural understanding of 'confiscation' was as a punishment for some kind of crime—most obviously, in the context of post-war China, a war crime. This is precisely why, in 1946, the Party began by restricting confiscation to 'collaborators' and 'tyrants'; as for ordinary landlords, one could just as well have asked, as of the people living along the proposed railway line, what crime they had committed to merit the 'confiscation' of their property, absent any further evidence about how they had obtained it or what they had done wrong. At this point, when the Civil War was just beginning and the CCP sought to establish a broad anti-KMT united front, the CCP leadership felt constrained by such considerations, and, as we have seen, experimented with methods of transferring land that enabled its recipients to 'be in a position of reason and legality.' For complex reasons to do with leaders' perceptions of the war and of land reform up to that point, by the spring of 1947, they no longer felt constrained in this way, and with the victory in the Civil War, it had become possible for the CCP to impose this

⁸⁸ 'Land Reform Law', points 2, 3, 5, 6.

⁸⁹ 叶明华 Ye Minghua '土地改革学习问答' [*Questions and answers concerning the study of land reform*] (Shanghai: Shiyong Chubanshe, 1950), 26.

understanding – that 4-5 percent of all rural households were part of the landlord class, and that all members of the landlord class were enemies – onto Chinese society.⁹⁰

1.4 Post-1949 Land Reform: From Moderation to Radicalism, Again

Although taking place against the background assumption that all landlords were enemies, post-1949 land reform nevertheless promised to be considerably more moderate in both the designation and the treatment of the targets of expropriation than the ‘leftist’ phase in 1947. Notably, rich peasants were not defined as targets of the People’s Democratic Dictatorship, and land reform was to leave them mostly unscathed. The expropriation of landlords was circumscribed to surplus land, housing, grain, livestock and tools, with all of their other property exempt.⁹¹ Liu Shaoqi, who in 1947 had called for landlords to be forced to beg for a week and carry manure before giving them just enough to survive, was now the face of moderation, explaining to the delegates of the National People’s Consultative Conference that the Party would ‘eliminate feudalism in a gradual manner, one which respects the human dignity 人格 of landlords.’⁹² A new non-enemy category, ‘small land rentier 小土地出租者,’ was introduced to account for the fact that, in the highly commercialized and agriculturally productive parts of China, many people owned small tracts of land that they rented out, either because they had another occupation, or did not have the labour power to till it.⁹³ Businesspeople who owned agricultural land – which was not uncommon, since land functioned as a relatively low-risk investment for urban or semi-urban capital – were not to be treated as ‘landlords’ so long as their income came primarily from their business activities, and their agricultural land was to be ‘requisitioned’ rather than ‘confiscated.’⁹⁴

Post-1949 land reform involved considerably more violence than the Party claimed it would in the summer of 1950. The increase in violence began in the autumn of that year, as China entered the Korean War, the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries was initiated, and the Central-South Bureau (the sub-bureau of the Central Committee

⁹⁰ Cf. Billeter, ‘The System of “Class Status”’, 140-41.

⁹¹ ‘Land Reform Law’, 2, 6.

⁹² 刘少奇 Liu Shaoqi, ‘在政协全国委员会第一届第二次会议上关于土地改革法的讲话’ [Speech on the land reform law at the second meeting of the first national committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference], 1950.6, *CCPM*.

⁹³ ‘Land Reform Law’, 5; ‘Decision on Class Status’, 1.1.2.

⁹⁴ ‘Land Reform Law’, 5; ‘Decision on Class Status’, 1.1.3.

responsible for Henan, Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Guangdong and Guangxi) launched a critique of a tendency it called 'peaceful land reform.' Cadres were told that the campaign was not to be understood as merely the redistribution of land in accordance with the policies issued by the government, but as a great mass movement. Excesses were bound to happen, but they could be corrected after they occurred, and could not to be allowed to interfere with the objective of mass mobilization.⁹⁵

What kinds of violence took place during land reform? First, there was the quasi-legal execution of those designated as 'evil tyrants.' 'Evil tyrants' were defined by the Decision on Class Status as those who 'rely on or constitute a kind of counterrevolutionary force to dominate the locality, and are shown by evidence to have regularly used violence and force to tyrannize and rob the people and to have caused great losses to life and property'; they were to be dealt with by People's Tribunals following accusation from the masses.⁹⁶ In his report to the Second Session of the Seventh Central Committee in March 1949, however, Mao had referred to 'evil tyrants' as 'the section of the landlord class in power 地主阶级当权派.'⁹⁷ Clearly, not every such person could be 'shown by evidence to have regularly used violence and force to tyrannize and rob the people and to have caused great losses to life and property.' This tension was in fact raised by some cadres; the East China Bureau claimed that the two definitions were 'consistent in spirit' – this spirit being to 'correctly set policy and grasp leadership, so as to break up and isolate our enemies and defeat them one by one, and avoid extending the category of "evil tyrant" to include their henchman or ordinary landlords.'⁹⁸ In other words, the function of the concept of 'evil tyrant' was to identify those to be attacked first and most harshly. If people could be found who met the full definition of an 'evil tyrant', then all the better, but if they couldn't, those at the head of existing power structures were still defined and treated as such. One former militiaman in a county in Sichuan recalls that 'the rule of thumb was to shoot "the four biggest powerholders" in each

⁹⁵ Shue, *Peasant China in Transition*, 82-85; Yang, 'The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question', 147-49; '中共中央中南局关于放手发动群众彻底完成土地改革计划的指示' [Directive of the Central-South Bureau of the CCP Centre on giving free rein in mobilizing the masses to thoroughly complete the plan for land reform], 1950.12.1, *CCPM*.

⁹⁶ 'Decision on Class Status', 2.10.

⁹⁷ Mao, 'Report to the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the CCP', 1949.3.5, *SW4*, 365-66).

⁹⁸ '中共中央转发华东局关于恶霸定义问题的电报' [Party Centre circulates East China Bureau's telegram on the question of the defining evil tyrants], 1949.11.19, *CCPM*). For further discussion of these issues and fascinating examples, see Man, '“Back-to-Back” Politics'.

bao or village.’⁹⁹ A similar policy – ‘to choose at least one landlord, and usually several, in virtually every village, for public execution’ – was reported in a county in Guangdong.¹⁰⁰

These public executions were frequently carried out in a highly scripted, even theatrical way, and were ideally preceded by aggrieved villagers ‘speaking bitterness 诉苦’ against the accused. Through this process, villagers participated in the public denunciation and humiliation of representatives of the old order, and the state demonstrated its ability to inflict violence on those it deemed enemies.¹⁰¹ Most importantly for this dissertation, a central aim of this process was to establish a new boundary between the People and all those classified as landlords. As the anthropologists Jack Potter and Sulamith Heins Potter put it:

The guiding slogan of the struggle sessions was ‘The poor and middle peasants are one family; the enemy are the landlords.’ This slogan symbolically redefined the landlords, excluding them from the category of kinsmen (to whom the villagers owed loyalty), and placing them in the category of class enemies and outsiders towards whom harsh treatment could be morally justified.¹⁰²

Jeffrey Javed’s recent work has greatly elucidated this process, arguing that the Party systematically relied on a process he calls *moral mobilization*: the ‘masses’ were defined as a righteous in-group against the criminal others represented by the landlord class; sensationalized examples of moral transgressions by those identified as landlords were used to elicit outrage and to justify violence (a process Javed calls ‘moral theatrics’), which in turn strengthened the newly drawn boundary between in-group and out-group.¹⁰³

While bearing in mind the great symbolic importance of this process, it is also necessary to recognize that the greatest amount of violence (in terms of the number of people victimized) during both pre- and post-1949 phases of land reform was of a less symbolic and more pragmatic kind. Referred to as the ‘pursuit of moveable wealth 追浮财’ or the ‘digging

⁹⁹ Eyferth, *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots*, 123.

¹⁰⁰ Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy and Political Power*, 228.

¹⁰¹ Shue, *Peasant China in Transition*, 73-74; 91. The role of theatrical violence in early PRC state-building has been an important theme in the work of Julia Strauss; see ‘Paternalist Terror’, ‘Morality, Coercion and State Building’, *State Formation in China and Taiwan*, especially 143-62, 222-31. On ‘speaking bitterness’, see Guo and Sun, ‘Speaking Bitterness’; Li, ‘From Bitter Memories to Revolutionary Memory’; Wu, ‘Speaking Bitterness’. Matthew Noellert’s in-depth study of land reform in Shuangcheng County, Heilongjiang, during the Civil War places a strong emphasis on the process of overthrowing and humiliating ‘local strongmen’, who, he argues, were those who had abused their positions of power and for this reason were hated by ordinary villagers (*Power over Property*). While convincing as far as it goes, it is unclear that the case of Shuangcheng—an area atypical both in its high level of inequality and the extent of penetration by Japanese imperialism—can be used as a basis for general conclusions even about Civil War land reform, much less about land reform as a whole.

¹⁰² Potter and Potter, *China’s Peasants*, 48.

¹⁰³ Javed, *Righteous Revolutionaries*, 59-64.

out of buried wealth 挖底财,’ it involved beating and torture to force people to hand over money and other moveable goods.¹⁰⁴ In his widely publicized report on land reform of June 1950, Liu Shaoqi obliquely referred to these phenomena having taken place during the Civil War, stating that they would not be repeated, but it is now well-documented that they took place on a significant scale.¹⁰⁵ As recent work by Liu Shigu and Cao Shuji *et al* has shown, the CCP’s leaders were highly concerned to ensure that they could extract as much wealth as possible from the upper stratum of rural society. For this reason, they delayed the initiation of land reform and imposed a series of burdens on those whose land was to be expropriated: high taxation, returning deposits, and various kinds of fines.¹⁰⁶ The purpose of this was to extract as much wealth as possible in an orderly fashion, and without resorting to the kind of direct violent extortion that had taken place during the Civil War; but in practice, the result was often not that different. The need for revenue became even stronger with China’s entry into the Korean War, and the background of war, combined with the simultaneous move to oppose ‘peaceful land reform’ and the initiation of the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries, greatly strengthened the tendency towards coercion.¹⁰⁷ Instances of ‘extractive’ violence were frequently recorded, particularly after the autumn of 1950. In its concluding summary on the movement to ‘oppose tyrants, reduce rents, and return deposits’, the South-West Bureau reported:

...near the end of the movement... in the context of the increasingly intense campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries, middle and small landlords don’t have much left while large landlords stubbornly resist, but some of our cadres, lacking strategic clarity and eager to obtain economic results, undertake ‘hard’ struggle against everyone... at this stage, the practice of stringing up and beating people has taken place everywhere... Landlords, feeling that there is no end in sight and no way out, have been committing suicide...¹⁰⁸

In September, *Neibu Cankao* reported that landlords were committing suicide throughout the Central-South region as well. The greatest number of suicides was attributed to a ‘purely

¹⁰⁴ The importance of extractive violence is highlighted in DeMare, *Land Wars*, especially 121-26.

¹⁰⁵ Liu, ‘Report on the question of land reform.’

¹⁰⁶ Cao, Li, and Zheng, ‘Research on the Movement to Reduce Rents and Return Deposits’; Cao and Li, “‘Additional Levies on Rich Households’”; Liu, ‘Grain Requisitioning, “Spring Famine”, and the Reduction of Rents/Returning of Deposits’; Zhang, ‘Research on the Compensation and Fines Movement.’

¹⁰⁷ A direct connection between the need for revenue for the Korean War and the intensity of the campaign to ‘return deposits’ is argued for in Cao, Li, and Zheng, ‘Research on the Movement to Reduce Rents and Return Deposits’. On the connection between the Korean war and the use of coercion, see the retrospective comments from Tao Zhu and Liu Shaoqi cited in Yang, ‘The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question’, 145.

¹⁰⁸ ‘中共中央西南局关于西南区清匪、反恶霸、减租、退押运动的总结报告’ [Southwest Bureau’s summary report of the on the movements to eliminate bandits, oppose tyrants, reduce rents, and return deposits in the Southwest Region], 1951.7.7, *CCPM*.

economic perspective’ that involved pursuing hidden wealth, ‘settling accounts’ and imposing fines without any limits; it was noted that half of those who committed suicide in this situation were women and/or of old age.¹⁰⁹

Any attempt at conclusions of a general nature is limited by the availability of statistical evidence. The only provincial-level statistic on violence that I am aware of is based on a sample of 40 townships 乡 in Guangdong carried out in 1952-53.¹¹⁰ Given the fine-grained nature of this data, it is worth reproducing:

Table 1.2. Treatment of landlords in Guangdong

	Landlords in Power 地主当权派 ¹¹¹	Ordinary Landlords 一般地主	Total
Number of Households / People	288 (18%) / 2025 (22%)	1324 (82%) / 6993 (78%)	1612 / 9324
Escaped	15 (0.74%)	119 (1.7%)	
Executed	115 (5.7%)	35 (0.05%)	
Committed suicide	54 (2.7%)	233 (3.3%)	
Died for various other reasons 因其他各种原因死亡的	29 (1.4%)	225 (3.2%)	
Total number of deaths (percentage of relevant population, per household)	198 (9.8%, 0.7)	493 (7.1%, 0.37)	691 (7.4%, 0.43)
Total number of people dead, sentenced, or detained and not released (as above)	284 (14%, 1)	636 (9%, 0.48)	920 (9.9%, 0.57)

¹⁰⁹ ‘中南区土地改革中各地连续发生地主自杀现象’ [Landlords are committing suicide during land reform throughout the Central-South Region], 1951.9.27, *CCPM*.

¹¹⁰ 广东省人民政府土地改革委员会 Land Reform Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People’s Government, ‘广东省土地改革重要统计资料简编’ [Important statistical material on land reform in Guangdong, concise edition], 1953.6.30, in Zhonggong Guangdong Shengwei Danggshi Yanjiushi, Guangdong Sheng Dang’anguan (eds.), *Guangdong Sheng tudigaige yundong shiliao huibian (1950-53)* (Guangzhou, 1999), 937-38.

After listing this data, the authors add that an investigation of 28 townships where land reform reinvestigation had been completed found that the overall situation was roughly same—the only differences were that fewer of those ‘in power’ had escaped and more of them had died (*ibid.*, 938).

¹¹¹ I.e. a group equated with ‘evil tyrants 恶霸’ by Mao in 1949; see above.

As we would expect, there were many more executions among ‘those in power’ than among ordinary landlords, both in absolute terms and even more so proportionally. But what stands out is that suicides and ‘death for various other reasons’ – which is hard to interpret as anything other than a euphemism for the outcome of beating and other mistreatment – were not only more numerous but also proportionally more frequent among ‘ordinary landlords’ than among ‘those in power.’

How representative is this data? Guangdong was certainly among one of the more ‘leftist’ provinces due to the multiple rounds of opposition to ‘peaceful land reform’ carried out, in conjunction with campaigns against ‘localism’, after the leadership of this province was singled out for criticism by the Central-South Bureau.¹¹² But as the reports from the Central-South Regional and South-West Regional levels cited above indicate, similar things were happening elsewhere too, and Yang Kuisong has cited many examples from throughout post-1949 land reform areas.¹¹³

The widespread nature of extractive violence against ordinary landowners is important to this thesis for two reasons. The first is that these events were in obvious contradiction to the official narrative that land reform was primarily a noble and just struggle against wicked oppressors, and that ‘excesses,’ when they took place, were connected to righteous indignation about past crimes.¹¹⁴ This led to a tension between lived memory of land reform and official discourse throughout the subsequent decades. Second, these events manifest the exclusion of those classified as ‘landlords’ from what sociologist Helen Fein calls the

¹¹² For a pioneering early account of land reform and ‘localism’ in Guangdong, which however significantly overstates the extent to which leaders in Guangdong actually resisted the narrative of sharp conflict along class lines, see Vogel, ‘Land Reform in Kwangtung’. For a concise recent summary of how research on this topic has developed, see Cai, ‘Review of Research on Early PRC Land Reform in Guangdong’.

¹¹³ Yang, ‘The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question’, 145-53. Man Yong has found complete statistics on how ‘struggle targets’ were dealt with in Northern Anhui Prefecture, but the kinds of treatment recorded are only arrest, execution, *guanzhi* 管制, and ‘verbal struggle’ 说理斗争 (‘Identity and Fear’, 55-56). Anhui was part of the East China Region, which in general was perhaps less radical than the other two large post-1949 land reform regions, Central-South and South-West. In this prefecture, the number of those dealt with as ‘evil tyrants’ was 22% of the total number of landlord households, which corresponds quite closely to the figures for Guangdong; what stands out is that the number of individuals dealt with as ‘criminal landlords’ 不法地主 was more than half the total number of landlord households (56.9%). Even allowing for multiple individuals from single households being recorded separately, this is a very high figure. As Man notes, the statistics do not include deaths by ‘struggle’ and suicide, so it is impossible to draw any precise conclusions, but the fact that so many households were dealt with as ‘criminal’, together with the numerous reports about suicide analysed by Man, indicate that these phenomena were not unusual in Northern Anhui either.

¹¹⁴ This narrative appeared regularly in published reports by high-level intellectuals who had participated in land reform, as a way of refuting claims that the campaign had become too violent. See, for example, Li, ‘Why is it not possible to “peacefully divide the land”?’, 胡世华 Hu Shihua, ‘人民民主专政在农村生了根’ [The People’s Democratic Dictatorship has taken root in the countryside], 1951.5.3, *RMRB*. On intellectuals providing justification for violence, see DeMare, *Land Wars*, 127-29, where the same article by Hu Shihua (who was a specialist in mathematical logic and a Professor of Philosophy at Peking University at the time) is used as an example.

‘universe of obligation’: ‘the range of persons and groups toward whom basic rules or “oughts” are binding.’¹¹⁵ This is vividly reflected in the 1947 quote from Zhu De cited above about not thinking that killing a few more landlords was something terrible, but this kind of reasoning permeates the record of post-1949 land reform as well. Consider how the secretary of the Mei County Party Committee in Guangdong spoke about the murder of a middle-aged or elderly woman in 1952, as part of a criticism of the tendency to use too much violence when trying to extract ‘surplus grain’:

...as for not allowing [landlords] to sleep, stringing them up, beating, and forcing them to kneel, this is happening everywhere. What’s even worse are a small number of cadres who see severely impure elements wrecking land reform and do not stop them, or even see this as evidence that ‘the peasants are in high spirits 情绪高.’ In [one location], some impure elements, including a KMT paratrooper commander, were allowed to torture 整 a landlord woman 地主 嫖 to death. They first made her kneel on broken tiles, then pulled her legs until she was bleeding from her groin, and then a number of them jumped on her stomach, only stopping as the sun was rising and she had died. The masses were very unhappy, saying ‘now that you’ve tortured the landlord to death, who are we supposed to demand surplus grain from?’¹¹⁶

In the discursive context of the time, what had gone wrong here was that ‘impure elements’ were allowed to ‘wreck land reform,’ with the result that the masses had one less landlord to demand grain from. The lesson to be learned was that ‘impure elements who use the pursuit of surplus grain or the pursuit of hidden weapons to wreck land reform must be dealt with severely.’¹¹⁷ Similarly, the increase in landlord suicides (described in this report as ‘exponential’) was a tactical failure, and unless those committing suicide were poor or middle peasants, it did not have any disciplinary implications.¹¹⁸

Writing about the targeting of ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ during the Cultural Revolution in his home village, Gao Mobo notes that ‘for a long time since 1949 they had been treated as non-human...they had been brutally victimised, humiliated, and unjustly treated, so much so that they had no right to defend their interests whatsoever.’¹¹⁹ As I hope this chapter makes clear, the foundations for this treatment were laid during land reform. To

¹¹⁵ Fein, *Imperial Crime and Punishment*, 7.

¹¹⁶ 余踪 Yu Zong, ‘充分发动群众掌握政策，彻底打倒地主阶级当权派做到分局规定的土改第一条规格 [Thoroughly mobilize the masses and grasp policy, completely overthrow those in power among the landlord class, achieve the first requirement for land reform set by the [South China] sub-bureau’, in Rao Yingchun (ed.), *Mei Xian cong qingfei fanba dao tudi gaige lishi ziliao zhuanji* (Meizhou: Zhonggong Meixian Xianwei Dangshi Yanjiushi, 2008), 197.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 202.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 197, 202; cf. Man, ‘Identity and Fear’, 56.

¹¹⁹ Gao, *Gao Village*, 153.

be labelled a landlord during land reform was not merely to become the target of expropriation: it was to be excluded from the newly formed moral community of the People, and to become the legitimate target of violent and degrading treatment. Contrary to common perception, however, it was not supposed to imply membership of a permanent underclass. Notwithstanding all the violence and demonization outlined in the foregoing, it remained the case that the State Council's Decision on Class Status provided for the removal of landlord labels after five years of law-abiding labour. Those in landlord households under the age of 18, or who were studying or engaged in another occupation, were not to be labelled 'landlord elements.' And rich peasants, who were about similar in number to landlords, were not dealt with as enemies at all during post-1949 land reform. While the foundations for long-term stigma against and mistreatment of rural class enemies and their descendants were laid during land reform, as the next chapter will argue, this was not done as part of a consciously designed 'class status system'.

2 Landlords and Rich Peasants in the ‘Class Status System’

Scholars have long noted that a system of labels existed during the Mao era which sorted individuals into more and less favoured categories, primarily, though not exclusively, by reference to a combination of their own or their families’ pre-revolutionary socioeconomic position. In a pioneering study, Jean-Francois Billeter called this the ‘class status system.’¹ He noted that the system had a series of features that didn’t make sense if it was understood simply as an outgrowth of the Party’s Marxist analysis of society: the labels seemed largely *permanent*, despite the fact that the pre-revolutionary socioeconomic realities to which most of them referred were entirely transformed well within the first decade of CCP rule; they were, if not by top-down design but apparently in practice, *hereditary*; and they were *heterogenous*, involving not only socioeconomic categories like ‘landlord’, ‘poor peasant’ and ‘worker’, but also explicitly political designations such as, on the one hand, ‘revolutionary cadre’, and, on the other hand, ‘counterrevolutionary’ and ‘rightist.’² Billeter argued that these paradoxes could be resolved if the system was thought of as a *sui generis* ‘system of social categories enjoying unequal rights and prestige,’ with complex roots that included but were not limited to the influence of Marxist social analysis, and which had a series of functions that could help explain its genesis and persistence.³

While there have been a number of village studies published since the 1980s that have shed further light on the significance of class labels—tending to confirm, in particular, that bad class labels were in practice permanent and hereditary—until recently, there have been few attempts to build on Billeter’s project of analyzing the system as a whole.⁴ The most recent work to do so is Donald Treiman’s and Andrew Walder’s quantitative analysis of the long-term impact of class labels on life chances. In setting up their study, they describe a unified system that was consciously set up to promote certain ends—social justice and the consolidation of CCP power—and rigorously enforced for three decades.⁵ Where Billeter had noted that the features of the labels that appear paradoxical from a Marxist perspective—their permanence, heredity, and heterogeneity—had come about in a gradual

¹ Billeter, ‘The System of “Class Status”’.

² Ibid., 130-36.

³ Ibid., 130, 137.

⁴ For village studies, see Introduction, fn. 17.

⁵ Treiman and Walder, ‘The Impact of Class Labels’. The first line of the abstract reads: ‘In 1950, China’s new Communist government created hereditary family class labels intended to promote the advancement of households supportive of the Communist movement along with the economically disadvantaged, and to penalize property owners and those associated with the old regime.’

fashion, and in the case of heredity, was never officially sanctioned and even at odds with official ideology, Treiman and Walder instead imply that these features were inherent in the system as it was conceived:

Designed to consolidate political control and lay the foundations for a socialist society, these labels were enforced for three decades... Although the categories were inspired by Marxist class analysis, they were in fact political statuses attached to entire families, passed down through generations (though the male line) and enforced by bureaucratic rules.⁶

Recent scholarship by historians, in contrast, has begun to question the notion of a unitary 'class status system' imposed from above and consistently enforced for three decades. Jeremy Brown's case study of class label changes in rural Hebei and Henan between 1960 and 1979 has broken new ground by using material from the county level and below to argue, firstly, that the system was far more dynamic, varied, and confused at the grassroots than is implied by the notion of a static 'system', and second, that the ways in which central guidelines about class labels were actually implemented (or not) was determined primarily by 'relationships, personalities, and grudges at the grassroots.'⁷ Puck Engman, in his study of the Party-state's management of the capitalist population in Shanghai, has questioned the idea, widely referred to in existing scholarship but lacking detailed empirical support, that the class status of the urban population was systematically investigated and assigned parallel to that of the rural population during land reform.⁸

This chapter contributes to the project of deconstructing the 'class status system' in two ways. First, I argue for the need to consider separately the subset of labels that placed one in the category of an 'enemy', or more technically, an 'target of the People's Democratic Dictatorship,' since it was primarily the us-enemy 敌我 distinction that imbued the entire system of labels with its political and social significance. Secondly, I seek to historicize the permanence and heredity of bad class labels, which recent general descriptions such as that of Treiman and Walder have tended to reify as inherent parts of a consciously designed system. I argue, instead, that these features were the outcome of a contingent historical process, with key turning points in 1957 and 1962.

I begin by reviewing how landlords and rich peasants fit into the broader framework of binary us-enemy conflict in the People's Republic. I then trace how the framework of us-enemy conflict involving landlords and rich peasants was applied by the Party during two

⁶ Ibid., 1126.

⁷ Brown, 'Moving Targets', 76.

⁸ Engman, 'Shanghai's Dispossessed', 2.

crises that were caused primarily by factors internal to the socialist system: rural unrest in 1957, and the failure of the Great Leap Forward. In both of these cases, the Party initially responded to the crisis by trying to frame the underlying issues as primarily antagonistic conflict between the People and their enemies, but soon had to acknowledge that such framing was inadequate to grasp the underlying realities. However, the initial reliance on us-enemy framing powerfully reinforced the salience of labels like 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' in both internal and public discourse, and in the case of the failure of the Leap, was soon followed by the return to 'class struggle' as the master narrative of politics in the People's Republic.

This background then makes it possible to explain how class enemy labels became permanent and hereditary. As I shall show, these labels were never explicitly understood as either permanent or hereditary by the Party-state, even in its internal discourse, for two reasons: first, there was simply no Maoist ideological justification for such a caste-like understanding of these categories, and second, it did not make sense in the strategic terms in which policy and its implementation was framed within the bureaucracy, with its focus on 'breaking up' the enemy and isolating a minority of diehard reactionaries. However, the emergence of us-enemy conflict in which a subset of landlords and rich peasants were among the primary antagonists as the central political narrative of the People's Republic *after* the transition to socialism ultimately produced a system in which these labels became, in practice, largely permanent and hereditary.

2.1 Landlords, Rich Peasants, and the Us-Enemy Divide

The Early People's Republic

The canonical text explaining how and why a subset of the Chinese population would be excluded from among the 'People' in the People's Republic is Mao Zedong's 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship,' which identified 'the landlord class, the bureaucratic capitalist class and their representatives, the KMT reactionaries and their accomplices' as those against whom dictatorship was to be exercised.⁹ In practice, no one was actually identified as belonging to the 'bureaucratic capitalist class' by the new regime, while

⁹ Mao, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship,' 417-18.

members of the landlord class, on the one hand, and KMT-associated and other counterrevolutionaries on the other, numbered in the millions.¹⁰

Treiman and Walder write that the system of class labels was ‘rife with contradictions’, of which the most notable was the ‘conflation of “class” with political affiliation.’¹¹ They suggest that the CCP simply copied what they describe as the Soviet practice of considering as ‘proletarian’ anyone who joined the revolutionary ranks prior to the victory of the revolution regardless of their economic background, while, conversely, ‘no matter how humble one’s origins, to have joined the Nationalist Party or army would have erased one’s “proletarian” origins and would make one a class enemy.’ This description elides the considerable complexity of this issue in CCP theory and practice. While joining the revolution made it possible for one’s individual class status to become that of revolutionary cadre or soldier—during the civil war, even landlords and rich peasants themselves could have their status changed in this way after one year if they demonstrated loyalty to the cause¹²—it did not imply a change in one’s family background, and landlord or rich peasant background could cause very serious problems both during land reform and later (as explored later in the section on heredity, and in more detail in Chapter 5). The CCP’s understanding of the reverse situation, of people from poor backgrounds joining the KMT or other ‘reactionary’ organizations, was likewise more complicated, and did not simply involve the conflation of class and political affiliation. While it is well-attested that during land reform, political affiliation was sometimes the basis for classifying people as class enemies and expropriating them, this is something that Party documents wrote of as an incorrect, non-Marxist mode of classification that was to be avoided.¹³ Having been a member of the KMT or other organizations deemed ‘reactionary’ could, depending on how high one had been in the organization, make one a ‘counterrevolutionary element’ and thus an enemy rather than a member of the People, but if one was from a proletarian background, that fact would remain in one’s record as one’s family background. Rather than being literally ‘erased’, it was outweighed.

In areas where land reform was carried out after the founding of the People’s Republic, rich peasants were not initially designated as targets of the People’s Democratic Dictatorship. This gradually changed as the Party moved to eliminate the rich peasant economy, an

¹⁰ Engman refers to the ‘bureaucrat-capitalist’ as a ‘category without a demography’ and as an ‘absentee enemy of the people’ (‘Shanghai’s Dispossessed’, 50-52). See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the number of those identified as landlords and counterrevolutionaries.

¹¹ ‘The Impact of Class Labels,’ 1127.

¹² Ren Bishi, ‘Some issues in land reform’, speech made on 1948.1.12, printed on 1948.3.28, *RMRB*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, see also examples in Huang, ‘Representational and Objective Realities’, 122.

objective that was enshrined in the 1954 Constitution.¹⁴ In early 1955, articles began appearing the *People's Daily* with titles such as 'Youth League Member Bravely Exposes a Rich Peasant's Sabotage' and 'Escaping the Rich Peasant's Trap', detailing cases of rich peasants leading the 'backwards elements' among the masses away from socialism and towards capitalism.¹⁵ Some cadres were apparently quite keen for rich peasants to join the co-operatives, for the following kinds of reasons:

'Rich peasants have good draft animals, good tools, they know how to run a farm, they have technical skills, and they can write and count – so admitting them to co-operatives and mutual aid teams is good.'

'Rich peasants are obedient, they don't ask for loans, they don't ask for grain subsidies, they arrive to meetings promptly, and they'll do whatever you tell them to do.'

'Rich peasants have become weaker, they don't dare to act rashly, they are better and better behaved 老实, so they are no longer a source of any danger.'¹⁶

These perceptions, the article argued, were all mistaken: beneath a façade of docility lay a desire to usurp power and to carry on exploitation. After a brief interlude of neutrality proclaimed in 1950, rich peasants had once again become enemies in official discourse.

During collectivization, landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries were frequently referred to together; then in 1957, the categories of 'bad element' and 'rightist' emerged.¹⁷ By mid-1958, official documents, especially in the public security system, were referring to all non-People under a single umbrella of 'landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad and rightist five-type elements 地富反坏右五类分子'.¹⁸ This is perhaps the most vivid illustration of the 'heterogeneity' of labels identified by Billeter, which he sees as their most conspicuously non-Marxist feature that reveals that their true

¹⁴ '1954 Constitution', 8.

¹⁵ '青年团员马景盛勇敢地揭发富农的破坏活动 [Youth League member Ma Jingsheng bravely exposes a rich peasant's wrecking], 1955.1.17, *RMRB*; '跳出了富农的圈套' [Escaping the rich peasant's trap], 1955.3.21, *RMRB*.

¹⁶ '富农的“老实”' [The 'well-behaved' rich peasant], 1955.2.25, *RMRB*.

¹⁷ In 1955 and 1956, 'bad element' appeared in *sufan* policy documents as an addendum to 'counterrevolutionaries', in the form 'counterrevolutionaries and other bad elements' (it appeared within the directive that initiated the *sufan* campaign, which then gave rise to the need to define it; see '中共中央关于展开斗争肃清暗藏的反革命分子的指示' [Party Centre's directive on initiating a struggle to eliminate hidden counterrevolutionary elements], 1955.7.1 *CCPM*, and '中共中央批准中央十人小组关于反革命分子和其他坏分子的解释及处理的政策界限的暂行规定' [Party Centre approves the Central Ten Person Small Group's temporary regulations on the policy boundaries concerning the explanation and [method of] dealing with counterrevolutionary elements and other bad elements], 1956.3.30, *CCPM*. In 1957, it developed into a separate category referring to people who had committed various kinds of non-political crimes. The concept was explained to the public in a *People's Daily* editorial in August ('对坏分子必须实行专政' [It is necessary to exercise dictatorship against bad elements], 1957.8.19).

¹⁸ 第九次全国公安会议关于进一步加强对地、富、反、坏、右五类分子改造工作的决议 [Resolution of the Ninth National Public Security Conference on further strengthening the work of reforming landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist five-type elements], 1958.8.16, *CCPM*.

origin was the Party's 'determination to organize social relationships according to a rational and controllable order.'¹⁹ The function of terms like 'five-type element' was that it conveniently grouped together all those who were to be dealt with under the rubric of an 'us-enemy contradiction 敌我矛盾,' using 'dictatorial' rather than 'democratic' means.²⁰ There was, I would suggest, nothing inherently contradictory or non-Marxist about this: pre-revolutionary social class was one reason to consider people enemies and exercise dictatorship over them, but that did not mean it had to be the only one. As Mao had put it in the revised version of his 'Contradictions' speech of 1957, providing the justification for treating 'bad elements' as enemies: 'To maintain public order and safeguard the interests of the People, it is necessary to exercise dictatorship as well over thieves, swindlers, murderers, arsonists, criminal gangs and all kinds of bad elements who seriously disrupt public order.'²¹

But the tendency towards subsuming all enemies under the umbrella of *class* enemies was certainly strong, and could give rise to utterances and phrases that were indeed remarkably lacking in Marxist rigour. Some of the most egregious instances of this tendency came from Mao himself. At the Chengdu Conference in March 1958, Mao said:

In terms of class analysis, our country has two exploiting classes and two working classes. The first exploiting class consists of the remnants of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. These are the unreformed landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements, to which we must now add rightists as well. This is the anti-socialist stratum. Rich peasants are exploiters, they have voting rights [since they were not formally deprived of civil rights in post-1949 land reform areas], but people don't respect them... The second [exploiting class] is the patriotic bourgeoisie, the bourgeois intellectuals, and the majority of the members of the democratic parties 民主党派²²

He further explained at the Hankou Conference in April:

The unreformed landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad and rightist elements, these people are anti-CCP, they are the Jiang Jieshis, the KMT, the hostile classes of the present, like

¹⁹ 'The System of "Class Status"', 136.

²⁰ Ibid., 135-36.

²¹ Mao, '关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题' [On the correct handling of contradictions among the People], 1957.6.19, *RMRB*.

²² Mao, '在成都会议上的讲话 (六)' [Speech at the Chengdu conference (6)], 1958.3.26, *MSWS* 1958-60, 45.

Zhang Bojun. The rightists within the Party are the same... An estimate of about 5 percent of the population, about 30 million people, is about right. This is the hostile class 这是敌对阶级.²³

This formulation was then taken up by vice-minister of Public Security Xu Zirong at the 9th National Public Security Conference in September:

We must recognize not only that counterrevolutionaries continue to exist in certain numbers, but also that they continue to have a class foundation 阶级基础 in China. Our struggle against counterrevolution is closely connected to the developments in the situation of class struggle as a whole.

[In China], we currently have two exploiting classes. The first exploiting class consists of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists. The contradiction between us and this class is an us-enemy contradiction. The national bourgeoisie is the second exploiting class. Under the specific circumstances of China, the contradiction between us and this class usually manifests itself as a contradiction among the People...²⁴

‘The class of landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists 地、富、反、坏、右这个阶级’—this is indeed a formulation that, to use Walder’s and Treiman’s words, is ‘rife with contradiction’, and involves the ‘conflation of class with political affiliation’, and indeed even with criminality.²⁵

The tendency towards this kind of conflation arose from the imperfect correspondence between two ways in which conflict was conceptualized by the Party: on the one hand, conflict between the People and their enemies, and on the other hand, class conflict. Due to the complexity of each in both theory and practice, these two key pillars of politics in the Mao era were not always coextensive. There was nothing inherently contradictory in this: it was theoretically consistent to maintain that a ‘hooligan’ from a poor peasant family had become an enemy of the People and ought to be dealt with accordingly, whereas a patriotic capitalist, or a prosperous middle peasant who advocated household farming—and was therefore siding with capitalism against socialism—was nevertheless a member of the People to be dealt with through persuasion and ‘education.’ In other words, contradictions between the People and their enemies were not always manifestations of class conflict, and conversely, class conflict was not always manifested in contradictions between the People

²³ Mao, ‘在汉口会议上的讲话（二）’ [Speech at the Hankou conference (2)], 1958.4.6, *MSWS* 1958-60, 61

²⁴ ‘关于当前斗争形势与今后工作部署：徐子荣在第九次全国公安会议上的发言（摘要）’ [On the current situation of the struggle and arrangements for the future: Xu Zirong’s speech at the Ninth National Public Security Conference (summary)], 1958.9, *CCPM*.

²⁵ Treiman and Walder, ‘The Impact of Class Labels,’ 1127.

and their enemies. However, there were strong forces, both ideological and practical, and at all levels of the Party, that pushed towards interpreting the two as coextensive wherever possible, which I shall explore in the next section.

The Crisis of 1957

During the summer of 1955, in a foreshadowing of the events of two years later, the Party reassessed the origins of the grain supply crisis that had developed earlier in the year. During the spring, peasants throughout China were worried that the state had left them with insufficient grain and requested emergency supplies, and were unenthusiastic about production because they thought the state would procure whatever surplus they would produce.²⁶ At the time, it was largely accepted by the leadership that the state had in fact erred in procuring too much grain, but by the summer, they had shifted to thinking that the crisis was largely an artificial one, and that its major causes included the destructive activities of 'landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries.'²⁷ Thus, the first time after 1949 that 'landlords' and 'rich peasants' appeared next to each other in the title of an article in the *People's Daily*, the context was that of their purported sabotage of the state's grain procurement policy.

1956, however, was a year of optimism. In February, the Party publicized an ambitious programme for the development of agriculture, as part of which former class enemies were to be drawn into the rapidly forming agricultural collectives.²⁸ A subset of them, those deemed to have performed well, could join as full members and no longer class enemies (explored in greater detail in a separate section below, on the permanence of labels). At the Eighth Party Congress in September 1956, it was declared that, following the socialist transformation of the economy, 'the era of tempestuous class struggle' was over, and that

²⁶ Shue, *Peasant China in Transition*, 235-6; '关于迅速布置粮食购销工作，安定农民生产情绪的紧急指示' [Urgent directive on swiftly arranging the purchase and sale of grain and stabilizing the peasants' willingness to work], 1955.3.3, *CCPM*.

²⁷ '向破坏国家粮食政策的地主、富农反革命分子进行斗争' [Carry out struggle against landlord, rich peasant and counterrevolutionary elements who wreck the state's grain policies], 1955.7.12, *RMRB*. This 'multi-faceted' sabotage included creating an atmosphere of worry and inciting peasants to request grain from the government even if they didn't really need it, and illegally buying up state grain to hoard and resell. This latter activity could involve misleading cadres into believing they lacked grain by very effectively 逼真 feigning poverty, a process described in detail by the article.

²⁸ 'Draft Programme'.

formerly exploiting landlords and rich peasants were ‘in the process of being transformed into new people who live from their own labour 自食其力的新人.’²⁹

As is well-known, the political winds shifted considerably over the course of the following year with the initiation of the anti-rightist campaign. Earlier scholarship tended to understand this primarily as an urban movement targeting intellectuals who spoke out during the spring of 1957. In recent years, however, scholars have begun to show that the political developments initiated by the anti-rightist campaign had a major impact in rural areas as well. At the same time as the Party received a barrage of criticism from students and workers, it was also faced with opposition to rapid collectivization and the policy of unified purchase and sale, and claims like ‘the peasants’ lives are hard 农民生活苦’ were also stigmatized as ‘rightist.’³⁰ Cao Shuji has argued that the rightists identified among educated people in county towns had aired their views in the autumn of 1957 and knew that this would land them in trouble, but could not stop themselves from speaking out about the hardships that had been imposed on rural residents, since they mostly came from farming families, and so had a direct window onto the effects of rapid collectivization and the policy of acquiring surplus grain.³¹ Felix Wemheuer has traced how hunger became politicized in the course of the ‘Socialist Education Campaign’ that was launched just two months after the anti-rightist campaign, and how ‘complaints about the agricultural cooperatives and state purchasing policies became an issue of socialism versus capitalism.’³²

Figure 2.1. A rightist falling off the precipice separating the ‘enemy’ and ‘us’³³

²⁹ ‘中国共产党中央委员会向第八次全国代表大会的政治报告’ [Political report of the Central Committee of the CCP to the Eighth Congress], 1956.9.17, *RMRB*.

³⁰ See for example ‘吴芝圃代表用事实驳斥右派谎言’ [Representative Wu Zhipu uses facts to repudiate the lies of the rightists], 1957.7.4, *RMRB*; ‘让实物来参加大辩论’ [Let material objects join the great debate], 1957.9.30, *RMRB*, and numerous others between July and September.

³¹ Cao Shuji, ‘An Overt Conspiracy’, especially 93-96.

³² Wemheuer, *Famine Politics*, 100.

³³ *Nanfang Ribao*, 1957.7.17, 3. The paper labelled ‘false confession’ cannot outweigh the bag of ‘genuine crimes’ pulling the rightist towards the abyss.



But while the Party had created the new category of ‘rightist’ to label as enemies individuals who had expressed particular kinds of unwelcome opinions, and to thereby stigmatize these opinions, the Party was careful about restricting the use of the rightist label to those above a certain level of education and administrative position.³⁴ In this sense, it is true that the anti-rightist campaign was targeted at intellectuals, with the qualification that this included the educated people in county and sub-county administrative positions written about by Cao Shuji, not just the high level figures in the major urban centres who were its initial and most prominent targets. At the rural grassroots, those already considered enemies—landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries—were portrayed as the primary vehicles of ‘rightist’ opinion. Both internal and public documents wrote of how class enemies rejoiced upon encountering the opinions expressed by rightists, and took this as inspiration to spread these views among the masses, for example by ‘inciting’ them to

³⁴ ‘中共中央关于在工人、农民中不划右派分子的通知’ [Notice of the Party Centre on not identifying rightist elements among workers and peasants], 1957.9.4, *CCPM*; ‘中共中央批转河南省委关于在乡干部中不用右派分子名称的请示’ [Party Centre approves and circulates Henan Provincial Committee’s request for instructions on not using the label of rightist element among district cadres], 1958.1.15, *CCPM*.

complain about a lack of grain.³⁵ This served to support the view, explicitly laid out by Mao in October 1957, that a mere 10 percent of the population either did not support or actively opposed socialism, and more generally, that there was no genuine conflict of interest between the overwhelming majority of the rural population and the state.³⁶ Moreover, in a prelude to what would happen on a larger scale from 1963 onwards, newspapers began carrying regular reports of landlords and rich peasants ‘counterattacking’ and seizing back property that had been confiscated during land reform, and occasionally even of murdering cadres and activists.³⁷

However, while the Party sought to interpret the rural unrest of 1957 in ‘us-enemy’ terms as far as it could, it became clear that this could only work up to a point, as this unrest originated from a fairly broad swathe of the rural population. Those who were most actively involved in resisting collectivization and the sale of surplus grain were almost certainly those the Party called ‘prosperous middle peasants,’ and Party policy was very consistent in maintaining that this stratum belonged among the People and was not to be dealt with coercively. Reports from the Socialist Education Movement of autumn 1957 regularly restate this point, and a major shortcoming identified among grassroots cadres was their tendency to rely on coercion against this group.³⁸ Moreover, as Li Huaiyin has argued, resistance to aspects of collectivization and grain procurement was often deliberately framed in terms that rendered it legitimate from the perspective of the state, by, among other things, actively excluding those labelled as landlords and rich peasants from participating.³⁹ This was especially true of those Li sees as the new village elite: ‘current or former co-op cadres, retired soldiers, Party and Youth League members, and other literate individuals’ with good

³⁵ For example, ‘右派分子的话为什么和地主的差不多?’ [Why is it that the opinions voiced by rightist elements are pretty much the same as those of landlords?], 1957.7.3, *RMRB*; ‘江宁农民不受地主富农蛊惑, 扫除夏粮统购的障碍’ [Peasants in Jiangning have not been misled by landlords and rich peasants, and clear away obstacles to the purchase of summer grain], 1957.8.4, *RMRB*.

³⁶ Mao, ‘坚决相信群众的大多数’ [Resolutely believe in the majority of the masses], 1957.10.13, in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 5 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1977), 482.

³⁷ ‘胆敢翻案!——兼论农村里的牛鬼蛇神’ [They dare to reverse verdicts!—Ox monsters and snake demons in the countryside], 1957.7.28, *RMRB*, editorial reprinted from *Nanfang Ribao*; ‘人民的天下绝不容地主横行: 凶手张明堂被处极刑’ [The People will absolutely not tolerate landlords rampaging: the murderer Zhang Mingtang has been sentenced to death], 1957.8.5, *RMRB*.

³⁸ For example, ‘云南省委关于富民县反击反动地主富农反革命分子运动中几个问题的通报’ [Circular of the Yunnan Provincial Committee on some issues in the movement to counterattack against landlord, rich peasant and counterrevolutionary elements in Fuming County], 1957.8.2, *CCPM*; reports from Shaanxi and Shandong in ‘中共中央办公厅《情况简报(整风专辑)汇编》(十九)’ [CCP General Office, *Report on the Situation* (Special Volume on Rectification), 19], 1957.9.2, *CCPM*.

³⁹ Li Huaiyin, *Village China*, 78. See also ‘中央批转江苏省委关于正确处理农村人民闹事问题的指示’ [Party Centre approves and circulates Jiangsu Provincial Committee’s directive on correctly dealing with rural people creating disturbances], 1957.6.2, *CCPM*; the Jiangsu provincial report explicitly notes that landlords and rich peasants were excluded from protests in some places.

political backgrounds. While the crisis of 1957 thus saw the intensification of 'us-enemy' framing and, as discussed in the section on the permanence of labels, the introduction of the practice of re-labelling those from whom landlord and rich peasant labels had been removed, the Party-state nevertheless came to understand rural resistance in this period as primarily a contradiction among the People to be dealt with through education and persuasion.

The Aftermath of the Great Leap

A much greater crisis followed only a few years later, as excessive procurement based on inflated estimates of grain production during the Great Leap Forward led to famine. As the Party leadership was confronted with increasing evidence of starvation, social disorder, and brutality by cadres, it had to decide how to interpret these developments. On November 15th, 1960, Mao commented:

While emphasizing the excellent situation and studying policy, it is also necessary to discuss the one third of locations where things are bad: where evildoers 坏人 are in power, people are being beaten and are dying, grain production is decreasing, there is not enough to eat, the democratic revolution is not yet complete, and feudal forces are wreaking havoc with ever greater hostility to socialism...⁴⁰

It is not clear how Mao formed the impression that 'feudal forces' and the 'incompleteness of the democratic revolution' were a major factor. What is clearer is how this idea was then reinforced. In a central directive drafted by Zhou Enlai commenting on the situation in some parts of Shandong, Henan, and Gansu from three weeks later, this assessment was strengthened.⁴¹ After mentioning the 'intolerable' behaviour of some cadres, it wrote:

Some of this destructive counterrevolutionary behaviour is clearly a case of feudal forces having seized power locally and undertaking desperate and destructive revenge. This is the most intense manifestation of class struggle in rural areas. We must not forget that landlord and rich peasant elements and their families make up 8 percent of the rural population... The vast majority of these people have undergone varying degrees of socialist transformation...[but]...among them, there are the most resolute and hidden counterrevolutionary elements who have not reformed or refuse to reform, who look upon

⁴⁰ Mao, '在中央机关抽调万名干部下放基层情况报告上的批语 [Comment on report on the situation of 10,000 cadres from central organs sent down to the grassroots], 1960.11.15, *CCPM*.

⁴¹ I owe this reference to Gao Hua, 'The Great Famine', 62; likewise for the fact that it was drafted by Zhou.

socialism with extreme hatred, and who are preparing to seize power and stage a comeback. As Comrade Mao Zedong has said, we must not only continue carrying out the socialist revolution, but must also complete the unfinished tasks of the democratic revolution.⁴²

Among the worst affected regions, one of the earliest to come to the Party Centre's attention was Xinyang Prefecture in Henan Province.⁴³ By late December 1960, the reorganized committee of Xinyang Prefecture produced a report on the 'rectification movement' in the region, finding that, indeed, counterrevolutionary and feudal forces were largely to blame, and directly quoting Mao's words from mid-November:

...more and more counterrevolutionary groups and active counterrevolutionary sabotage is being revealed by the day, and the incompleteness of the democratic revolution is especially apparent... It was discovered that half of Guangshan County [one of the most severely affected counties in Xinyang] underwent peaceful land reform, and a minority did not undergo land reform at all. In [one production brigade in this county], land reform was carried out very superficially – classes were basically not differentiated, with 34 of 47 landlord and rich peasant households escaping the net. These materials show that the problems in Xinyang are extremely serious, that it was a large massacre carried out by the enemy, and verify the claim in Chairman Mao's directive that 'evildoers are in power, people are being beaten and are dying, grain production is decreasing, there is not enough to eat, the democratic revolution is not yet complete, and feudal forces are wreaking havoc with ever greater hostility to socialism, and are wrecking the production relations and productive forces of socialism.' This is the substance of the Xinyang problem....

It is necessary to follow the directives of the Centre, the Central-South Bureau and Provincial Committee and to carry out a thorough remedial course 补课 in democratic revolution—just like land reform, to completely overthrow the enemy, unveil evil deeds, retrieve power, and turn the situation around.⁴⁴

This report was then approved and circulated, first by the Central-South Bureau and then by Mao, who called for 'type-three' communes throughout the country to follow this example.⁴⁵

⁴² '中央关于山东、河南、甘肃和贵州某些地区所发生的严重情况的指示' [Party Centre's directive on the severe situation in some areas of Shandong, Henan, Gansu, and Guizhou], 1960.12.8, *CCPM*.

⁴³ See Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone*, chapter 1.

⁴⁴ '中南局批转河南省信阳地委“关于整风运动和生产救灾工作情况的报告”' [Central-South Bureau approves and circulates Xinyang Prefectural Committee's 'Report on the situation of the rectification movement and production and disaster relief'], 1960.12.31, *CCPM*.

⁴⁵ '中共中央中南局转发毛主席对信阳地委“关于整风运动和生产救灾工作情况的报告”的批示' [Central-South Bureau circulates Chairman Mao's instructions on the Xinyang Prefectural Committee's 'Report on the situation of the rectification movement and production and disaster relief'], 1960.12.31, *CCPM*. Mao described the three types of location at a work conference shortly after this circular: 'Type one locations are good, policies have been implemented and there is no 'egalitarian wind' 共产风. Type two locations are also comparatively good. Type

About half a month later, at the Central Committee plenum that marked the end of the Leap, Mao commented:

...that counterrevolutionaries and landlords have returned to power in the countryside, that they have called themselves 'Communists' while re-instituting feudalism, causing all kinds of disorder – we have only recently come to understand this. All 'type-three' counties, communes and brigades involve the reinstitution of counterrevolution—to attribute [the wide range of problems associated with type-three areas] to them is reasonable, this kind of situation certainly exists.⁴⁶

That month, a report from Baoding found that poor peasant cadres at the grassroots had been bought over by landlords and rich peasants, who were able to do so due to the incompleteness of land reform; a report from the Hebei provincial level found that a major cause of problems was that too many four-type elements had been de-labelled.⁴⁷

However, as in 1957, this foregrounding of the 'us-enemy' framing was superseded in relatively short order, as it became clear that it did not provide a plausible explanation for the situation in rural China, nor a way out of the crisis.⁴⁸ According to Deng Liqun's recollection, Tao Zhu, the first secretary of the Central-South Sub-Bureau, went to Xinyang to investigate, and found that those who had been responsible for extractive and cruel behaviour were all entirely 'pure' cadres from poor peasant backgrounds.⁴⁹ Over the course of 1961, as the famine continued in large parts of China, it became clear to many leaders that there had been numerous 'Xinyang incidents' throughout the country, and that decisive steps were required to turn things around.⁵⁰ In April, Liu Shaoqi returned to his home, and

three locations are backwards, they aren't good, and in some cases leadership has been usurped by landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries and bad elements - the "Communist Party" is a mere banner behind which the KMT and the landlord class conducts its affairs and has restored its power.' He went on to estimate that roughly 30%, 50% and 20% of locations China-wide belong to the each category, respectively ('毛泽东在工作会议上的讲话' [Mao Zedong's speech at the work conference], 1961.1.13, *CCPM*).

⁴⁶ Mao, '在中共八届九中全会上的讲话(二)' [Speech at the Ninth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (2)], 1961.1.18, *CCPM*.

⁴⁷ Gao Hua, 'The Great Famine', 60.

⁴⁸ This is not to say it did not have consequences: new landlords and rich peasants were identified in some areas as part of 'remedial democracy' (on which see Brown, 'Moving Targets', 55-58), and the prefectural and county level leaders in Xinyang were punished for their purportedly counterrevolutionary actions, with reference, wherever possible, to their own landlord or rich peasant family background or that of their wives. But the original plan to execute some 800 cadres per county in Xinyang, formulated by the Central Control Commission and the Central-South Bureau, was rejected by the Party Centre (see Yang, *Tombstone*, 64-65).

⁴⁹ Deng Liqun, *A Few Words*, 107-108.

⁵⁰ Already in November 1960, the 12 articles had been passed which sought to combat the 'communal wind' 共产风 that had been revealed as a serious problem (a tendency that had already been criticised in 1958/59, but which had returned in the wake of the Lushan plenum). The Ninth Plenum of January 1961 further established policies to

was shocked by the conditions he found there. At a central work conference at the end of May, he introduced, as a saying from peasants in Hunan, the formula that the problems had been ‘three parts natural disaster and seven parts human failure’, and in his discussion of the latter, indicated that part of the blame lay with the Party centre, and made no reference at all to class enemies.⁵¹

Liu repeated this interpretation in his speech at the momentous ‘7000 cadre’ conference of January 1962, with only a very brief reference to the role of class enemies, as taking advantage of the Party’s failures. When referring to ‘us-enemy’ conflict and the People’s Democratic Dictatorship, it was to criticize cadres’ use of dictatorial methods to deal with contradictions among the People.⁵² Mao, for his part, did make repeated reference to ‘landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists’ as the ‘other’ within the body politic, in refutation of Khrushchev’s revisionist line that a communist party in a socialist state should represent the entire population, and he also noted that ‘the remnants [of the reactionary classes] must by no means be underestimated...the overthrown reactionary classes are still seeking restoration.’ He therefore urged that ‘our tools of dictatorship 专政工具 must not weaken, and must be further strengthened.’⁵³ But, as Roderick MacFarquhar suggests, ‘perhaps in the context of Mao’s self-criticism [in the same speech] and the general atmosphere of the conference, these words seemed only the harmless rumblings of an extinct volcano.’⁵⁴ For a period of about a year—from the summer of 1961 to the summer of 1962—‘class struggle’ was largely removed from the agenda.

The Return to Class Struggle

In September 1962, the Eighth Plenum of the Tenth Central Committee affirmed Mao’s call for ‘class struggle’ to remain on the agenda throughout the entire socialist period. Mao’s reasons for reasserting the primacy of class struggle, and what exactly he meant by it, are complex, involving both the spectre of Soviet revisionism and a range of issues on which tension had developed between him and his colleagues: whether any kind of household

restore a degree of autonomy to peasant households, to return some of their ‘communized’ property, and restrain extraction from them, and in March, the draft 60 Articles pushed policy further in this direction.

⁵¹ Lin Yunhui, *A Utopian Movement*, 686.

⁵² ‘刘少奇在扩大的中央会议上的讲话’ [Liu Shaoqi’s speech at the Expanded Central Conference], 1962.1.27, *CCPM*.

⁵³ Mao, ‘在扩大的中央工作会议上的讲话’ [Speech at the Expanded Central Conference], 1962.1.30, *CCPM*.

⁵⁴ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Coming of the Cataclysm*, 171.

responsibility system was an unacceptable retreat from socialism, to what extent those attacked as right-deviationists after the Lushan plenum could be rehabilitated, and the size of the disaster that resulted from the failure of the Great Leap Forward. What matters most for the purposes of this chapter, and this dissertation more broadly, is that the threat allegedly posed by a significant subset of those labelled as landlords and rich peasants—as well as those who had ‘escaped the net’ at the time of land reform, or had been de-labelled since then—was a prominent part not only of what Mao understood by continuing class struggle, but especially of how this message was communicated through the Party and to the public. Of the many possible interpretations of ‘class struggle’ in a socialist society, this was the one that was most straightforward to understand and implement, and the least threatening to those in power.⁵⁵

While a number of scholars have remarked on the centrality of ‘old’ class enemies in the post-1962 discourses of class and class struggle, it is a point that bears emphasizing.⁵⁶ Consider that in the first major guiding document of the Socialist Education Movement (SEM), of the nine specific phenomena listed as illustrations of Mao’s claim that class struggle was intense, five concerned landlords and rich peasants, and the first four were almost entirely about them.⁵⁷ As is well-known, there were significant, if veiled, disagreements between Mao and Liu during the course of the SEM, but Liu was certainly no more moderate towards ‘old’ class enemies than Mao was. Liu’s objective was to keep the focus of class struggle at the grassroots and away from the higher levels where Mao was seeking to guide it, and for this purpose, blaming ‘old’ class enemies was highly convenient. As he put it to his wife Wang Guangmei in early 1964:

What are the roots of four unclean errors [among village cadres]? It is the corrupting influence of feudal and capitalist forces, or as it is normally said, “the cadres make the mistakes, but landlords and rich peasants are the root cause 错在干部，根子在地、富。”⁵⁸

And this was indeed what Wang found in her famous and widely distributed Peach Garden Experience of 1964, identifying the root of all that was wrong in Taoyuan Brigade as the

⁵⁵ Cf. Kraus, *Class Conflict*, 83.

⁵⁶ See Smith, ‘Class’, 215; Unger, ‘Cultural Revolution Conflict in the Villages’, 96; Wang, ‘The Construction of Class Struggle’; White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*, 15; Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, chapter 2, especially 47-49; Young, ‘Mao Zedong and the Class Struggle’, 42-7.

⁵⁷ Under point 3, ‘Severe and intense class struggle has appeared in Chinese society’ (‘中共中央关于目前农村工作中若干问题的决定（草案）’ [Party Centre’s decision on some issues in current rural work (draft)], 1963.5.20, *CCPM*, hereafter *Former Ten Points*).

⁵⁸ ‘刘少奇同王光美谈四清’ [Liu Shaoqi discusses the Four Cleans with Wang Guangmei], 1964.1, in *Pipan ziliao: Zhongguo Heluxiaofu Liu Shaoqi fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi lunji*, available at <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/liushaoqi/1967/141.htm>.

accountant of the fourth production team, a landlord who had allegedly sold off his land shortly before land reform and thereby 'escaped the net.'⁵⁹ At the same time, and as the subsequent chapters will explore in greater detail, a major element of the Socialist Education Movement was to increase the stigma associated with landlord and rich peasant labels among ordinary people in general.

Thus, when the Cultural Revolution exploded in 1966, these labels were central to how people understood the notion of a 'class enemy.' To be sure, plenty of people were newly labelled enemies, and after the profusion of labels was consolidated in 1968, the number of 'types' subjected to dictatorship rose from five to nine.⁶⁰ This notably included the category of 'unrepentant capitalist roader', covering many people formerly in positions of power from Liu Shaoqi downwards, but this broadening of the range of enemies did not generally have the effect of weakening attacks on landlords and rich peasants, since they were the 'default' class enemies who would be targeted whenever class struggle intensified. Indeed, those newly attacked during the Cultural Revolution were, as far as possible, presented as being connected to or in service of the landlord and rich peasant classes. As a 1967 article in the People's Daily put it, 'China's Khrushchev [i.e. Liu Shaoqi] is the general representative 总代表 of the landlords and the rich peasants and the deadly foe of poor and lower-middle peasants.'⁶¹ In the political context of the late Mao era, those labelled landlords and rich peasants, and often their family members, were among the most numerous and clearly identifiable 'enemies', and were therefore the first targets of any general intensification of 'us-enemy' conflict.⁶²

In the foregoing I have traced how 'us-enemy' conflict with landlords and rich peasants as among the major antagonists emerged as the central political narrative of socialist China. As I have tried to show, this was a gradual process that was interrupted on a number of occasions by a recognition that the binary logic of the People versus their enemies could not make sense of the underlying realities, but from 1962 onwards, this framing became inescapable. In what follows, I will show how this helps to explain the development of two features of class enemy labels, permanence and heredity, that were in tension both with the Party's general ideological commitments and with its specific policies on these issues.

⁵⁹ Wang, 'The Construction of Class Struggle.'

⁶⁰ '中共中央、中央文革关于对敌斗争中应注意掌握政策的通知' [Notice of the Party Centre and Central Cultural Revolution Group on paying attention to grasping policy in the struggle against the enemy], 1968.12.26, *CCPM*.

⁶¹ '中国赫鲁晓夫是地主富农总代表' [China's Khrushchev is the general representative of the landlords and rich peasants], 1967.7.27, *RMRB*.

⁶² Even among heterodox opinions voiced by members of rebel factions, one very seldom comes across any suggestion that these people did not deserve to be treated as enemies.

2.2 Permanence

It has become part of popular wisdom about the Mao era that 'bad' class labels like 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' assigned during land reform were basically set in stone until the late 1970s.⁶³ Scholars sometimes note that the regulations promulgated during land reform made provisions for the change of landlord and rich peasant status after, respectively, five and three years of law-abiding labour, but suggest that this never happened on any significant scale.⁶⁴ In an important article on the 'landlord-rich peasant question' during post-1949 land reform, the leading PRC scholar Yang Kuisong writes:

Barely a year and a half [after a relatively 'moderate' directive of June 1951 about the settlement of dispossessed landlords post-land reform], the Party Centre...began to revise its decision that landlords could be given civil rights after working for five years, and rich peasants three years after ceasing to engage in exploitation, emphasizing that 'since landlords and rich peasants have been engaging in sabotage and resisting the government in considerable numbers, it seems better not to have a unified, clear regulation on this issue at present,' ... Later, Mao came to entirely oppose the idea of removing labels from landlords and rich peasants with such ease, saying: 'in the past, our regulation was that landlord labels could be removed in three to five years, but looking at it today, I'm afraid it will have to be thirty to fifty years.' Liu Shaoqi then added, by way of explanation, that 'the Soviets had expelled landlords and rich peasants, whereas we did not—we are still living with [them], so if the lines are not drawn clearly, it could become very dangerous.'⁶⁵

But exactly how much later did Mao change his mind? He made the comments cited by Yang in December 1960, at the very moment when he was communicating the idea that class enemies had been responsible for what had happened in Xinyang and elsewhere. As I shall show in this section, until 1957, the Party leadership and bureaucracy were still quite optimistic about the prospect of most former class enemies becoming members of the People in fairly short order, and the 1950 guidelines for the removal of stigmatizing class labels were implemented on a significant scale. The Party's response to the crisis of 1957 laid the foundations for the long-term stigmatization of former landlords and rich peasants, but it

⁶³ For examples from two of the most authoritative recent surveys of the Mao era, see Walder, *China under Mao*, 111; Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China*, 63.

⁶⁴ See Wemheuer, *ibid.*; see also Richard C. Kraus, *Class Conflict*, 53.

⁶⁵ Yang, 'The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question', 154.

only became inevitable following the failure of the Great Leap Forward and the return to class struggle. Although the Party's stated objective always remained reform, the meaning of label removal no longer meant entry among the ranks of the People: a de-labelled class enemy was still a class enemy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Party's policies on the long-term fate of those dispossessed by land reform was formalized following the wave of 'leftism' in 1947. Documents on class status assignment from early 1948 clearly stipulated that rich peasant status could be changed after three years and landlord status after five years of law-abiding labour, and these policies were reaffirmed in the regulations on class status passed by the State Council in August 1950. In early 1953, in connection with preparations for People's Congress elections, the Party leadership clearly restated its commitment to the policy that those 'landlord class elements' who had been working for five years and 'have completely obeyed the laws and regulations of the government and have not engaged in any reactionary behaviour should have their class status changed and given political rights.'⁶⁶ The reason this was taken seriously as a bureaucratic issue was because it had been stipulated that 'landlord class elements', and 'rich peasant elements' in pre-1949 land reform areas, would be deprived of the right to vote, reflecting the fact that they were subject to the People's Democratic Dictatorship. There is evidence from Shaanxi and Hebei that in some locations, the majority of rich peasants and landlords were de-labelled during these elections.⁶⁷ In early 1955, newspapers in Hong Kong began reporting that a new policy had been introduced to allow those classified as overseas Chinese landlords 华侨地主 who had been law-abiding to have their class status changed immediately, even if land reform had only been concluded in 1952 or 1953 in their locality,⁶⁸ and by August 1956, 96% of overseas Chinese landlords in Fujian had reportedly had their class status changed.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ '邓小平关于“中华人民共和国全国人民代表大会及地方各级人民代表大会选举法”草案的说明' [Deng Xiaoping's explanation concerning the draft of the 'PRC Electoral Law for the National People's Congress and local People's Congresses at all levels'], 1953.2.11, *CCPM*. Cf. Lü, 'Between Discourses of Citizenship and Class.'

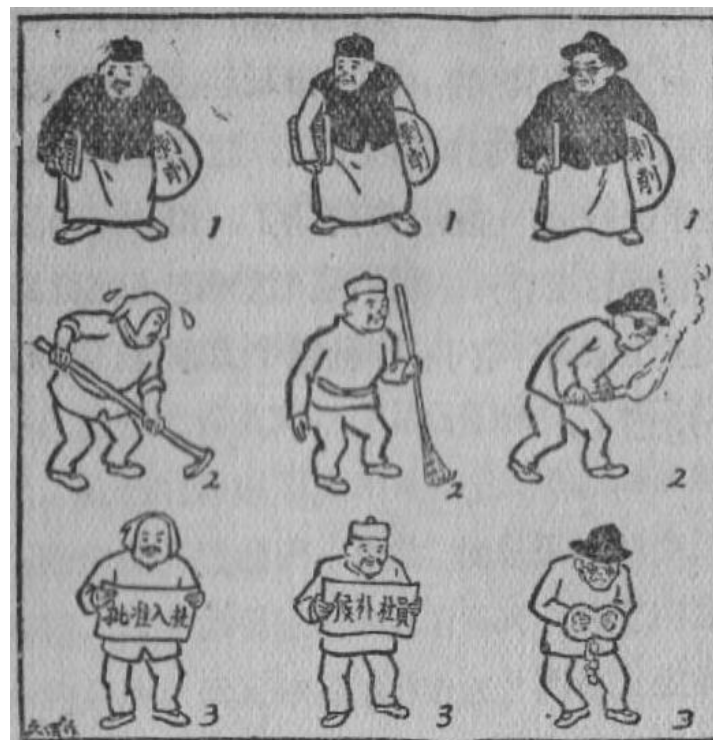
⁶⁷ '中共中央转发陕西省委关于评审富农入社问题的意见' [Party Centre circulates Shaanxi Party Committee's opinions on evaluating rich peasants' entry into the co-operatives], 1956.11.10, *CCPM*; '河北省委政法领导小组对两个公社地主、富农、反革命分子改造情况的调查' [Report of the Political and Legal Leading Small Group of the Hebei Provincial Committee on the situation of the reform of landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary elements in two communes], *RMGA*, 1961 no. 6, 3.

⁶⁸ '广东侨乡春节前传喜讯：华侨地主成份提前改变' [The hometowns of Overseas Chinese in Guangdong send good news before the spring festival: overseas Chinese landlords can have their class status changed sooner], *Xianggang Dagong Bao*, 1955.1.23, available at <https://libproject.hkbu.edu.hk/was40/detail?record=26720&channelid=4935>.

⁶⁹ '中共福建省委召开侨务扩大会议' [CCP Fujian Provincial Committee convenes an expanded meeting on Overseas Chinese Affairs], 1956.8.29, *RMRB*.

1956 saw another round of elections, and more importantly, rapid collectivization. The ‘Draft Programme for Agricultural Development’ published in January 1956 specified that ‘former landlords 过去的地主’ and ‘rich peasants who have given up exploitation’ were to be drawn into co-operatives and, depending on their ‘performance 表现’ could become full members, candidate members, or non-members labouring under surveillance.⁷⁰ Full membership entailed a change in class status to ‘peasant 农民.’ These possibilities were graphically represented in two booklets designed to popularize the Draft Programme. In the first one, we see three phases of recent history—pre-liberation, post-liberation, and the present—as experienced by three different types of landlords.⁷¹ They all start in stereotypical landlord garb holding a bag of exploited wealth, but the first goes on to work hard, the second to work with moderate intensity, and the third to engage in sabotage. These different types of behaviour then correspond to their current treatment: full co-operative membership, candidate membership, and arrest.

Figure 2.2. Types of landlords during co-operativization (1)



⁷⁰ ‘Draft Programme.’

⁷¹ ‘1956 年到 1967 年全国农业发展纲要通俗讲话’ [*Popular talks on the Draft Programme*] (Beijing: Tongsu Duwu Chubanshe, 1956), 14.

In the second image, we see four possibilities illustrated in the present: a full co-operative member carrying a large hoe, with his trousers and sleeves rolled up, moving ahead energetically and throwing off his hat labelled 'landlord'; a candidate co-operative member carrying a smaller hoe and retaining his 'landlord' hat; a man who retains his full landlord attire and has to work under surveillance, his head lowered and his hands together; and a saboteur in the process of being subjected to the force of the law.⁷² The first two types take up by far the most space in the image, and the well-performing former landlord throwing off his hat is central to the image.

Figure 2.3. Types of landlords during co-operativization (2)



Following the initial round of assessment, it was found that in pre-1949 land reform areas, half of former landlords, rich peasants, and counter-revolutionaries had been admitted to co-operatives as full members and 40 percent as candidate members, with only 10 percent labouring under surveillance.⁷³ The proportion of full co-operative members in

⁷² '1956 年到 1967 年全国农业发展纲要 (草案) 图解' [*Visual explanations of Draft Programme*] (Beijing: Tongsu Duwu Chubanshe, 1956), 9. I am grateful to Puck Engman for calling my attention to this document.

⁷³ '关于 1956 年公安工作主要情况和 1957 年工作的意见' [The main situation in public security work during 1956 and opinions on work during 1957], in '中共中央关于批准第八次全国公安会议文件的批示' [Party

areas where land reform was conducted after 1949 was considerably lower, standing at just 20 percent (with 60 percent candidate members and 20 percent labouring under surveillance).⁷⁴ Indeed, in early 1956, the Guangdong Provincial Committee instructed that in most places, the proportion of full members was to be capped at just 10 percent,⁷⁵ and in a report on this work from March, the provincial Public Security Bureau argued that it was best for the proportion of full members, like that of those under surveillance, to be limited, with the majority in between.⁷⁶ The Ministry of Public Security commented that these proportions were up to each province to decide.⁷⁷ Statistics from provincial public security gazetteers published in the 1990s and 2000s suggest that in post-1949 land reform areas, the proportion admitted to co-operatives as full members was no lower than 20%. The following are the data for provinces where such statistics are available:

Table 2.1. Proportion of landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries admitted to co-operatives as full members in 1956-57, by province⁷⁸

Province	Proportion (in ascending order)
Sichuan	20.5%
Hunan	22%
Jiangxi	22.6%

Centre's instructions approving the documents of the Eighth National Public Security Conference], 1957.2.12, *CCPM*.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ This directive is referred to in 广东省公安厅关于执行全国农业发展纲要（草案）第四、五条工作简报（第一号）' [Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department's bulletin on the work of implementing the fourth and fifth clauses of the Draft Programme (no. 1)], 1956.2, *GAJS* no. 153, 5.

⁷⁶ '广东省公安厅关于规划地主、富农、反革命分子入社工作的简报（第三号）' [Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department's bulletin on arranging the entry of landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary elements into the co-operatives (no. 3)], 1956.3, *GAJS* no. 155, 14.

⁷⁷ '广东省公安厅关于规划地主、富农、反革命分子入社工作中若干政策问题的意见' [Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department's opinions on some policy issues in the work of arranging the entry of landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary elements into the co-operatives], 1956.5, *GAJS* no. 164, 13.

⁷⁸ '四川省志，公安、司法志' [Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer: Public Security and Judiciary] (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1997), 90; '湖南省志，第六卷，政法志：公安' [Hunan Provincial Gazetteer, Vol. 6, Politics and Law: Public Security] (Changsha: Hunan Chubanshe, 1997), 441; '江西省志，公安志' [Jiangxi Provincial Gazetteer, Public Security] (Beijing: Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1996), 49; '广西通志，公安志' [Guangxi General Gazetteer, Public Security] (Nanning: Guangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2002), 559; '福建省志，公安志' [Fujian Provincial Gazetteer, Public Security] (Beijing: Fangzhi Chubanshe, 1996), 64; 浙江省公安厅 Zhejiang Provincial Public Security Department '浙江省人民公安志' [Zhejiang Province People's Public Security Gazetteer] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2000), 257; '湖北省志，司法' [Hubei Provincial Gazetteer, Judiciary] (Wuhan: Hubei Renmin Chubanshe, 1998), 190; '河南省志，公安志' [Henan Provincial Gazetteer, Public Security] (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Chubanshe, 1994), 59. I have omitted the editors for all volumes other than Zhejiang, as in each case it is simply the corresponding provincial gazetteer editorial committee.

Guangxi	22.7%
Fujian	23.5%
Zhejiang	27.4%
Hubei	34.5%
Henan [the only province where land reform took place on a large scale before 1949 for which aggregate data is available, hence the notably higher proportion]	70%

What did it mean to become a full co-operative member and to have one's class status changed? The general idea was that, besides the stipulation that they could not hold important posts in the co-operative for a certain period of time, there were to be no further political differences between them and the rest of the rural population. A work group from the Ministry of Public Security investigating two districts in Hunan Province found that in some places they continued to be called on to attend 'education and admonition' meetings with those who had not had their labels removed, and called on this practice to be ended.⁷⁹ Moreover, in its remarks on the 'social foundations of counterrevolution' in these localities, the group made the following suggestion about those who had become full co-operative members:

We think that these co-operative members should be considered working People, and should no longer be considered among the social foundations of counterrevolution. As for candidate co-operative members, although their class status has not been changed, it is also worth considering not generally listing them among the social foundations of counterrevolution.⁸⁰

This was written at the end of 1956, in a period of considerable optimism about the conclusion of large-scale class struggle. The idea that even candidate co-operative members might not be considered among the social foundations of counterrevolution is one that would not be entertained again during the Mao era.

As discussed above, the anti-rightist campaign had major consequences in rural China. A narrative emerged according to which reactionary class enemies, encouraged by the views of

⁷⁹ '中央公安部湖南视察组关于竹根乡和石板町乡公安保卫工作情况的调查报告' [Investigation report of the Hunan Inspection Group of the Ministry of Public Security on the situation of public security and defence work in Zhugen and Shibanting townships], 1956.11, *GAJS* no. 181, 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

urban rightists, had begun attacking the agricultural co-operatives and the state's grain monopoly.⁸¹ The 'counter-attack' that followed was to target a minority of landlords and rich peasants, but it also included some of those whose labels had been removed. A report from Yunnan published in the *People's Daily* in early August wrote that 'recently, a considerable number of landlord and rich peasant elements whose status has been changed have spread rumours and incited the masses,' and reported that such people would be relabelled as landlords and rich peasants—literally, the 'landlord or rich peasant hat would be put back on them 戴回地主富农帽子.'⁸² This represented the public introduction of the practice of re-labelling, a practice that, just eight months before, the Hubei Provincial Committee had advised against, apparently operating under the assumption that, once someone's class status has been changed, it did not make sense to change it back—if they needed to be punished for some kind of transgression, that was to be done on its own terms.⁸³ This was a key step in the transformation in the meaning of class status change, as it left absolutely no doubt about its conditional nature. As a particularly strident editorial from July 1957 put it:

That we have allowed landlords, rich peasants, and [counterrevolutionaries] to enter the co-operatives, some as members, some as candidate members, and some under surveillance—this is no more than a further act of lenience by the People towards the reactionary classes and reactionary elements. Even those who have been recognized as co-operative members and de-labelled must continue to be reformed under the surveillance of the People, and can by no means act as they please 胡作胡为.⁸⁴

The discursive foundations were thus very much present for the indefinite stigmatization of former landlords and rich peasants. However, the second half of 1957 did not see the large-scale reversal of the policies of the previous period. The issue of re-labelling was addressed by Minister of Public Security Luo Ruiqing in early September, who suggested, based on

⁸¹ See three articles in the *People's Daily* on 1957.7.29: '江苏江浦农业社干部反击右派应声虫，不让地主篡夺农业社领导权' [Cadres of the Jiangpu co-operative in Jiangsu counterattack against the yes-men of the rightists, and do not allow landlords to usurp leadership of the co-operative]; '湖北农民开始说理斗争，地主富农休想倒算' [Peasants in Hubei begin struggle through speaking reason; landlords and rich peasants need to forget about being able to *daosuan*]; '坚决回击地主、富农、反革命分子倒算，巩固农村社会主义阵地—广东省委向农村党组织发出指示' [Resolutely beat back *daosuan* by landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary elements, consolidate the socialist front in the countryside: the Guangdong Provincial Committee sends an instruction to rural Party branches].

⁸² '打退阶级敌人的反攻—云南加强管制不法地主富农' [Beat back the counterattacks of the class enemies: Yunnan strengthens the *guan zhi* of criminal landlords and rich peasants], 1957.8.3, *RMRB*.

⁸³ '中共湖北省委关于处理地主富农分子入社问题几点意见的通知' [Notice of the Hubei Provincial Committee on some opinions concerning the issue of dealing with landlord and rich peasant elements entering the co-operatives], 1957.1.21, *AC*.

⁸⁴ 'They dare to reverse verdicts', 1957.5.28, *RMRB*.

preliminary investigations, that the proportion of those to be re-labelled was to be about 15% in post-1949 land reform areas and 10% in pre-1949 land reform areas.⁸⁵

At the Ninth Plenum of the Eighth CCP Central Committee in mid-January 1961, when Mao endorsed the view that class enemies usurping power were responsible for the worst excesses of the Leap, he also called for 1961 to be a year of 'research and investigation.' The need to invigorate the spirit of 'research and investigation' was communicated to grassroots public security cadres in the early May issue of the journal *Renmin Gongan*. It began with an editorial titled 'Class Investigation Is the Foundation of Properly Carrying Out Public Security Work,' which was a comment on a pair of local reports about the removal of labels from landlords, rich peasants and counterrevolutionaries.⁸⁶ The first report, about two communes in Yuncheng County, Hebei, was said to have shown that 'for a fairly long period of time, we have lacked deep understanding of the extremely important question of rural class struggle.'⁸⁷ It noted in particular that labels had been removed from many class enemies who had not 'truly reformed':

In these two communes, the proportion of landlords, rich peasants and counterrevolutionaries that have been truly reformed 真正改造好的 is just 22 percent, and yet labels have been removed from 65 percent of them, with a maximum of 86 percent in one production team. In other words, between forty-something and sixty-something percent of landlord, rich peasant and counterrevolutionary labels have been removed incorrectly, or too early.⁸⁸

How and why did this happen? The editorial went on to explain:

The investigation material from Yuncheng County shows that the classification of landlords, rich peasants and counterrevolutionaries was changed in two large batches, in 1954 and in 1956. Since 1958, there have been labels both removed and reapplied. What this shows is that the situation of incorrect or early label removal has been around for a long time. Why was it not discovered? The basic reason is that we did not undertake proper class investigation before and after removing labels.

⁸⁵ '中共中央批转公安部党组“关于全国公安厅局长座谈会的情况报告”和罗瑞卿同志在全国公安厅局长座谈会上的总结发言' [Party Centre approves and circulates Ministry of Public Security Party Group's 'Report on the meeting of the heads of Public Security Departments and Bureaus from throughout the country' and Comrade Luo Ruiqing's concluding speech], 1957.10.28, *CCPM*.

⁸⁶ '进行阶级调查是做好公安工作的基础' [Carrying out class investigation is the foundation of doing public security work well], *RMGA* 1961 no. 6, 1-2.

⁸⁷ 'Report of the Political and Legal Leading Small Group of the Hebei Provincial Committee', *RMGA*, 1961 no. 6, 3-5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

As I have sought to show, the large-scale removal of labels in 1954 and 1956 in pre-1949 land reform areas like Hebei was not an anomaly, nor the result of ‘insufficient investigation,’ but a consequence of the Party’s policies and how it understood class labels at the time: as in the process of becoming irrelevant. A second report, from Zhongshan county in Guangdong, found that in three sample production brigades, 41% percent of landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries had had their labels removed since 1956, mostly in 1956 and 1957. The report claimed that of these changes, 28% were mistaken, and attributed it to the following:

Insufficient awareness of the long-term and complicated nature of class struggle. In 1956, when landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries were brought into the co-operatives...unrealistic proportions for removing labels were given at both the prefectural and county levels. Some prefectures even produced a plan for changing the class status of all [landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries] within a few years. As a result, right-deviating ideas like ‘remove many [labels] and apply few’ and ‘landlords can have their class status changed five years after land reform’ were widespread.⁸⁹

The idea that landlords could have their status changed after five years was official policy – presumably the right-deviating idea referred to here was that this was to be the general procedure, rather than something restricted to a minority who met stringent criteria for having ‘truly reformed.’ But if these ideas were ‘right-deviationist’, then the Ministry of Public Security would also seem to have been guilty of it, at least in early 1957, when it had written:

Former 原来的 landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries have been placed into the co-operatives in large numbers, and after two-three seasons of education and reform, they have undergone new changes, both in old and newly liberated areas. Following re-evaluation in 95 districts in Hebei, the proportion of full co-operative members has risen to 90%. Investigations in 16 districts from later-liberated areas in Guangdong, Jiangsu, Anhui and Gansu show that the proportion of full co-operative members has risen to 50% [from somewhere around the original average of 20%].⁹⁰

⁸⁹ ‘广东省佛山地委政法委员会工作组对地主、富农、反革命分子摘帽子情况的典型调查’ [Typical investigation of the work group of the Guangdong Foshan Prefectural Committee’s Political and Legal Committee on the situation of labels having been removed from landlord, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionary elements], *RMGA*, 1961 no. 6, 5-6.

⁹⁰ ‘关于 1956 年公安工作主要情况和 1957 年工作的意见’ [The main situation in public security work during 1956 and opinions on work during 1957], 1957.1.17, in ‘中共中央关于批准第八次全国公安会议文件的批示 [Party Centre’s comments approving the documents of the Eighth National Public Security Conference], 1957.2.12, *CCPM*.

In this context, it is not at all clear that plans for the majority of labels to be removed in a few years was a peculiar 'right-deviation.' Certainly, perceptions had changed by the second half of 1957 compared to the beginning of the year, but it was only after the failure of the Leap that the perception developed that the large-scale label removals during elections and co-operativization had involved serious mistakes.

As explored in greater detail in the next chapter, the return to class struggle from 1962 onwards was not seen as an end to the project of reforming class enemies. Here I will focus on what it meant for the question of label removal, arguing, first, that it did not lead to the complete abandonment of the notion of removing class enemy labels, but, second, that the meaning of such label removal was by this time very different to what it had been in 1956. The second of the Socialist Education Movement's guiding documents, the Latter Ten Points, called for a thorough evaluation of four-type elements, and wrote that 'a few 个别 whose performance is truly good can have their label removed'; however, this was preceded by a call to re-label those who had been de-labelled and had since 'engaged in destructive behaviour 有破坏活动.' Moreover, the stipulation seen in central level documents between 1958 and 1961 that more labels should be removed than reapplied 摘多于戴 disappeared.⁹¹ As a policy document from the Ministry of Public Security put it:

Removing and applying labels is a kind of weapon with which we can break up, transform, and attack the enemy, and when it is used, it should be strictly controlled. It is not good to remove or to apply labels in large batches.⁹²

Of about 500 label changes submitted to the County People's Congress for approval in the first half of 1966 in one county in Anhui that I have been able to analyze, 139 (or about 28 percent) involved the removal of labels from people deemed to have been successfully reformed, and only twelve involved re-labelling people who had previously been de-labelled.⁹³ At the same time, however, another 96 people were newly labelled landlord, rich peasants, or counterrevolutionary elements, and 56 as bad elements.

⁹¹ E.g. Xie Fuzhi 谢富治, '继续大鼓干劲为保卫社会主义建设连续大跃进而奋斗 (报告提要)' [Continue drumming up energy, fight for the protection of the continued Great Leap Forward in socialist construction], 1960.2.11, in 中央原则批准公安部党组关于第十次全国公安会议情况的报告' [Party Centre approves in principle the report of the Ministry of Public Security's Party Group on the Eleventh National Public Security Conference], 1960.4.8, *CCPM*.

⁹² '关于农村社会主义教育运动中对敌斗争的一些问题 (第十三次全国公安会议讨论纪要)' [On some questions concerning the struggle against the enemy during the rural Socialist Education Movement (Minutes of the discussion at the Thirteenth National Public Security Conference)], *GAJS*, 1964 no. 11, 7.

⁹³ Data aggregated from archival files concerning eight districts in Wuwei County, *WCA* 15-1-1-1966-102 to 109. See Appendix 2 for details.

On what it meant to be de-labelled, it is instructive to compare a document from the Ministry of Public Security from 1964 with one from 1956. As noted above, a work group from the Ministry in 1956 wrote that de-labelled former class enemies should not be considered among the social foundations of counterrevolution but among the members of the working People. In 1964, by contrast, in calling for the clarification of the targets of dictatorship 清理专政对象, the Ministry called for the recording of:

...the numbers and behaviour of landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary and bad elements from whom labels have been removed. Two types—those who have truly been reformed and those who are behaving badly—should be distinguished and recorded separately.⁹⁴

Were those who had ‘truly been reformed’ still ‘objects of dictatorship’? It is not entirely clear:

Four-type elements whose labels have been removed and have truly been reformed are still to be considered remnants of the reactionary classes 仍然属于反动阶级残余的范畴, but it is permissible to not treat them as objects of dictatorship, it is not necessary to assign specific people to monitor them, so as to show that we are treating them differently.⁹⁵

This reflects a fundamental shift that had taken place: in 1956, de-labelled class enemies were no longer class enemies but members of the working People. This was far less clear by the second half of 1957, and by 1964, they had become remnants of the reactionary classes whom it was merely ‘permissible’ to not treat as objects of dictatorship. While the Party still proclaimed that its objective was that of reform, removing labels was conceived of internally as a kind of ‘weapon’ to be used sparingly. In 1956, the phrase ‘former landlord 过去的/原来的地主’ appeared with a certain regularity, and de-labelling was referred to as ‘changing class status 改变成份’; after the anti-Rightist campaign, the term ‘hat 帽子’ became common to express the idea of returning labels, but the term ‘changing class status’ remained in use;⁹⁶ but by the time of the Socialist Education Movement, the idea of ‘removing a hat’ predominated, and so a former landlord who had been de-labelled generally became a ‘de-labelled landlord 摘帽地主’—in other words, still a ‘landlord.’⁹⁷

⁹⁴ ‘On some questions concerning the struggle against the enemy,’ *GAJS*, 1964 no.11, 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁶ ‘Resolution of the Ninth National Public Security Conference on further strengthening the work of reforming landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist five-type elements’, 1958.8.16, *CCPM*.

⁹⁷ By the SEM, this term seems to have become quite standard. The first reference to it that I have encountered is from the minutes of a meeting of Party Secretaries from the county level and above in Anhui in April 1961, which

During the early Cultural Revolution, the notion that class enemies could ever really be reformed seems to have been implicitly called into question, as in the following dialogue between Kang Sheng and Red Guards in Xinjiang:

[according to regulations from the time of land reform], if a landlord has participated in labour [after being expropriated], and apparently does not oppose socialism, then, after five years like this, his class status has changed. Do you believe this? (Masses: no!) If you go to the countryside and tell the poor and lower-middle peasants that a certain landlord has been working not only for five years, but for twenty years, and so his class status can be changed, will they accept this? (Masses: no they won't!). They won't, you're right. Chairman Mao has developed Marxism-Leninism on the issue of class—class is not just about economic factors...but also about political and ideological factors... During this Cultural Revolution, Red Guards have raided landlords' houses and capitalists' houses, and have found 'ledgers for a change of regime 变天帐'. Why is that? That's why we say class is not just a matter of economics, but also of politics and ideology.⁹⁸

The possibility that former class enemies might still be harbouring reactionary thoughts and designs, which the Socialist Education Movement had done so much to convince people of, combined with the zealous search for enemies characteristic of the Cultural Revolution, meant that no former class enemy could ever really be beyond suspicion. There is evidence from Guangdong that overseas Chinese landlords and rich peasants who were de-labelled in 1955-56 were re-labelled and subjected to persecution, and this is unlikely to have been an isolated phenomenon.⁹⁹ The policy of allowing overseas Chinese landlords to be de-labelled earlier in 1955-56 was vividly denounced in a Red Guard publication from August 1967:

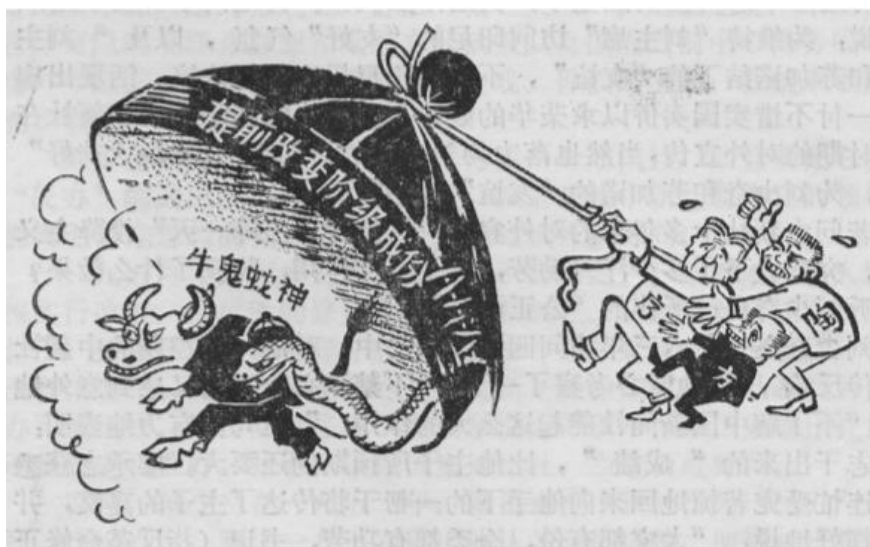
Figure 2.4. The early removal of labels from Overseas Chinese landlords (in 1955) as represented in the Red Guard press¹⁰⁰

writes: 'A comrade from the Agricultural Small Group asks: After the class status of a landlord or rich peasant element has been changed, what is their class status? A comrade from Anqing Prefecture thinks that their individual status can be "peasant," while their family background can remain landlord or rich peasant. Some comrades say that they can be called "landlords or rich peasants whose label has been removed 摘了帽子的地主、富农", a name that was suggested by the masses.' ('中共安徽省地市县委书记会议《会议简报》第五期' ['Conference bulletin' of the conference of Anhui prefectural, municipal, and county committee first secretaries, no. 5], 1961.4.14, *CCPM*).

⁹⁸ '康生对新疆少数派“红二司”战士的讲话' [Kang Sheng's speech to the soldiers of the Xinjiang minority faction 'Red Second Headquarters'], 1966.11.15, *CCPM*.

⁹⁹ 梅伟强 Mei Weiqiang and 关泽锋 Guan Zefeng, '广东台山侨务志' [*Gazetteer of Overseas Chinese Affairs in Taishan, Guangdong*] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2012), 54.

¹⁰⁰ Reproduced from Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China*, 210; the original source is a Red Guard publication titled '批廖战报' [War report criticizing Liao], 1967.8.1, edited by a group in Beijing that was set up with



Where in 1956, the figure losing the landlord cap was a newly minted co-operative member ready to build socialism, in 1967, it was an ox-demon and a snake-spirit plotting to undermine it; and the landlord cap itself, originally a piece of clothing that could be thrown off as part of a change in dress and attitude, had become a large object confining evil forces.

After the height of the Cultural Revolution, the system of evaluation that took shape between 1956 and 1966—discussed in detail in the next chapter—was gradually re-established, and it once again became possible to be de-labelled, but this still meant being a ‘de-labelled landlord’ or ‘de-labelled rich peasant.’ It was only in 1979 that a decisive change came, when Minister of Public Security Zhao Cangbi clarified, in terms that had been hinted at in 1956 but not since, what it meant for labels to be removed:

After labels are removed from four-type elements, they should be referred to, depending on their work or profession, as commune members, workers, teachers, etc. They ought to enjoy all of the rights of citizens outlined in the Chinese constitution, and must not be subjected to any direct or indirect discrimination. They must no longer be referred to as ‘de-labelled landlords 摘帽地主’, ‘de-labelled rich peasants,’ ‘de-labelled counterrevolutionaries’ or ‘de-labelled bad

the purpose of criticizing the two figures pulling the rope in the image: Liao Chengzhi and Fang Fang (the organization behind it was called the ‘Preparatory Committee of the Beijing Liaison Station to Criticize Liao Chengzhi and Fang Fang 北京批判廖承志、方方联络站筹备组’; see Yu, ‘Partial Index of Cultural Revolution Newspapers, 17). Both Liao and Fang were leading figures in the Overseas Affairs Bureau. The figure encouraging and protecting them is Tao Zhu, who had been the party secretary of Guangdong when the policy to remove labels from overseas Chinese landlords earlier was introduced; at this point (August 1967), his rapid rise to and fall from the highest levels had already taken place (Shen, ‘The Sudden Rise and Fall of Tao Zhu’). It is a considerable irony that Tao had played a direct role in undermining Fang when the latter was a secretary of the Guangdong Party Committee by accusing him of ‘localism’ and ‘right-deviation’ during land reform; the campaign to oppose these alleged tendencies led by Tao resulted in significant ‘leftist’ excesses, including towards overseas Chinese landowners (see Czeller, ‘Local Reassessment versus Central Prestige’).

elements,' much less are they to be considered 'targets of dictatorship.' If they make mistakes, they are to be dealt with using the methods of criticism and education used to handle contradictions among the People.¹⁰¹

To conclude, the permanence of class enemy labels was not the deliberate outcome of a plan or system formulated when these labels were initially assigned, but rather the consequence of the continued centrality of binary conflict and class struggle to political life after the transition to socialism. Linguistically and conceptually, it was reflected in the transformation of terms like 'former landlords and rich peasants' and 'changing class status', in which the concept of a 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' was still linked to socioeconomic facts, to the notion of a 'hat' that could be removed or reapplied as a form of social control, without implying a change in the underlying categorization of the person in question.

2.3 Heredity

Unlike the question of permanence, the issue of the heredity of class and political labels has attracted a comparatively large amount of scholarly attention, due to its having become a major point of contention during the early Cultural Revolution.¹⁰² The first Red Guards, themselves mostly from 'red' cadre families, famously espoused the 'bloodline theory 血统论,' which posited a near-perfect correlation between the 'redness' (or not) of a young person's family background and his or her own 'redness.' This unorthodox quasi-biological view was met with unease at the higher levels of the Party, and was criticized as a form of 'reactionary historical idealism' in a *Red Flag* and *People's Daily* editorial at the start of 1967.¹⁰³ This was followed in February by the publication and widespread distribution of an essay by Yu Luoke, a young factory worker and son of a rightist, which not only systematically refuted the 'bloodline theory,' but also creatively argued, from Maoist premises, for the view that class background was largely irrelevant to individual political 'redness.' This essay was widely debated in the Red Guard press before being denounced by Qi Benyu in April for having gone too far in arguing for the irrelevance of class

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² See White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*; Kraus, *Class Conflict*, 120-131; Billeter, "The System of 'Class Status'", 134-35; and more recently, Song, Wu, and Zhou, 'Guest Editors' Introduction'; Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁰³ '把无产阶级文化大革命进行到底' [Carry out the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to the end], 1967.1.1, *RMRB*.

background.¹⁰⁴ Thus both extremes—that only class background matters, and that class background does not matter at all—were denounced as reactionary, and the pre-Cultural Revolution official position—class background matters, but it is not all that matters—was re-established.¹⁰⁵

While the debates around the ‘bloodline theory’ have been well-covered in existing scholarship, there has not yet been any systematic attempt to use newly available sources to trace how official policy and discourse on heredity evolved in the years prior to the Cultural Revolution. In this section, I show that the issue was a vexed one throughout these years, with the Party continually seeking to maintain a balance between the extremes of caste-like heritability, which had no Maoist ideological justification and would lead to a series of practical problems, and complete non-discrimination, which was seen as dangerously complacent about the influence of class enemies on their children. To the extent that bad class labels became hereditary in practice—and there is considerable evidence that they did, particularly from the SEM onwards—this was not the consequence of a deliberate policy, but an outcome of continuing centrality of class struggle traced in the first section of this chapter. This point is important for two reasons. First, it allows us to see the complex and conflicting views on this issue within the Party which are missed if heredity is seen as the consequence of a consciously designed ‘system’. Secondly, it provides background for Chapter Five, in which I explore a key corollary of the non-hereditary nature (at the levels of discourse and policy) of labels—the Party’s expectation that young people from class enemy backgrounds ‘draw a clear line’ between themselves and their families.

According to land reform regulations on class status, those under the age of eighteen or those who were studying were only to be assigned a class status 阶级成分 if they were already ‘in a position of actual control in the household 已成为家庭的实际支配人’; otherwise, they were only to be assigned a ‘family background 家庭出身’.¹⁰⁶ As discussed above, the question of who was to be counted as a ‘landlord class element 地主阶级分子’ first became a bureaucratic issue in 1953, in connection with preparations for People’s Congress elections, and these regulations clearly separated out young people as having a landlord background rather than themselves being ‘landlord elements.’ The same principles applied during the next round of elections in 1956; Minister of the Interior Xie Juezai emphasized that during voter registration, ‘a rigorous distinction must be made between landlord class elements and

¹⁰⁴ Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, 76-90.

¹⁰⁵ This point is made especially clearly in White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*, 59-60.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Decision on Class Status’, 2.9.

people from landlord backgrounds' in line with the 1953 guidelines.¹⁰⁷ During the same year, collectivization was taking place, and the principles set out in early 1956 for the inclusion of landlords and rich peasants in the co-operatives mentioned the issue of young people from such families, writing that those who were under 18 or studying at the time of land reform, or those who had begun to participate in agricultural labour and did not have a controlling position in the family, were not to be considered landlord or rich peasant 'elements', and were to be allowed to join co-operatives as 'peasants'.¹⁰⁸

Treiman and Walder write of a system set up in the early 50s and designed to disadvantage those from propertied backgrounds, but this overlooks the fact that there were relatively few formal restrictions on the educational advancement of those from landlord or rich peasant backgrounds in the early PRC, and anything true of these groups is even truer of those from 'capitalist' families.¹⁰⁹ In fact, there seem to have been none at the central level until 1958, something that is confirmed by anecdotal evidence of young people from landlord-designated families being able to attend university and normal school during the mid-1950s with state scholarships.¹¹⁰ Youth League and Party membership were more complicated, since from early on they required the demonstration of a 'clear line' between oneself and one's family, and 'hard' restrictions on Party membership applied to those whose close family members had been punished or killed.¹¹¹ At the same time, however, the Party tried to take steps to prevent educated young people from rural class enemy families—a valuable resource in a country with China's literacy rate at the time—from being 'wasted' as a result of their being constrained to the countryside by overzealous cadres.¹¹²

There was a major turning point in 1958, when a series of restrictions were introduced in higher education on those from politically impure backgrounds, including a clause deeming inadmissible students from landlord and rich peasant families 'who have failed to draw a

¹⁰⁷ '内务部关于 1956 年基层选举工作中若干问题的意见' [Views of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on some issues in grassroots election work during 1956], 1956.7.27, in *Shaanxi Zhengbao*, 1956 no. 12, 514.

¹⁰⁸ 'Draft Programme', 4.

¹⁰⁹ Treiman and Walder combine landlords, rich peasants and counterrevolutionaries together with capitalists under the umbrella of people with 'bad labels'—an understandable simplification from the perspective of the Cultural Revolution, but one that elides many complexities.

¹¹⁰ Li, *The Fate of a Large Landlord Family*, 173-74; Tang, *The River of Life*, 28.

¹¹¹ 中央组织部同意西南局组织部关于直系亲属系被镇压、管制或畏罪自杀的地主、恶霸、反革命分子的工作人员入党问题的处理意见' [Central Organization Department agrees with Southwest Bureau Organization Department's views on dealing with the Party membership applications of employees whose direct relatives include landlords, tyrants, or counterrevolutionary elements who have been executed, placed under *guanzhi*, or have committed suicide out of fear of punishment], 1954.1.16, *CCPM*.

¹¹² '中共中央转发安子文同志关于劳动就业问题的综合报告' [Party Centre circulates comrade An Ziwen's summary report on the issue of labour and employment], 1952.8, *CCPM*.

clear ideological line and have performed backwardly 表现落后.¹¹³ These criteria were not made public, but it was announced in the *People's Daily* that 'politics would take command' in university admission, and that the Party intended to raise the proportion of students from worker-peasant background to bring it in line with the population at large (from one third to 80%).¹¹⁴ The following year, the Ministry of Education reported that 'in some areas, applicants from landlord and rich peasant families have been generally denied admission altogether.'¹¹⁵ The Ministry's Party Group therefore found it necessary to clarify that these applicants *could* be admitted to study for ordinary majors provided they had 'drawn a clear ideological boundary with their families and have performed progressively 表现进步.'¹¹⁶

Perhaps the most complex and tension-ridden period for the issue of heredity was that of the Socialist Education Movement. As will be explored, from different angles, in each of the subsequent chapters, a central feature of this campaign was the renewed stigmatization of landlords and rich peasants, and a corresponding essentialization of these categories. This essentialization, however, was in tension not only with the Party's proclaimed aim of reforming class enemies, but also with the ideological and practical imperative to consider the children of class enemies separately from their parents. This is something that Party leaders were entirely aware of, which is why the tenth of the Latter Ten Points, the second major guiding document of the SEM, was entirely concerned with the treatment of young people from landlord and rich peasant families. The way this document—and official discourse in this period more generally—framed the issue was that there were two mistaken tendencies in dealing with these young people:

One kind of deviation is to lack a class viewpoint and class awareness, failing to carry out necessary struggle against the reactionary words and deeds of a small number among the children of landlords and rich peasants. The other kind of deviation is to treat the children of landlords and rich peasants equally to landlord and rich peasants elements: to indiscriminately prevent them from taking on any public tasks 社会工作; to not recognize the credentials of Youth League members who have returned from urban areas to the countryside and to prevent them from participating in Youth League meetings; some places have even expelled all

¹¹³ '中共中央转发《教育部临时党组关于1958年高等学校招生工作的请示报告》' [Party Centre circulates 'Ministry of Education Temporary Party Group's report and request for instruction on the work of recruiting students into institutes of higher education in 1958], 1958.6.30, *GKWX*, 321–25.

¹¹⁴ '加强党的领导做好高等学校招生工作' [Strengthen Party leadership, carry out well the recruitment of students to institutes of higher education], 1958.7.3, *RMRB*.

¹¹⁵ '教育部党组关于高等学校录取新生的政治审查标准的补充解释' [Supplementary explanations by the Ministry of Education's Party Group on the standards for political screening for the acceptance of students in institutes of higher education], 1959.7.5, *GKWX*, 350.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

landlord and rich peasant background youths and children from the Youth League and the Young Pioneers. Both of the foregoing attitudes are incorrect and not in accordance with the Party's policies.¹¹⁷

The theoretical justification for this duality was that, on the one hand, these young people had been influenced by the thinking and habits of the 'exploiting classes' to a much larger degree than those from non-exploiting class families had; but, on the other hand, they were not themselves exploiters and had 'grown up under the red flag', benefitting from the Party's correct ideological education.

As explored in Chapter Five, the Party's inclusiveness towards these young people during the SEM was paired with a renewed focus on the need for them to develop hatred towards their parents, which was considered a key part of the process of choosing the side of the People. But what matters for present purposes is that both public and internal documents from these years indicate that the Party was aware of cadres' tendency to treat young people as direct inheritors of their parents' status, and considered this a mistake. In October 1965, *Huadong Tongxun*, an internal journal edited by the Central Committee's East China Sub-Bureau, reprinted an anonymous letter jointly written by a number of young people from landlord and rich peasant families.¹¹⁸ The authors began by declaring that they completely supported the dictatorship of the proletariat and the Party's policies towards people from their background, and went on to list the ways in which their treatment failed to correspond to these policies: denial of their right to speak in meetings, being avoided by people from 'good' backgrounds, being beaten and sworn at, and gradual exclusion from education at all levels. This led to many of them feeling dejected and hopeless about the future. Addressing the 'dear leader' and the 'glorious Party', they concluded by asking that 'the Party's policies be properly transmitted to grassroots cadres, so that they don't think that the harsher they are towards the children of landlords and rich peasants, the better they are at implementing the class line.' The letter was accompanied by a brief introduction from the editors, who noted that the 'state of mind reflected in the letter is fairly representative among the children of landlords and rich peasants,' and acknowledged that the kind of phenomena described in it, including the attitude of grassroots cadres, were indeed common. They emphasized that these young people had a high degree of 'plasticity 可塑性' and could be educated, and that 'treating them like four-type elements, wantonly depriving them of

¹¹⁷ 'Latter Ten Points', 10. This paragraph remained unchanged in the revised version of one year later.

¹¹⁸ '正确执行党对地富子弟的政策'[Correctly carry out the Party's policies towards the children of landlords and rich peasants], *Huadong Tongxun*, 1965 no. 14, 13.

their rights, discriminating against and excluding them at every turn will force them into the arms of the enemy, which is highly detrimental to the revolutionary cause.¹¹⁹

The logic of heredity that arose out of CCP ideology and policy was more complex than the simple patrilineal inheritance model that is often described as the official position, even if that was, more often than not, what actually happened in practice. In fact, explicit patrilineality never appeared in official regulations; in documents from the early PRC, a person's class background was said to depend on the class status of their 'family 家庭,' not their father.¹²⁰ The classification of the family in turn almost always depended more on the father than the mother due to the way Chinese society was organized, but this was not codified in CCP policy.¹²¹

As we have seen, the justification for considering family background relevant was primarily the notion that young people were subject to the ideological influence of their parents—this idea was more prominent in public discourse than notions of social justice, except during the introduction of the 'class line' in education in 1958. What, then, did this imply for subsequent generations? It could be argued within a Maoist framework that such influence could last for more than one generation, but if it was possible to transform one's class consciousness—a central tenet of Maoism—then it should also be possible to eliminate this influence. Not only was this ideologically justified, it was also a matter of considerable concern to the many high-ranking Party cadres whose own family background was non-proletarian. The minutes of a 1962 meeting convened by the Ministry of Education contain the following comments under the heading 'how to designate a student's class background':

Everyone [in attendance] agreed that this issue has not been dealt with clearly enough, and hoped that the Centre might issue regulations. During the process of recruiting students, [higher-level cadres have] frequently found that students' class background was incorrectly assigned [by lower-level cadres]. For example, a student whose father is a teacher and whose grandfather is a landlord would frequently have his or her family background assigned as 'landlord.' There have even been students whose fathers are veteran revolutionary cadres and who spent their entire childhood and adolescence in the revolutionary ranks who have had

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ 'Decision on Class Status', 3.9; '青年如何看待家庭出身' [How should young people treat their family background?], *ZGQN*, 1956 no. 11, 18.

¹²¹ This point is made very clearly in Engman, 'Shanghai's Dispossessed', 83 fn. 13.

their family background identified as 'landlord' on account of their grandfather. This situation has really upset some veteran cadres.¹²²

The minutes went on to note:

After discussion, the following view emerged fairly unanimously: the purpose of identifying family background is primarily to understand the form of family life 家庭生活方式 that has had the greatest effect on a given student's thinking and consciousness. Therefore, a student's family background should be determined on the basis of the family in which he or she has lived for the longest period. If the student has been supported by his or her father and the father is a cadre or teacher, the student's family background is cadre or teacher... If the student has spent some time supported by the father and some time supported by the grandfather, then his or her family background is whichever family environment he or she spent more time in and had a greater ideological effect.¹²³

These principles were then incorporated into subsequent regulations for university admissions, from which the explicitly gendered assumptions of the internal minutes were removed: 'father' became 'head of household.'¹²⁴

The principle that family background depended on the class status of whoever one was raised by gave one memoirist a fleeting moment of hope: shortly before graduating from junior middle school in 1964, he had to fill out a registration form, and the teacher explained that one's 'class background 出身,' which in his case had always been 'landlord' on account of his father, in fact depended on 'the person who was directly responsible for providing for you 直接供养你的人'.¹²⁵ In the author's case, this was his mother, as his father was in jail during most of his childhood, and his mother in turn was a salaried worker 职员. He reported this fact to the teacher, only to be told that since the local police station had his family background registered as 'landlord', that was what he had to fill in.¹²⁶

The Party's primary concern with this principle in fact appears to have been to prevent the bad class of grandparents from being transmitted to the children of cadres, as indicated by this reference in the tenth of the Latter Ten Points:

¹²² '教育部全国教育会议简报' [Bulletin of the Ministry of Education on the National Education Conference], 1962.4.27, *GKWX*, 414.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ '高等教育部关于 1965 年高等学校招生工作的通知' [Notice of the Ministry of Higher Education on the work of recruiting students into higher education in 1965], 1965.6.9, *GKWX*, 548.

¹²⁵ Yang, 'Turning Bitterness to Joy', 716-17.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

The children of revolutionary cadres or revolutionary soldiers whose own family background is landlord or rich peasant should, if they grew up directly under the care of their parents ...be considered as coming from a revolutionary cadre or revolutionary soldier family, and should not be treated as the children of landlords or rich peasants.¹²⁷

If the Party had been consistent about this, it would have specified that the same principle applied generally, not only in the case of revolutionary cadres or soldiers. As far as I can tell, however, this was never done in any public document during the Mao era (the Latter Ten Points, for example, was widely publicized, unlike the criteria the political screening of university applicants, which were strictly internal), and evidence suggests that the practice of treating bad class family background as heritable for an indefinite number of generations was common. The minutes of a 1965 Ministry of Education meeting noted:

Comrades from Jiangsu, Jilin and Anhui all noted that some county Party committees rejected the practice of filling in students' family background based on their parents' or guardians' status, thinking that unless they based it on that of the exploiting class grandfather [whenever that was the case], in a few years, there wouldn't be any exploiting classes left 过几年就没剥削阶级了.¹²⁸

This tendency was of course also strong in the Red Guard movement, and in September 1966, Zhou Enlai warned that it could be dangerous if taken too far:

There are some people whose family background is very good—for example, there's a Red Guard whose father is a veteran cadre, but his mother's family background is landlord. His maternal grandmother lives with them, and she's a landlord's wife 地主婆, and so you [Red Guards] went there and began beating her—this is not right. If you carry on like this, a good number of you Red Guards sitting here will have to begin defending yourselves... A number of you have grandmothers from landlord families.¹²⁹

Some Red Guards who had avoided this problem while in the cities were confronted with it during the early 70s as sent-down youths, when rural cadres treated them as coming from

¹²⁷ 'Latter Ten Points', point 10.

¹²⁸ '高等教育部全国高等学校招生工作会议简报' [Bulletin of the Ministry of Higher Education on the National Conference on Recruiting Students into Higher Education], 1965.5.27, *GKWX*, 540.

¹²⁹ 周恩来王任重对北京市红卫兵代表的讲话' [Zhou Enlai's and Wang Renzhong's speech to Beijing Red Guard representatives], 1966.9.1, *CCPM*. Zhou went on to add: 'To be clear, I'm not saying this to make excuses about my own feudal family background. My father was a minor functionary who earned no more than 30 yuan a month, so according to Party policy, my background should be salaried employee. My grandfather was a county magistrate, so when I joined the Party, I filled in my family background as feudal 填了封建家庭出身, why should I want to change it now?'

exploiting class families on account of their grandparents or great-grandparents.¹³⁰ This reportedly even happened to the grandchild of a senior CCP official; his or her friends tried to reason with the local cadres, pointing out that by this logic, Chairman Mao's child would have to be classified as coming from a rich peasant family, apparently to no avail.¹³¹

Such treatment of sent-down youths was consistent with how local young people seem to have generally been treated. Those who turned 18 between 1970 and 1975 were born between 1952 and 1957, and so were more often the grandchildren rather than the children of the people in charge of households at the time of land reform, but they were still widely considered to be 'landlord/rich peasant children 地富子女', particularly if, as was often the case, their parents were being treated as landlord or rich peasant 'elements' following the death of the first generation. Evidence suggests that prior to the removal of labels in 1979, members of this 'third generation' could often expect to inherit the landlord/rich peasant 'element' label from their parents that, according to the logic of the Party's policies, should only have applied to their grandparents.¹³² But it was only in 1979, when class labels were finally removed *en masse*, that the Party publicly and clearly stated this logic:

The individual status of rural commune members whose family background is landlord or rich peasant is uniformly to be determined as commune member, and they are to enjoy the same treatment as all other commune members....

¹³⁰ Liu, 'Sent-down Youths under the Pressure of the "Blood Lineage Theory"', 115.

¹³¹ Cited in *ibid.* Whether it was actually widely known at this time that Mao's father had been a rich peasant is unclear; this fact was certainly not widely advertised, but it must have been a topic that was both of great interest and also, given Mao's near divine status at this time, somewhat taboo. Yu Luoke's famous essay 'On Family Background' does list Mao, next to Marx and Lenin, as the 'great leaders of the proletarian revolutionary cause' whose 'family background was not good 出身不好' (See 北京家庭出身问题研究小组 Beijing Small Group for the Research of the Question of Family Background, '出身论' [On family background], 1967.1.18, *CCPM*).

¹³² This phenomenon was identified in two reports in the *People's Daily* in early 1979 that preceded the announcement of the policy to remove most class enemy labels, see '新乡地区公安局落实四类分子政策' [The Public Security Bureau of Xinxiang Prefecture implements policy towards the four-type elements]; '认真落实党的政策' [Conscientiously implement the Party's policies]; both 1979.1.19, *RMRB*. One villager, who had inherited his mother's landlord element label in 1964, was quoted as saying: 'I had thought that this landlord element label of mine would pass down through the generations, and that my family's descendants have no hope. I didn't think that the Party's policies would be properly implemented with respect to my family 落实到我一家, I will teach my children and grandchildren to always follow the Party!' ('Conscientiously implement the Party's policies'). See also Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Revolution Resistance and Reform*, 54-55, where they recount a 1964 case in which the 'class status' (they must mean 'family background') of a new-born was filled in as 'landlord'; in this case, the 'landlord element' was the baby's grandfather Li Maoxiu, but even that designation was questionable, as Maoxiu was 19 at the time of land reform in 1946, and had been involved in the anti-Japanese resistance (Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*, 87, 101). On the contrast between official policy and urban practice, and the even great contrast between official policy and rural practice, see Yang, 'Turning Bitterness to Joy', 716-17.

The family background of the children of commune members whose family background is landlord or rich peasant is uniformly to be commune member; they should no longer be considered as being from a landlord or rich peasant family background.¹³³

To conclude, like their permanence, the heritability of class enemy labels was not part of their original design, but something that developed out of the continued centrality of class struggle and binary conflict to politics in the People's Republic. To be sure, socioeconomic background was always a vexed issue for the Chinese Communist Party, which sought to represent the proletariat and the poor peasantry, but whose ideas were attractive to many young people from relatively prosperous backgrounds, and which took over a country in which the majority of the literate population was likewise from such backgrounds. The conceptual and bureaucratic distinction between individual status and family background functioned to deal with this problem. But continued class struggle after the transition to socialism required class enemies, so as older generations of landlords and rich peasants died, grassroots cadres had a strong incentive to treat enemy status as heritable. However, this was always in tension with the Party's ideological and policy commitments, which maintained that, while parental influence was a factor, it could be overcome through correct education and individual resolve to choose the revolutionary path. The emotional conflicts faced by young people as a result of this situation will be the subject of Chapter Five. The next chapter turns to the major corollary of the non-permanence of class enemy labels: the project, carried out primarily by the public security system, to transform class enemies into People.

¹³³ ‘化消极因素为积极因素: 中央决定给得到改造的四类分子摘帽, 对地富子女的成份也作了明确规定’ [Turning negative factors into positive factors: the Party Centre has decided to remove the labels of four-type elements who have been reformed, and has also issued clear regulations on the class status of the children of landlords and rich peasants], 1979.1.29, *RMRB*.

3 ‘Surveillance and Transformation’

Among the verbs used by the Chinese Communist Party to describe its activities, few applied to as many domains as ‘*gaizao*’—to transform, remould, or reform.¹ In 1949, the term appeared in the titles of nearly one hundred articles in the *People’s Daily*, with its objects ranging from the non-human (‘nature’, ‘alkaline land’), to social arrangements (‘industrial production’, ‘village administration’), forms of art and media (‘Peking Opera’, ‘privately run radio stations’), and finally to people themselves (‘old [i.e. KMT-era] police and legal personnel’, ‘beggars’, ‘prostitutes’, ‘mischievous children’, and above all ‘intellectuals’ and their ‘thought’).

Most existing scholarship on the CCP’s projects to transform people and their thinking has concentrated on two of their manifestations. The first is the *sixiang gaizao*—usually rendered as ‘thought reform’ or ‘ideological remoulding’—of educated urbanites who were seen, on the one hand, as members of the People and important contributors to socialist construction, but on the other, as the carriers of ideological tendencies that were inimical to socialism.² While in practice, *sixiang gaizao* was not voluntary, it was not understood by the Party as a coercive or punitive practice, and its methods—small group meetings, criticism and self-criticism, autobiographical analysis—were also applied in other contexts, and indeed were inspired by the rectification carried out within the Party in Yan’an in 1942–44.³ Moreover, while the term *sixiang gaizao* was generally reserved for the less dependable constituents of the People’s Democratic United Front (i.e. the petit bourgeoisie, particularly the ‘intellectuals’ among them, as well as capitalists), workers and especially peasants were also seen to require regular ideological education.⁴

The second is the sentencing of those judged guilty of counterrevolutionary and other crimes to ‘reform through labour’ (*laodong gaizao*, or *laogai*), a key instrument of the People’s Democratic Dictatorship. The CCP made much of its transformation of Pu Yi and

¹ ‘*Gaizao*’ has the implication of a large-scale change affecting the nature of that being *gaizao*-d; hence ‘transformation’ and ‘remoulding’ seem to me generally more accurate than the milder ‘reform’, which corresponds more to the Chinese *gaige*. However, since ‘thought reform’ and ‘labour reform’ have become standard translations of *sixiang gaizao* and *laodong gaizao*, and using ‘transform’ and ‘remould’ are awkward for some other phrases as well, I use all three terms interchangeably as translations of *gaizao*.

² Chen, *Thought Reform of Chinese Intellectuals*; Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, U, *Creating the Intellectual*.

³ On these methods, see Apter and Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse and Mao’s Republic* and Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose*, the latter with a greater emphasis on the coercive dimension of rectification. Important recent studies include Cheek, ‘Making Maoism’, and Huang, ‘The Rectification Movement’.

⁴ See Mao, ‘On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,’ in which he writes: ‘The serious problem is the education of the peasantry’ (SW4, 419). On the thought reform of capitalists, see Feng, ‘Identity, Ritual, and Politics.’

Japanese war criminals through these means; conditions were of course very different for the millions who experienced *laogai* in the large network of labour camps that took shape in the 50s.⁵ From 1957 onwards, this institution was accompanied by a nominally less coercive form, *laodong jiaoyang*, or *laojiao*, which did not require a criminal sentence.⁶ During the Great Leap, authorities at the county and commune levels were given the right to organize *laojiao*; by 1960, it had become clear that this was giving rise to widespread abuses, leading the Party Centre to prohibit this practice and to limit the scale of *laojiao* in general.⁷

What emerges from the existing literature is thus that the CCP's projects to remould people were split between Yan'an-rectification-type thought reform for non-proletarian urbanites, more suasive ideological education for workers and peasants, and custodial labour reform, initially for those found guilty of major political and other crimes, and later for a wider range of alleged offenders against the political and social order. Aminda Smith has shown that the targets of custodial reform in the early People's Republic included a group that were explicitly not 'enemies': beggars, prostitutes, vagrants, and others who lived on the margins of urban society.⁸ These people were understood by the CCP as victims of the old society who would enter the ranks of the working People after developing the skills, habits, and thinking needed to engage in productive labour. Many of them did, but those who failed to do so after a number of years revealed themselves to be 'bad elements', and were usually absorbed into the system of *laojiao*.

What remains unclear from the above, however, is how the Party carried out the transformation of the many millions of landlords, rich peasants, and assorted counterrevolutionaries who were spread throughout Chinese society, and whom there was neither any practical reason nor any quasi-legal justification for incarcerating. In fact, a whole range of institutions and practices developed during the Mao-era for dealing with

⁵ Mühlhahn, *Criminal Justice*, 176; see Kiely, *The Compelling Ideal*, 305-306, for observations on the reform of high-ranking Japanese, collaborator and KMT prisoners. Mühlhahn estimates that about 20 million people were imprisoned in *laogai* by around 1960, on the basis that official sources mention 2000 labour camps at this time, and assuming an average of 10,000 inmates per camp (269). He goes on to write that 'based on this cautious and conservative estimate, at least 5 to 7 percent of the Chinese population was imprisoned in labour camps. This number would fit well with Mao's estimate that the Chinese population was 5 percent counterrevolutionaries' (ibid.). Presumably Mühlhahn is referring to the proportion of the adult population, since China's total population at the time was over 600 million. But the suggestion that about 5 percent of the adult population was imprisoned by design seems problematic, since, as this chapter will show, many and perhaps most enemies were to be subject to '*shehui gaizao*', that is, reform in the context of society, not in custody.

⁶ Fu, 'Re-education through Labour in Historical Perspective.'

⁷ Li, 'A Preliminary Investigation of Re-education through Labour and *Guanzhi*', 146-49

⁸ Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes*.

non-incarcerated enemies, but they have received comparatively little scholarly attention.⁹ As this chapter will show, the ‘surveillance and transformation 监督改造’¹⁰ of non-incarcerated enemies, among whom ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ were the greatest in number, was a major project of the public security system, and it gave rise to a set of institutions and practices that became important features of everyday life in rural China in the 1960s and 70s.

The first part of this chapter reviews the measures taken by the Party after land reform and during co-operativization to deal with those who were identified as enemies but not arrested or killed. I first review the development of the practice of ‘*guan zhi* 管制,’ after which I move to the process of co-operative formation. During the early phases of co-operativization, political security – meaning above all the exclusion of class enemies – was a major priority, but as the movement developed to a ‘high tide’, this became impractical, and so class enemies were drawn into the co-operatives, which now became the setting for their continued transformation from ‘exploiters’ to ‘labourers.’ In the optimistic climate of 1956, it seemed that this process was already well underway and, in some cases, even nearing completion. The second part of the chapter explains how the Party sought to institutionalize and expand the system of ‘surveillance and transformation’ during the Great Leap, a period that pitted a greater pessimism about the difficulty of transforming class enemies against the belief that the mass mobilization could achieve almost anything. During these years, the public security system developed a blueprint that amounted to turning rural society into a kind of panopticon in which class enemies’ actions and thinking could be perfectly monitored. While implementation of this blueprint was limited by, among other factors, the social chaos that accompanied the Leap and its failure, the public security system continued working towards it for the rest of the Mao era. The third part explores how the Party tried to reconcile its professed aim of transformation with the renewed centrality of class struggle from 1962 onwards. The solution to this tension, the ‘Fengqiao model’, is held up to this day

⁹ To my knowledge, the only scholarly work that deals with this system in detail is a 2018 case study of one commune published in *Ershiyi Shiji*, the author, Pan Xuefang, was previously a lecturer at a Party School in Taizhou and is now an independent scholar who has published numerous articles on rural society in Zhejiang (Pan, ‘The Transformation of Four-Type Elements’). Li Ruojian and Liu Jun discuss it in their macro-level works on policy towards the four-type elements (Li, ‘From Atoning for One’s Crimes to Becoming a Scapegoat’; Li, ‘A Study of Policy on the Four-Type Elements’). Dutton writes about ‘*guan zhi*’ emerging in 1951, but he associates it with the urban work unit, which during the early PRC was not the most widespread form of social organization even in urban areas (*Policing Chinese Politics*, 167-68). Mühlhahn perceptively notes that ‘surveillance in various forms (*guan zhi* or *jiandu laodong*) was a vehicle well suited for subjecting deviants to group pressure and for getting the masses involved in the process of social control’; while he includes ‘communes’ and ‘security committees’ in addition to work units, his description nevertheless focuses on the urban context (*Criminal Justice in China*, 241).

¹⁰ I translate *jiandu* as ‘surveillance’ when it is a noun and ‘monitor’ when it is a verb.

as an exemplary form of ‘mass line’ policing, but, I suggest, is better understood as a means by which the Party tried to limit the excesses that its own messaging about class enemies since 1962 had generated. The fourth and final part compares the ideals and realities of the CCP’s programme to transform class enemies, subjecting to empirical scrutiny its basic premises: that class enemies had lived a parasitical life before the revolution, that CCP rule had made life much better for most people in rural areas, and that class enemies themselves could live dignified lives in the New China as constructors of socialism.

3.1 From Land Reform to Collectivization

Post-Land Reform Settlement and the Emergence of ‘Guanzhi’ 管制

In May 1951, as land reform was coming to an end in large swathes of China, the Party Centre sent out instructions on ensuring that landlords be able to participate in agricultural labour or find other work. In late April, it had received a copy of a telegram sent by the Central-South Bureau to its subordinate organs, which noted that most landlords were not engaging in agricultural labour, wanting instead to do business, work in a factory, or teach, and to lease or return the agricultural land they had been allotted. There were various reasons for this: some had never engaged in agricultural labour and had other skills, others had worries about applying their labour and remaining wealth to their land, and some had been expropriated to such a degree that they lacked the means to work their land.¹¹ Available statistical evidence suggests that landlords had notably less land, fewer tools, and less access to livestock than the post-land reform average; that is to say, contrary to official policy, more than their ‘surplus’ property was expropriated.¹²

The Centre’s instructions urged that ‘in areas where struggle against the landlords has been fairly complete, the peasantry should be persuaded to go easy on those landlords who have demonstrated compliance, so as to attain a situation where most of them work the land

¹¹ ‘对土地改革业已完成地区的地主参加劳动生产及就业问题的指示’ [Directive on the question of landlords participating in labour and getting jobs in areas where land reform has been completed], 1951.5.10, *CCPM*.

¹² In the East China Region, those in landlord families had an average of 2.12 *mu* per capita, which was just under 80% of the average. (华东军政委员会土地改革委员会 Land Reform Committee of the East China Military-Administration Committee, ‘华东区土地改革成果统计’ [Statistics on the achievements of land reform in the East China Region] (Shanghai: 1952.12), 6. In the Guangdong survey cited in chapter 1, those in landlord families had 0.85 *mu* per capita, which was about 60% of the average; they were almost completely deprived of cattle and tools (Land Reform Committee of the Guangdong Provincial People’s Government, ‘Important statistical material on land reform in Guangdong,’ 931-32),

they have been allotted and thereby sustain themselves.’ Those who were literate or otherwise technically competent could be allowed to find relevant jobs, or could be assigned teaching duties, and those with commercial skills, so long as they genuinely lacked agricultural skills, could be allowed to engage in business. Those in genuine need of assistance to work their land were to be given it, and those with money they had hidden 底财 were to be assured it would not be confiscated if they invested it in productive activities.¹³ The Centre noted, however, that no matter what landlords ended up doing, it was necessary to keep track of their whereabouts, making sure they did not escape and change their identities. Those who did not comply were to face continued struggle, and, if necessary and possible, to be organized into forced labour teams. The instructions concluded by noting that ‘properly dealing with landlords after land reform is a very important social question—all localities should pay attention to it, and should report their experiences to the Centre.’¹⁴

In June, the East China Bureau formulated a set of extremely strict draft regulations on ‘*guanzhi* and reform’ of landlords after land reform, requiring all landlords to report if they had any visitors and to obtain approval before travelling anywhere.¹⁵ Those who met any of a number of vague criteria (e.g. ‘doesn’t work hard’, ‘doesn’t know their place and obey the law’) were to be controlled even more strictly, for example by not allowing them to receive guests or to travel anywhere distant, and by organizing them into forced labour teams. At regular intervals, landlords were to be called together to receive admonition 训话. In the East China Bureau’s draft, only a small number of exceptionally well-behaved landlords could be exempted from these measures. The Party Centre suggested that it would be ‘more tactical 更策略’ if it were made possible for ordinary law-abiding landlords to be exempted. This suggestion was adopted when the regulations were publicized in July, but the default was still to subject all landlords to *guanzhi*, and exemption had to be approved by the county government.¹⁶

¹³ The letter of the land reform law actually excluded such property from confiscation, but this was systematically disregarded in practice (see Chapters 1 and 6).

¹⁴ ‘中共中央对土地改革业已完成地区的地主参加劳动生产及就业问题的指示’ [Party Centre’s directive on landlords participating in labour and finding employment in areas where land reform has been completed], 1951.5.10, *CCPM*.

¹⁵ ‘中共中央转发华东局《关于土地改革后管制和改造地主的规定（草案）》’ [CCP Centre transmits East China Bureau’s ‘Regulations on the *guanzhi* and reform of landlords after land reform (draft)’], 1951.6.24. *CCPM*.

¹⁶ ‘华东军政委员会发布关于土地改革完成地区管制改造地主的规定’ [East China Military-Administrative Commission publishes regulations on the *guanzhi* and reform of landlords in areas where land reform has been completed], 1951.7.25, *CCPM*.

In August of the following year (1952), the Central-South Region promulgated its own set of regulations on the same issue.¹⁷ This was a month after the Ministry of Public Security had issued regulations on the *guanzhi* of counterrevolutionaries, which specified that *guanzhi* was a specific measure to be applied to various types of non-active counterrevolutionaries who had not fully repented but did not need to be arrested (a list that included ‘landlords elements who maintain their reactionary standpoint’).¹⁸ In light of this, it did not make sense to apply *guanzhi* to all landlords as the East China Region had done, and so the regulations specified that this was a measure to be applied only to those who: 1) had tried to retrieve property (*fangong daosuan* 反攻倒算)¹⁹ 2) were engaging neither in agricultural production nor any other ‘legitimate occupation’; 3) had (in the past) carried out tyrannical or counterrevolutionary activities; or 4) had been given a criminal sentence by the government and courts and handed over to the masses to be subject to *guanzhi*.²⁰ As this last clause indicates, *guanzhi* could be a form of legal punishment, but it did not have to be; according to these regulations, the list of those subject to it was to be proposed by peasant associations, reviewed by the district People’s Congress, and approved by the county government. In the Ministry of Public Security’s regulations of a month earlier, by contrast, the right to ratify *guanzhi* belonged to Public Security Bureaus at the county or municipal level.

The Common Programme of 1949 had specified that all ‘ordinary reactionary elements and feudal landlords’ would be ‘deprived of their political rights for a certain period of time,’ but it didn’t specify what exactly these political rights were. The Ministry of Public Security’s regulations on *guanzhi* specified that the ‘political rights’ of which those under *guanzhi* were to be deprived were: the right to vote and be elected, to hold positions in state organs, to join People’s organizations or militias, to hold honorary titles, and the freedoms of speech, publishing, assembly, forming organizations, communication, residence, migration, and participation in demonstrations. The process of subjecting someone to *guanzhi* was supposed to involve a series of formal procedures, and *guanzhi* itself was only supposed to apply to individuals rather than entire families, but who was subject to *guanzhi* and in what form during these years probably depended primarily on the local cadres and activists who

¹⁷ ‘中南军政委员会为公布“中南区管制、改造地主暂行规定”命令’ [Central-South Military-Administrative Commission’s order to publicize ‘Central-South Region’s temporary regulations for the *guanzhi* and reform of landlords’], 1952.8.18, *CCPM*.

¹⁸ ‘管制反革命分子暂行办法’ [Temporary method for the *guanzhi* of counterrevolutionary elements], 1952.7.17, *RMRB*.

¹⁹ This was a specialized term referring to attempts by landlords and rich peasants to take back property confiscated during land reform, and is discussed at length in Chapter 6 (6.2, ‘Property claims as threats to the political order’).

²⁰ ‘Central-South Military-Administrative Commission’s order’, 1952.8.18, *CCPM*.

made up the security committees 治安委员会 and militias that were charged with its implementation.

The arbitrary nature of this process is well illustrated by the recollections of Nan Xiaoshun, a native of Yueqing County near Wenzhou, whose mother and grandmother had been designated as landlords (his father, the famous Buddhist monk Nan Huaijin, had escaped to Taiwan in 1949). After land reform, Nan's family eked out a living by running a small dry goods shop. One day in 1953, his elder brother went to the local town to buy some goods and visit their aunt. After he returned, the village children's pioneers 儿童团 accused him of leaving without asking for permission, and ordered Nan's brother and him to the school hall, where Nan's brother had to explain where he had been and what he had done. After Nan's brother mentioned that he had visited his aunt, the leader of the pioneer group charged that landlords could not freely visit other landlords. They carried on the accusations for some time, while two 'sentries' were stationed outside their house to prevent their mother and grandmother from interfering. After this episode, Nan and his brother—both of them in their teens, and considerably under 18 at the time of land reform—were both subjected to a system of having to report whenever they left the village.²¹ This had all taken place at the initiative of the local children's pioneers, and was clearly contrary to official policy—but, as Gao Hua observes, the 'right of interpretation 解释权' of these policies generally lay with local cadres.²²

Class Enemies and the Co-operatives

Prior to the high tide of collectivization, the entry of landlords and especially rich peasants into the co-operatives was generally seen as a grave danger to be averted. This was rarely an issue with landlords, since their economic and political weakness made their entry more of a burden than an advantage in most cases, but rich peasants in post-1949 land reform areas were sometimes seen as attractive or even essential to the newly forming mutual aid teams and co-operatives, a perception that Party propaganda regularly tried to counter.²³ In locations where land reform had taken place before 1949, however, matters were less clear-cut. In these areas, landlords and rich peasants had become eligible for the

²¹ Nan Xiaoshun, *The Lives of Three Generations*, 138-39.

²² Gao, 'Class Identity and Difference,' 317.

²³ See Chapter 2.

removal of their labels by the early fifties (three to five years having passed since land reform), and as discussed in the previous chapter, there is evidence that this took place, particularly during the 1954 elections. Were those whose labels had been removed eligible to join mutual aid teams and co-operatives? I have not been able to find any clear regulations on this question, but the spirit of the relevant documents suggests the answer should have been ‘yes.’²⁴ However, when the Party secretary and vice-secretary of Hulin County in Heilongjiang were expelled from the Party as ‘class alien elements 阶级异己分子’ in May 1955, their crimes included ‘wrecking the Party’s rural class line,’ the main consequence of which was that a quarter of former landlords and rich peasants had joined co-operatives.²⁵ This in turn was made possible by the fact that the majority had had their labels removed and civil rights reinstated during the 1954 elections, and that the county committee had issued a regulation stating that those whose status had been changed and who were not engaging in exploitation could join the co-operatives.

One piece of evidence against the leaders of Hulin county was that at a 1953 conference on rural public security, the entry of former landlords and rich peasants into the co-operatives had been presented as a good way of monitoring them.²⁶ In mid-1955, this was considered ‘wrecking the Party’s class line’, but not long thereafter it became part of the justification for the nationwide policy to allow all landlords and rich peasants to join co-

²⁴ In April 1952, the Hebei Provincial Committee asked the North China Bureau about this issue, but it is unclear whether they received a response (‘河北省关于农业生产合作社当前主要情况及问题向华北局的报告’ [Hebei Provincial Committee’s Report to the North China Bureau on the current situation and problems of agricultural co-operatives], 1952.4.9, in Zhonggong Hebei Shengwei Dangshi Yanjiushi (ed.), *Zhongguo Gongchandang Hebei bian nian shi* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Chubanshe, 2019), 430. In July 1952, the People’s Daily published an answer to a reader’s question about whether landlords could be allowed to join mutual aid teams as a way of ‘more effectively transforming them’ (‘关于地主能否参加互助组和供销合作社的问题’ [On the question of whether landlords can join mutual aid teams and purchase and sale co-operatives], 1952.7.23, *RMRB*). The answer was no, but the phrasing—‘...for these reasons, landlord elements, prior to having had their class status changed, cannot be allowed to join mutual aid teams’—implied that they *could* join after their status had been changed. However, this was not made explicit here or elsewhere.

²⁵ ‘共黑龙江省委纪律检查委员会关于开除阶级异己分子虎林县委书记高军、副书记钱德璧党籍给予虎林县委部分改组其领导机关处分的决定’ [Decision of the Heilongjiang Party Committee’s Discipline Inspection Committee on the expulsion from the Party of the class alien elements Gao Jun (Hulin County Committee Secretary) and Xian Debi (Hulin County Committee Vice-Secretary), and on the partial reorganization of the leadership organs of the Hulin County Committee], 1955.5, *CCPM*; ‘严防阶级敌人混入党内’ [Take strict precautions against class enemies sneaking into the Party], 1955.7.16, *RMRB*. The term *jieji yiji fenzi* is translated by Neil Diamant as ‘alien class element’ (*Revolutionizing the Family*, 288; *Useful Bullshit*, 121), but I believe changing the word order in this way is slightly misleading, as it suggests that the term simply meant ‘an element belonging to an alien class.’ However, this term was used primarily to refer to people from an exploiting class *background* who entered the revolutionary ranks and were claimed to have maintained the standpoint of the exploiting classes, not people who were revealed to have *themselves* been exploiting class elements. See Chapter 5, fn. 88, for further discussion.

²⁶ ‘Decision of the Heilongjiang Party Committee’s Discipline Inspection Committee,’ 1955.5, *CCPM*.

operatives.²⁷ The suddenness of the change was not lost on some people in an experimental district in Zhejiang where the policy was trialled in late 1955, who reportedly commented: ‘Yesterday we were being told that landlords and rich peasants must not be allowed enter the co-operatives under any circumstance, so why are we now being told that all landlords and rich peasants should be allowed in?’²⁸

As the previous chapter has shown, during the process of collectivization, the Party implemented on a large scale the policy of removing class enemy labels from those deemed to have been successfully reformed. These people were supposed to be able to go about their lives as regular members of the co-operative, with the important proviso that, for ‘a certain period of time,’ they could not perform any important roles in the co-operative. Those deemed ‘ordinary’ – the majority in most places – entered the co-operatives as ‘candidate members 候补社员’. A minority did not become co-operative members at all, and instead were described as having been handed over to the co-operatives by the government to work under surveillance.²⁹ In February 1957, the Ministry of Public Security reported that in old liberated areas (meaning where land reform was carried out before 1949), 50% of landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries had entered the co-operatives as full members, 40% as candidate members, and only 10% under surveillance; in later liberated areas, only 20% became full co-operative members, but the majority, 60%, were candidate members, and only 20% were subject to labour under surveillance (either as the outcome of their evaluation when they entered the co-operatives, or as a legal punishment 依法管制).³⁰

According to a book designed to popularize these policies published in January 1957, the kind of harsh *guanzhi* that the East China region had called for against all landlords back in 1951 only applied to the last two categories, and in its harshest form, only to those sentenced to legal *guanzhi*. Those whose status had been changed were supposed to be ‘educated on an individual basis, to further raise the level of their thinking and understanding’ – they did not have to attend ‘landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary element’ meetings. Candidate co-operative members were to be ‘regularly educated’ and asked to produce plans for how hard they would work against which they would be evaluated. Those

²⁷ 青萍 Qing Ping, ‘农业生产合作社怎样执行地主、富农、反革命分子入社政策’ [How agricultural co-operatives should implement the policies concerning the entry of landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary elements], (Beijing: Tongsu Duwu Chubanshe, 1957.1), 8.

²⁸ ‘兰谿县下余乡接收地主、富农分子入社的初步经验’ [Preliminary experiences of accepting landlord and rich peasant elements into co-operatives in Xiayu Township, Lanxi County], in Shi Jingtang et al. (eds.), *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong shiliao (xia)* (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1962), 938.

²⁹ Confusingly, this was often also called *guanzhi*, but without the 依法 in front of it.

³⁰ ‘The main situation in public security work during 1956 and opinions on work during 1957’, 1957.1.17, *CCPM*.

labouring under *guanzhi* 管制生产 were to be made to sign pledges stating they would be obedient and work hard, and were to be criticized and warned if they were seen to be falling short. It was only the final category, those under legal *guanzhi* 依法管制 – understood as distinct from working under *guanzhi* in being a form of legal punishment—who were supposed to be subject to a regime of regularly reporting on their work and thoughts to the security committee, and having to ask for leave if they wanted to go anywhere.³¹ As the next part will show, these measures soon became the norm for all those whose labels hadn't been removed.

3.2 The Great Leap and the Expansion of Surveillance

In its January 1957 report, the Ministry of Public Security had noted that the situation of landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries 'has undergone and is continuing to undergo positive changes.'³² By the summer of 1958, following the 'counterattack' against rural class enemies of the second half of 1957, Minister of Public Security Luo Ruiqing's assessment was notably more pessimistic.³³ Of the majority, he said: 'although they are not resolutely counterrevolutionary, turning them into good people 把他们化成好人 will still require a serious process... there is still a serious struggle between transformation and opposition to transformation 改造和反改造的严重斗争.' Those whose labels had been removed were still just at the beginning of a process, and 'the complete transformation of their political thinking' would require a long time. This assessment of the difficulty of transformation was paired, however, with an insistence that it *could* be done, and that it was very important to do so:

As Lenin said, if we don't know how to force counterrevolutionary and reactionary class elements to transform, if we don't know how to use the labour power [lit. 'two hands'] of the enemy to build socialism, then we have only carried out half of struggle against them.³⁴

Doing so, moreover, would isolate the small minority of truly irreformable diehard counterrevolutionaries, who could then be more easily suppressed. 'In this sense', Luo

³¹ Qing, *How agricultural co-operatives should implement the policies*, 17-18.

³² 'The main situation in public security work during 1956 and opinions on work during 1957', 1957.1.17, *CCPM*.

³³ Luo Ruiqing 罗瑞卿, '对敌要狠, 对内要和' [We should be vicious towards the enemy, and peaceful towards the People], 1958.7.1, *CCPM*.

³⁴ Ibid. It is not clear what Lenin quote Luo was referring to.

explained, 'the work of transforming the majority of counterrevolutionary and reactionary class elements who can [be made to] renounce their reactionary standpoint is even more important than the work of suppressing resolute counterrevolutionaries.'

The following month, the Ninth National Public Security Conference passed a resolution on the issue, which began:

There are still many landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary and bad elements in the country. Except for a minority who will be reactionary to the end, the majority can be made to transform. For this reason, it is necessary to resolutely implement the line of 'arresting few and monitoring many', to go all out on *shehui gaizao* 大搞社会改造, to force them to take the socialist road, and to mobilize their labour power in the service of socialist construction.³⁵

The recently coined term *shehui gaizao* was repeated throughout this document; what it referred to was not the transformation of society, but rather the transformation of enemies within the context of society, as opposed to in some form of custody. As the directive put it, *shehui gaizao* was the 'local, mass-based surveillance and transformation of landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary and bad elements dispersed throughout society who haven't been sentenced to *laogai* or been collected 收容 for re-education through labour.' This work would be a 'complicated, long-term struggle', and a 'central task in the coming period.'

Two rather typical phrases from the Chairman were used as inspiration for *shehui gaizao*. First, enemies were now 'completely immersed in a great ocean of the labouring masses—they have to change even if they don't want to.'³⁶ Second, 'ten good people surround one bad person 十个好人夹一个坏人....this is [what we mean by] dictatorship.'³⁷ There was also a slightly more concrete formulation, the 'three guarantees and one pledge': production teams had to guarantee that enemies were being educated, working, and not engaging in wrecking, and enemies had to pledge that they would be obedient and hard-

³⁵ 'Resolution of the Ninth National Public Security Conference on further strengthening the work of reforming landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist five-type elements', 1958.8.16, *CCPM*.

³⁶ This quote originates from Mao, '介绍一个合作社' [Introducing a co-operative], 1958.4.15, in *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao di 7 ce* (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 1998), 177, in which Mao wrote: 'I have never seen the masses as inspired, with such high morale, and as daring as at present. The exploiting classes of the past are completely immersed in a great ocean of the labouring masses—they must change even if they don't want to. As for people who won't change until they die, those who want to see God with a head made of granite, they also exist, but they don't affect the big picture.' Luo Ruiqing then quoted the sentence on 'immersion in an ocean of the labouring people' in an address a few months later ('We should be vicious towards the enemy', 1958.7.1, *CCPM*).

³⁷ This was first introduced by Luo in September 1958 as having been recently said by Mao at Beidaihe, but I haven't found the relevant text ('罗瑞卿在各省、市、自治区党委五人小组负责人会议上的讲话' [Luo Ruoping's speech at the conference of leading cadres of the five-person group of the Party Committee of each province, city, and autonomous region] 1958.9.12, *CCPM*).

working.³⁸ But this still left a lot of practical questions unanswered. Who was actually responsible for monitoring enemies? How were enemies to be incentivized to transform? How was the process of their transformation to be evaluated, and how was the information generated by this process to be recorded?

Over the years that followed, the public security system produced elaborate answers to these questions, as part of an effort to establish a comprehensive system of social control of enemies at the rural grassroots. In July 1960, the Public Security Department of South Shanxi Prefecture published a booklet on how the Security Committee 治保会 of Luo village in Linyi County had implemented the call to ‘carry out *shengai* in a big way 大搞社改’—so well, in fact, that they had obtained the title of ‘All-China Grassroots Public Order Advanced Worker Unit.’³⁹ The account of *shengai gaizao* provided in this booklet is in many ways overwrought, unrealistic, and dependent on the fact that it became a national-level model for this work, but it provides an unusually detailed look into the ideas that developed in the public security system during these years. Reports on the implementation of similar ideas and mechanisms—assigning responsibility for a combination of open and covert surveillance, regular education and admonition meetings, having to report back on one’s work and thought, public and mutual evaluation, and the accumulation of information—appeared regularly and were presented as important aspects of public security work. In what follows, I illustrate how each of these aspects—surveillance, education, self-reporting, public and mutual evaluation, and data gathering—were presented in the Luo village model, with references to related material from the Great Leap from other areas, mostly published at the central and the Jiangxi and Sichuan provincial levels. The events narrated in these models are clearly meant to serve a simple didactic purpose, and I reproduce them here in order to illustrate how the process of reform was imagined within the public security system, not as credible accounts of what was actually happening. Moreover, many of the mechanisms promoted were probably far too onerous to have been implemented on a wide scale during the Great Leap. However, the basic ideas embodied in the Luo village model can, I suggest, be seen as a blueprint that the public security system worked towards for the rest of the Mao era.

³⁸ This formulation seems to have originated in the Fujian public security system in early 1958; see Luo Ruiqing, ‘工作要切实，头脑要清醒’ [Our work must be solid, and our heads must be clear], 1958.4.9, *CCPM*.

³⁹ 晋南专员公署公安处 Public Security Department of the South Shanxi Prefectural Commissioner’s Office (ed.), ‘一面社改红旗：临猗罗村大搞社会改造经验’ [A *shengai* red banner: the experience of Luo village (Linyi County) in carrying out *shengai gaizao* in a big way], (NP, 1960.7.15), *AC*, hereafter ‘*Shengai* red banner.’

Implementing Mass Surveillance

The first section of the Luo village model concerned allocating responsibility for surveillance. Both ordinary villagers and the targets of surveillance were to propose whom they were to monitor or be monitored by. At first, villagers were worried about being responsible for monitoring the more problematic targets, while five-type elements were worried that no one would be willing to take responsibility for monitoring them. The party branch convened a meeting to deal with these issues:

One target of reform, Hu Laowu, examined himself in front of the masses, crying bitterly: 'My thought is really bad, and I don't work well, so no one is willing to take responsibility for me. I resolutely guarantee that I will transform myself.' He expressed his resolve to transform, and set out a plan for doing so. As a result, not only [the person] who initially refused to monitor him expressed his willingness to do so, but others among the masses did so too....⁴⁰

This was followed by bimonthly meetings convened by the head of the surveillance group at which the targets of reform would have to report on their progress, and monthly meetings when the surveillance group heads reported back to the security committee.

In addition to this direct, open surveillance (i.e. when all parties knew who was monitoring whom), the more problematic elements—those who were more likely to carry out 'active wrecking 现行破坏'—were also to be monitored covertly. The achievements of this method were illustrated with the following episode. One day in February 1958, when landlord element Han Lingwen was transporting manure, a watchful poor peasant noticed that Han overreported the amount of manure he had transported by one cart. He proceeded to report this to the production team leader, and to speak to Han in person and criticize his action. Han realized he had erred, and wrote a poem on a wall in the village to express his remorse:

I am landlord Han Lingwen 我是地主韩令文
Who consistently fails to follow the masses 一贯作风不随群
The masses monitor and reform me 群众监督改造我
I resolve to change and become a new person 决心改变做新人⁴¹

⁴⁰ 'Shegai red banner', 5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6.

The purported importance of mass surveillance was highlighted in far more dramatic fashion by events that took place in early 1960 in another south Shanxi county less than a 100 kilometres from this model village, where what was at stake was not a cart of manure, but dozens of lives. In the ‘Pinglu Incident’, which would become famous throughout China for decades due to a dramatic and widely published account of how soldiers from Beijing flew to the scene to provide medicine, 61 people working on a road construction project were poisoned by arsenic placed in the canteen’s pots.⁴² The culprit, Zhang Decai, was from a poor family and had been orphaned as a child, but had an impure past, having been recruited by the Japanese-collaborator ‘peace preservation corps’ to run errands as a teenager, and having served as a bodyguard for a commander in Yan Xishan’s army. Zhang’s motive for placing arsenic in the communal pots is impossible to tell with certainty, but one villager who had known him his entire life suggested, when interviewed in 2008, that he probably underestimated its poisonousness, and that he had simply wanted to make everyone sick so that work on the project would finally stop and he could get some rest.⁴³

Although it does not seem Zhang had been formally labelled as a ‘counterrevolutionary element’ prior to this incident, it was straightforward enough to exaggerate his past and label him as such. But the story became truly complete when it turned out that the person who supplied him with the arsenic, Hui Shenwa, was from a landlord family. The reason Hui had access to arsenic was that his family specialized in Chinese medicine, and the reason he had given it to Zhang was because Zhang told him he wanted to hunt foxes and rabbits for fur, so that he could make some money to buy some shoes for his daughter. Hui, who had been adopted as a child, had been hard of hearing his entire life and was considered a simple, honest person. But none of this mattered, as the narrative of a counterrevolutionary and a landlord conspiring to poison ‘class brothers’ was too perfect (the fact that many of those poisoned were working there right before the Spring Festival

⁴² The report that would become famous China-wide was published in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* with the title ‘For 61 class brothers’ on February 28th 1960, and appeared in the People’s Daily the next day (‘为了六十一个阶级兄弟’ [For 61 class brothers], 1960.2.29, *RMRB*). The emphasis was primarily on the heroism of those who delivered the medicine, but as the title indicates, this was already presented in terms of class solidarity. Then, when the ‘truth’ about those behind the poisoning emerged, the class struggle element was foregrounded (‘六十一个阶级兄弟事件真相大白；放毒凶犯张德才、回申娃被处决’ [The truth behind the 61 class brothers incident is revealed; the murderers Zhang Decai and Hui Shenwa have been executed], 1960.4.7, *RMRB*). My narrative of what actually happened is based on recent accounts which draw primarily on oral history interviews with people who were present, including the county party secretary and a victim of poisoning who stood up to denounce Zhang and Hui. That these people told a very different version of what happened compared with the official version, despite this reflecting poorly on their behaviour at the time, lends considerable credibility to their account (Shi, ‘The Story behind “For 61 Class Brothers”’; Du, ‘The 61 Class Brothers and Their Class Enemies’; Zhao and Dang, ‘Continuous Revolution and the Reconstruction of Class’).

⁴³ Du, ‘The 61 Class Brothers and Their Class Enemies’, 148.

precisely because of class and historical problems was also conveniently ignored when the incident was publicized). Zhang and Hui were both executed shortly thereafter, despite villagers trying to intervene on behalf of Hui.⁴⁴ Just a few months later, a livestock feeder in the same village mistook pesticide powder for cement, leading to the death of the livestock that he was in charge of. The feeder was a poor peasant and old Party member, but he was still accused of deliberate poisoning and executed; another livestock feeder in the village, who was from a landlord family, committed suicide shortly thereafter for fear of what might happen to him. When the incident was reported in *Renmin Gongan*, the livestock feeder responsible was described as a 'degenerate element who had been expelled from the party for defending counterrevolutionaries', and the one who committed suicide as a 'landlord element' who had been his accomplice.⁴⁵

These events were reported in *Renmin Gongan* as illustrations of the need to strengthen *shehui gaizao* work. As the editors of the journal put it, 'it has been almost two years since the Party Centre put out the directive that "ten good people should surround one bad person," but in Pinglu County, it has still not been properly implemented.' This work was to be taken very seriously, so that 'when the enemy moves, we know 敌动我知道.'⁴⁶ As discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, the figure of the unrepentant class enemy willing to resort to violence and murder increased in prominence during the first half of the 1960s. While such individuals were claimed to be a minority among five-type elements, it was impossible to know who they were, making it even more important to build up a system in which all those with enemy labels were regularly monitored, not just by cadres, but also by ordinary villagers. The broad conceptualization of this problem is well illustrated by remarks made by Xie Fuzhi (who had recently replaced Luo Ruiqing as Minister of Public Security following the latter's move to the Ministry of Defence) in early 1960:

The large number of five-type elements is the social root of active wrecking 现行破坏. Properly doing the work of transformation and control, preventing these bacteria from fermenting and growing and gradually removing them 使这些细菌不能发酵滋长, 并逐步地把他们化掉, is key to ensuring the public security of town and country, and especially to further consolidating the People's Communes and protecting the Great Leap in agricultural production. All locations should conscientiously investigate whether the Chairman's directive on 'ten good people

⁴⁴ Zhao and Dang, 'Continuous Revolution and the Reconstruction of Class', 75.

⁴⁵ '从“平陆事件”看社改工作中的问题' [Issues in *shegai* work as seen through the 'Pinglu incident'], *RMGA* 1960 no. 13: 23.

⁴⁶ '社会改造工作要抓紧' [*Shehui gaizao* work must be grasped firmly], *RMGA*, 1960 no. 13: 23.

surrounding one bad person' has been implemented, and whether 'surveillance and reform small groups' have been set up for each five-type element...⁴⁷

In addition to preventing 'active wrecking,' the system of constant surveillance would ensure that all class enemies would work hard and be obedient. In Southern Jiangxi Prefecture, the benefits of implementing mass surveillance were illustrated in two ways: first, it meant that enemies no longer dared to leave the locality without asking for permission, and second, they worked 40-50% harder than they had done previously.⁴⁸ In one commune in Weiyuan County, Sichuan, an elderly woman in her sixties was mobilized to monitor a landlord element; she enlisted her grandchildren in this task, who noticed that the landlord had left the village without asking for leave, with the result that he was caught and reprimanded.⁴⁹

Education

The second issue discussed in the Luo village model was education. The emphasis here was on convening regular occasions at which the targets of reform were to be educated to behave well and told about the achievements of socialist construction. The importance of such occasions was illustrated through the case of a counterrevolutionary and landlord named Gu Jinping, a narrative that may have been inspired by the recent shocking incident in the nearby county of Pinglu. According to this narrative, Gu had planned to poison the water tank of a villager who had been given some of his confiscated property during land reform, but was deterred when, during an admonition meeting, the director of the security committee read out a report about the arrest of a rich peasant elsewhere in the county. He remained hostile, however, and eventually decided that he'd set fire to some stacks of wheat instead. Why he would do this was not specified, but it didn't need to be, since it was considered self-evident that class enemies might want to carry out random acts of sabotage. But right at this time, another study session was convened. By this time, the director of the

⁴⁷ '谢富治在第十次全国公安会议上的报告提要' [Summary of Xie Fuzhi's report at the Tenth National Public Security Conference], 1960.2.11, *CCPM*.

⁴⁸ '赣南区对地、富、反、坏分子改造工作的几项措施' [Some measures taken by the South Jiangxi Region in the work of reforming landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, and bad elements], in *Jiangxi Sheng Gonganting* (ed.), *Shengai gongzuo jingyan zhuanji* (NP, 1960.3), AC, 4.

⁴⁹ '总结经验、发扬成绩，将社会改造工作做得更深入、更细致、更有成效' [Summarize experiences, carry forward successes, and make *shehui gaizao* work even more penetrating, meticulous, and effective], *Sichuan Gongan*, 1960 no. 1: 9.

security committee had sensed that something was awry with Gu, and so added a few lines to his speech: 'As for the few of you who are not working hard, and are considering wrecking, I know about that too—you should come back from the brink, before it's too late.' Gu was frightened and shocked—had he accidentally spoken of his plans while asleep? He concluded that if he carried out any wrecking, he would surely be caught:

He realized that he was completely surrounded on all sides, and that obediently transforming himself was the only way forward. He thought: 'after every political movement, there are always landlords and rich peasants arrested in other villages, but never in our village. If it weren't for the strict education and supervision of the security committee and its director, I would be in jail by now in the best case, and more likely would have been executed already.'⁵⁰

Moved by these thoughts, Gu unearthed and handed over some hidden silver and confessed his previous plans to poison the water and set fire to the stacks of wheat. From 1956 to 1958, the number of his work points rose from 1800 to 3000, and by 1960, to 4000.⁵¹

The emphasis here was clearly on deterrence rather than any kind of positive education; in Southern Jiangxi, by contrast, the ideal of education was taken further with the institution of 'political night schools' convened two or three times a month at the brigade level. The term 'school' here was supposed to be quite literal:

Study is carried out through lectures, newspaper reading, and debates on specific subjects... These 'political night schools' are able to regularly educate [four-type elements] about policy and current events, and to persuade them on many issues through reason 从道理上说服他们. Doing this instead of simply reprimanding them 单纯训斥 not only makes it easier for them to accept being reformed, but also enables them to understand our Party's directives and policies, thereby reducing their resistance 抵触情绪. Organizing them to study makes them feel that the Party and government care about them; if they don't reform, they will feel guilty 扪心有鬼. With this system of organized study having been institutionalized, they are also less worried, and are willing to reveal their true thoughts in the process of study and discussion.⁵²

Another method used in southern Jiangxi, which was widely promoted throughout China in 1958-59 before being discontinued, and which was less pedagogical in orientation, was to

⁵⁰ 'Shengai red banner', 8.

⁵¹ The veracity of this narrative is of course highly questionable. In fact, a subsequent part of this same booklet contains a different version of the story, where it is in 1950 that Gu plans to poison the water jar, and various other plot points also differ (ibid., 17-19). In terms of work points, 4000 per year appears to have been a normal figure for men at the height of their abilities (i.e. in their twenties to early thirties) (Li Huaiyin, *Village China*, 213-215); Gu was in his mid-40s according to the narrative, so this would have been a high figure, but not outlandishly so.

⁵² 'Some measures taken by the South Jiangxi Region,' 4.

convene problematic class enemies, and sometimes other ‘undesirable elements 不良分子’, at the level of the commune for admonition (this was generally referred to as *jixun* 集训). This practice was claimed to have been very effective at uncovering hidden crimes, weapons, wealth, and reactionary thoughts, and identifying people with unclear histories.⁵³ *Jixun* had been identified as one of the three methods of *shehui gaizao*, next to surveillance among the masses and commune organized *laojiao*, in the 9th Public Security Conference resolution of August 1958. Already in early 1959, the implementation of both *jixun* and commune organized re-education through labour came under criticism for failing to distinguish between us-enemy and intra-People contradictions, and in March 1961, Party group of the Ministry of Public Security issued regulations drastically reducing the scope of both *jixun* and re-education through labour, prohibiting both from being carried out at the county level or below.⁵⁴

Reporting Back

The third section of the Luo village model concerned the system for having enemies report on their progress. The village had established a system of reporting to the security committee at intervals of 3, 5 or 7 days, or daily in the case of the most problematic offenders. They had to report on how hard they had been working, on whether they’d been obeying orders, and on their thinking, to inform on others, and to announce if they planned to go anywhere or have any visitors. This system had apparently been in place for five years without any interruption: ‘regardless of rain or wind, the targets of reform voluntarily come to the public order committee to report, and each time, a member of the committee records what they say.’ These reports were then analyzed and investigated, and used as the basis for commendation or criticism.

⁵³ Ibid., 5; ‘解虞县部分地富分子在集训中暴露出许多反动思想和罪恶活动’ [Some landlord and rich peasant elements in Jieyu County have revealed lots of reactionary thoughts and criminal activities during *jixun*], 1958.6.23, *CCPM*. This second report, from Shanxi, appeared in *Neibu Cankao*; it also appeared in a collection of speeches by delegates from North China Region at the Ninth National Public Security Conference of August-September, where other delegates also made reports about the successes of *jixun* (‘第九次全国公安会议发言稿汇编 (华北)’ [Collection of speeches made at the Ninth National Public Security Conference (North China)] (NP, 1958.9).

⁵⁴ 吉林省公安厅二处 Second Office of the Jilin Public Security Department, ‘在集训中应注意分清两类矛盾’ [Pay attention to distinguishing the two kinds of contradiction in the course of *jixun*], *RMGA*, 1959 no. 3: 19; ‘不要滥用社办劳动教养’ [Do not misuse commune organized re-education through labour], *RMGA*, 1959 no. 3: 21); ‘中央批准公安部党组关于第十一次全国公安会议的三个文件’ [Party Centre approves the three documents on the Eleventh National Public Security Conference from the Party Group of the Ministry of Public Security], 1961.4.20, *CCPM*.

Figure 3.1. 'Landlord element Zhu Cunran reporting on his labour to the Security Committee.'⁵⁵



The advantages of this system were illustrated with examples of how the frequency of reporting was adjusted—between daily and weekly—depending on individuals' behaviour, and the great effects that such adjustments supposedly had. One rich peasant was said to have commented:

I first thought that that this system of reporting was really too strict, and was basically just a way to make life more difficult for us landlord and rich peasant elements.... But by the end of the year, I had thousands of work points. If I hadn't been controlled so closely, not only would I have not earned so many work points, I would probably also have ended up violating some law!⁵⁶

⁵⁵ 'Shegai red banner', 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

It seems likely that most people who were subjected to it found this system both pointless and demeaning, as the first comment suggests; but the correct attitude was to recognize that it provided a much-needed framework to work hard and avoid getting into trouble.

Evaluating and Comparing

The system of reporting back was followed by that of evaluation and comparison 评、比、查. Every season, there were 'three comparisons' and 'four evaluations.' 'Comparison' meant five-type elements had to compete with each other in work points, in their responsiveness to the calls of the government, and in their adherence to the law 遵守法律. 'Evaluation' meant that the security committee and the surveillance small group evaluated whether each five-type element was law-abiding, their thinking good or bad, whether they had met the goals they had set for themselves, and whether they had engaged in any wrecking. The outcome of the evaluation and comparison was then made public. This seasonal evaluation then fed into an annual recategorization, which involved, first, assessment by the masses, and second, self- and mutual assessment.⁵⁷

It was through this system of evaluation that the Party's policy of de-labelling was supposed to be implemented. Each year since 1955, between 5 and 16 people in this village had their labels removed as part of this process, with the result that over 60% of the original class enemies had been de-labelled by 1960. This then increased the pressure on those who had not been de-labelled to make efforts to be included in the subsequent batch of de-labellings. This was presented as involving a combination of hope and fear:

In 1958...rich peasant element Hu Yuanlin personally witnessed 6 rich peasants being de-labelled, leading him to strongly appreciate that hard work is the most important criterion. He resolved to change his attitude to work, and in 1959 earned over 4100 work points, more than double the previous year...

Landlord Guo Xichang, who has since been de-labelled, said: 'I used to pray to heaven all day hoping that public security director Zhao Wencheng might die, and whenever I heard a [political] movement was coming, I was filled with anger. But the moment I thought of the three comparisons and four evaluations, I became nervous, since I knew I didn't meet the criteria to be de-labelled, and wearing a landlord hat is really hard to bear 戴着地主帽子真难受.'

⁵⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

So I resolved to transform myself, and to become new person engaged in the construction of socialism.⁵⁸

Reports from 1958-60 frequently wrote of the continually improving behaviour of enemies as a result of the measures being implemented, and correspondingly, of a fairly steady stream of label removals. As the director of the Public Security Bureau of one county in southern Jiangxi put it, after reviewing figures showing that from 1958 to 1959, the proportion of those de-labelled had risen from 40.8% to 44.6%, and that a further 43.7% were candidate commune members:

Just as the Centre has said: the forces of counterrevolution are decreasing in numbers and strength... Practice shows that...through a relatively long period of political education and labour under surveillance, it is entirely possible for the majority of five-type elements to be transformed into self-reliant and decent citizens 善良公民.⁵⁹

It may thus have seemed possible that within ten or so years, only a small number of diehard counterrevolutionaries would remain labelled. However, at the Tenth National Public Security Conference which took place just a few weeks before this report was written, Xie Fuzhi gave 'limiting figures 控制数' of, on the one hand, 5 percent for label removals, but on the other, 3 percent for re-labelling.⁶⁰ The net effect would thus have been an extremely slow progression towards the reduction of labelled enemies. At this point, Xie still maintained that there should be more label removal than re-labelling 摘多于戴, but by 1964, even this stipulation had disappeared.⁶¹

Storing Information

Finally, the Linyi County model village had also achieved considerable successes in the bureaucratic realm, through the establishment of an archival system. This had been done in a fairly makeshift manner until the visit of a section chief from the provincial Public Security Bureau, who arranged for the provision of robust archival folders. The advantages of this

⁵⁸ 'Shegai red banner', 11.

⁵⁹ 贵溪县公安局局长蔡金良 Cai Jinliang, Director of the Guixi County Public Security Bureau, '大搞社改工作的几点做法与体会' [Some methods and experiences from doing *shegai* work in a big way], in *Shegai gongzuo jingyan zhuanji*, 19.

⁶⁰ 'Summary of Xie Fuzhi's report', 1960.2.11, *CCPM*.

⁶¹ 'On some questions concerning the struggle against the enemy during the rural Socialist Education Movement', *GAJS*, 1964 no. 11: 7.

were illustrated with the case of an unpopular woman with bound feet in her fifties—her class background was not specified—who did not work hard and spoke badly of others. After it became clear to her that the security committee had a file on all the things she had said, she resolved to change her ways. Not only did she begin working hard, she also began providing information on other targets of reform.⁶²

The storing of information on enemies was an important theme in the public security system from 1958 onwards. In May 1959, *Renmin Gongan* published the account of a public security cadre in Gansu who explained how he had overseen the establishment of archival files on five-type elements. In January 1958, a reactionary slogan appeared in their district, and because they had not done this work before, it took them over 10 days simply to collect writing samples and thumbprints from all the five-type elements. ‘This’, he wrote, ‘was an important lesson, showing us that it won’t do if we don’t have materials on all five-type elements’, and they proceeded to establish a file on each one, including their self-criticisms and confessions and denunciations from the masses.⁶³ In one commune in Jiangxi, a work group from the province oversaw the reorganization of scattered materials into one file for each person. The materials in each file were ‘bound in a regular and aesthetically pleasing manner 整齐美观, making them easy to consult, laying solid foundations for future struggle against the enemy—what were originally scattered, chaotic, and largely unusable ‘dead archives’ have been brought to life.’⁶⁴ It seems likely that the investment in time and resources required for this work did not occur in most places during the Great Leap years, beyond those chosen as pilot or model sites. This is also suggested by the language used when these efforts were given another major push during the Socialist Education Movement, which indicated that this work was basically just starting.⁶⁵

3.3 The Return to Class Struggle and the Fengqiao Model

As the failure of the Great Leap became ever more evident, and faced with widespread social disorder and evidence of cruel and extractive behaviour by cadres, the Party had to

⁶² A cynical interpreter might suggest that all that changed is who she was speaking ill of.

⁶³ ‘我是怎样重视和建立档案工作的 [How I have given importance to the work of establishing archival files]’ *RMGA*, 1959 no. 9: 28-29.

⁶⁴ ‘九江市郊区沙河人民公社是怎样建立五类分子档案的’ [How Shahe Commune in the suburbs of Jiujiang City established archival files on five-type elements], *Shengai gongzuo jingyan zhuanji*, 18.

⁶⁵ ‘江西省公安厅关于建立四类分子档案和卡片工作的通知’ [Notice of the Jiangxi Public Security Department on establishing archival files and cards for four-type elements], 1964.4.6, *CCPM*.

decide how to understand these phenomena vis-à-vis the us-enemy boundary. In January 1961, Mao endorsed the view that us-enemy contradiction was primarily responsible for the worst excesses; and as we have seen, less than a year earlier, the People had been told of enemies ruthlessly poisoning their class brethren. The inability of this model to explain what was actually happening led to a brief pause in the emphasis on binary conflict, but by September 1962, Mao had decisively returned it to the agenda.⁶⁶

The return to class struggle was certainly not presented as an end to the project of transforming class enemies. On the contrary: the last paragraph of the Former Ten Points of May 1963, quoting from a recent directive by Mao, stated: ‘this is an intense struggle against the capitalist and feudal forces savagely attacking us...and it is a great movement to transform the vast majority of people among these forces into new people.’⁶⁷ The Latter Ten Points of that autumn called for all four-type elements to be ‘evaluated 评审’ as part of the Socialist Education Movement, and for the ‘strengthening of the regularized work of monitoring and transforming them.’⁶⁸ In May 1964, the Ministry of Public Security called for evaluation to become ‘a regular institution 经常制度’ taking place once a year, with a series of further measures—having to report guests and ask for permission to leave, regular reporting on one’s thinking and work, and education admonition meetings at regular intervals—to be institutionalized, and for Public Security Bureaus at the county level to assign a specific person responsible for managing this work on a day-to-day basis 专门管理日常的改造工作.⁶⁹ In this way, the Socialist Education Movement was supposed to bring about the widespread implementation of the system developed in ideal form during the Great Leap years.

In January 1964, the Party Centre issued a directive dedicated entirely to the issue of reforming four-type elements, the title of which made clear that the Party’s stated objective was to ‘transform the vast majority of four-type elements into new people.’⁷⁰ However, if one reads the content of this directive and the accompanying materials, it becomes clear that its primary purpose was more that of reining in the ‘leftism’ that the Party’s own

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ ‘Former Ten Points’.

⁶⁸ ‘Latter Ten Points’, 9.

⁶⁹ ‘On some questions concerning the struggle against the enemy during the rural Socialist Education Movement’, *GAJS*, 1964 no. 11, 11-14.

⁷⁰ ‘中共中央关于依靠群众力量，加强人民民主专政，把绝大多数四类分子改造成新人的指示’ [Party Centre’s directive on relying on the power of the masses, strengthening the People’s Democratic Dictatorship, and transforming the overwhelming majority of four-type elements into new people], 1964.1.14, *CCPM*.

propaganda about class enemies had given rise to, rather than being a positive vision of rehabilitation and inclusion:

At an expanded work conference in January 1962, comrade Mao Zedong pointed out: ‘... exercising dictatorship against the reactionary classes does not involve destroying all reactionary class elements – it means reforming them through appropriate means, so that they become new people.’...

At present, however, [i.e. following the initiation of the Socialist Education Movement] many cadres, particularly at the prefectural and county levels, do not have a thorough understanding of this...Some comrades want to arrest people at every turn, and some even call for a few people to be killed in order to get the movement going. This is mistaken.⁷¹

The explanation and justification for the approach being advocated was full of contradiction – on the one hand, speaking of transforming class enemies into new people, on the other hand, giving reasons that evinced a complete lack of belief in or commitment to this objective:

Currently [as opposed to during the early PRC], the conditions for and probability of reforming four-type elements into new people through reliance on the power of the masses is much higher. In order to preserve this useful labour force 为了保留这批有用的劳动力, to preserve a negative role model for the masses 为了在群众面前保留一批反面教员, to raise the revolutionary vigilance of the masses, to help us win over the children of four-type elements, to isolate and reform those four-type elements whose performance is still bad – for these reasons, we should follow the guiding principle of ‘don’t kill any, and don’t arrest the majority (95+%),’ and rely on the force of the masses to transform the large majority of four-type elements into new people. This way of doing things is more beneficial to the People and the socialist cause than arresting or killing them.⁷²

The logic of the model for reform that this directive sought to promote, the ‘Fengqiao model 枫桥经验’, was similar. This model originated in a district in Zhejiang, and, in significantly updated form, is promoted to this day as an example of how to resolve contradictions at the grassroots instead of passing them up to higher levels.⁷³ Michael

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ 赵义 Zhao Yi, ‘枫桥经验：中国农村治理样板’ [*The Fengqiao Model: A Model for Chinese Rural Governance*] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2008); 广州市委政法委 Political and Legal Committee of the Guangzhou Municipal Party Committee, ‘新时代枫桥经验：广州实践’ [*The Fengqiao Model of the New Era: Experience from Guangzhou*] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Chubanshe, 2019); 浙江省委政法委 Political and Legal

Dutton has described it as an ‘experiment in local mass-democratic dictatorship put into effect over retrograde elements’, ‘the beginnings of a new and very different way of understanding the state’ which led to ‘most potential enemies...being dealt with at a local level prior to them causing major problems.’⁷⁴ This characterization both greatly overstates the novelty of what happened in Fengqiao, and assumes that it was a response to genuine problems that arose spontaneously at the grassroots. But what were these problems, and where did they come from? The recollections of Lü Jianguang, a leading cadre in the Zhejiang Public Security Bureau at the time, suggest that some events from previous years were discovered or reinterpreted in accordance with the Party Centre’s narrative that class enemies were relentlessly attacking socialism, leading grassroots cadres and activists to call for ritualized violence and arrests:

Between July and September 1963, the production brigades of the seven SEM experimental point communes began struggle against the enemy by relying on and mobilizing the masses. Among the 65,000 people in these seven communes, there were 911 four-type elements, and investigation found that 163 (17.9%) had engaged in comparatively severe illegal behaviour... these four-type elements recorded ‘accounts for a change of regime’, they wrote reactionary poems, or they took back houses redistributed to poor peasants at the time of land reform. More commonly, they used ‘wine, women, money, and power’ to corrupt some grassroots cadres. After these activities of a small number of four-type elements were revealed and the righteous anger of the cadres and the masses was stirred, some grassroots cadres and activists among the masses proposed that there should be ‘a round of military struggle 武斗 (meaning physical and verbal abuse [*sic* 即打骂体罚]) against four-type elements and a batch of arrests.’⁷⁵

As the original report that constituted the Fengqiao Model put it:

The many facts about the enemy’s savage attacks raised the revolutionary vigilance of the cadres and the masses, and provoked their righteous indignation. In particular, many grassroots cadres and activists called for a number of them to be arrested and taken away at once... Many production brigade and production team cadres called for all four-type elements to be struggled against, saying: ‘those who have engaged in destruction should be struggled, but those who have not are also cunning at heart 内心也刁滑, and should also be struggled.’⁷⁶

Committee of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee, ‘读懂新时代“枫桥经验” [Understanding the New-Era “Fengqiao Model”] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2020).

⁷⁴ Dutton, *Policing Chinese Politics*, 215.

⁷⁵ Lü, ‘The Whole Story of the “Fengqiao Model”’, 126.

⁷⁶ ‘诸暨县枫桥区社会主义教育运动中开展对敌斗争的经验’ [The experience of Fengqiao District (Zhuji County) in carrying out struggle against the enemy during the Socialist Education Movement], 1964.1.2, *CCPM*.

The Fengqiao model involved trying to convince cadres that class struggle did not require violence or arrests, that there should be differentiation in the treatment of four-type elements depending on their behaviour, and that ordinary villagers should see the surveillance of enemies as their own responsibility. All of these were perfectly standard ideas that appeared regularly since collectivization, but the Fengqiao model was the first time they were set out systematically in the post-1962 period.

Perhaps the most novel aspect of the model was the way it presented the opposition between physical and verbal struggle 武斗/文斗. This particular application of the *wen-wu* binary seems to have first been systematically used in the Fengqiao model, and it subsequently became very prominent during the Cultural Revolution when authorities sought to restrict Red Guard violence.⁷⁷ The Fengqiao work team elicited a debate among the cadres and masses about which form of struggle was better:

[One cadre] said: “We obtained political power through fighting, not through speaking 江山是打出来的，不是讲出来的—you can only beat enemies into submission, you cannot reason them into submission.”⁷⁸

This was not the only view, however, and not the one that the authors of the report wanted to promote:

...many people disagreed with this view...saying that in the past, during many struggle sessions ‘...before even clarifying what was at issue, beatings would begin at once. This not only failed to successfully overcome the enemy, but on the contrary, increased their resistance.’ Especially with respect to those who can be educated, beating them only makes them more reactionary.⁷⁹

In other words—and as I shall discuss in greater detail in the next section—there was a recognition that at least some of the hostility felt by class enemies was a consequence of how they were being treated, and this recognition led to occasional calls to curb violent and degrading treatment, and to an emphasis on what was called ‘struggle through speaking reason 说理斗争.’ The Fengqiao model provided examples of how speaking reason instead of employing violence could transform the consciousness of formerly recalcitrant class

⁷⁷ See ‘中国共产党中央委员会关于无产阶级文化大革命的决定’ [CCP Central Committee’s Decision on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution], 1966.8.9, *RMRB*; and the editorial ‘用文斗，不用武斗’ [Struggle with words, not with weapons], 1966.9.5, *RMRB*.

⁷⁸ ‘The experience of Fengqiao District’, 1964.1.2, *CCPM*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

enemies. The process involved a thorough evaluation of all four-type elements, done in groups depending on whether they were ‘well-behaved’ or not:

Some four-type elements had come to the evaluation meeting with pads under their knees in preparation for having to kneel. When they got to the meeting and saw that not only was there no beating or kneeling, but the well-performing were even given encouragement, they immediately came clean about their illegal acts and thinking 违法活动和思想. Some four-type elements...expressed their willingness to ‘come back from the brink, and make a fresh start in life 悬崖勒马, 重新做人.’⁸⁰

In summary:

Cadres and the masses all agreed that ‘struggle through words’ is really a good way of making the enemy submit... struggle through actions seems very ferocious on the surface, but...no one really understands what the struggle is about. Struggling through words, presenting facts, speaking reason—in this way, the enemy’s ‘sheep clothing’ is torn off, and their black heart 黑心 is revealed.⁸¹

The notion of ‘struggle through words’, and related ideas like ‘causing people to submit through reason’, came to have a prominent place in public security discourse during the SEM years.⁸² But what was this reasoning supposed to reveal, and how would these truths compel class enemies to transform themselves? What was the process of transformation from a class enemy into a member of the People really supposed to be about? These are the questions to which I now turn.

3.4 Ideals and Realities of Transformation

For an idealized version of what the transformation from a class enemy to a member of the People was supposed to look like, we can consult an autobiographical account attached to the Luo village model described in part two.⁸³ The narrator, Xiang Ziying, had been an ‘unscrupulous businessperson 奸商’ in a county town before liberation, ‘drinking and playing cards during the day and visiting brothels at night, living a dissipated, shameless

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² For example, in early 1964, an entire issue of *Gongan Jianshe* consisted of reports about carrying out this kind of struggle (GAJS, 1964 no.2).

⁸³ ‘*Shengai* red banner’, 20-22.

and corrupt life.’ During land reform, 12 *jian* of his housing, 46 *mu* of his land, a donkey, a mule, a cart, and his tools were all confiscated. ‘At the time’, he recalled, ‘I really hated the CCP and the People’s Government, and often had thoughts of killing Old Qiu, the cadre stationed in our village, and Zhao Taihai, who was the most active in struggling against me.’ He left the village to try to link up with a friend, the bodyguard of an official in the Yan Xishan government, as well as his nephew, but they had both been arrested or killed; he therefore returned home with no choice but to ‘wait for Chiang Kai-shek’s return.’

In 1950, when he heard of the outbreak of the Korean War, he ‘was so full of joy [he] couldn’t sleep,’ and seized the opportunity to take back some of his housing. However, he was denounced to the government, which ‘ferociously criticized [him].’ As all of China was liberated and the PLA defeated the Americans in battle after battle, he sunk into a depression. Campaigns to suppress and eliminate counterrevolutionaries continued incessantly 镇反、肃反运动起来了，而且一连搞了几年, leading him to feel like there was no way out other than to change his ways 改恶从善. In 1956, he joined the co-operative with the other landlords and rich peasants; although the regulations claimed that there would be no discrimination against them in pay, he didn’t believe this would really happen. At the end of the year, however, he was paid 40 yuan, and his eldest son was admitted to normal school with a government scholarship. Things only got better from there:

At the end of 1957, I received [a dividend of] 180 yuan. In 1958, after the People’s Communes were established, my daughter was also able to attend school at government expense. By this time, my eldest son had already become a teacher... It became clear to me... that I really had to change my ways, to repay my debt of gratitude to the Party and Chairman Mao, and to achieve a change of class status. At the height of the Great Leap, I joined forces with carpenter Wang to manufacture a multi-headed sprayer...for which we were commended by the Party branch, leading me to have even greater determination to completely eliminate my reactionary anti-Party, anti-People thoughts. I then went on to use scrap metal...to produce over 20 water taps for the nursery... That year, the masses agreed to the removal of my landlord element label.⁸⁴

This was the basic trajectory of the ideal of reform: an exploitative and corrupt life before the revolution; hostility about the CCP’s destruction of that life and hope for Chiang Kai-shek’s return; and a gradual realization, first, that Chiang Kai-shek wouldn’t return, and second, that life under CCP rule is better not only for the masses, but also for former exploiters themselves, who are treated fairly and able to live a dignified life as builders of socialism (in

⁸⁴ ‘*Shagai* red banner’, 20-22.

this case with a distinct Great Leap Forward local technology element). But to what extent did this narrative correspond to reality in rural China?

Class Enemies as Guilty Exploiters

There were two key elements of the standard narrative about class enemies' pre-revolutionary lives: that they were such as to require the admission of guilt and a search for redemption, and that they were basically parasitical and had no experience of physical labour. These ideas were regularly explained to class enemies at the admonition meetings that they were obliged to attend, and their successful reform was premised on their having accepted them. As the 1958 Ministry of Public Security resolution on surveillance and transformation put it, a person who has been successfully transformed:

- 1) Is consistently politically obedient/well-behaved 老实, has genuinely abandoned the reactionary standpoint, **has sincerely lowered their head and admitted guilt in front of the People**, supports the CCP, obeys state directives, has resolved to take the socialist road.
- 2) Proactively engages in labour, has basically changed the exploiting class thinking of **seeking benefit without work 不劳而获**, **has developed habits of industriousness and thrift.**⁸⁵ (emphasis mine)

These ideas served to legitimate the CCP's treatment of landlords and rich peasants, but they were also often straightforwardly false. This is most obvious in the case of the majority of rich peasants, who, by the Party's own criteria, were people who had engaged in primary agricultural labour, and were often among the most competent farmers. Internal documents sometimes implicitly acknowledged this. In December 1959, summarizing *shengai* work of the past year, the Jiangxi Public Security Bureau found that the best performing of the four-type elements were rich peasants, followed by landlords, then bad elements, and finally counterrevolutionaries. Those who performed well were people who 'didn't have much wealth in the past, didn't have any high political position, and already have the habit of engaging in labour.'⁸⁶ In October 1961, a work team of the Hebei Public Security Bureau

⁸⁵ 'Resolution of the Ninth National Public Security Conference on further strengthening the work of reforming landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist five-type elements', 1958.8.16, *CCPM*.

⁸⁶ 江西省公安厅 Jiangxi Public Security Department, '1959 年社改工作情况和体会 [*Shengai* work in 1959: the situation and our experiences], in *Shengai gongzuo jingyan*, 2.

carried out an investigation of four-type elements in a village in Ding County, and found that about 70% of them had been 'reformed comparatively well.' The report identified five kinds of people in this category: those who were young at the time of land reform; women who had recently married into landlord or rich peasant families at the time of land reform, or were in a subordinate position in the family; those whose children had become cadres or workers; 'enlightened gentry'; and finally, middle- and small-landlords who didn't have any political power before land reform and were able to work hard at farming. The report noted that all of these people's labels had been removed, and yet in the very same sentence proceeded to make the following puzzling claim:

...but these people still retain the deep force of habit of feudal landlordism 浓厚的封建地主的习惯势力, they are tied by countless links to people of their own class, and their complete transformation still requires a long process, so the fact that they have reformed comparatively well does not mean that it is permissible to not distinguish them from the working People.⁸⁷

To appreciate the extent of the internal contradiction here, consider that the people this document had literally just cited as examples included: a rich peasant who was 20 at the time of land reform, studied in a CCP school after land reform and had performed consistently well as an assistant to district cadres in collecting the grain tax and carrying out propaganda; a woman from a middle peasant family who had just married a landlord at the time of liberation; a woman who had been scorned by her landlord husband for not bearing a child and had spent her life doing housework for her husband and his concubine; a doctor whose father had run a medicine shop and had treated CCP cadres during the war, and had been elected as a People's Congress representative in 1950 (at the time of land reform in 1947, he was considered an enlightened gentry who had 'given away' his land—and this is the *father* of the person in question); and a 'landlord' who had owned 50 *mu* before land reform which he worked with hired labour, had never participated in any political activity, and had consistently worked hard since land reform.

The CCP was of course highly committed, at a theoretical level, to the notion of polluting influences from the old society that could persist for a long time. However, as the report's description makes clear, these were not people who had lived a distinct 'feudal landlord' life prior to the revolution, so what did it mean to say they 'retained the deep force of habit of

⁸⁷ '河北省公安厅批转省厅保定工作组关于农村地富反坏分子变化情况的调查报告' [Hebei Public Security Department approves and circulates the Provincial Baoding Work Group's investigation report on the changes in the situation of landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, and bad elements in the countryside], 1961.9.30, *Hebei Gong'an Tongxun* no. 41, AC, 3.

feudal landlordism'? It seems difficult to avoid a cynical interpretation of these ideas as a way to artificially maintain a contingent of potential class enemies.

Perceptions of the Nature of CCP Rule

All three outline texts for class enemy admonition meetings in my possession—from 1959, 1964, and 1971—begin with an extended discussion of the excellent economic situation in China as a whole and the locality in question, and of the enthusiastic support of the masses for the CCP and socialism. Such claims were often in conflict with people's actual experiences in rural China in the 1950s and 60s, starting with the unified purchase and sale of grain and cotton that sought to extract all surplus from rural households and channel it into urban industrial development, culminating in the cadre excesses and famine of the Great Leap years, and followed by long years of austerity and strict enforcement of the *hukou* system in the 1960s and 70s.⁸⁸ After listing all the achievements in agricultural and industrial production, the 1959 text stated that 'countless numbers of working People are singing the praises of the CCP and of our great leader Chairman Mao; they say that the CCP is like, or even better than, one's own mother 共产党像亲娘，亲娘不如共产党.'⁸⁹ The 1964 text could not avoid implicitly acknowledging the failure of the Great Leap, while at the same time insisting on its success:

The current situation in the entire country is excellent. Last year, the national economy took a comprehensive turn for the better, and the situation here, like everywhere else, is very good. The grain output of many places has already reached 1957 levels, and some places has even surpassed 1957 levels... This year's bumper harvest thoroughly confirms that correctness and greatness of the General Line, the Great Leap Forward, and the People's Communes; any doubts on this score are without foundation.⁹⁰

In 1965, an account was distributed of how a 'reactionary landlord element' in the famous Dazhai brigade gradually came to accept being reformed; this process had many aspects,

⁸⁸ A thorough review of the literature on all these topics is not possible here, but see Eyferth, 'State Socialism and the Rural Household', which provides both a general account of the implications of the political economy of Maoist China for everyday life in rural areas, and an explanation of the gendered burden of cloth production against the background of the state monopoly on cotton. See also fn. 92 below.

⁸⁹ '关于召开地、富、反、坏四类分子会议的讲话提纲' [Speech outline for a meeting of landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, and bad four-type elements], (unknown county in Yantai prefecture, Shandong), 1959.12.18, AC.

⁹⁰ '泰兴县公安局关于召开四类分子训话会的训话提纲' [Taixing County Public Security Bureau's admonition outline for convening an admonition meeting of four-type elements], 1964.1.28, AC.

one of which was his daughter's explaining to him how much better off people were in the New China:

Once when they were chatting, they began talking about whether the new society or the old society was better. [His daughter] took the opportunity to educate him, telling him: 'in the past, most of the masses didn't have enough to eat or enough clothing to keep warm, living a life not worthy of cattle or horses. Only landlords and rich peasants ate and dressed well. Is such a society good, in which people don't care whether others live or die?' Her father replied that of course it isn't. She then continued, 'today, with the policies of the CCP and Chairman Mao, everyone has food to eat, clothes to wear, and work to do, so what is it that you oppose?' He had no way to respond.⁹¹

In reality, of course, he would have had plenty of ways to respond, since it was not true that people in rural China generally had enough to eat or clothes to wear, even before and after the years of the famine.⁹² The Party's standard formula for making sense of complaints about these issues was that they originated from either enemies or more prosperous middle-peasants, and that members of these groups sometimes succeeded in inciting the less politically aware among the masses (and sometimes even cadres) to join in.⁹³ This meant that public security organs paid close attention to opinions voiced by class enemies, which the system of surveillance and information collection developed during the Great Leap was meant to facilitate. Comments allegedly made by landlord elements in Jiangxi in 1959 include:

'Today the lives of cadres and [urban] workers have improved; it's only peasants who have a bitter life. Cadres and workers have enough money to buy chickens to eat, whereas peasants don't even have enough money to buy salt and oil. Peasants have been given land, and yet they still eat porridge three times a day. Working a landlord's land in the past, one could at least have proper rice twice a day and porridge just once.'⁹⁴

⁹¹ 大寨大队的反动地主分子徐绍贺是如何逐步接受改造的 [How Xu Shaohe, a reactionary landlord element in Dazhai Brigade, gradually accepted reform], 1965.8.8, *AC*.

⁹² The threshold above which grain was considered 'surplus', and therefore subject to state extraction, was considerably below international standards for subsistence; see Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China*, 47-49; on clothing, see Eyferth, 'State Socialism and the Rural Household', who calculates that the rural ration for cotton cloth in the Mao era 'fell short of the most basic replacement needs' (16). As Oi and Eyferth show, rural people developed strategies for meeting their basic needs for food and clothing against this background, but the point is that keeping oneself and one's family fed and clothed was a constant struggle, and for reasons that were evidently connected to state procurement.

⁹³ 'Shegai' work in 1959', 1-2.

⁹⁴ '提高警惕，严防与打击敌人现行破坏'[We must raise our vigilance and strictly guard against and attack the enemy's active wrecking], *Jiangxi Sheng Shangrao Zhuanshu Gonganchu qingkuang jianbao*, no. 3, 1959.9.18.

‘The CCP and the KMT have recently begun fighting again; the CCP has been unable to win and has asked for a peace settlement. The KMT has given the CCP three conditions for a settlement: first, disband the communal mess halls; second, abolish the rationing of grain; third, don’t treat the masses like cattle and horses.’⁹⁵

‘Today we have a new feudalism which is much worse than the old one.’⁹⁶

‘You blow it and waves appear 一吹三层浪

You drink it and valleys appear 一吸九条沟

How strange indeed 古怪真古怪

To see a head in one’s bowl 碗里显人头

(this satirical verse by a landlord about having to eat watery porridge had apparently ‘become a popular song among a small number of the masses’)⁹⁷

One ‘comment’ included in the Jiangxi Provincial Public Security Department’s report on class enemies inciting the masses was the following:

Landlord element Dong Jinshan, not satisfied with having to eat watery porridge, used his chopsticks to tap on his bowl, and sang: ‘Socialism is good, socialism is good...’⁹⁸

In the Ding County, Hebei village investigated by the provincial PSB in 1961, the example given of the most reactionary category of four-type element was the ‘leading tyrannical landlord’ in the village before liberation; two of his brothers had fled to Taiwan and one had been killed by the CCP. He himself had fled to Beijing during liberation and but had quietly returned home in 1958. He had mostly kept to himself since then, but he had allegedly made two comments that the work team found notable. First, when he was sent to work on building a reservoir, he commented: ‘The Great Leap is the CCP driving people to death 大跃进是共产党要人命. This building of reservoirs is like Qin Shi Huang building the Great Wall, let’s wait and see how long they can keep it going.’ In 1960, when lower nutritional

⁹⁵ ‘农村闹粮现象依然严重，地富反坏分子煽动挑拨群众闹事和盲目外流’ [The rural situation of agitating for grain remains severe; landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary and bad elements are instigating the masses to cause trouble and blindly leave], *Jiangxi Sheng Gonganting qingkuang jianbao*, 1959 no. 17: 2.

⁹⁶ ‘传达省六级干部会议后农村各阶层的反映’ [The response of each stratum in the countryside after communication from the provincial six-level cadre conference], *Jiangxi Sheng Gonganting qingkuang jianbao*, 1959 no. 21: 4-5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁸ ‘The rural situation of agitating for grain remains severe’, *Jiangxi Sheng Gonganting qingkuang jianbao*, 1959 no. 17: 3.

standards were introduced to cope with the famine, he commented to other villagers: 'Have a think, who is benefitting from you all going hungry?'⁹⁹

Comments of this directly inflammatory kind were probably made primarily by people who had been involved in non- or anti-CCP political activity prior to 1949, but it is certainly not implausible that 'ordinary' landlords and rich peasants—like other rural residents—would have commented on the discrepancy between party propaganda and everyday life. But where such comments were interpreted as merely 'backwards' coming from middle or poor peasants, for landlords and rich peasants, they were evidence of a failure to renounce one's reactionary standpoint and a reason to deny admission into the community of the People; and, as we have seen, the public security system sought to ensure that any such comments were detected, recorded, and fed into how class enemies were evaluated.¹⁰⁰

The Treatment of Class Enemies

Accounts of successful class enemy transformation invariably mention that they and their children had been treated fairly by the CCP. Xiang Ziyang from Luo village at first didn't believe that the co-operative would pay him equally to non-class enemies, but in fact he didn't face any discrimination in payment, and his son studied at a normal school on a government scholarship.¹⁰¹ Among the well-transformed categories described by the Hebei PSB's work group in 1961, two were claimed to have benefitted in similar ways. Those who had been small-scale landowners worked as hard as they could to earn work-points; the income of the more successful among them was 'not only not lower than that of poor and middle peasants, but wasn't even lower than their own income in the past [before land reform].' Those whose children had become cadres or urban employees benefitted both from their children's positive ideological influence, and from the money they were sent.¹⁰²

There is reason to think that these narratives were representative of the situation of some landlord and rich peasant families in the pre-Socialist Education Movement period. The ability to earn work-points depended to a significant extent on demographic factors and

⁹⁹ 'Hebei Public Security Department approves and circulates the Provincial Baoding Work Group's investigation report', 4.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Chan, Madsen and Unger, *Chen Village*, 145: 'One of the sent-down youths observed: "Everybody felt that...if, like everyone else, a landlord grumbled that this year's crops weren't as plentiful as last year's...then this indicated the landlord might really be trying to oppose Chairman Mao."'

¹⁰¹ 'Shegai red banner', 21

¹⁰² 'Hebei Public Security Department approves and circulates the Provincial Baoding Work Group's investigation report', 2-3.

agricultural skill. Families categorized as 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' had more members than the average family, which could, depending on age and gender, be to their advantage;¹⁰³ and most rich peasant families, as well as managerial landlord families, were experienced in farming. It is also true that, during the early PRC, young people from landlord and rich peasant families were more likely than others from rural families to be able to pursue further education and gain fixed urban employment, as their existing level of education was generally higher, and there were relatively few political restrictions until the late 50s (see Chapters 4 and 5). For both of these sets of issues, however, the Socialist Education Movement marked a major turning point; and for many families, the fifties had already been a time of considerable hardship and discrimination. I shall discuss the issue of social discrimination in Chapter 4, and the question of parent-child relations (including economic support) in Chapter 5. In this section, I will address issues concerning the treatment of enemies that arose directly from policy on reform: economic discrimination, physical abuse, and differential treatment corresponding to behaviour.

This set of issues in fact appeared from the early post-land reform period, when the Party first called for the surveillance and transformation of landlords.¹⁰⁴ The policies on landlords and rich peasants during the establishment of the co-operatives emphasized differential political treatment depending on behaviour together with equal pay for equal work 同工同酬.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *JDZX*, 410.

¹⁰⁴ '认真贯彻"中南区管制、改造地主暂行规定' [Earnestly implement the 'Central-South Region's temporary regulations on the *guanzhi* and reform of landlords'], 1952.8.18, *Changjiang Ribao*, CCPM.

¹⁰⁵ 'Draft Programme', 4.5.

Figure 3.2. 'Equal pay for equal work'¹⁰⁶



In its 1958 resolution on transforming enemies, the Ministry of Public Security restated the principle of equal pay for equal work, called for differentiated treatment, and pronounced that ‘tying people up, beating and cursing them, and all other corporal punishment is strictly forbidden.’¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, the Fengqiao Model was all about trying to convince cadres that four-type elements should not all be treated the same, and that the ‘struggle’ against them should not involve physical and verbal abuse; in other words, the need for the model was premised on the fact that the policies on differentiation and abusive treatment were being widely violated. As a report from a commune in Hunan on ‘struggle through speaking reason’ put it:

Beating people at struggle meetings has a great force of habit 在斗争会上打人，是一种很大的习惯势力. As soon as the [socialist education] movement started, some grassroots cadres and a

¹⁰⁶ *Popular talks on the Draft Programme*, 14.

¹⁰⁷ 'Resolution of the Ninth National Public Security Conference on further strengthening the work of reforming landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist five-type elements', 1958.8.16, *CCPM*.

small number among the masses said: ‘without beating or cursing, the enemy won’t be afraid 不打不骂，敌人不怕.’¹⁰⁸

None of this is surprising if we recall that land reform had already involved the widespread violation of policies against beating, and that the cadres in charge of ‘surveillance and transformation’ at the village level were often those who had distinguished themselves during land reform by their willingness to participate in violence against the very people they were now in charge of reforming.

As for economic discrimination, while Party policy initially rejected such practices, a major concession was made during the Socialist Education Movement. The Latter Ten Points of October 1963 expressed concern that in recent years, the economic situation of some landlord and rich peasant families had improved more rapidly than that of poor and middle peasants. Just two years prior, the work group of the Hebei PSB had written approvingly about a former landlord who had worked even harder to earn work points after the publication of the 60 Articles (which made a larger proportion of income work-point rather than *per capita* dependent), who tended his private plot well, and raised a chicken and a goat, with the result that his living standard was above average. By 1963, this kind of phenomenon came to be seen as a worrying trend, which led to the Party Centre to call for additional ‘voluntary labour’ for landlord and rich peasant families.¹⁰⁹ This seems to have involved, on the one hand, physically lighter but symbolically subservient work like collecting chairs to prepare the scene for meetings and sweeping the floors in public areas, and on the other hand, harder physical work in miscellaneous construction projects.¹¹⁰ As class enemies became older and infirm, this work was often formally or informally taken over by their children. One memoirist recalls that the physically harder ‘voluntary’ work was eventually abolished, and instead class enemy families had about ten percent of their work points deducted each year.¹¹¹

In 1965, four landlord brothers from a village in coastal Fujian used a fishing boat to escape with their entire families to the tiny GMD-controlled island of Wuqiu 乌坵.¹¹² After reviewing the sequence of events leading to the escape and criticizing local cadres for failing

¹⁰⁸ ‘湖南省委报送一个公社宣读中央两个十条后对敌开展说理斗争情况的报告’ [Hunan Provincial Committee submits a report on struggle against the enemy through speaking reason in one commune following the reading of the Centre’s two ten points], *GA/S*, 1964 no. 2: 5.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Latter Ten Points’, point 9.

¹¹⁰ Zhao, *Early Morning*, 26, 241.

¹¹¹ Zhao, *Early Morning*, 241; see also Teng, *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa*, 146.

¹¹² ‘中共福建省委关于莆田县冯山大队四户地主下海投敌事件的通报’ [Fujian Provincial Committee’s circular on four landlord households going out to sea and defecting to the enemy in Fengshan Brigade, Putian County], 1965.5.22, ‘A’ County Archives.

to spot the signs of its being planned, the County Party Committee's report mentioned both abuse and economic discrimination as factors:

There have been numerous problems in the implementation of the Party's policies, with the result that the objectives of education and reform have not been attained. During political movements, methods have been simple and crude, involving stringing up and beating. For example, in 1963, because [the landlords who escaped] sought to seize back an oil press 油场 confiscated during land reform, the brigade carried out eight consecutive nights of 'protracted battle 疲劳战术' against them, and [one of them] was tied up and beaten by members of the People's Militia for an entire night. In terms of work distribution, they were assigned too much voluntary labour and their income was low [because of unfair work point calculations].¹¹³

In its commentary, the Provincial Committee added that this reflected a province-wide tendency that had emerged towards discriminating against four-type elements in work point calculations and grain distribution, and in some places even imposing retroactively the Centre's new 'voluntary labour' requirement, and called for these 'methods which don't take seriously policy or show any concern for tactics 不讲政策不讲策略的做法' to be corrected.¹¹⁴ This was at a time when the Fengqiao model was being promoted, but the following year, the beginning of the Cultural Revolution basically eliminated the Fengqiao-type moderating influences that had existed to try to balance the excesses produced by the rhetoric of class struggle; the Fengqiao model itself was denounced as a 'protective umbrella for class enemies.'¹¹⁵ A middle-school student from poor peasant family in Xinhua County, Hunan, who in 1968 wrote a letter addressed to Chairman Mao about his views on the economic and political situation of the country, described the treatment of landlords and rich peasants as follows:

The way landlord and rich peasant elements are treated disregards whether they have reformed well or not; they are seized and struggled against, punched and kicked, and paraded around with tall hats. In my view, the resistance of some landlord and rich peasant elements originates precisely from this long-term, cruel dictatorship against them. If we treat them like this, why wouldn't they hope for Jiang Jieshi's return?¹¹⁶

Following the height of the Cultural Revolution, the more regularized form of mass dictatorship, in which reporting and evaluations were more common than parading around

¹¹³ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁵ Chen, 'Remembering My Husband Chen Youtang', 162

¹¹⁶ 萧瑞怡上毛泽东书[Xiao Ruiyi's letter to Mao Zedong], 1968.5.6, *CCPM*.

with tall hats, was gradually re-established.¹¹⁷ It is for this period that most memoir material is available, offering a window onto what the programme of surveillance and transformation described in this chapter meant at the village level during the last decade of the Mao era. One memoirist was involved directly in the process of surveillance and reform: as a sent-down youth from a red background, the brigade decided to assign him to a distant courtyard and make him responsible for monitoring the landlord who lived in it.¹¹⁸ The poor peasant couple who lived there had originally been given this responsibility, but their class stand was seen to be insufficiently firm—not only did they not monitor him properly, they would occasionally provide him and his wife with vegetables. As a politically progressive young man, the author was seen as a good choice to enforce proletarian dictatorship. Upon arriving, he gave the landlord a half-hour admonition, and that evening worked out a system for surveillance and reform:

Each morning, he would bow down in front of the picture of Chairman Mao and ask for forgiveness, repeating ‘I am an ox-spirit-snake-demon, and I am guilty’ ten times, and fill up my water tank before heading out to the fields. After work, he would sweep the village square, then bow three times before Chairman Mao’s picture and reflect on his crimes. Each month, he would write a repentance statement 悔过书 for me to inspect.¹¹⁹

This system was approved by the brigade, and the author was firm in enforcing it:

¹¹⁷ Numerous provincial gazetteers write that the work of monitoring and reforming four-type elements was interrupted between 1966 and 1970-72, from which point it was resumed to some extent (e.g. *Hunan Provincial Gazetteer*, 442; *Fujian Provincial Gazetteer*, 66; *Zhejiang Province People’s Public Security Gazetteer*, 259; ‘安徽省志 公安志’ [*Anhui Provincial Gazetteer, Public Security*] (Hefei: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1993), 472); many don’t make any distinctions within the period from 1966 to 1978, and some refer to ‘leftist’ phenomena such as beating and treating four/five-type elements’ children as ‘elements’ (*Jiangxi Provincial Gazetteer*, 50; ‘河北省志 第71卷 公安志’ [*Hebei Provincial Gazetteer, vol. 71, Public Security*] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1993), 142). The Zhejiang gazetteer writes that ‘in 1971, after implementing the spirit of the 15th National Public Security Conference, the work of monitoring and reforming four-type elements was resumed to an extent, but under the interference of extreme ‘left’ thinking, it could not proceed normally’ (*Zhejiang Province People’s Public Security Gazetteer*, 259). The minutes of this conference mention continuing the work of ‘monitoring and reforming five-type elements and implementing Chairman Mao’s directive on “placing a bad person among numerous good people, this is dictatorship”’ (‘中共中央批转第十五次全国公安会议纪要’ [Party Centre approves and circulates minutes of the fifteenth National Public Security Conference], 1971.2.26, *CCPM*).

¹¹⁸ Jiang, ‘The Good Landlord Li Yuanbin.’ The text itself does not indicate the location or the time, except for the fact that the author left the village in March 1971. I have found recollections by an author with the same name about the Cultural Revolution period; the name is already sufficiently rare to justify concluding that it is the same person, and the author’s biography in the second article specifies that he was a *zhiquing* from February 1969 to March 1971, which removes any remaining doubt. These sources indicate that the author was a high school student in Chongqing during the Cultural Revolution, and that he was a *zhiquing* in what was then Kai County, now a district of Chongqing (Jiang, ‘The Early Death of a Schoolmate’; Jiang, ‘A Beautiful Myth’). Incidentally, Karl Gerth cites an article about trading ration coupons for a wristwatch by the same author (*Unending Capitalism*, 249).

¹¹⁹ Jiang, ‘The Good Landlord Li Yuanbin.’

One day after work, Li Yuanbin was tired and in bed, but he had not swept the village square, so I burst into his room, tore his blanket off, pulled him outside and forced him to sweep the square. On another occasion, it was raining in the morning, and after asking Chairman Mao's for forgiveness, he stood in front of my door and asked if he could fill my water tank after it stopped raining. I angrily told him to fill it at once. So he went to fetch me water in the pouring rain, with the result that he got soaked and his asthma flared up... These actions of mine were regularly praised by director Zhang of the brigade. Half a year after I arrived, I was selected as a model educated youth, and even gave a speech at the district model educated youth conference on my experience of enforcing dictatorship against a landlord element.¹²⁰

Later, after a dramatic episode in which landlord Li Yuanbin prevented the author from getting into trouble for making a big mistake in copying a Chairman Mao quote on the village wall newspaper, the author changed his attitude to Li and even became friends with him, while continuing to report to director Zhang that he was strictly enforcing dictatorship, until his departure from the village in 1971.

Another memoirist was involved in the process of reform in a very different way—he helped his great uncle, a combined 'counterrevolutionary' and 'rich peasant', write the self-examination reports 反省书 that four-type elements had to produce after monthly admonition meetings.¹²¹ This was no easy task:

You were supposed not only to thoroughly confess all the bad things 坏事 you had done, but also to expose the bad things others had done. If you didn't include anything bad you had done, you would be called disobedient 不老实 and be reprimanded. The most frequent lines were: 'Have all of you counterrevolutionaries turned into snow-white cats, is there no class struggle left?' 'If you stubbornly resist to the end and refuse to confess, then there's no way out! 只有死路一条.'¹²²

The entire arrangement was premised on the fact that these class enemies were guilty, so if they were to play their part, they had to provide evidence that they were, in fact, guilty, but without getting themselves into actual trouble:

You had to rack your brains to think of something that could be called a crime but was not serious enough to get you into actual trouble: 'crimes' like having taken some ears of wheat

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Zhang, *The Trials of Life*, 104-109. The author was a rural resident in Rugao County, Jiangsu and was born in 1944 (ibid., 1, 9). He refers to the 'methods of dictatorship' that he describes as having existed through the 1960s and 70s, and the specific episode concerning 'cutting off capitalist tails' as taking place in the 'early 70s' (ibid., 104, 107).

¹²² Ibid., 106.

that had dropped from the collective fields, or having a guest without reporting it in advance, or occasionally not taking study seriously enough. You then had to analyze these from the level of political struggle 上纲上线 or apply some big labels to yourself – sometimes frighteningly big labels, such as digging up the foundations of socialism, or wrecking collective production – and in this way you could pass the test 过关. I would help them write their reports this way one month, that way the next, mixing it up so that they were never quite the same.¹²³

This was genuinely a delicate balancing act, as the author's great uncle found out. His family, like a number of others in the village, supplemented their income by making straw mats in secret at night. When the brigade intensified its efforts to 'cut off capitalist tails', he became worried that if he didn't confess, someone else would report on him, and so he included it in his self-examination report. The brigade leaders seized on this as a case of 'four type elements starting underground factories and restoring capitalism', and organized a group of militiamen to search the households in the village. They confiscated all the thatch and mats, and the brigade organized a struggle meeting at which all the guilty class enemies, including the author's great-uncle, were hauled onto the stage to be criticized.

These regular performances continued until early 1979, when the Party announced that the three-decade long process of reforming class enemies had been basically completed. What was the evidence for this? Minister of Public Security Zhao Cangbi explained:

During the counterrevolutionary storm generated by Lin Biao and the 'Gang of Four,' the number of four-type elements who carried out destructive activities was extremely small, which constitutes ample evidence of the correctness and success of the Party's policies to transform them.¹²⁴

This line of reasoning – that class enemies would originally have sided with Lin Biao and the Gang of Four, but did not, because they had been successfully reformed – was even more explicit in a report from Fengqiao District in Zhejiang, where the policy of large-scale de-labelling had first been trialled. In 1970, a 'follower of the Gang of Four' in one commune had reportedly sought to recruit some four-type elements to attack a commune leader, but only two were willing to join him. The reason for this was that, 'although the "Gang of Four" represent the overthrown reactionary classes, not many four-type elements really stood on their side, as the vast majority of them had already been reformed.'¹²⁵ In this way, the Party

¹²³ Ibid., 106-107.

¹²⁴ '实事求是地解决好四类分子摘帽问题' [Resolve the issue of removing labels from four-type element in a realistic manner], 1979.1.30, *RMRB*.

¹²⁵ '摘掉一顶帽，调动几代人' [Remove one label, energize multiple generations], 1979.2.5, *RMRB*.

was able to both maintain that its programme of reform had been necessary, while also being able to explain why it was now complete.

3.5 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has sought to show that the CCP's project to transform those it designated as enemies took place not solely, or even primarily, in the context of segregated labour camps, but in the context of ordinary society – meaning, in most cases, villages and small towns that became part of People's Communes. Ordinary society was to become an environment in which the actions, words, and thinking of those labelled enemies could be subject to constant surveillance. Technological and other limitations prevented this from becoming a reality, but the ambition gave rise to a series of institutions and practices that shaped the daily lives of most landlord and rich peasant 'elements' and their families for two to three decades. This system was supposed to be one of gradual reform rather than permanent subjugation, and the public security system genuinely did make efforts to differentiate between those who met the ideal for transformation and those who did not. However, the ideal was based on premises about both the targets of reform and the nature of life in the People's Republic that frequently did not correspond to reality, requiring people to produce performances of guilt, repentance, and gratitude that they were unlikely to have actually felt.

As we have seen, the process of label removal, which took place on a large scale up to 1957, slowed down considerably thereafter. Label removal did take place over the subsequent years, but due to widespread re-labelling and discovery of landlords and rich peasants who had 'escaped the net', the net effect was marginal. A key set of questions, to which this thesis can only offer speculative answers, concerns those who were de-labelled and never subsequently re-labelled. Such people must have been numerous, particularly in the parts of northern and north-eastern China where over fifty percent of class enemy labels were removed during collectivization. Policy documents regularly stated that these people did not have to attend class enemy meetings, but it was also made clear that they could not be treated simply as ordinary People. What this meant in practice probably depended on local factors. It is plausible that where there was no personal hostility between the people in question and local cadres, and there were others available to be targeted during episodes of class struggle, de-labelled landlords and rich peasants could live like other villagers,

although in the knowledge that a conflict or misstep could lead to the force of the People's Democratic Dictatorship crashing down on them.

The force of this dictatorship was supposed to come not just from the exercise of state power, but from the power of the masses, who were to draw a clear line between themselves and class enemies and participate actively in monitoring them. Yet both of the memoirs just cited suggest that 'the masses' were not actually all that interested in doing this. Landlord Li Yuanbin's poor peasant neighbour felt sorry for him more than anything, and the self-examination reports had to be written for brigade cadres: in ordinary life, the memoirist writes, there wasn't actually 'any clear distinction between "those exercising dictatorship" and the "targets of dictatorship", much less any deep hatred.'¹²⁶ Among the villagers, 'the large majority never actually considered these four-type elements to be bad people 当成坏人看.' These observations raise the question that is central to the next chapter, namely: to what extent were class labels actually assimilated into the thinking of ordinary people?

¹²⁶ Zhang, *The Trials of Life*, 105.

4 'Class as Caste'? The Social Status of Landlords and Rich Peasants

Early accounts of the 'class status system' in Mao's China argued that, while the Party's ideology and policies were ambiguous, by the mid-1960s, the system had become a rigid and hereditary ordering of social status. Richard Kraus wrote of 'class as caste,' and Jonathan Unger referred to the status of class enemies as that of 'outcastes' and 'pariahs,' suggesting an analogy to the Indian caste system.¹ Recently, Lee Haiyan has invoked the concept of 'racism,' in a broad sense used by Etienne Balibar referring to all kinds of 'naturalizing practices of exclusion and depreciation,' as the most useful way of understanding class in Maoist China:

Class racism posits a radical dichotomy between the exploited and the exploiting class, each with its own genealogy, political agenda, moral values, affective regime, lifestyle, and pseudo-biological characteristics. Class becomes an identity fortified by a quasi-biological theory of "political bloodline" (*zhengzhi xueyuan*); and the idea of "class origin" is institutionalized in the *chengfen* system.²

Some Chinese dissident public intellectuals have looked to recent European history and found an analogy for the treatment of class enemies in the persecution of Jews.³ The previous chapters suggest that such conceptualizations must be qualified:⁴ the Party's disavowal of any straightforward heredity, and its periodically repeated insistence that the vast majority of enemies could be transformed into members of the People, make the logic of this system importantly different from caste-based, racist, and ethno-religious discrimination.

However, despite these fundamental differences, such analogies do also have important elements of truth to them, as this chapter seeks to show. While the 'bloodline theory', and associated early-Cultural Revolution practices of what Michael Schoenhals has aptly termed 'bio-political demonisation'⁵ were rejected by Party leaders, these ideas and practices emerged against a certain background: in a political culture in which the boundary between 'us' and 'them' – literally, 'the enemy and us 敌我' – was defined as fundamental, and in the wake of a political campaign, the Socialist Education Movement (1963-66), which aimed to

¹ Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*, chapter 6; Unger, 'The Class System in Rural China', 124, 131.

² Lee, *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*, 206, 208.

³ Hu, 'China's "Jews"'; Lin, 'China's Disappeared "Jews"'.

⁴ As they were by Kraus and Unger.

⁵ Schoenhals, 'Demonising Discourse in Mao Zedong's China,' 475.

ensure that this boundary was assimilated into the thinking of cadres and ordinary rural residents. Moreover, Party propaganda and policy on rural class enemies, first during land reform and then with greater intensity during the Socialist Education Movement, had two features that are typical of many forms of naturalizing discrimination: at the abstract level, a discourse of an underlying essence shared by the 'other', and at the practical level, the objective of excluding the 'other' from the domain of ordinary social interaction—of rendering them, quite literally, outcasts.

I begin this chapter by reviewing how these features emerged during land reform. I then show that the boundaries established during land reform had faded by the early 1960s in many parts of rural China, and explain how various forms of cultural and human capital could enable class enemies to reintegrate into rural society. I then demonstrate how essentializing propaganda and policies of social exclusion returned with greater intensity during the Socialist Education Movement. Where the first round of essentialization and social exclusion had been a strategic choice to enable the Party to carry out its land reform programme, which involved destroying existing structures of power in rural China and replacing them with one loyal to the Party, I suggest that the second round is best understood as what Billeter describes as 'concealment': the Party taught the masses about the pre-revolutionary evils of class enemies, and generated panic about their evil designs in the present, as a means of diverting attention from the fact that it had just led the rural population into a terrible famine.⁶

In the conclusion, I consider how successful these efforts were in influencing public perception of class enemies during the second half of the Mao era. I suggest that, while they certainly played a role in enabling and sustaining considerable violence and discrimination, it is doubtful whether these boundaries were assimilated into most rural residents' perceptions of social reality. This was connected to another major disanalogy with broadly 'ethnic' discrimination: the general absence of visual, cultural, or material distinctions that would have sustained perceptions of most class enemies as fundamentally 'other.' Indeed, to the extent that there were traits that could lead to class enemies being perceived as different to the rural average, these were often forms of social or cultural capital that were sources of esteem rather than disdain. Thus, when the state ended its intense efforts to maintain these boundaries, their social salience quickly disappeared.

⁶ Of Mao's reaffirmation of the primacy of class struggle in 1962, Billeter writes: "[Mao] was concealing the real problem, that is the discontent of the intellectuals and the disaffection of the peasantry, badly hit by the consequences of the Great Leap Forward, toward the new regime" ("The System of 'Class Status'", 149-150). I leave open the question of the extent to which Mao and other Party leaders actually believed these narratives.

4.1 The Construction of Boundaries and Their Partial Fading

As discussed in Chapter 1, labels like ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’ often did not correspond to socially salient boundaries prior to the revolution. The reasons some people had more land than others were complex and varied, but it was not because those with more land belonged to a separate status group. In-group solidarity was based on identification with groups within which there was economic inequality: groups such as lineages or sub-lineages, villages or parts of villages.⁷ Separating out those labelled landlords from these groups and convincing people that they were all ‘enemies’ was therefore a complicated process. The difficulty was not so much in identifying *some* landowners who could become the focus of mass hatred, but in explaining why this hatred should apply to all those labelled landlords, for this was not an idea that came naturally to the masses, or even to cadres. As the Land Reform Committee of Mei County in Guangdong explained, in connection with the transition from attacking ‘evil tyrants’ to general land reform:

The thinking of many of our comrades is not clear: they know only that the evil tyrants, the landlords in power, are detestable, but they don’t hate ordinary landlords. We must clarify at the level of our understanding that landlords not working and having good food and housing, exploiting the working peasants, with the result that the peasants don’t have enough food and clothing despite labouring all year, is in itself a crime...

Numerous cadres only hate the evil tyrants, and don’t think [ordinary] landlords are guilty, saying things like: ‘landlords haven’t committed any great crimes, and the masses don’t speak any bitterness about them, so what are we supposed to do?’ Others say: ‘Landlords don’t have any blood debts, they’ve only engaged in economic exploitation, which isn’t a great crime.’⁸

⁷ Important articles on pre-revolutionary social differentiation and its transformation during the revolution include Lu, ‘The Models of Social Differentiation’, and Man and Ge, ‘Research on the Transformation of Social Relationships.’

⁸ ‘梅县目前土改在贯彻深入发动深入斗争必须解决的几个问题’ [Some issues that need to be resolved in order to implement thorough mobilization and thorough struggle during land reform in Mei County], 1952.6.22, in *Mei Xian cong qingfei fanba dao tudi gaige*, 214. For similar statements from Civil War-era land reform, see Man, ‘“Back-to-Back” Politics’, 78, 86; ‘地主就是罪恶穷人就是道理!’ [To be a landlord is to be criminal, to be poor is to be right!], 1947.7.20, *RMRB*; and from Henan after land reform reinvestigation in 1952, 赵定远 Zhao Dingyuan, ‘商城县油坊店乡怎样开展查田查阶级斗争打倒了地主阶级’ [How was the struggle to investigate land and investigate class carried out and the landlord class overthrown in Youfangdian District, Shangcheng County?], 1952.4.8, *CCPM*. In this report, the author explains how the masses allegedly went from pitying the dependents of a landlord who committed suicide to realizing that this was a ‘plot’ he had carried out to protect his family, leading them to hate the landlord class even more; through the process of struggle, they ‘began to understand that so long as someone is a landlord they are guilty 只要是地主就有罪恶, and have overcome muddled thinking that people who “have no blood debts”, “never acted as *bao* head,” or “never oppressed the masses” are “good landlords”.’

The Party did have an internal policy of differential treatment among members of the landlord class, with those against whom there was no popular anger to be treated more leniently, but as explored in Chapter 1, this was widely violated, and propaganda stressed unity rather than distinction: ‘all crows under heaven are black,’ as one phrase had it.⁹ Exhibitions were organized throughout China and films screened in which the evils of the ‘landlord class’ were vividly portrayed.¹⁰ The most prominent of these, *The White Haired Girl*, which originated as a drama in the CCP’s base areas and in which the main villain was not just a cruel exploiter but also a lecherous rapist, was the most widely screened film in the early PRC, having been viewed 500 million times by 1956.¹¹

Given the heterogeneousness of the people labelled as landlords and the many relations they were embedded in with members of the People, it does not seem plausible that they universally came to be identified with the evil landlords presented in party propaganda. However, the Party certainly did succeed in creating new categories of great social salience—not necessarily because people believed Party propaganda about the ‘landlord class,’ but because they had seen what being labelled a landlord meant in terms of how one would be treated in the New China. Numerous memoirists recall how relatives and friends shunned their families after they were classified as landlords, not so much out of a newfound appreciation that renting out land was morally reprehensible, but out of fear of being associated with ‘class enemies.’¹² Social exclusion, moreover, was very much an aim of official policy, for it was seen as necessary to destroying the authority of pre-revolutionary rural elites, or in official parlance, ‘shattering the prestige of the landlord class.’ One leader in Guangdong quoted a landlord as saying ‘I am now like a leper, everyone avoids me,’ and

⁹ This was described as what ‘the peasants’ said about landlords by Qinghua University Vice-Dean Li Guangtian in his essay titled ‘Why is it not possible to “peacefully divide the land”’, which appeared in *Xin Guancha* and was reprinted in Tianjin Shi Tudigaige Canguantuan (ed.), *Women canguanle tudigaige yihou* (Beijing: Wushi Niandai Chubanshe, 1951). I have no evidence that this text was particularly widely read, but I have seen it in the Meizhou Municipal Archives under the heading ‘Land Reform Propaganda Material’ (Meizhou Municipal Archives, 003-A12.1-24, 7-9). Unfortunately my stay at these archives was brief; after I asked for a photocopy of these pages and the archivist saw the content, he became worried and was reminded of a regulation that foreigners couldn’t visit the archives without a letter of introduction from the municipal government. The phrase ‘all crows under heaven are black’ in reference to landlords was also used by Zhang Naiqi in an article published in the People’s Daily (‘从西南土地改革谈到民族工商业’ [From land reform in the southwest to patriotic industry and commerce], 1951.10.27, *RMRB*), and one memoirist recalls it as a propaganda slogan from the time, next to ‘landlords are all Huang Shiren’ [the evil landlord character in the *White-Haired Girl*, see below] (Qiu, *Eighty Years*, 31). Notably, this phrase later also appeared in Lei Feng’s diary: ‘Some people say landlords in the south exploited peasants a bit more lightly [than those in the north]....this is all incorrect. Landlord Zhang San is a King of Hell 活阎王, landlord Li Si is a smiling tiger—this absolutely does not mean that landlord Zhang San is not good, and landlord Li Si is better. All crows under heaven are black’ (雷锋日记 1959-1962 [Lei Feng’s Diary, 1959-1962] (Beijing: Jiefangjun Wenyi Chubanshe, 1963), 24.

¹⁰ See Chapter 1.

¹¹ Meng, *A History of the Art of Cinema in New China*, 31-35.

¹² Li, *The Fate of a Landlord Large Family*, 171; Nan, *The Lives of Three Generations*, 137.

cited an example of a landlord being unable to find anyone to carry the coffin of a deceased relative, both as successful examples of the landlord class having been isolated.¹³ A professor at Yanjing University wrote in the *People's Daily* of how, as the 'peasants had stood up,' the word 'landlord' had become a term of abuse.¹⁴ A similar, if less intense process then took place with respect to rich peasants, as the Party sought to convince people that allowing them into co-operatives was a grave danger.¹⁵

As explored in the previous chapters, collectivization involved the de-labelling of a substantial minority of landlords and rich peasants, and this period saw numerous pronouncements from Party leaders suggesting that class labels would fade from relevance in the wake of China's socialist transformation. Although the anti-rightist campaign involved a marked retreat from the optimism of 1956 and saw the introduction of the practice of re-labelling, this measure was limited to a small minority of those who had been de-labelled. According to official policy, those who had been de-labelled were to be treated like other villagers, with the exception that they were not supposed to hold any important positions for a certain unspecified period of time.¹⁶ There is evidence that in the second half of the 1950s, it was possible for some landlords and rich peasants—whether officially 'de-labelled' or not—to find a non-marginalized position in the new, collective rural order. There were, broadly, four factors that could make this possible, the first three connected to their social and human capital, and the fourth, paradoxically, to their marginalized position. The first was their position in traditional social networks, especially networks of kinship, that many rural residents considered as or more important than the labels of the Party-state. The second was their possession of skills, such as literacy or agricultural competence, from which the collectives could benefit. The third was the greater likelihood (compared to the rural average) that their children had received an education and could obtain urban employment, and were able to provide financial support. The fourth was cadres' perception that, on account of their politically precarious position, they were more obedient and less likely to shirk or steal than other commune members. All of these factors could lead cadres and ordinary villagers to treat landlords and rich peasants well, and could even lead cadres to contravene regulations and assign them to important and 'sensitive' positions such as that of accountant, cart-driver 车把式, or livestock feeder 饲养员. As Wang Hongsheng writes in

¹³ '方方关于揭阳、兴宁、龙川三县土改检查报告' [Fang Fang's inspection report on land reform in Jieyang, Xingning, and Longchuan counties], 1951.3.10, *CCPM*.

¹⁴ 林庚 Lin Geng, '伟大的土地改革' [The Great Land Reform Movement], 1951.3.24, *RMRB*.

¹⁵ See Chapter 2.

¹⁶ See Chapter 3.

his ethnographic history of his home village in Fujian, illustrating the points about kinship, skills, and precarity:

Some [rich peasants]... were respected as the agricultural authority of the team; their opinions on the arrangement of agriculture received much attention...

The production team based on living location consisted mainly of neighbours or clan members who called each other "cousin" or "uncle". Sometimes they even arranged lighter work for old [landlords and rich peasants]. In 1962, four landlords were assigned as accountants of the teams [out of roughly 12 teams in the village]...

In the eyes of the common peasants, these four landlords were better accountants than others, partly because they had been well educated and trained, and partly because they did not dare to be corrupt. They were also chosen because they worked very well in the field.¹⁷

One memoirist recalls that his "landlord" father was designated as the custodian of the co-operative's funds 保管员 when it was set up; the director, a distant relative, felt 'at ease' with the money looked after by the author's father.¹⁸

These are uncommon non-official accounts about the period between collectivization and the Socialist Education Movement describing phenomena that, in official documents, would be referred to as 'blurred class boundaries 阶级界限模糊,' or a 'failure to distinguish between us and the enemy 敌我不分.' There is a straightforward explanation for why memoirs and oral histories would not mention this kind of phenomenon even if it did occur, namely that memories of this interlude were likely to be overwhelmed by subsequent events. Indeed, the section in which the memoirist just cited describes his father's being assigned the custodian position in 1957 is titled 'at the lowest rungs of society 社会最底层,' and much of it concerns his father's suffering during the Great Leap Forward as a result of famine and his victimization by higher-level cadres.

Official sources mention the issue of class boundaries occasionally during the Great Leap, particularly in connection with clearing out class enemies from 'key positions 要害部门' such as livestock feeding and collective canteens—particularly in the wake of the Pinglu Incident described in the last chapter—but it was in the post-1962 period that this question became central. These sources must be treated with a degree of caution, since they were produced in the context of a larger narrative about the danger of forgetting class struggle; but the kinds of phenomena they describe are not implausible. A report from a county in southern Fujian, reprinted in *Neibu Cankao* in April 1963, wrote of a 'severe failure to

¹⁷ Wang, 'From Revolutionary Vanguard to Pioneer Entrepreneurs', 101.

¹⁸ Li, *The Fate of a Landlord Large Family*, 175-76.

distinguish between us and the enemy' in one brigade, where five type elements were 'virtually treated like family 几乎一家人了.' Landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries were allowed to participate in the political life of the village, they were given commendations for exceptional work like anyone else, they were allowed to act as work points recorders, and they could travel without having to ask for permission. One landlord element was invited to tell stories by 13 of the brigade's 15 production teams. Four poor- and lower-middle peasants intermarried with landlord and rich peasant families, including the brother of the brigade's Youth League secretary. Party members and poor peasants were willing to lend grain and cash to landlords and rich peasants, and examples of poor and lower-middle peasants calling landlords and rich peasants 'brother or uncle 称兄道弟、呼伯喊叔' were 'very numerous.'¹⁹

A general lack of interest in class categories among grassroots cadres was described by the Henan Provincial Party Committee in its report from the same month, writing that 'the concept of class struggle has gradually faded from people's minds' since land reform.²⁰ Some cadres didn't understand what sense it made to speak of classes when 'everyone puts food on the table by earning work points,' while others did distinguish between classes, but precisely in the opposite way to that intended by the Party, saying things like: 'landlords and rich peasants are obedient and good to lead, middle peasants are mischievous and hard to deal with, poor peasants are muddle-headed and no good.'²¹ The Party Committee of Mei County, Guangdong, complained that the leaders of some brigades and teams 'regularly rely on [four-type elements] to do things 办事, asking them to write things up or to perform calculations, and discuss communal affairs with them.'²² In Neixiang County, Henan, some cadres thought that 'among landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, and poor peasants, there are good and bad people,' and thought that if there was in any struggle, it was between good and bad people, not between classes. They also saw no problem with landlords and rich peasants inviting them for a meal or a drink, or giving them a gift or two: this was just 'ordinary behaviour 人之常情,' and meant that these people respected them.²³

¹⁹ '云霄县世坂大队敌我不分的情况严重' [A severe failure to distinguish between us and the enemy in Shibao brigade, Yunxiao county], 1963.4.9, *CCPM*.

²⁰ '河南省委关于当前农村社会主义教育运动情况的报告' [Report of the Henan Provincial Committee on the current situation of the rural Socialist Education Movement] 1963.4.15, attached to 'Former Ten Points'.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² '中共梅县委员会扩大干部(党员)会议关于共产党员、革命干部必须站稳阶级立场的决议' [Resolution of the expanded cadre (Party member) meeting of the Mei County CCP Committee on the need for Party members and revolutionary cadres to maintain a firm class stand], Mei County Archives, 3-A12.1-144, 26-29.

²³ '中共内乡县委关于县三级干部会议情况的报告' [CCP Neixiang County Committee's report on the county three-level cadre conference], 1963.12.9, *NCA* 2-31-6, 169. A note on pagination for *NCA*: there are many different

In the same county, an investigation into the economic, political, and cultural changes since land reform in one production brigade found that landlords and rich peasants had made a significant comeback. The income of both landlords and rich peasants was nearly 15% below average in 1952, but had risen to the average level by 1957, and by 1962, landlord families had the highest average income in three of the five teams, and rich peasant families had the highest in the remaining two.²⁴ The reason for this was simple: a considerably higher proportion of their family members (usually children) had urban jobs, from whom they received remittances. In 1952, such income for landlord and rich peasant families was just 3.3 yuan per person on average, but had risen to 9.3 yuan by 1957 and to 17 yuan by 1962, representing over 20% of their total income. The corresponding figures for poor peasant families in 1962 were just 4.8 yuan and 5.5%. Landlord and rich peasant families' upward mobility was just as visible in the socio-political as in the economic realm:

For a period of time following land reform, landlords and rich peasants had been punished into submission 整得灰溜溜的. Their social standing was very low and they were politically disgraced. The masses were reluctant to come anywhere near them, and when they were in public, they lowered their heads and arms. Later, [however], and especially after collectivization, landlords and rich peasants all became candidate commune members, eating in the same canteens, working the same land, and receiving the same pay as the poor and middle peasants. Fraternal relations between cadres and the masses on the one hand, and landlords and rich peasants on the other, became common, and they began calling each other 'elder brother so-and-so' and 'uncle so-and-so.' The class perspective [of cadres and the masses] became blurred, their ideological armoury was set aside, and so the class ranks naturally lost their clarity. In addition, poor and middle peasants and even cadres have married the sons and daughters of landlords and rich peasants (statistics for five brigades show that [members of] 11 poor and middle peasant households, or 7.5%, married [members of] landlord or rich peasant [households]), becoming 'one family'...

... many of their children work elsewhere, and some of them have important posts. In these five production teams, of the 16 landlord and rich peasant households, seven have children who [have urban jobs], and these 'elderly gentlemen 老太爷' are regarded more highly [as a

page numbers on each document; it is hard to tell which is the most current one, and some of them are not visible. I have opted to always follow the handwritten red numbers when those are present.

²⁴ '关于前湾大队各阶层政治、经济、文化情况的调查报告' [Investigation report on the political, economic, and cultural situation of each stratum in Qianwan Brigade], 1963.9.13, NCA 2-31-18, 136-50.

result], with some of them given very respected terms of address by the masses, and some landlords and rich peasants have even become 'community elders' [lit. 群众中的“事中人”].²⁵

The report further noted that financial support from their children enabled some landlords and rich peasants to avoid taking agricultural labour seriously, and gave the following vivid example:

Landlord element Jia Heshun was particularly disgraced after land reform [lit. 'particularly resembled a stray dog 尤似丧家犬'], but now three of his children have urban jobs, so he roams the village all day pretending to collect manure while singing folk opera 梆子腔. Last year, he only collected an average of 23 *jin* of manure per day. What's more, he goes around boasting that so long as his children can earn money, he doesn't fear anything.²⁶

Another report from the same county focused primarily on the issue of lineage relations. It described one village where a landlord element was in charge of the warehouse keys and attended brigade committee meetings, and was referred to as 'chief of staff 参谋长' by villagers who shared his surname.²⁷ Another area was described as a 'great feudal fortress of the Liu clan,' where, following the death of the wife of a counterrevolutionary—and presumably a clan elder—the production team leader secretly paid a visit to express his condolences and lent team funds for the funeral, and two landlords secretly arranged for 80% of the Liu clan members in the area to visit and pay their respects.²⁸

What can we conclude from the foregoing about the extent to which class boundaries became 'blurred' between land reform and the early 1960s? I have suggested that its infrequent appearance in memoirs and oral histories does not mean that this process was not occurring in many places, and the sources just reviewed provide some positive evidence, and help to illuminate the causal factors that could have contributed to this happening. It seems quite plausible that, if not for the developments discussed in the rest of this chapter, the social salience of class label distinctions would have generally faded in much of rural China by the mid- or late- 1960s.

²⁵ Ibid., 146.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ '当前部分干部敌我不分的调查报告' [Investigation report on the current failure to distinguish between us and the enemy among some cadres], 1963.8.8, *NCA* W15-2-90, 62.

²⁸ Ibid.

The Return to Class Struggle and Class Education

In the second half of 1962, Chinese political life was reoriented by Mao's declaration that class struggle continued under socialism, and by the spring of 1963, the message coming from the Party Centre was clear: there was intense class struggle in rural China, and its primary manifestations involved landlords and rich peasants.²⁹ In this light, the reintegration of landlords and rich peasants into rural society was a major threat, and a propaganda drive was seen as necessary to raise awareness among cadres and the masses about these dangers. At the same time, a particular concern emerged with educating the generations that were coming of age—people who were born around 1949 and had no experience of the 'old society.' As Song Renqiong, the first secretary of the Northeast Bureau put it in a report to the Party Centre in May 1963, 'most young people have not directly experienced or seen the exploitation and oppression of the peasantry by landlords and rich peasants; even the children of poor peasants and hired hands lack perceptual knowledge 感性知识 of class and class struggle...'.³⁰ Both young and old therefore needed to be given 'class education.' A variety of media, such as films and profusely illustrated booklets, and events, such as class education exhibitions and 'recall the bitter and ponder the sweet 忆苦思甜会' meetings, were developed to facilitate acquisition of 'perceptual knowledge' of class and class struggle.³¹

Figure 4.1. Covers of children's books on the evils of the landlord class published during the Socialist Education Movement³²

²⁹ See Chapter 2.

³⁰ '宋任穷同志关于农村社会主义教育的两个问题的报告' [Comrade Song Renqiong's report on two issues concerning the rural SEM], 1963.4.10, attached to 'Former Ten Points.'

³¹ On cinema in rural China during the Mao era, including the key role of mobile projection teams, see Johnson, 'Reconsidering Post-Revolutionary Cultural Change'; Li, 'Cinematic Guerrillas', and Zhou, 'The versatile film projectionist'. On class education exhibitions (though with more of an urban focus, with Shanghai as the case study), see Ho, *Curating Revolution*, 207-57. On 'recalling the bitter and pondering the sweet', see Wu, 'Recalling Bitterness'.

³² '可恨的地主' [*Despicable landlords*] (Shanghai: Shaonian Ertong Chubanshe, 1964); '穷凶极恶的地主阶级' [*The boundlessly vicious landlord class*] (Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 1965); '万恶的地主阶级' [*The extremely evil landlord class*] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shaonian Ertong Chubanshe); '地主发家的秘密' [*The secret of how a landlord becomes rich*] (Beijing: Shaonian Ertong Chubanshe, 1965).



As the next two sections will show through examples from films, written media, and internal reports, this education involved essentializing class enemies, and seeking to exclude them from the domain of ordinary social relations. These two tendencies corresponded roughly to two ways in which class enemies were seen to pose a threat. This first was the

threat of direct sabotage or even physical violence, the potential for which was claimed to be widely concealed beneath a façade of obedience and docility. The second was the threat of ‘peaceful transformation 和平演变’: the idea that class enemies were plotting to usurp power and undermine socialism by corrupting cadres and leading them away from socialism.

4.2 Class Education and Essentialism

The common saying puts it well: “No matter where a dog goes, it will eat shit; no matter where a wolf goes, it will eat people.” The class nature of the exploiting classes won’t change. Although the landlord and rich peasant classes have been overthrown, they have not been finally eliminated – they are not resigned to their defeat, and will struggle to the very end.³³

Although much land reform propaganda involved trying to convince people that all landlords, even those that seemed good according to ordinary moral standards, were guilty, there was not yet a full-fledged discourse distinguishing between superficial appearance and underlying nature. Such a discourse emerged during the Socialist Education Movement, and was almost a necessary consequence of the claim that landlords and rich peasants remained a major threat. This was because, despite the purported intensity of the class struggle waiting to be uncovered throughout rural China, those labelled landlords and rich peasants were, on account of their precarious position, generally among the most obedient rural residents. Against this background, the only way to show that these people constituted a great threat was to begin talking about the sinister nature underlying their harmless appearance. The quotation above was the beginning of a reply to the following question from a reader of *China Youth*:

I grew up in a city and recently moved to the countryside. Since moving to the countryside, what I have observed is that landlords and rich peasants are usually all quite well-behaved and obedient. They work when they are supposed to, they do what they are told, and they are very polite towards others. Given today’s excellent domestic and international situation, as well as commune members’ high level of [class] consciousness, wouldn’t it be extremely foolish of

³³ 敢峰 Gan Feng et al, ‘谈谈阶级立场和阶级观点’ [*Discussing Class and Class Viewpoint*], (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe, 1965), 44.

landlords and rich peasants to carry on fantasizing about a change of regime or to plot any kind of sabotage? Even if they don't want to give up, surely they must!³⁴

Following the passage quoted above, the authors continued by invoking the case of Liu Wenxue 刘文学, the 14-year-old Young Pioneer killed in 1959 by a landlord whom he caught stealing from the collective's chili peppers and had intended to denounce, and whose story had become known throughout China through plays and books about his life.³⁵ The reply concluded with the following discussion of the distinction between appearance and essence:

When analysing issues we should not stop at the surface level, much less be misled by false appearances, but should look through the surface to the essence 应该通过表现看本质. That some landlords and rich peasants pretend to be 'obedient and well-behaved' is only because military power is in the hands of the People and they don't dare to brazenly wreak havoc. In their bones, they are full of hatred towards the new society. The superficial appearance of class enemies as 'friendly' and 'well-behaved' should be analysed from a class viewpoint, so as to expose the vicious plots beneath their smiles. Tigers sometimes smile and wolves sometimes dress up in sheep's clothing, but in the end they still eat people.³⁶

These ideas were perhaps given fullest expression in the 1965 film *By the Jian'gan River*, based on a Beijing opera play from two years earlier. The nature of the villain is made clear in the song with which the film opens:

...

Viewers, watch this new play, *By the Jian'gan River*

In which an instance of life-or-death 你死我活的 class struggle

Reveals the beast 豺狼 lurking beneath the surface of a reactionary landlord.³⁷

The story takes place during the summer harvest of 1962, and revolves around three characters: the apparently obedient former landlord and cart-driver Tong Shantian, the young and naïve production team leader Tong Yuzhu, and the wise old poor peasant Qing Kui. Early in the film, it emerges that Tong Shantian had started a rumour about the return of Jiang Jieshi, and had been telling his son about which fields had belonged to their family before land reform. Tong Shantian is able to spin both of these events in such a way that

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 45.

³⁶ Ibid., 47.

³⁷ Li Houming 李厚明 and Wang Suren 王素稔, '箭杆河边' [*By the Jian'gan River*] (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 1965), 1. This book, part of a series titled 'cinematic literature scripts' 电影文学剧本, reproduces all the dialogue from the film.

team leader Tong Yuzhu forgives him, but Yuzhu is pressured by Qing Kui and others to revoke Shantian's cart-driver position. As a result, Shantian begins scheming to eliminate Qing Kui, who takes over as cart-driver and becomes responsible for delivering that year's harvest. Shantian decides to sabotage a bridge over which the cart must pass, but is discovered by Yuzhu. He then attempts to stab Yuzhu with a dagger which, it turns out, is the very dagger with which he had murdered Yuzhu's father during land reform, who had been the leader of the Peasant Association. As he struggles with Yuzhu, the villagers arrive, and the village militia arrest Shantian and his wife—who, as was quite common, is presented as a similarly deceptive accomplice. The masses shout 'down with landlord Tong Shantian,' and in the song that closes the film, the audience is reminded to 'never forget class struggle.'

Figure 4.2. Film poster for *By the Jian'gan River*³⁸



By the Jian'gan River is notable because it was probably the most widely viewed film in which the issue of landlord reform and reintegration is central to the plot, and related issues

³⁸ 汪海明 Wang Haiming (ed.), 中国电影老海报：20 世纪 60 年代（修订版）[*Old Chinese film posters: the 1960s (revised edition)*] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Meishu Chubanshe, 2007), 101.

are extensively discussed. Thus, early on in the film, when it is proposed that Tong Shantian's position as cart-driver be revoked, Qing Kui's son-in-law says:

'He is a landlord—it's true that his label has been removed, but at this critical point [the summer harvest] we can't place too much trust in him!'

Qing Kui expresses his agreement:

'Yes! While he's driving the cart, he's away all day, going around by himself—we can't keep an eye on him!'³⁹

The key tension in the story is between the old poor peasant Qing Kui, who sees through façade put on by Tong Shantian, and the young Tong Yuzhu, who is naïve and taken in by appearances. This tension is given detailed expression in musical dialogue about whether Tong Shantian has reformed. Qing Kui sings:

Tong Shantian wants a change of regime
And transmits accounts to his son
Hoping that Bandit Jiang will return and he can seize his property back!
The proof is right before your eyes,
What is there left to say?
He can no longer be the cart-driver!⁴⁰

Yuzhu responds:

Tong Shantian has been willing to reform
He's caused no trouble for years
Could he have secret designs?
Could he be harbouring evil intentions beneath his smile?
Surely not!
He's driven the cart with dedication
Regardless of wind or rain
Why has he told his son
To remember the property taken from them?
Could he be so foolish as to think
That Bandit Jiang might change the heavens?⁴¹

³⁹ By the Jian'gan River, 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁴¹ Ibid., 16.

Yuzhu proceeds to confront Shantian about the rumours of Jiang's return, to which Shantian responds:

Now that agricultural production is so good, and our lives so comfortable, how could I think of him [Jiang] with any fondness? If you hadn't mentioned him, I would have forgotten about him long ago!⁴²

Yuzhu then asks why he told his son about their confiscated property; Shantian first denies that he had, then proceeds to explain:

Ah, yes I remember now. It was like this. One day, little Long asked me: 'Father, why do my schoolmates say our family are landlords?' I told him: 'Indeed we were, that was before liberation, our family made a living by exploiting poor people.' I then proceeded to recall one by one which houses and land we had forcibly taken 霸占来的. After finishing, I told him: 'the more property and land we had in the past, the greater our crimes.' Tell me, Team Leader Yuzhu, was I right to tell him this?

[Yuzhu doesn't respond]

I then told him: 'I spent half of my life as a parasite, and now it's too late for regrets. You must follow the Party from a young age and serve the People when you grow up, so as to atone for the sins of your father, grandfather, and ancestors!' I wasn't wrong to tell him this, was I, Team Leader Yuzhu?⁴³

Shantian proceeds to sing:

You say I teach little Long to keep a ledger for a change of regime
This is really very unfair!
Why did I have to become a landlord in this life? 谁让我错投胎当了地主
Even if I were to jump into the Jian'gan river
I couldn't cleanse myself of my sins.⁴⁴

Yuzhu is inclined to believe Shantian's display and tells Qing Kui, who sharply rebukes him, and laments that Yuzhu is naive and inexperienced. They go on to have an argument about whether Shantian has reformed:

⁴² Ibid., 18.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

Yuzhu: 'Tong Shantian is someone who is afraid of leaves falling from trees, why would he drop a stone on his own feet?'

Qing Kui: 'So you're saying landlords and rich peasants have all given up 都死了心—in that case, where are the rumours coming from?'

Yuzhu: 'Those rumours could have come from another village. Are you saying that all landlords and rich peasants have heads made of rock?' [i.e. are impervious to reason/transformation]

Qing Kui: 'Are you saying that there isn't a single one with a head made of rock?'

Yuzhu: 'But Tong Shantian always does whatever he is told, he is the most obedient. These two years since he's been the cart-driver, he hasn't caused any trouble at all—I think we've reformed him pretty well.'

Qing Kui: 'That's on the surface, do you know what's going on in his mind/heart 心? Of the three landlord and six rich peasant households in our village, there are some that are willing to reform, but Tong Shantian, I don't trust.'⁴⁵

The dialogue goes on, ending with Qing Kui reminding Yuzhu that he was still a toddler at the time of land reform. Then, as the pressure increases on Tong Shantian and his cart-driver position is revoked, he begins plotting to kill Qing Kui, and the audience is given clues that he had killed Yuzhu's father at the time of land reform, revealing that he is not merely deceptive, but also murderous. This duality—of class enemies beginning with 'soft' methods but immediately switching to the 'hard' when threatened—was a standard trope, and is most vivid in one of the final scenes, when Yuzhu discovers Shantian in the process of sabotaging the bridge. After Yuzhu demands to know what Shantian is doing at the edge of the village in the middle of the night, Shantian immediately comes up with an excuse, claiming that his son has a fever and he had just been to the neighbouring village to call a doctor. Shantian's wife quickly steps in to support this story, urging Yuzhu to let Shantian hurry back to the ill child. But after Yuzhu notices the saw hidden behind Shantian's back and realizes he had been sabotaging the bridge, Shantian immediately takes out his dagger

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

and attempts to kill Yuzhu.⁴⁶ In the journal *Dianying Yishu*, a reviewer commented on how well the film illustrated this duality, and explained what its pedagogical function was:

In sum, the film thoroughly exposes landlord Tong Shantian's soft methods of attack, but at the same time, goes on to further expose the extreme viciousness of this reactionary landlord element. When Tong Shantian feels encircled and can't see a way out, he has no qualms about resorting to murder. This portrayal corresponds perfectly to logic that governs the behaviour of those landlord elements who resolutely refuse reform and oppose the People 完全符合那些坚决抗拒改造、坚决反对人民的地主分子的一般发展规律, and thus tells the viewers a clear truth: in the final analysis, class struggle is an all-or-nothing struggle in which one side must be eliminated [lit. a struggle as a result of which either you exist and I/we don't, or I/we exist and you don't 一场有你无我, 有我无你的斗争]... It is only through struggle that [class enemies'] reactionary nature can be exposed and attacked, and their bad influence eliminated. And of course, only through acute, direct struggle against hostile class elements can the majority of them be transformed into new people.⁴⁷

Despite the final moderating sentence on reform, the overall message of the reviewer, as of the film itself, was clear: there are 'beasts' lurking beneath the facade of many 'well-behaved' and 'obedient' landlords, and since it is never possible to be sure—deception, after all, is their special skill—it is better to assume the worst.

4.3 Class Education and Social Exclusion

A landlord element giving a cadre a gift—is this a 'minor matter 小事'? The poor and lower-middle peasants relied on the lessons of history and used the method of class analysis to see that this was not a case of ordinary interpersonal interaction 一般的人情往来, but a political attack 政治进攻.⁴⁸

As we have seen, the evident contradiction between the docility of most landlords and rich peasants and the Party Centre's claim that they represented a grave threat represented a problem which, at one level, was met by claiming that appearances could be deceptive, and murderous intent could lie beneath even the most convincing façade. Another part of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 79-80.

⁴⁷ Xie Liming 谢力鸣, '革命人民要有阶级慧眼—影片《箭杆河边》观后杂记' [The revolutionary People must have an all-seeing eye with respect to class: miscellaneous thoughts after seeing the film *By the Jian'gan river*], *Dianying Yishu*, 1965 no. 1, 34.

⁴⁸ '这是“人情”，还是毒药?' [Is this a small gift, or is it poison?], 1964.12.14, *RMRB*.

response involved reframing apparently innocuous attempts by class enemies to reintegrate into society as part of a scheme to undermine socialism and seize power. This was referred to as the strategy of ‘peaceful transformation’ – a term originating from John Foster Dulles about US strategy towards socialist countries, which greatly exercised Mao and was repurposed to apply to the domestic sphere as well.⁴⁹ As the text of the Jiangsu Class Education Exhibit explained:

We have the great People’s Liberation Army, so the People’s state is very secure. Class enemies have not abandoned their plots to restore their power through military force, but they know that this would be very difficult to do. For this reason, they have been employing more insidious methods, seeking to enter our ranks or corrupt those within them, waving the flag of the CCP and socialism while doing the evil deeds of the GMD and capitalism. We must remain highly vigilant about the plots of class enemies to undertake ‘peaceful transformation.’⁵⁰

Concluding this section, the text listed ten ways class enemies corrupted cadres, from food and gifts to intermarriage and swearing brotherhood, and warned exhibitiongoers:

We do not hear the sound of guns or artillery being fired – it is against the backdrop of eating and drinking, of joking and laughing, that fierce class struggle is taking place.⁵¹

The discourse and policies that took shape during these years delegitimized any attempt by landlords and rich peasants to reintegrate into rural society, and sought to exclude them from the domain of ordinary social interaction. I consider three domains of social life in turn: exchanges of gifts and favours, lineage, and marriage.

*Exchanges of Gifts and Favours*⁵²

In December 1964, the People’s Daily published a letter from a cadre titled ‘Is this a small gift, or is it poison?’⁵³ In the letter, the cadre narrated how a few days before the Dragon

⁴⁹ See Qiang, ‘1959: Preventing Peaceful Evolution.’ The term first appeared in the *People’s Daily* in February 1960 referring to imperialist designs to undermine socialist countries (‘维护和平的决定性力量’ [Protect the decisive force of peace], 1960.2.6), and in early 1964 began appearing in connection with the need to carry out class education among children (‘对子女进行阶级教育是父母的革命责任’ [The class education of children is the revolutionary responsibility of parents], 1964.1.3)

⁵⁰ 江苏省阶级教育展览会 Jiangsu Provincial Class Education Exhibition (ed.), ‘江苏省阶级教育展览会讲解词 (初稿)’ [Spoken Text for the Jiangsu Province Class Education Exhibit (First Draft)] (NP, 1965.4), AC, 41.

⁵¹ Ibid., 72.

⁵² Cf. Madsen, *Morality and Power*, 61

⁵³ ‘Is this a small gift, or is it poison?’

Boat Festival that year, a landlord element surreptitiously snuck into the house of the production team leader and gave the team leader's wife some glutinous rice dumplings that she had hidden underneath her apron. In the days that followed, she did various further favours, offering to look after their children and to lend them tools for milling flour. Some of the poor and lower-middle peasants got wind of this, and they organized a meeting in which they exposed this 'scheme' and offered the team leader some constructive criticism:

You shouldn't underestimate these few dumplings—just think, why would a landlord element offer dumplings specifically to you, and not to anyone else? Why has she never offered you dumplings before, but only now that you are team leader? Why is it that she, who has been so miserly in the past, now offers to look after your children for free?...

We saw through [the landlord's] scheme in an instant, whereas you remained oblivious. This is because we all have 'class' in our minds 脑子里有阶级, whereas you don't. As a cadre, you absolutely must have 'class' in your mind—in this way, no matter what tricks the enemy might try to pull, you won't be fooled....⁵⁴

Following this feedback from the poor and lower-middle peasants, the cadre in question realized he had erred:

If you, my class brothers, hadn't pulled me back [from the brink], I would have made a big mistake. From now on I will definitely draw a clear class line...

The letter was brief and formulaic, but the editors of the *People's Daily* provided a short commentary to further elucidate the significance of the episode:

Many so called 'minor matters' are in fact where serious matters originate, it is just that they have not yet developed to a critical level. A landlord element giving a cadre a gift—is this a 'minor matter?' The poor and lower-middle peasants relied on the lessons of history and used the method of class analysis to see that this was not a case of ordinary interpersonal interaction, but a political attack.

...

So long as [cadres] resolutely listen to the Party and firmly rely on the poor and lower-middle peasants, we have nothing to fear from enemies with knives, and we have nothing to fear from enemies with smiles either. In the face of a revolutionary People equipped with a high level of

⁵⁴ Ibid.

class consciousness and revolutionary vigilance, the enemy's sugar-coated bullets are bound to fail.⁵⁵

This kind of discourse effectively meant that those labelled as landlords and rich peasants were to be excluded from the domain of ordinary social exchange, or what Richard Madsen (citing the residents of Chen village) refers to as relationships involving 'the flavour of human feeling 人情味'.⁵⁶

This seems in fact to have been explicitly understood as one of the aims of the Socialist Education Movement. For example, the report from Neixiang County, Henan cited above, which described the blurring of class boundaries since collectivization, went on to call for 'landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary and bad elements to...become disgraced [lit. emit a foul odour 发臭] among the masses, like they had been at the time of land reform, so that they hide their "tails" 把"尾巴"夹起来 and lower their heads.'⁵⁷ Similarly, in the summary of a SEM experimental site in this county where the objectives of the campaign were deemed to have been achieved, the masses had been educated to adhere to the 'six do-nots' with respect to 'the enemy': do not believe what they say, do not do favours for them, do not be on close terms with 接近 them, do not accept bribes from them, do not use familiar terms of address with them 称兄道弟、叫大叫小, and do not be lenient or protective towards them.⁵⁸ To illustrate the success of the movement, the following examples were given:

In the past, landlord element Jia Benzhou was all smiles when he saw other production team members, but now he walks around with his head down, and retreats to his house to eat. He said to poor peasant Wang Zhaoxiang: 'From now on I will not talk nonsense, I'm a guilty man, and will just focus becoming a better worker.'⁵⁹

These examples were given to illustrate changed attitudes among the masses:

In the past, landlord element Du Tianfu didn't even cook her own food, she could go to anyone's house in the village and be given food [presumably because she did favours for everyone, see following]. After [the movement], she went to the house of poor peasant Zhou

⁵⁵ '头脑里要有阶级' [One must have 'class' in one's mind], 1964.12.14, *RMRB*.

⁵⁶ Madsen, *Morality and Power*, 61.

⁵⁷ 'Investigation report on the political, economic, and cultural situation of each stratum in Qianwan Brigade', 1963.9.13, *NCA* 2-31-18, 148.

⁵⁸ '关于城关公社北符营大队在社教运动中发动群众管制敌人试点做法的报告' [Report on the experimental site methods of mobilizing the masses to *guan zhi* the enemy during the Socialist Education Movement in Beifuying Brigade, Chengguan Commune], *NCA* W15-1-158: 68.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Qiaoyun and said: 'The lunar new year is coming, you have many children, do you need me to help you sew any clothes?' Zhou responded: 'Even if I didn't have anything at all to wear during the new year, I still wouldn't want you landlords to help—how come you never offered to sew me clothes before liberation?' [The middle peasants also learned to draw a clear line], for example, middle peasant Qi Yanduan—in the past, landlord element Wang Guofu regularly visited Qi, and was invited to stay and eat, being treated better than a cadre. After the struggle, Wang visited Qi again, but Qi told him: 'your class status is not good, you should stop coming to my house.'⁶⁰

Notably, in none of these cases was it specified that the person in question had done anything wrong in particular; their class status was taken to automatically justify this exclusion.

As the foregoing suggests, a main concern was to cut off paths by which class enemies could join the web of mutual obligations that would enable them to reintegrate into society, and to compensate for their bad political status. Indeed, as the article in the People's Daily cited above made clear, any such attempt was to be understood as *ipso facto* a form of politically motivated infiltration, a 'political attack.' One list of forms of 'peaceful transformation' listed in a Neixiang County report included, in addition to the usual 'strategies' of flattery, familiar terms of address, invitations to eat and drink, and gifts of needed items, the following: 'sparing no effort in offering help: carrying water, collecting firewood, taking care of children, embroidery, grinding flour, sewing clothes;' and 'keeping a close eye on the situation to meet requirements and developing skills 手艺 broadly, trying to become a master of all trades 百事通.'⁶¹ Another report found that 72% of 'sabotage' by four-type elements involved 'peaceful transformation,' which included, in addition to the methods already mentioned, acting as a matchmaker, intermarriage, having children adopted by relatives 过继, and doing business together.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 70-71.

⁶¹ Ibid., 61.

⁶² 'CCP Neixiang County Committee's report on the county three-level cadre conference', 1963.12.9, NCA 2-31-6: 173-74. A question that the documents from Neixiang leave entirely unaddressed is whether all of this also applied to those whose labels had been removed at some point in the past, and who hadn't done anything to justify re-labelling. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, this was a matter on which the policy and discourse coming from the centre was ambiguous. Certainly, these people were not to be exempt from suspicion – for example, as noted in the previous section, it was explicitly mentioned in *By the Jian'gan River* that Tong Shantian's label had previously been removed. However, a draft document on the issue of class stand from the summer of 1963 issued by the Mei County Party Committee in Guangdong *did* make a clear distinction, explicitly allowing cadres and Party members to have social relations with '[former] landlord and rich peasant elements whose class status has been changed according to the law and who have become commune members' ('Resolution of the expanded cadre (Party member) meeting of the Mei County CCP Committee', Mei County Archives, 3-A12.1–144, 26-29, point 3.) I do not know

Lineage

Lists of modes of ‘peaceful transformation’ undertaken by class enemies invariably included the use of lineage relations to blur class boundaries. Although the material foundations of lineage institutions had been undermined during land reform and many temples and ancestral halls had been converted to other uses or destroyed in the intervening years, it was far more difficult to convince people that lineage relations were of no moral relevance, and merely an instrument of the landlord class to mislead the peasantry. Public security documents indicate a significant rise in lineage-related activity (as well as other ‘feudal superstition’) in the wake of the Great Leap. One report from Neixiang County wrote that a rich peasant and the son of a counterrevolutionary had seized on the fact that the production team leader had begun worshipping an ancestral tablet:

They stir up the masses, saying: ‘Even the team leader is worshipping the ancestors, if you carry on hanging a portrait of Chairman Mao for much longer, you will have forgotten your origins 忘本—failing to observe seniority among clan members, disrespecting elders, what kind of morals are these 算个啥世光? This is why production has been so poor these past years.’ As a result of their provocation, during the spring festival of 1963, 39 of the production team’s 44 households (93.1%) displayed ancestral tablets, and only the remaining five households displayed portraits of Chairman Mao.⁶³

From a scholarly perspective, this return to rituals and beliefs that the Party-state had attempted to suppress is probably best explained as a fairly spontaneous popular reaction to CCP’s loss of legitimacy after it had led so much of the rural population into famine. The Party understood it as a combination of the backwardness of some of the masses and the nefarious actions of class enemies, and wanted cadres to consider it a serious threat.

One of the many documents attached to the Former Ten Points, praised by Mao as one of four ‘brilliant models’ for cadre meetings, reported that in one production team in Henan, two landlords surnamed Dong went to a certain Dong village to continue the clan genealogy; not only did the local cadres participate, but the event was followed by three days of opera

whether this clause was inspired documents from the prefectural or provincial levels, but it indicates that at least some leading cadres at the county level had a non-essentialist understanding of policy on class status.

⁶³ ‘内乡县公安局对城关公社北符营大队刘北生产队地富经济文化情况的调查报告’ [Neixiang County Public Security Bureau’s investigation report on the economic and cultural situation of landlords and rich peasants in Liu Bei Production Team, Beifuying Brigade, Chengguan Commune], 1963.9.24, *NCA* W14-1-147, 50.

performances and the slaughtering of four pigs in honour of the ancestors.⁶⁴ One of the landlords became the clan head and all clan members ceremonially kowtowed before him. He made a point of helping the cadres to their feet, saying: ‘Gentlemen 爷们, please stand up, in the past, you 您 struggled against me, but that’s not a big deal, at the end of the day us Dongs are all one family.’ The report, which concerned a conference attended by cadres from the county, commune, and brigade levels, went on to describe how cadres were educated to recognize that this was a manifestation of class struggle:

We discussed the following questions: Whom does this benefit? Whom does it harm? What plans do they have, what intentions do they harbour? Once we began looking for threats, everyone’s sight became clear. Originally, some people thought feudal superstitions are simply old customs – editing genealogies is no more than continuing the family line 不过是传宗接代 and commemorating ancestors, and can’t be seen as class struggle. But once we began to dig deeper, the truth came out... Why is it that some landlords who have become clan heads go on and on about being one family in public, but carry on ‘class education’ towards their children and grandchildren in secret!? If this is not class struggle, what is it!?

... [One brigade secretary] criticized his mistakes and his blurred thinking, saying: “This meeting has exposed the ox monsters and snake demons... In the past, when old men came together to edit genealogies, I thought this was just them commemorating their ancestors – after all, who doesn’t have ancestors? Originally, all peasants under heaven were one family, but now we’ve become one family with the landlords and rich peasants...”

The attacks on these practices initiated during the SEM were of course greatly intensified by the anti-traditional iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution, during which remaining material foundations of lineage institutions, such as genealogies and temples, were frequently destroyed or (in the case of buildings) converted into spaces of Maoist worship. Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, the relevance of lineage was certainly not suppressed everywhere, as indicated by periodic appearance in subsequent years of propaganda seeking to convince people that class boundaries were more important than lineage boundaries, and claiming that the revival of lineage was a plot carried out by class enemies in concert with the recently deposed villain of the moment – first Liu Shaoqi, then Lin Biao.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ ‘河南省委关于当前农村社会主义教育运动情况的报告’ [Report of the Henan Provincial Committee on the current situation of the rural Socialist Education Movement], 1963.4.15, attached to First Ten Points.

⁶⁵ ““宗族亲”不破，印把子难握’ [Without demolishing ideas of ‘clan relations’, political power cannot be retained], 1969.1.30, *RMRB*; ‘亲不亲，阶级分——批判“同姓都是一家人”’ [Whether or not someone is a relative depends on class: criticizing the notion that ‘those of the same surname are one family’], in *Pipan fandong laoguhua* (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1974), 49-50; ‘亲不亲，阶级分——坚持阶级分析的方法’ [Whether or not someone

Marriage

In March 1963, the Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee produced a report on how peasants in the suburbs were responding to the documents that had been issued following the Tenth Plenum of the previous year:

The poor and lower-middle peasants were especially proactive [in listening to the documents being read]... Their grasp of the two fundamental issues of class struggle and consolidating the collective economy was most profound. They said: 'In the past, landlords had knives in their hands; now, they conceal knives behind their smiles.' Some said: 'Landlords are like sugar mixed with white arsenic, if you're not careful, you'll be harmed.'...

Some poor peasants had intended to become related to landlords and rich peasants through marriage 结亲, but have now changed their minds. [In one brigade] a poor peasant commune member was in a romantic relationship 谈恋爱 with the son of a rich peasant, and another was courting the daughter of a rich peasant. After studying the communique [of the 10th plenum] and raising their awareness, they both broke off relations on their own initiative.⁶⁶

The 'problem' of intermarriage between the children of poor and lower-middle peasants and landlords and rich peasants became a common theme in the discourse of the period, and, as in this report, it was generally assumed that if peasants' 'class consciousness' was raised, this phenomenon could be prevented.⁶⁷ However, this issue touched on a number of complex questions of policy, as Party leaders came to realize. According to the traditional logic of rural society, marriage was something that happened between two families, not simply two individuals. Thus, if the son of a poor peasant married the daughter of a rich peasant, that would render the two families 'related by marriage 结亲.' Party policy, however, considered marriage the choice of two individuals, and did not consider class status directly heritable. It ought therefore to have been perfectly acceptable for a poor

is a relative depends on class: uphold the method of class analysis], in *Nituizi ye neng xue zhexue* (Hefei: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1976), 65-68.

⁶⁶ 中共杭州市委办公室 Secretariat of the Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee, '杭州农村各级干部和各阶层群众对中央三个文件的反应' [The response of cadres at each level and the masses from each stratum in the rural areas of Hangzhou to the Party Centre's three documents], 1963.4.8, Hangzhou Municipal Archives, 1-29-91, 3.

⁶⁷ See the reports cited above: 'Investigation report on the political, economic, and cultural situation of each stratum in Qianwan Brigade', 1963.9.13, *NCA* 2-31-18, 146; 'A severe failure to distinguish between us and the enemy in Shibao brigade, Yunxiao county', 1963.4.9, *CCPM*.

peasant, even a cadre, to marry the child of a landlord or rich peasant, so long as the marriage partner displayed a high level of political consciousness and had 'drawn a clear line' between themselves and their family (an issue that is the subject of the next chapter.) Party leaders were aware of this, and the Latter Ten Points of November 1963, which were partly intended to restrict the excesses generated by the Former Ten Points, addressed these issues:

Concerning the question of whether Party members and cadres who have married the children of landlords or rich peasant can remain in their positions, decisions should be made on the basis of individual performance. The fact of having married the child of a landlord or rich peasant cannot be the sole basis for deciding on this question. Such party members and cadres should be educated, their consciousness should be raised, they should draw a clear political line and take a firm class standpoint, should educate their partner, and should resist any bad influence from their partner.

...

Following the initiation of the SEM, [Party organizations in] some locations have placed all kinds of restrictions on party members, youth league members, and poor and lower middle peasants marrying the children of landlords and rich peasants. Those already involved in such marriages have been deemed to have lost their class standpoint, and some of them have even faced disciplinary sanction. These methods are inappropriate. On this question, education is necessary...to avoid falling into traps set by class enemies...but there should not be any hard restrictions.⁶⁸

The Party leadership thus made sure to avoid contradicting its own policies on marriage and class status; however, the narrative of marriage being a 'trap' through which class enemies sought to corrupt cadres certainly remained, appearing, for example, as a central plot element of the 1964 film *Watershed*.⁶⁹ Moreover, the primacy of 'class struggle' from the SEM to the late 1970s meant that the marriage prospects of those from class enemy families would generally remain very poor.

4.4 The Consequences of Class Education

⁶⁸ 'Latter Ten Points', point 10.

⁶⁹ For a brief synopsis, see 中国电影资料馆、中国艺术研究院电影研究所 Centre for Material on Chinese Cinema and Cinema Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Arts (eds.), '中国艺术影片编目 1949-1979 下' [*Catalogue of Chinese Art Cinema, vol. 2 of 2*] (Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 1982), 849-50.

To what extent was the campaign of re-stigmatization outlined above successful? The Party certainly succeeded in greatly strengthening the salience of class labels through the Socialist Education Movement, and the violence against class enemies and their family members during the Cultural Revolution must be understood, at least in part, as the outcome of the Party having successfully convinced many people that the members of these groups were dangerous enemies.⁷⁰ In ordinary social life, one major impact, noted in the previous chapter, was to cement the additional burdens imposed on class enemies as a regular feature of their lives. This was often work of a demeaning kinds which, Unger suggests, was a 'symbol of polluted status,' and its effect should not be underestimated.⁷¹ There were also practices, not officially sanctioned but referred to with a certain frequency in memoirs, particularly during the peak of the Cultural Revolution, of visual differentiation, such as armbands or patches sown onto clothing, or signs on doors, to differentiate class enemies.⁷² The constant background of class struggle also meant that those with unfavourable labels were in a continuously precarious position, in which any ordinary interpersonal or interfamilial conflict could be interpreted as an instance of 'class vengeance', and mistakes or misfortunes would be interpreted as sabotage.⁷³ Another major impact of the revival of class struggle was to further diminish the marriage prospects of young people,

⁷⁰ The first large-scale massacres of class enemies and their children during the Cultural Revolution, which took place in Dao County, Hunan, and then neighbouring counties, appear to have been directly connected to claims spreading through Party and militia organizations that class enemies were planning to initiate a revolt, and even that they had organized 'killing squads' and were preparing to kill Party members (Tan, *The Killing Wind*, 8, 32-33, 71, 415, 420). However, it is important to bear in mind that these processes occurred through the Party and military hierarchy, and do not appear to have been 'pogrom'-like actions by ordinary villagers. This was also the case in Guangxi, as Andrew Walder has recently shown: the massacre of class enemies and their family members in the summer of 1968, which Su Yang's research explained as the actions of co-villagers who were indirectly mobilized by the rhetoric of authorities at higher levels, seems instead to have been the outcome of a systematic and hierarchically implemented campaign to suppress one of the two major provincial factions, the April Faction, in which class enemies and their families were targeted as 'accomplices', often when there were no actual April Faction members present to serve as targets (Su, *Collective Killings*; Walder, 'Anatomy of a Regional Civil War'). As Walder argues, this explanation is both more consistent with the newly available data—which show that those associated with the April Faction were by far the largest group of victims—and is also better able to explain why these killings occurred in a concentrated period in a large region.

⁷¹ Unger, 'The Class System in Rural China', 124.

⁷² Huang, *People from Jie'an*, 82; Teng, *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa*, 179; Wu, 'A Portrait', 160; Zhang, *A Difficult Life*, 91; Zhou, *Cuotuo, Xuanwo*, 133-34. According to a villager interviewed by Huang, the practice of making four-type elements wear white armbands (but not that of hanging signs above their doors) was discontinued after Jiang Qing reportedly criticized it, on the grounds that, while it was conducive to monitoring class enemies, it also enabled them to recognize each other and co-ordinate their actions (*People from Jie'an*, 82). I have not been able to find any official regulations on this issue (or any comments from Jiang Qing). On visibly distinguishing People from non-People, see also Schoenhals, 'Demonising Discourse', 476.

⁷³ See Madsen, *Morality and Power*, 181, for a general explanation of this logic, and Gao, *Gao Village*, 36, 153, for the implication that class enemies would seek to avoid any kind of conflict. See Leese, 'Revising Political Verdicts in Post-Mao China', 118-123, on 'class vengeance' as a legal category.

particularly young men, from class enemy families.⁷⁴ The reason for this was straightforward: the primary routes out of agricultural life—education or military service—had become almost entirely off-limits for those with bad family backgrounds, and having these labels in one's family usually resulted in a high degree of political precarity and economic discrimination in the village itself.

The foregoing might lead us to conclude that the Party was successful in re-stigmatizing class enemies: people really did come to view categories like 'landlord' and 'rich peasant' as heritable markers of polluted social status. Jonathan Unger suggested that this was the case in Chen Village: although the revival of class struggle in the 1960s was the product of a state initiative and was led by cadres and activists,

...not just the village's cadres and young political activists participated but also, voluntarily, the bulk of the unambitious ordinary peasants. They believed in the strict class distinctions and in the legitimacy of class antagonisms.⁷⁵

Unger argues that this was because the Party 'provided the good-class peasantry with a complex set of emotional justifications and material reasons for discriminating against the bad-class households': the satisfaction of being part of the group that suffered the most in the Old Society and which had a special historical role, and relative advantages in education and marriage.⁷⁶ In a more abstract vein, Jean-Francois Billeter argues that an understanding of classes as the basic units of society, as opposed to individuals (as in the modern West) or families (as in the Chinese tradition), while in some sense artificial, was nevertheless widely accepted, because it 'corresponded to numerous interests...it was simple, seemed true, and created an intelligible order.'⁷⁷

However, the speed with which the social salience of class labels seems to have disappeared after their official removal in 1979 suggests that there were limits to how deeply these labels were embedded in people's understanding of social reality.⁷⁸ It is also necessary to keep in mind just how much variation there could be between different villages. This was made clear to me by the contrast between what I was told by two men, both sons of 'landlords' and born around 1949, and from neighbouring counties in southwest Fujian, about how they and their elders were treated during the 1960s and 70s. According to one,

⁷⁴ See Unger, 'The Class System in Rural China', 133-45, and Zhang, 'Class Categories and Marriage Patterns', for a more recent quantitative study.

⁷⁵ Unger, 'The Class System in Rural China', 130.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 130-34.

⁷⁷ Billeter, 'The System of "Class Status"', 161.

⁷⁸ Unger, 'The Class System in Rural China', 139-40.

those from bad class families were expected to keep their heads down when walking in the village and to give way to good class villagers, and were regularly subjected to verbal and physical humiliation. The other, by contrast, told me that ‘class struggle’ was not really taken seriously by villagers. Those from bad backgrounds were discriminated against in decisions that involved higher-level bureaucratic approval—primarily admission to school and joining the army—and cadres occasionally went through the motions of ‘struggling’ against class enemies, but they and their children were treated no differently to others in daily life. The phenomenon of class struggle as mere performance also appears in memoirs: one memoirist, who had been a sent-down youth full of revolutionary zeal, wrote of his shock upon seeing the cadre who had been in charge of a struggle meeting against class enemies drinking with a ‘landlord’ just a few days later. He expressed his outrage to the good class peasants in his production team, expecting them to share it:

I was not prepared for what they told me: we are all relatives and friends living in the same village, we see each other every day, how could we take all of this so seriously? 都是同一个村沾亲带故的，抬头不见低头见，哪有那么认真？ All those struggle meetings are just for show, stay here long enough and you’ll understand.⁷⁹

As Erving Goffman famously argued, social life in general can be usefully thought of as involving performance, but it has also been suggested that there was a distinctively theatrical quality to public life in China under Mao.⁸⁰ This isn’t to say that Maoist politics was mere performance that did not involve genuine emotions, much less to discount the very real suffering inflicted upon those forced to play the villains in the continuously re-enacted drama of class struggle. It is however to suggest that there was a systematic tension between performance and belief, since rural class struggle, particularly after collectivization, involved a series of narratives and categories that were at significant remove from most rural residents’ experience of social reality. In particular, the ‘otherness’ of class enemies was difficult to embed into the thinking of those who actually lived alongside them. To the extent that there were ‘ethnic’ factors involved—emotionally felt group attachments based on ideas of shared culture or common ancestry—these, primarily lineage, cut across the lines drawn by the CCP. It is true, as Haiyan Lee argues, that Maoist political culture posited a radical dichotomy between exploiters and exploited, each with their ‘own genealogy,

⁷⁹ Li, ‘Five Lines from my Life as an Educated Youth’, 209. I am grateful to Qiu Xinyang for this reference. For a similar example, see Unger, ‘Cultural Revolution Conflict in the Villages’, 97; Unger writes that ‘in at least some places... “class struggle” was merely a mock ritual acted out for Party officials from outside the immediate community.’

⁸⁰ Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self*; DeMare, *Mao’s Cultural Army*, 241-42; Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 287.

political agenda, moral values' and so on, but the persuasiveness of this picture must have been limited by the existence of rich cultural traditions forming the basis of group identity, and a socioeconomic reality in which, as the Henanese cadre cited above noted, 'everyone put food on the table by earning work points.'⁸¹

⁸¹ 'Report of the Henan Provincial Committee on the current situation of the rural Socialist Education Movement', 1963.4.15, attached to 'Former Ten Points'.

5 'Drawing a Clear Line': The Children of Class Enemies

The previous chapter explored the Party's efforts to create and maintain a boundary between ordinary members of the People and rural class enemies, particularly at the level of the village community. This chapter turns to an even more ambitious and more uniquely Maoist endeavour: to insert the boundary between the People and their enemies into the family. As I sought to show in Chapter 2, Party policy and discourse was consistent that class enemy status was not directly heritable, but this had an important corollary: if those from class enemy families were to demonstrate that they had chosen the side of the People, they had to 'draw a clear line 划清界限' between themselves and their families, and demonstrate that they viewed their parents as enemies. Paradoxically, however, they were also expected to provide for their parents in old age. This chapter explores how these conflicting expectations were manifested in official discourse, and how people responded to them.

I begin by demonstrating the complex status of filiality as a moral value in the early People's Republic, showing that notions of filial obligation based on feelings of gratitude towards parents were actively endorsed in official discourse during the 1950s. I then show that, unlike for the majority of people, for the children of those classified as landlords, and later also rich peasants, harbouring positive emotions towards parents was construed as a political failing. This discourse emerged during land reform, and was systematically reinforced during the Socialist Education Movement, when those from such families were told that political progress required them to develop hatred for their parents. In the second half of the chapter, I turn to ways in which people tried to resolve the conflict between state and family generated by these expectations. I first explore the challenges faced by those who tried to meet official expectation to 'draw a clear line,' and then consider those who rejected the Party rather than their families.

5.1 Filial Emotion as Political Failing

Filiality in the Early People's Republic

'Filial piety 孝'—a combination of ritual, material, and emotional expectations concerning how people should relate to their parents, grandparents, and ancestors—was

probably the single most important value in the moral system of traditional China. As the psychiatrist and historian Robert Lifton has written, filiality is a 'biologically-based social ethic of great force, an ethic known in all societies, but brought to its highest development in China.'¹ This high degree of development was not just philosophical and cultural: filial piety was thoroughly embedded in the late imperial legal system. This involved not only legal sanction of near-absolute parental authority—including the right of parents to kill disobedient children²—but the placing of filial obligation even above the state's interest in punishing criminality. Confucius is said to have argued that righteousness requires fathers and sons to cover for one another should one of them commit a crime, and this imperative was asymmetrically manifested in the Qing legal system, which actively *required* that junior relatives conceal senior relatives' crimes.³

During the first half of the twentieth century, modernizing intellectuals blamed filial piety for many of China's ills, and as the Chinese empire became a nation-state, legal sanction for lifelong parental authority over offspring was withdrawn.⁴ As the bond between state and citizen replaced that between parent and child as fundamental in public discourse, individual ethical obligations were correspondingly reconceptualized. Children's obligations to their parents were no longer seen as absolute, but as conditional on whether they were conducive to the demands of the nation, and of an abstract rather than a Confucian role-based ideal of justice. The extent of this transformation by the early People's Republic is well illustrated by Lao She's account of his reaction to witnessing a son denouncing his 'counterrevolutionary' father at a public sentencing rally in 1951:

How could something like this happen at any time but the present? I was about to shed tears. In the past, the Chinese always placed high regard on 'a son covering for his father, and a father covering for his son', with the result that truth and justice were covered beyond hope of discovery. Today, the relationship of father and son can no longer cover the truth—truth is greater, is more important, than one's father. If a father is an enemy of the People, the son should denounce him. Today, one's responsibility is to society: an enemy of society is one's own enemy...⁵

¹ Lifton, *Thought Reform*, 366.

² Du, *State and Family*, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴ Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 107-117; Du, *State and Family*, 168-202.

⁵ 老舍 Lao She, '新社会就是一座大学校' [The new society is a great school], *Renmin Wenxue* vol. 4 no. 6 (1951), 20.

As radical as these developments were, they did not mean that filiality had ceased to exist as a moral value in the early People's Republic—not only because the ideals proclaimed in official discourse had not necessarily been assimilated into the thinking of ordinary people, but also because official discourse did not fully reject the notion of filial obligation. Both of these points can be seen through the case of Xu Yunying, a student at Hujiang University in Shanghai who briefly became a model for emulation after publicly denouncing her capitalist father during the three- and five-antis campaign of early 1952. Following her denunciation, which was broadcast on the radio throughout Shanghai, Xu came under criticism from teachers and other students, who thought that her actions had manifested a lack of gratitude 忘恩负义, immorality 大逆不道, a lack of human feeling 没有人情, and even inhumanity 绝灭人性.⁶ Official media sought to convince the public that these criticisms were incorrect; however, after promoting Xu as a model for about two months, the case was brought to a relatively harmonious conclusion: it was reported that both Xu's father and her sister—the latter having come under investigation for assaulting Xu—were dealt with 'leniently' after they demonstrated repentance.⁷ In the pages of *China Youth*, the biweekly journal of the Communist Youth League, young people whose parents were classified as 'capitalists' were encouraged not to sever relations with their families, and those from non-capitalist backgrounds who had been inspired to distance themselves from their families were criticized.⁸

The 1950 Marriage Law had enshrined the duty of children to care for their aged parents, and in 1956, a drive was initiated to encourage people to fulfil this obligation, since the state was in no position to take on the responsibility of caring for the elderly.⁹ This drive even involved attempts to resurrect the concept of filial piety in socialist form, as this was seen by some authors as necessary to provide moral force to the purely legal obligation contained in the Marriage Law. In December 1956, an article by Minister of Civil Affairs Xie Juezai appeared in the People's Daily on the topic of 'Loving One's Parents' in which he argued that in opposing feudal filial piety, what the Party was doing was to 'remove the

⁶ See, respectively: '检举不法资本家父亲是不是'忘恩负义'? —请读者帮助许云影同学批判沪江大学部分师生对她的错误看法' [Does it 'lack gratitude' to denounce one's law-breaking capitalist father? A request for readers to help Xu Yunying criticize the mistaken views about her held by some teachers and students at Hujiang University], *Wenhui*, 1952.3.27; '在'三反'和'五反'运动中资产阶级家庭出身的革命青年如何看待自己家庭? [How should revolutionary youths from capitalist families understand their own families during the three- and five-anti movements?], *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 7, 8-9; and '许仲清、许云娥已真诚悔悟认罪 许云影被毆案从宽处理 [Xu Zhongqing and Xu Yun'e have sincerely admitted guilt and repented—Xu Yunying's beating has been dealt with leniently]', *Wenhui*, 1952.5.17.

⁷ 'Xu Zhongqing and Xu Yun'e have sincerely admitted guilt and repented', *Wenhui*, 1952.5.17.

⁸ 'How should revolutionary youths from capitalist families understand their own families', *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 7, 8-9.

⁹ Raddock, 'Between Generations', 520; see also Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution*, 210.

hypocritical and coercive feudal coating of filial piety so as to enable pure love between parents and children to flourish; this does not imply that children can refuse to support their parents.¹⁰

Drawing a Clear Line during and after Land Reform

In explaining why the children of capitalists should not sever ties with their families, the journalists at *China Youth* argued that such actions were not in accordance with the situation of the Chinese revolution at the time, since ‘the capitalist class [was] still one of four friends in the People’s Democratic United Front.’¹¹ Those designated as members of the ‘landlord class’, by contrast, were all enemies, and they included the families of many educated young people. Many of these young people, motivated by idealism, career prospects, or some combination of the two, hoped to become members of the Youth League and the Party, and the Party and state needed them to staff their expanding bureaucracies – including the very work teams that brought revolution to the countryside.¹² To demonstrate that they had chosen the side of the People, they needed to show that they viewed the landlord class, including their own parents, as their enemies.¹³ This meant, at a minimum, not taking any steps to help them – not only in ways that involved violations of Party policy (such as by helping them disperse property to obtain a lower classification), but also attempts to protect them from ‘leftist’ excesses that contradicted the Party’s own policies. The atmosphere of land reform in its radical phase is captured by the recollections of Ye Duiyi, an intellectual from a wealthy urban background who was invited to observe land reform in Guangdong:

Landlords were driven to suicide, and on one occasion that he found particularly painful, he watched a young activist viciously beat his own landlord father. Duiyi knew that such violence was a violation of party policy and that his team was expected to report its views of the land reform experience. Nonetheless, he also understood that any objection to this violence would invite accusations that he was seeking to protect the exploiting landlord class, so he said nothing.¹⁴

¹⁰ 谢觉哉 Xie Juezai, ‘爱父母’ [On loving one’s parents], 1956.12.24, *RMRB*.

¹¹ ‘How should revolutionary youths from capitalist families understand their own families’, *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 7, 8-9.

¹² DeMare, *Land Wars*, 44-46.

¹³ ‘站到人民的立场上来了’ [Coming over to the side of the People], *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 1, 8.

¹⁴ Esherick, *Ancestral Leaves*, 242.

For young people seeking to relinquish emotional attachment to parents who had become the targets of violent expropriation, it was in some sense an advantage if their parents resembled the cruel landlords depicted in Party propaganda, since this provided a moral justification for rejecting them. One student's account, published in a collection of land reform study materials, wrote of how one of her mother's servants had committed suicide after being beaten, and of how her aunt and cousin had tortured a tenant to death who had been unable to pay rent due to illness.¹⁵ She concluded by linking her family to the 'landlord class' in general:

My family is a very good representative of the entire landlord class, which I must resolutely turn my back on. I hope that young friends from landlord families can all fully comprehend the evils of the landlord class. No matter how exactly it manifests itself, in substance, it is all the same.¹⁶

It could hardly have been convincing, however, to claim that ordinary landlords were morally equivalent to those who had driven their servants to suicide or tortured their tenants to death. Accounts by young people whose parents had not engaged in any such cruelty tended to emphasize that all landlords were guilty due to their role in upholding an unjust system. This provided a way to condemn landlords who were regarded as virtuous by traditional moral standards, such as those who had engaged in various kinds of 'good deeds' like funding schools or giving alms, or had acquired their property through thrift and hard work.¹⁷ This kind of argument could have been convincing at an abstract level, but was less likely to be conducive to the emotional transformation that rejecting one's parents required.¹⁸ The issue of emotional connections with class enemy parents appeared in many letters and self-examinations, often referring to the difficulty of relinquishing a sense of gratitude about having been provided for, and was typically resolved by suggesting that such feelings should be redirected from one's parents to those one's parents had exploited – 'my parents gave birth to me, but the peasantry provided for me,' as one phrase had it.¹⁹ The most general argument was that any lingering emotions that stood in the way of 'drawing a

¹⁵ 侯坤 Hou Kun, '血的回忆: 一个大地主官吏女儿的自白' [Recollections of blood: confessions of the daughter of a large landlord-bureaucrat], in *Renshi tugai, yonghu tugai: hanjia duwu zhi yi* (Shanghai: Shanghai Shi Xuesheng Lianhehui), 29-31.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ 'Coming over to the side of the People', *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 1, 9.

¹⁸ See Lifton, *Thought Reform*, 269-70, for a similar example.

¹⁹ 王运生 Wang Yunsheng, '检举我的恶霸父亲' [Denouncing my evil tyrant father], *Yunnan Geda*, 1951.12.24, *AC*, 3.

clear line' were a product of petit-bourgeoise tendencies latent in all those from a non-proletarian background, and especially intellectuals.²⁰

After land reform, new questions arose. In early 1952, *China Youth* received numerous letters asking whether it was acceptable to financially support landlord-classified parents who faced hardship following land reform:

Some young people ask: my parents are truly very old, and cannot participate in manual labour; or, while they are able and willing to work, they lack tools or draught animals, or have too many dependents to make ends meet—in this case, can I use my income to support them? Our answer is the following: if, without your intervention, they would go begging or stealing, or would starve to death, then that would be a burden on the People, so if you support them out of concern to reduce the burden on the People, that is acceptable. However, your standpoint must be clear: your reason for supporting them can by no means be 'carrying out your filial duties 尽孝.'²¹

Confucian morality attributed great importance to reverence when providing for their elderly parents: Confucius is said to have remarked that unless support for parents is accompanied by an attitude of respect, it is no different from feeding dogs and horses, and the concept of 'reverent caring 供养' emerged in the medieval period to encapsulate this.²² It is difficult to imagine a starker contrast between these ideals and how the children of class enemies were told understand their support for their elderly parents. In a subsequent article, the editors restated the impermissibility of filial emotion in the following terms:

If you [support them] in order to 'repay the debt of gratitude for their love and care 报答父母养育之恩,' willingly acting as a 'filial child' of the landlord class, and supporting them in continuing to live a life free of labour, then you have taken the standpoint of the landlord class.

²³

This move from filiality towards landlord-classified parents to filiality towards the abstract 'landlord class' is one that became well-established over the subsequent years, and functioned effectively as a form of political condemnation.

²⁰ 'Coming over to the side of the People', *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 1, 10.

²¹ '关于地主家庭出身的青年与家庭经济联系的问题' [On the question of economic relations between young people and their landlord families], *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 4, 32.

²² Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 113-15.

²³ '续评革命青年和地主家庭的联系问题' [Further commentary of the question of relations between revolutionary youth and their landlord families], *ZGQN*, 1952 no. 5, 30.

To see how this discourse could operate in practice, consider a case recounted by Yang Kuisong in his recent collection based on personal dossiers.²⁴ Shang Haowen, a cultural instructor in the army whose father had been classified as a 'landlord-businessperson' and died under unclear circumstances while detained by the Peasant Association, came under criticism in 1955 for having expressed dissatisfaction with the government's policy of forcing farmers to sell 'surplus' grain to the state, claiming it was making life for his mother and other villagers very difficult.²⁵ Shang handed over his diaries, thinking this would provide evidence that his ideas were not reactionary or motivated by hostility to the CCP. The group responsible for evaluating Shang came to a different conclusion. They claimed that, since he was from a landlord background, his criticism couldn't have been motivated by sympathy for the peasantry, and was motivated instead by hostility to the Party stemming from his emotions about the death of his father.²⁶ This issue was the subject of a remarkable exchange between Shang and the small-group questioning him, in which Shang tried to deny that he felt compassion for his father, and was contradicted with an extract from his diary:

Shang: Based on my ideological situation, I ought to feel compassion 同情 for my father, but in fact I don't. I only have compassion for the peasantry, and have no feelings 感情 about my father.

Q: You have said that your father's dying while being struggled is better than if he had been executed with a gunshot, is this compassion or is it not?

A: He was old, he could not work, I have no objection to his having died. This has nothing to do with compassion.

Q: You're saying that your father was old and could not work, so it was just as well for him to die – so you're worried that he might have had to work, is this not compassion for your father?

A: Analyzed in this way, yes.

Q: To say that your father was old, so it was just as well for him to die; that to die is better than to live and endure hardship; that to die in this way is better than to be executed by gunshot, is this not also compassion?

A: Yes, the perspective is that of compassion.

The questioner reads from Shang's diary:

'Father, my dear father, today I have lost yet another relative!' Does this display compassion or a lack of compassion for your father?

²⁴ Yang, *A Record of Marginalized Individuals*, chapter 6.

²⁵ Ibid., 185-86

²⁶ Ibid., 192-93.

(silence)²⁷

That afternoon, Shang made a thorough confession concerning his feelings about his father, which illustrate well the importance of filial emotion in Shang's thinking, and his awareness that these feelings were impermissible for the son of a class enemy:

When I was at the [military] base [in 1949], father walked over 500 li to see me, and I thought, how come he is so good to me... that he walked all this way to see me really moved me, I came to feel the strength of the love of a father for his child, and that his beating and cursing me in the past was all for my own sake. When he died, I felt he had raised me in vain 白养了我一场, as he hadn't enjoyed a single day of happiness on my account... I hadn't thought that the time he came to see me at the base would be the last time we would ever meet. He raised me in vain, I hadn't even poured him a cup of water, I hadn't discharged even a fraction of my filial duties 没有尽点孝. After joining the army, although I received some years of revolutionary education, I still felt compassion for him, but I feared that others would say I am the 'filial son' of the landlord class, that I stand firmly on the side of the landlord class, that I defend the interests of the landlord class, so I was afraid of confessing these feelings...²⁸

Shang was eventually browbeaten into making a series of detailed self-criticisms accusing himself of being a 'filial son of a despotic landlord' whose thinking had been unduly influenced by his compassion for his deceased father and widowed mother.²⁹ He claimed that he had overcome his filial emotions towards his father in the standard way, by recognizing that it wasn't his father that had truly provided for him, but the people his father had exploited. He admitted, however, that he had continued to feel compassion for his widowed mother, and described this as an ideological error:

Towards my mother, I really do feel compassion. This is a class error 阶级上的错误, and illustrates that my class consciousness is not high. Why do I feel compassion for her? Because I do not begin from her engagement in exploitation, but from her family background [she originally came from a poor-peasant family, something Shang had earlier mentioned in her defence], and her goodness towards me when I was at home—the mother-child relation is taking precedence over the class stand. This is something I should correct.³⁰

This case—of a low-level cadre whose father had been a minor landowner with little political involvement—provides an exceptionally vivid illustration of the extent to which the

²⁷ Ibid., 194.

²⁸ Ibid., 195.

²⁹ Ibid., 199-201.

³⁰ Ibid., 197.

illegitimacy of filial emotion for the children of class enemies had become established by the early People's Republic, and of the kinds of political problems it could cause.

Cultivating Successors to the Revolution; Cultivating Hatred for Class Enemy Parents

In 1956-57, agriculture was collectivized, and in the process, landlords and rich peasants became members of the collectives; a substantial minority of them who were deemed to have 'successfully reformed' had their labels removed. The significance of class labels would quite possibly have faded against the background of collectivized agriculture, had it not been for the failure of the Leap and Mao's response to 'never forget class struggle'. A major element of the SEM was to 'cultivate successors for the revolution 培养革命接班人,' and the targets of this education included the children of class enemies. As the Party Centre put it in late 1963, the majority of young people from such backgrounds

have not drawn a clear line with their families, they lack emotions towards the working people.... These people currently stand at a crossroads: they are among the primary targets of the hostile classes in their attempt to win over the young generation. We should strengthen our work of educating and transforming them, to make them rebel against the class they were born into, and to take the socialist road.³¹

As part of this education, they were to be taught to hate their parents as representatives of the wicked 'old society.' The stigmatization of all those classified as landlords, first carried out systematically during land reform, continued with even greater intensity, now with rich peasants invariably included next to landlords, and combined with the new focus on the 'nature 本质' beneath class enemies' innocuous appearance discussed in the previous chapter.

In early 1964, *China Youth* published a response to a letter they had received from a reader who asked for help with difficulties in developing the attitudes and emotions called for by the Party:

You say that, at the level of thought and emotion, you have had trouble coming to hate your own family 思想感情上对自己的家庭恨不起来, thinking that your parents worked hard in the past, did some charitable things, and don't seem as vicious as other landlords and rich peasants. Having lived at home for a long time, you haven't detected any greatly mistaken thoughts,

³¹ 'Latter Ten Points', point 10.

words, or actions on their part, don't feel that they have had any bad influence on you, and don't know how you are supposed to draw a clear line between yourself and your family at the level of thought 和家庭划清思想界限. These difficulties are frequently encountered by young people from landlord and rich peasant families who are seeking progress, so we thought it would be important to share our opinions with you.

We feel that the key to this question is to come to see clearly the ugly nature 丑恶本质 of your exploiting class family. Only if you see clearly the nature of your exploiting class family can you come to hate them, only then can you come to love the poor and lower-middle peasants, to have a common language with them, to get closer to them, and to turn your back on your own family. Whom one should love and whom one should hate; whom one should support and whom one should oppose: these are fundamental questions for young people seeking progress.

32

The key was to 'recognize the ugly nature of [his] exploiting class family.' His parents may not have appeared to be deserving of hatred, but

landlords and rich peasants—no matter whether their surname is Wang, Li, Chen or Zhao, no matter how much they exploited, or how great their crimes—are all exploiters and oppressors of the peasantry. One must use this universal truth to come to understand the past and present of one's own family.³³

As during land reform, official discourse used 'exploitation' not solely or even primarily as a technical term referring to surplus extraction, but as a thoroughly moralized one referring to a kind of evil behaviour. While some exploiters may have been worse than others, they were all basically bad people:

although there are differences in severity of crimes among the landlord class, in substance it is all the same, and there is absolutely no distinction of good and evil 根本没有什么善恶之分...³⁴

Hatred for class enemy parents was portrayed as following naturally from a 'correct' understanding of what they had been like before the revolution, and, in many cases, of what they were still like. This was often already problematic during land reform, and was much more so by the 1960s, since those elites who had been highly oppressive and cruel had generally been killed during land reform, and the idea that having collected rent or hired

³² '正确认识家庭是争取进步的起点—给一个地主家庭出身的青年的复信' [Correctly understanding your family is the starting point of progress—response to a youth from a landlord family], *ZGQN*, 1964 no. 6, 18.

³³ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

labour in sufficient amounts to be considered a landlord or rich peasant in itself made someone deserving of hatred, regardless of any other qualities they might have had, is unlikely to have been convincing.³⁵ One memoirist, whose father and both paternal grandparents were designated as landlords, describes the tension between the portrayal of landlords in propaganda and what he knew about his family:

On the one hand, I was educated to believe the landlords were so hateful, without human feeling, tyrannizing and beating the poor and exploiting them through usury, forcing countless good people into misery. On the other hand, what I saw and heard since I was a child was that [my parents and grandparents] were diligent, frugal and benevolent.³⁶

He employed the method advocated in *China Youth* of asking 'good class' villagers about his parents and grandparents,³⁷ but didn't get the 'right' answers:

During the years when I was in the countryside, I encountered various people from the same generation as my grandfather and my father. Sometimes I would deliberately steer the conversation towards my father's and grandparents' behaviour in the past. Everyone agreed that grandpa was the most industrious and diligent person in the village... Grandma and father had an even better reputation... I spent my youth in this contradictory state of mind.³⁸

Political pressure increased on him in the 1960s to regard them as enemies, but he simply couldn't:

After I became an adult...I sought to draw a clear line with them, following the requirements of the time... But the moment I thought of my elderly grandfather and my ill grandmother, of my father who had just passed away [of hunger and illness in 1962], I was filled with grief, and could not come to hate them...³⁹

For this memoirist, the contradiction between propaganda and reality was particularly acute, since he had been told by good class villagers that they thought his class enemy relatives were good people, but I would argue that this contradictory state of mind was likely to be common among those growing up during and after the SEM. This period was characterized, on the one hand, by unprecedentedly intense propaganda about the purported evil of all

³⁵ In this context it is worth recalling that even the most radical propaganda did not claim that having collected rent or hired labour automatically made someone an enemy—the amount had to cross the threshold that separated, for example, a prosperous middle peasant from a rich peasant, or a small land rentier 小土地出租者 from a landlord.

³⁶ Lü, 'Landlord Elements in My Family.'

³⁷ 'Correctly understanding your family', *ZGQN*, 1964 no. 6, 19.

³⁸ Lü, 'Landlord Elements in My Family.'

³⁹ Ibid.

landlords and rich peasants, while on the other hand, actual landlords and rich peasants were usually powerless, at the mercy of local cadres, and often elderly and physically frail.

During the Cultural Revolution, ‘filial descendant of the landlord class 地主阶级的孝子贤孙’ became a standard label attached to virtually any political target whose family background could be connected to the ownership of surplus rural land: figures as diverse as Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yi, Lin Biao, Yao Wenyan, and Zhang Chunqiao were all denounced in these terms at some point, as were countless ordinary people, including many who had in fact ‘drawn a clear line’ by any possible measure.⁴⁰ Old ‘landlords’ and ‘rich peasants’ were subjected to physical violence and humiliation throughout much of China, including more coercively implemented deportations from urban areas carried out jointly by the authorities and Red Guards, and if their children expressed any sorrow about this treatment, this was considered a political failing. Michael Schoenhals and Roderick MacFarquhar write of a low-ranking cadre whose ‘landlord’ mother had committed suicide following her expulsion from Beijing (on which more in the next section); ‘[a]lthough she lodged no complaint or protest, the daughter spoke with sadness about the suicide to a colleague..., [which] was enough to make the party branch to which she belonged charge her with ‘failing to draw a clear line of demarcation’ between herself and her ‘wicked landlord mother.’⁴¹

5.2 Seeking to ‘Draw a Clear Line’

For those from class enemy families who wanted to have a secure position in the New China, evidence that they harboured filial emotions was a major liability. They therefore had to suppress such emotions, or at least to avoid giving any evidence of them in contexts where they might come under political scrutiny. How difficult this was for anyone in particular could, however, vary greatly. Perhaps in the best position to do so were those

⁴⁰ See, respectively: ‘打倒党内最大的走资本主义道路的当权派 – 刘少奇’ [Overthrow the greatest person in power in the Party taking the capitalist road - Liu Shaoqi] (NP, 1967.4), 13, available in the ANU Chinese Digital Archive 1966-1976 (<http://hdl.handle.net/1885/44171>); ‘邓修外传’ [An alternative biography of Deng Xiaoping, the revisionist] (Beijing: Qinghua Daxue Jinggangshan Bingtuan, 1967.6), 29, available in the ANU Chinese Digital Archive 1966-1976 (<http://hdl.handle.net/1885/43932>); Du, *Family and State*, 248; ‘林彪是地主资产阶级的孝子贤孙’ [*Lin Biao Is a Filial Descendant of the Landlord and Capitalist Classes*] (Wuhan: Hubei Renmin Chubanshe, 1973); ‘地主阶级的孝子贤孙—姚文元’ [A filial descendant of the landlord class: Yao Wenyan], 1977.4.27, *RMRB*; ‘张春桥是地主阶级的孝子贤孙’ [Zhang Chunqiao is a filial descendant of the landlord class], in *Chedi pipan ‘sirenbang’ 9* (Jinan: Shandong Renmin Chubanshe, 1977), 27-31. See Qiu, *Eighty Years*, 106-107, for someone who had done everything ‘right’ but was still labelled in this way during the Cultural Revolution.

⁴¹ MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, 122-23.

whose parents died during land reform and who were able to come to terms with this fact. Such people could cut themselves off from their past, and if they had received an education, they usually had good prospects for social advancement in the early People's Republic. The fact that their parents were no longer alive meant that interaction with them could not become a political problem—though the fact that they had died during land reform would be recorded in their files, and this would be an obstacle to Party membership no matter how politically 'advanced' they were.⁴²

Most of those whose families were labelled landlords still had at least one and usually more than one living parent or grandparent after land reform, and thus had to deal with the practical question of how to relate to them. As we have seen, official guidelines, as manifested in journals like *China Youth*, did not expect people to cut all contact, and allowed the provision of assistance in cases of genuine need. In practice, however, such finer distinctions could be lost on cadres, as is clear from a description of a letter received by *China Youth* in 1956:

There is a young man whose father was a tyrannical landlord hated by the masses, and was sentenced to death by the People's Government in 1951. This young man had no complaint about the just sentence carried out by the People's Government. In the years since, he has ardently loved...his occupation as a teacher, and has become a member of the Youth League. His grandmother, mother, and younger sister all depend on him for support, so he has been sending them money every month. This is a responsibility that everyone has towards their family members, and yet the Youth League organization claimed that he had 'lost his standpoint and maintained contact with the landlord class' and suspended his Youth League membership. He protested by reference to the Party's policies, but was told that 'these policies only apply to ordinary young people from landlord families, not Youth League members [who need to meet a higher standard].' In his letter to us, he asked: 'Editor Comrade, my elderly grandmother and mother and my young sister have not committed any crimes—do I not have a responsibility to support them? Can I just stand by while they suffer from hunger and cold?'⁴³

The article noted, first, that Party policy made a distinction between 'elements'—that is, the class enemies themselves, in this case the executed father—and dependents of class

⁴² 'Central Organization Department agrees with Southwest Bureau Organization Department's views', 1954.1.16, *CCPM*.

⁴³ '怎样对待地主分子和反革命分子父兄及其亲属?' [How should one treat landlord element and counterrevolutionary element fathers and brothers and their dependents?], *ZGQN*, 1956 no. 22, 23–25.

enemies;⁴⁴ and secondly, that even the ‘elements’ themselves were conceived of as targets of ‘reform’ most of whom could eventually join the ranks of the People (in 1956, there was still considerable optimism about this in official discourse). For these reasons, expecting young people from such backgrounds to cut all relations with their families was completely unreasonable, and yet, this article noted, such expectations were ‘not only present among members of Youth League organizations, but also among many cadres in state administration and other organizations.’⁴⁵

Pressures of this kind were probably what led numerous young people from landlord and counterrevolutionary families to seek to formally renounce their relationship to their parents.⁴⁶ However, in 1956, the Supreme People’s Court approved a decision according to which it was not legally possible to sever the parent-child relationship—and the corresponding duty of care in old age—on political grounds.⁴⁷ This, like the article in *China Youth* just cited, was probably connected to the broader initiative that took place during this period to reinforce filial obligation towards elderly parents. The children of class enemies were therefore in the paradoxical position of being expected to show that they viewed their parents as enemies, while not being able to cut themselves off from them.

In 1958, the Party moved to reduce the overrepresentation of students from non-proletarian backgrounds in higher education by introducing a ‘class line.’ This involved a series of internal restrictions on the admissions of students from politically impure backgrounds, which included a clause deeming unsuitable students from landlord and rich peasant families ‘who have failed to draw a clear ideological line and have performed backwardly.’⁴⁸ This was followed by a sharp drop in the admission of students from such families, with all applicants being denied admission in many places, and the Ministry of Education having to clarify that those who ‘have drawn a clear ideological line with their families’ could be admitted to study for ordinary (as opposed to sensitive 机密) majors.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁴ The article suggests that the letter-writer’s mother was clearly not a class enemy ‘element’, but Party policy was ambiguous on this point, and the wives in landlord households were often treated as enemies as well (consider, for example, Shang Haowen’s widowed mother, discussed above). See the Introduction and Appendices for further discussion.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ ‘最高人民法院关于地主、反革命分子的亲生子女请求与其父母脱离亲属关系，应如何处理问题的复函 [Response from the Supreme People’s court on how to deal with requests from biological children of landlord and counterrevolutionary elements to renounce familial relations], 1956.9.15, in *Hunyin jiating falü shouce* (Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 1991), 195-96.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ ‘中共中央转发《教育部临时党组关于1958年高等学校招生工作的请示报告》’ [Party Centre transmits ‘Ministry of Education Temporary Party Group’s report on recruitment to institutions of higher education in 1958’], 1958.6.30, in *GKWX*, 321–25.

⁴⁹ ‘Supplementary explanations by the Ministry of Education Party Group’, 1959.7.5, *GKWX*, 350.

the relatively moderate period immediately following the Great Leap, there was an easing of political restrictions on admissions in higher education, and an article appeared in *China Youth* on what it meant to draw a clear line with ‘exploiting class’ parents—a category that included not only enemies like landlords and rich peasants, but also the more liminal group of capitalists—that echoed the article from 1956 cited above, and suggested that drawing a clear line may not actually require renouncing a fairly normal relationship.⁵⁰

Joining the Great Family of Socialism

This moderation was soon superseded, however, by the initiation of the SEM, which, as the previous chapter traced, involved a renewed drive to stigmatize landlords and rich peasants. With class struggle—and within that, the threat posed by old class enemies—firmly at the centre of the political agenda, the expectation to draw a clear line came to apply not only to young people hoping to make ‘progress’, but also to older people who already had well-established positions within the system. At a central work meeting in December 1964, Liu Shaoqi noted that ‘some areas have reported that among the dependents of the employees of organizations there are many tyrants, landlords, rich peasants, four types,’ and that ‘this [was] a problem of a general nature.’⁵¹ The same month, the Fujian Provincial Committee issued a decision on ‘Resolutely clearing out four type elements and capitalist elements among the dependents and domestic workers of cadres and employees of...work units.’⁵² The justification for this policy—which, in a move away from earlier norms,

⁵⁰ ‘教育部党组关于资产阶级子女升学问题的报告 [Report from the Ministry of Education Party Group on the issue of the children of capitalists continuing through education], 1961.8.17, *GKWX*, 399–401; ‘怎样才是正确地 和剥削阶级家庭划清思想界限?’ [How do you correctly draw an ideological line between yourself and your exploiting class family?], *ZGQN*, 1962 no. 11, 24.

⁵¹ Guo and Lin, *A Record of the Four Cleans Movement*, 254. Mao apparently did not consider the matter especially serious: ‘There aren’t *that* many [*ye mei name duo*]. The population of the country is hundreds of millions, those people are no more than a few million, maybe ten million, and are dispersed throughout the country. They are [of course] to be cleared out – they do exist, but there are not that many’ (ibid.).

⁵² ‘中共福建省委关于坚决清理住在机关、学校和企事业单位干部（职员）家属及雇佣保姆中的四类分子和资产阶级分子的决定’ [Fujian Provincial Committee’s decision on resolutely clearing out four type elements and capitalist class elements among the dependents and [female] domestic workers of cadres and employees residing in [party/government] organs, academic institutions, and enterprises], 1964.12.9, ‘A’ County Archives. At some point in 1964, the East China Bureau (to which Fujian was subordinated) called on cadres to send landlord and rich peasant family members to the countryside; this directive is referred to in 吴继周 Wu Jizhou, ‘清算我对于母亲成份问题上的立场错误’ [Exposing my error of standpoint on the issue of my mother’s class status], 1967.12.28, *CCPM*. There is also evidence of such a directive from the Sichuan Provincial level: a Party history of Xichang prefecture refers to a very similarly titled directive to that of Fujian (‘中国共产党西昌地委二十八年史’ [*Twenty-eight Years of the CCP Xichang Prefectural Committee*] (Xichang: Zhonggong Lianshan Zhouwei Dangshi

included ‘capitalist elements’ next to four-type elements – was that these people ‘have not only continued their parasitical lifestyles and evaded the supervision of the masses and reform through labour, but have also spread exploiting class thinking and have corrupted cadres and cadres’ children.’⁵³ The directive wrote that considerable resistance had been encountered in dealing with this issue, and was very unforgiving in its call for implementation:

In dealing with this issue, it is necessary to educate cadres and employees to raise their understanding, draw a clear line, be revolutionary on their own initiative, and correctly deal with their problems. Leading cadres should set an example. They should be told: whether or not they can correctly deal with this issue is a criterion in judging whether they are genuinely and truly revolutionary...

Anyone who refuses to carry out [this decision] is to be charged with shielding 包庇 four-type elements and capitalist elements. The party or administrative organization of any work unit that fails to strictly carry out [the decision]...is also to be held to account. This work is to be finished by the end of January 1965 [i.e. less than two months] throughout the province...⁵⁴

The directive left no room for exemptions: whether a person had been de-labelled or not was not mentioned, and if they were old and physically unable to work, they still had to be sent back, with the provision that their urban-resident relatives were to provide for them through remittances – but only at a level that that did not exceed the local average.⁵⁵

The recollections of a journalist for Xinhua in Hunan who had been reassigned to a county-level administrative job in the early 60s, illustrates what this could mean in practice:

In...1964, when the ‘plane-level’ SEM began, we studied the documents and examined ourselves and one another, each person having to pass the test 过关. At a meeting, some people criticized me for living with and providing for 供养在身边 my landlord father, saying this represented an unstable stand and a failure to draw a clear line. I repeatedly explained that my father had had a stroke 8 years ago and half of his body was paralyzed, so he would not be able to work, and there was no one who could take care of him back home. However, the organization still decided that I was to immediately send my father back.⁵⁶

Yanjiushi, 1995), 133). The memoir cited below concerns Hunan. There is therefore direct evidence of this happening in the three largest regions: East, Central-South, and Southwest.

⁵³ ‘Fujian Provincial Committee’s decision on resolutely clearing out four type elements and capitalist class elements’, 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Hu Jian, *Eighty Difficult Years*, 112.

Hu then had to arrange for his half-paralyzed father and stepmother to be resettled in their ancestral home.⁵⁷

This period saw the emergence of various ‘models’ in the press of young people rejecting the influence of their parents, as part of the cultivation of successors to the revolution. Many of these were children of people from liminal groups, like capitalists or intellectuals, who were portrayed as seeking to divert their children from the revolutionary path by preventing them from volunteering to move far away to engage in agricultural labour. There was, however, also a model for the children of class enemies.⁵⁸ Sun Yunjie was an elementary school teacher and youth league member; in 1962, she responded to the Party’s call to participate in agriculture and returned to her home village. She moved home to her rich peasant family, where she came into conflict with her parents and brother after ‘exposing their reactionary words and actions.’⁵⁹ Eventually the conflict intensified so much that she moved into an independent home. When the SEM began, she participated actively in denouncing her family, and was rewarded with titles from the commune, county, and provincial Youth League committees, and subsequently became a Party member. Both in Sun’s account and related articles, the party sought to convince young people to avoid the merely ‘formal 形式上的’ separation of leaving (or not returning to) their family homes, and to instead undertake the arduous task of struggle against their families.⁶⁰ The ultimate outcome in this, the only national-level SEM model of this kind, was not the successful reform of Sun’s family members, but only the successful reform of Sun herself, which involved the realization that she could not live together with her reactionary family.

Sun Yunjie rejected most of her family, but in the process, she received support from numerous sources: the leaders of the production team in which she was based, her second brother—who was a Party member working somewhere else and who sent a letter urging her to ‘take a firm stand’—and her superiors and colleagues at the school where she had worked.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ 孙云杰 Sun Yunjie, ‘我背叛了剥削阶级加入了共产党 (I turned my back on the exploiting classes and entered the CCP)’, in *Zhong zai biao xian shi Dang de jie ji zheng ce* (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe, 1965), 19-32.

⁵⁹ According to accounts of the SEM in Jin County, Sun’s family were labelled as ‘rich peasants who had escaped classification’ 漏划富农, meaning they had been reclassified at some point after land reform. See Ge, ‘The ‘Four Cleans’ Movement in Jin County’, 92-93; 大连史志办公室 Dalian Historical Gazetteer Office (ed.), ‘大连印记’ [Traces of Dalian] (Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 2009), 435-436. According to the latter source, subsequent investigation (it is unclear when) revealed that Sun’s family weren’t actually rich peasants at all.

⁶⁰ ‘和剥削阶级家庭生活在一起能不能划清思想界限？复一个地主家庭出身的青年’ [Is it possible to draw a clear ideological line when living with your exploiting class family? Reply to a youth from a landlord family], *ZGQN*, 1965 no. 20, 18-19.

When more educated youths arrived in the village, the local party branch arranged for some of them to stay with Sun. 'All of this care and support,' Sun wrote, 'led me to a deep appreciation of the warmth of living in the great family of socialism.'⁶¹ The prospect of embrace by the 'great family of socialism' must have been very compelling to young people being pressured to reject their biological families, but it is unlikely that many of them actually felt it in any consistent way. One memoirist writes:

Because my family background was 'landlord,' and my father was a counterrevolutionary on top of that, I had a really bad time in school. During the Cultural Revolution, in order to draw a clear line, I changed my surname... I remember when the teacher announced that my name had been changed. That moment, I felt like I had been liberated...

However, this change didn't really have much of an effect, and in some ways even put more pressure on me. People carried on treating me like someone of a different world, and Red Guard organizations and the Youth League remained off-limits.⁶²

Another author recounts the story of a young man from his home village who returned after failing to gain admission to university. His landlord family background meant that any kind of conflict he got into or dissatisfaction he expressed was dealt with as a political offense. To reduce the influence of his class background, he and his younger sister moved to a separate home, leaving their elderly, widowed father to live alone, and declared that he and his father were no longer related. However, this did not improve his political situation in appreciable way; as this author writes:

Was this action of any use? Although there was a slogan which proclaimed that the Party 'placed more weight on [political] performance [than on family background],' the performance of the children of landlords and rich peasants had no significance. Except for setting up a few model cases of 'justice prevailing over family 大义灭亲' for propaganda purposes, most of those from landlord and rich peasant families lived under the great shadow of their forebears... So what if you've drawn a clear line? Your parents are still who they are!⁶³

By the mid-1960s, active denunciation or a public 'split' with one's family seems to have become a standard requirement if young people from bad family backgrounds were to have any hope of escaping the stigma attached to their parents. During the Cultural Revolution, it could become a ritual one was violently forced to participate in, as in an example narrated by Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, based on their interviews with the father:

⁶¹ Sun, 'I turned my back on the exploiting classes', 30.

⁶² Sun, 'My Guilty Conscience', 178.

⁶³ Bi, 'The Tragic Lives of the Children of a Landlord', 74.

While the Cultural Revolution called for targeting ‘those in authority taking the capitalist road,’ red guards repeatedly attacked powerless scapegoats, especially ‘landlord’ Li Maoxiu.⁶⁴ [Local] militants ... joined the Beijing red guards in forcing 21-year-old Li Wei to repudiate his father. Wei was put on a stage before 1500 people at the clubhouse. His father, head shaved like convict, was forced to his knees, then trussed up, tied by the ankles, hung upside down high in the air, and whipped until he fainted...

Li Wei had to prove his father deserved the torture. The son invented a diary that his father had burned, ‘remembering’ passages that hoped for a landlord comeback. Activists told each other about so-and-so having seen this diary, persuading themselves that their barbarous cruelty was just. The son claimed his father sang counterrevolutionary Hebei opera arias, changing the lines to ridicule socialism.

Li Wei had to draw a class line. He, his wife, and his child left Maoxiu’s house for a separate building in the same courtyard. The most colourful clothing of Li Wei’s daughter was seized by red families to ‘save the child’ from superstitious influence. Years later the father insisted that the son had had no choice in violating filial piety...⁶⁵

Shortly after the departure of the red guards from Beijing, another contingent arrived from Tianjin, and together with local ‘rebels’, the process was repeated:

Like all rebels, they dragged out the ritual whipping boy, ‘landlord’ Li Maoxiu, for the usual torture. Son Li Wei was viciously beaten and compelled yet again to denounce his father. Maoxiu believed he had saved his son’s life by pretending to rupture the father-son bond.⁶⁶

As this example makes clear, at the height of the Cultural Revolution, ‘drawing a clear line’ could become little more than coerced participation in cruelty against one’s parents. Li Wei’s ‘reward’ for this was merely the avoidance of further victimization rather than any meaningful inclusion among the People. While the intensity and violence of the Cultural Revolution subsided over the subsequent years, it is nevertheless hard to imagine that many young people from class enemy families were truly embraced by the ‘great family of socialism’, no matter how thorough they were in rejecting their parents.

⁶⁴ The authors put ‘landlord’ in scare-quotes because Li Maoxiu was only nineteen at the time of land reform, prior to which he had been active in the communist-led resistance against the Japanese. He had the misfortune of being assigned the landlord label because his father had died and his brother had left (Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*, 87, 101).

⁶⁵ Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Revolution, Resistance and Reform*, 98.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

5.3 Rejecting the Party, Choosing One's Family

Many people tried to resolve the conflict between family and state by renouncing or distancing themselves from their families. Others, however, felt such close identification with their families that they did not consider this an option. The Party saw such people as a minority among the children of class enemies, describing them as 'those who have been profoundly influenced by their families, or have hatred for us because we killed their relatives—they have bone-deep class hatred for the Party and the People.'⁶⁷ While it is unlikely that many people saw themselves as hating 'the People' rather than the Party, it is hard to fault the basic analysis: killing or persecuting someone's parents or other close relatives is likely to engender hostility. These feelings were probably strengthened in those who were discriminated against, as many children of class enemies were, and in those who were receptive to traditional notions about avenging the death of close family members. To this must be added the Party's emphasis, especially strong in the years after 1962, on the need to always keep clear the distinction between 'us' and the 'enemy.' These factors meant that some people quite explicitly came to view themselves as involved in a binary struggle in which they, their families, and perhaps others in a similar situation were on one side, and the Party and its local agents on the other.

These feelings were likely to lead to a profound sense of alienation from public culture. Recent scholarship has shown how diary- and letter-writing were means by which people sought to transform their subjectivity in line with the expectations of the Party-state, but for the children of class enemies who identified with their families, such personal documents could instead represent a sphere in which they could express their thoughts and feelings without having to meet those expectations.⁶⁸ Such space, however, became more difficult to access as, with each political campaign, ever more personal documents became subject to political scrutiny. The materials discussed in this section entered the archival record precisely because they were discovered during the SEM and seen as evidence that their authors were dangerous counterrevolutionaries. These materials are poems, diaries, and a letter, together with the investigative reports produced following their discovery. Since these are not original personal documents but purported reproductions of sections of them in reports compiled by state agents during a political campaign, one might reasonably have

⁶⁷ 'Latter Ten Points', point 10.

⁶⁸ Li and Yan, 'Self-Cultivation of the Socialist New Person'; Windscrip, 'How to Write a Diary in Mao's New China'.

doubts about their authenticity. While we can be certain that they were selected and interpreted with a view to supporting the Party Centre's narrative that there was serious 'class struggle' in Chinese society, the large amount of politically irrelevant detail makes it unlikely that they were fabricated.

In 1963, the Zhejiang Provincial Youth League's propaganda department produced a report on He Qianhui, a trainee doctor who had expressed despair and hostility about various aspects of society in over a thousand 'reactionary poems' written between 1958 and 1963.⁶⁹ The husband of a nurse He had apparently seduced discovered these poems in his drawer while searching for evidence of the affair, and proceeded to hand them over to He's superiors. The poems included one that began 'National Day is no celebration for me,' and another in which he wrote, of the Great Leap Forward, that 'the further we leap, the worse it gets 越跃越紧.'⁷⁰ He also wrote about his compassion for his father, who lived under *guanzhi* in the countryside.⁷¹ In this and other poems, he referred to the CCP's grassroots cadres as 'jackals and wolves 豺狼.' The Youth League officials who produced the report sought to explain how He, who was only thirteen at the time of land reform, had nevertheless become so 'reactionary,' and they found the explanation in his emotional attachment to his class enemy family and his sense of filial gratitude:

He Qianhui comes from a very reactionary landlord family, his grandfather had passed the county-level imperial examinations... During land reform, He's grandfather was struggled against thoroughly by the peasants; he fought back against the revolution by refusing food and thereby committing suicide. This left a deep impression on He. His father was a KMT *bao* head, and has been put under *guanzhi* twice since liberation. He Qianhui has a deep emotional bond 深切的感情 with a family like this. He himself has said: 'From a young age, I respected my grandfather as if he were a god.' After his grandfather committed suicide, he cried bitterly. Since starting work [in 1958], he has written a poem commemorating his grandfather every year for the tomb-sweeping festival... Two years ago, during the post-Great Leap urban downsizing, when He worried he might be fired, his father wrote to him: 'If you lose your job, then come home—no matter how difficult things are, your family will always want you.' He was full of gratitude to his parents, and always felt that he had failed to properly repay them 报

⁶⁹ 杭州市委办公室 Office of the Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee, '地主子女何谦惠的反动诗 [The reactionary poems of He Qianhui, child of a landlord], *Tuan de Qingkuang*, 1964 no. 33, 1–11 (Hangzhou Municipal Archives, 126-1-529, 180-190).

⁷⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁷¹ Ibid., 3.

恩, writing many poems expressing his gratitude towards his parents and his hatred for the new society...⁷²

Apparently, these aspects of He's emotional life only came to light through the investigation that followed the discovery of his poems. Although his colleagues could tell he was full of dissatisfaction, when asked about it, he claimed it was because he couldn't get his wife's *hukou* moved from the countryside. Only one example is given of his revealing his feelings to someone else, when he lamented the decline of his family's fortunes: 'once, he could not help himself, and exclaimed to the head nurse: "I am the eldest son of the He family, and yet have ended up in this state!"'⁷³ Otherwise,

he never revealed his thoughts to others... He would often lock his dormitory and write poems, and would leave piles of ash behind from the paper he had burned... Sometimes he would become deranged, suddenly tearing up the book or magazine he was reading. However, not even Youth League members tried to understand the cause of this abnormal, furtive behaviour from the perspective of class struggle.⁷⁴

In explaining how it was possible that He's reactionary standpoint had remained concealed for so long, the report went on to note that the hospital's Youth League Committee had paid insufficient attention to carrying out 'in-depth thought work,' with the result that 'they have no understanding of the inner world 内心 of the kinds of people who are ideologically backwards and close themselves off very tightly.'⁷⁵

The same year, in 1963, the central level internal news publication *Neibu Cankao* reproduced extracts from the diary of a young man named Zhao Wenyu.⁷⁶ The son of a landlord, Zhao, too, was thirteen years old at the time of land reform, and his father died after being 'struggled' against. The reason extracts from his diary appeared in *Neibu Cankao* was almost certainly that he articulated an anti-CCP political position, according to which the Party had become a new ruling class and that another revolution was necessary to establish a society in which everyone would be free and equal. However – as the editors of the material emphasized – these views were connected to Zhao's experiences as the son of a landlord who was killed during land reform. They quoted a section from his diary in which

⁷² Ibid., 8-9.

⁷³ Ibid., 9

⁷⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁶ '一个地主儿子的复仇日记' [The revenge diary of a landlord's son], 1963.1.26, *Neibu Cankao*, in *CCPM*.

it seems Zhao was following the Confucian injunction to recall the appearance and personality of his deceased father while offering sacrifices at his grave:⁷⁷

In the ten years since the death of my father, I have been living in poverty and in a time of turmoil, so I have not had an opportunity to visit his grave. Today, as I came to offer sacrifices 祭, I began thinking about his life. I saw before me his appearance when alive, a famous doctor in our area who specialized in treating illness and saving lives, but who, in the process of social transformation, was treated as an evil tyrant. Savage beatings ended his life, he was persecuted to death, and they [*sic* – the new local power-holders] wanted me to die with him, so that our family would be exterminated 绝根断苗.⁷⁸

Zhao then wrote how these memories underpinned his understanding of the us/enemy divide:

Thinking about this sequence of events, I was filled with sorrow and rage. However, this combination of sorrow and rage coalesced into a resolute ambition, and into the realization that today's new enemies are even more vicious than evil tyrants in the old society were towards the poor. Today, I am able to distinguish more clearly than ever between friend and enemy 敌我分得一清二楚.⁷⁹

Zhao's understanding thus mirrored the CCP's own propaganda, according to which the development of a sharp us-enemy line in one's thinking was among the most important phases in the education of young people.

Writing poems and diaries was one possible way of expressing proscribed thoughts and emotions, but a solitary one. Becoming friendly with others in a similar situation carried the risk of accusations of conspiracy. Writing letters was a possibility, but also carried risks, as discovered by the son of a 'reactionary rich peasant' who had written a letter to the daughter of an executed landlord in a neighbouring production team in Neixiang County, Henan. Somehow—it is unclear how—this letter made it to the county Public Security Bureau, which proceeded to distribute it to each commune as an example of the intensity of class

⁷⁷ 'Ancestor worship was the filial son's spiritual expression. As practiced in literati families, it emphasized the personal, rather than the supernatural or absolute. The worshiper was to try to recall the faces and mannerisms of his departed parents so that 'the eyes of the son should not forget the looks (of his parents) nor his ears their voices; and that he should retain the memory of their aims, likings, and wishes.' (Lifton, *Thought Reform*, 364). The quote is from the *Book of Rites*, chapter 21, point 4.

⁷⁸ 'The revenge diary of a landlord's son', 1963.1.26, *Neibu Cankao*, in *CCPM*.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

struggle.⁸⁰ The letter appears to be a follow-up to a marriage proposal, and one of the author's intentions was to convince the recipient that it would be hopeless to try to improve her situation by marrying someone from a more politically favourable class background. To make this point, the author relied on a combination of official discourse about the protracted nature of class struggle, his and his interlocutor's experiences of hostile treatment, and a general sense that one must feel vengeful about the killing of one's father. This was of course an idea with ample support in the Confucian canon; and indeed the Party Centre had also used the term 'hatred originating from the killing of a close relative 杀亲之仇' in describing the minority of young people from class enemy families who were irredeemably hostile.⁸¹ The author wrote:

Your father was a battalion commander under the previous regime; he was arrested and shot by the CCP during the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries, and all of your family's property was redistributed. Although you were young and didn't know what was going on at the time, so you can't have experienced much sorrow, today, you must keep firmly in mind the fact that they killed your father and took your family's land – there can be no compromises on this... Just think how the CCP has treated members of the landlord and rich peasant classes, like us, with what contempt!...

People like us, who have hatred because our fathers were killed, cannot get married with the children of poor and lower-middle peasants. ... they have made clear above that class and class struggle will not disappear for at least three generations (meaning 100 years), so it is more stable if people from the same class marry each other...

...hatred that originates from the killing of one's father is not something you can just forget, this is something that anyone would feel – even if you don't talk about it, in your heart, you'll still feel it...⁸²

It seems likely that, in those who were receptive to it, the idea of an absolute moral obligation originating from the killing of one's father was only strengthened by the

⁸⁰ 内乡县公安局 Neixiang County Public Security Bureau, '从一封恋爱信中看反动阶级复辟野心' [The restorationist ambitions of the reactionary classes as seen through a love letter], 1964.9.19, *NCA*, W15-1-159, 113-117.

⁸¹ Cheng, 'Filial Piety with a Vengeance', 30-34; 'Latter Ten Points', point 10.

⁸² 'The restorationist ambitions of the reactionary classes as seen through a love letter', 1964.9.19, *NCA*, W15-1-159, 115-117.

insistence on the clear boundary between the People and their enemies that characterized official discourse in the Mao era, particularly after 1962.⁸³

Although the fate of the individuals described in this section is not clear from the sources available, all three cases were dealt with by the public security system, possibly as cases of active counterrevolutionary behaviour.⁸⁴ All three cases emerged during the SEM, in a period of intense mobilization to discover instances of purported class struggle. The fact that these people had been willing to commit to writing such thoughts does indicate that they had at least some confidence that these documents would not be discovered. It is difficult to imagine that, after the SEM, and particularly the early years of the Cultural Revolution, when far more innocuous writings could become the basis of severe punishment, anyone but the most disillusioned or hopeless would take such risks. The scope for documents to remain private probably increased in the period following the height of the Cultural Revolution, but memories of that period are likely to have deterred many potential writers.

For those who sided with their families in an 'us-enemy' struggle against the Party, the safest space to express these thoughts and feelings was probably the family itself, where they could be expressed in conversation at relatively low risk of detection. One memoirist, who grew up as the child of a landlord family during the Cultural Revolution, describes how he and his siblings were bullied and ostracized by other children and how his parents and grandfather were humiliated by cadres.⁸⁵ When he asked his mother why they had to stay hidden in their house all the time, she told him it was because

...we were landlords, and...the people outside were poor peasants who had taken our house, lands, and stores. They were making us suffer because the leaders were all bad. There was not fairness, no justice for us. We had to be quiet, stay out of trouble, and wait for better days to come.⁸⁶

Sometimes, the author's mother 'would point out to us which land and storefronts used to be ours, and we would feel quietly proud.'⁸⁷ Had such thoughts become public, they would have been seen as instances of class enemies hoping for a 'change of regime' and would

⁸³ Daniel Leese recounts a remarkable case from the Cultural Revolution in which many of these themes—hatred originating from the killing of one's parents, the expression of such sentiment in letters, and romance based on shared experience of the persecution of one's family as class enemies—are prominent; see 'Reversing Verdicts in Post-Mao China', 120-22.

⁸⁴ In the case of the He Qianhui, the report mentions in passing that he had been detained by the Public Security Bureau ('The reactionary poems of He Qianhui', *Tuan de Qingkuang*, 1964 no. 33, 10).

⁸⁵ Chen, *Colors of the Mountain*, chapters 1-2.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

have been a major political incident; but for those who lived with their parents, or whose spouses were in a similar situation, the home could be a domain for the relatively safe expression of prohibited narratives and emotions.

Although the Party maintained that those who sided with their class enemy families were a minority, the notion of the ‘class alien element 阶级异己分子’—someone from an exploiting class family who entered the revolutionary ranks, but later revealed themselves to be loyal their ‘original’ class—was important in both internal and public discourse throughout the 50s and 60s.⁸⁸ The next chapter uses one major political scandal from the Socialist Education Movement that centred around an alleged class alien element to explore the post-land reform significance of the issue that led to people being labelled as landlords and rich peasants in the first place: property.

⁸⁸ See the definitions in 陈北鸥 Chen Bei'ou (ed.), ‘人民学习辞典’ [*People's Study Dictionary*] (Shanghai: Guangyi Shuju, 1952), 288 (where the term is listed simply as ‘alien element 异己分子’, but with the same meaning), and 熊忠武 Xiong Zhongwu (chief ed.), ‘当代中国流行语词典’ [*Dictionary of Popular Terms in Contemporary China*] (Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1992), 21. For an example from the time of land reform, see ‘在斗争中站稳党的立场’ [Take firmly the Party standpoint in the course of struggle], 1951.12.1, *RMRB*. From the mid-50s, see the example from Hulin County cited in Chapter 3. In the wake of the Xinyang Incident, the Party secretary of one of the counties in Xinyang, who came from a ‘rich peasant’ family, was designated as a ‘class alien element’ (‘中共罗山县委对阶级异己分子许文波在“信阳事件”中所犯错误的处分决定’ [Luoshan County CCP Committee’s decision on the punishment of the class alien element Xu Wenbo for errors committed during the ‘Xinyang Incident’], 1962.4.23, *CCPM*). From the Socialist Education Movement, there is an internal document from the East China Bureau level in which this term features prominently, concerning a case not dissimilar to the one that is at the centre of the next chapter (‘华东局批转华东局直属机关党委“关于开除阶级异己分子宋光曙党籍的报告”’ [East China Bureau approves and circulates Party Committee of the East China Bureau’s Directly Subordinated Organs “Report on the expulsion from the Party of class alien element Song Guangshu], 1964.10.2, ‘A’ County Archives). Probably the most vivid portrayal of a ‘class alien element’ in public culture is the character Cui Zhiguo 崔志国 in the 1962 film *Locust Tree Village* 槐树庄; see ‘槐树庄’ [*Locust Tree Village*], *Yingpian Shuomingshu*, 1963 no. 1, for a synopsis.

6 Class Enemies, Property, and the Revolutionary Order

During the Lunar New Year of 1962, Geng Dingfa, a thirty-year old instructor at the Harbin Institute of Military Engineering, travelled to Shanghai for a family reunion. The family—four siblings and their widowed mother—took this opportunity to visit their ancestral home, a small town just north of the Yangzi river between Shanghai and Nanjing. The Gengs had left for Shanghai ten years before, but they still owned some buildings from which Geng senior and his brothers had run a wine trading business in the 1920s and 30s. Mr Geng had died in 1932, the family business was split up in 1942, and Mrs Geng was left with ownership of some of the buildings. Mrs Geng agreed for the acquaintances of a relative, the Wangs, to stay in the building on the town's main street, on the understanding that they would move out when her eldest son, then an apprentice in Shanghai, was ready to restart the business. But when Mrs Geng asked for return of the building a few years later, the Wangs, who were running a restaurant from it, refused. This led to a series of escalating court cases between 1950 and 1955. Courts at the county, prefectural, and provincial levels all found that the house belonged to the Geng family and called on the Wangs to move out, or, in the final case, to enter into a rental agreement, but the Wangs refused, and the Gengs could not pursue the matter, as they had moved away. When they returned for a visit in 1962, they formally took up the matter with the commune through a written request, which the commune cadres approved:

these two households have been in dispute for over ten years; official judgments have been issued from three levels, all of which the Wangs have refused to comply with, so this is clearly a case of seizure without justification 无理霸占; we therefore request that the [county] court take legal action 依法办理.¹

The court and the commune jointly agreed to dispatch brigade cadres to accompany the Gengs to settle the matter, but when the Gengs began moving the Wangs' property from the main building to the annexe that the Wangs had built, one of the Wangs threatened to commit suicide. With local cadres and villagers acting as mediators, an agreement was reached according to which the Wangs would buy the building from the Gengs for the substantial sum of 2050 yuan.

¹ Liu, 'Recollections Concerning Reversing the Verdict on the Geng Dingfa Counterrevolutionary Restoration Case,' 61.

The members of the Geng family had felt that it was entirely within their rights to seek to retrieve this property, as did the cadres who helped them secure it and the courts that had decided in their favour between 1950 and 1955. But their decision to pursue this claim was a fateful one: just two years later, Geng Dingfa was expelled from the Party and the military as a 'class alien element' who had assisted his 'tyrannical landlord' mother in seizing back property, and all of his siblings lost their jobs. The case was communicated throughout the army as a warning, and it was used in the Jiangsu Provincial Class Education Exhibition as an illustration of the intensity of class struggle.² After his attempts to reverse the verdict on the case in 1966-67 failed, Geng and his mother were sent to prison, with Geng narrowly escaping execution.³

Why was it that, in 1962—half a decade after the transition to socialism—the Gengs and the cadres who assisted them thought it was entirely legitimate for them to try to enforce their claim to the ownership of a building in their ancestral home that they had left a decade prior? And why, in turn, did this relatively minor episode concerning a 3 *jian* property (perhaps about 50 square meters) in a small town become a national-level political scandal? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine how entitlement to property was understood during Mao era, and its complex intersection with the two central divides of the period: between the People and their enemies, and between the urban and the rural.

The first part of this chapter sets up the background concerning property rights, from New Democracy to the socialist transition and the Great Leap Forward, and explains how the hostile expropriation of rural class enemies during land reform fits into this picture. I argue that, in rural areas, land reform was much more of an assault on the institution of private property than how it was portrayed by the Party. Land reform established a precedent for those empowered by the state to violently redistribute housing, furniture, clothes, and grain from people in rural areas, which, I suggest, was an important step on the way to the 'communal wind' of the Great Leap Forward. Having learned of the extent to which norms of private property had been undermined since the start of the Leap, in 1961, the Party leadership took a number of measures to re-establish a scope of ownership for rural residents that was protected from infringement, including the right to buy, sell, and rent out housing.

The second part of the chapter explores the political significance of claims by those labelled landlords and rich peasants on the kinds of property that remained (or were

² Teng, *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa*, 114-15, 129-30.

³ Teng, *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa*, 184-87.

supposed to have remained) privately owned after collectivization. I introduce the special category of property-related crime, that of *fangong daosuan* 反攻倒算, which involved attempts by those classified as landlords or rich peasants to retrieve property confiscated from them during land reform. Originating during the civil war, this crime would become a standard part of the Mao-era political lexicon, and it established a connection between claims by landlords and rich peasants on particular pieces of property and the security of the entire revolutionary order. The re-emergent discourse of class struggle from 1962 onwards created both incentives and pressures to interpret any property dispute involving people who were or could be labelled as class enemies through this lens. It was in this context that the Geng family's attempt to retrieve their house was transformed from a defence of their legitimate rights into a major crime.

The third and final part considers how former class enemies' claims on property were dealt with after class struggle ceased to be the organizing principle of Chinese political life. As part of the new emphasis on socialist legality, the Party, government, and courts sought to establish continuity with the policies and regulations of the pre-Cultural Revolution period. For former class enemies, this had two implications: on the one hand, they could be eligible for the return of property that had been confiscated contrary to policy after land reform; on the other hand, with one notable exception—overseas Chinese landlords—'turning back the clock' on land reform was out of the question, and any attempts to do so were to be resolutely rejected. Importantly, however, the interpretation of what continued to be referred to as *fangong daosuan* had been transformed: while it was still a punishable offense against the social order, its objective was no longer automatically assumed to involve counterrevolution.

6.1 Property Rights from New Democracy to the Aftermath of the Leap

From New Democracy to the Socialist Transition

What is perhaps most notable about the CCP's approach to property rights immediately after its rise to power is the extent to which the Party portrayed its revolution as consistent

with the institution of private property.⁴ The Party defined its first objective as carrying out a New Democratic Revolution that would destroy imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, and feudalism.⁵ Imperialists, bureaucratic capitalists, and feudal landlords were therefore to be expropriated, but since the property rights of these groups were portrayed as an illegitimate subset of property rights, this was not presented as constituting an attack on the institution of private property in general. Patriotic capitalists—in practice, virtually all capitalists who decided to stay on the mainland—were assured that their businesses would remain in their hands, the owners of urban housing were assured that they could continue to collect rent from tenants, and after land reform, rural residents were issued with documentation certifying their ownership of land and housing, which they could freely buy, sell, and lease.⁶

‘New Democracy’ was initially presented as a stage that would last for an unspecified but long period of time. However, in 1953, the ‘General Line for the Transitional Period’ was announced; the 1954 Constitution enshrined as state objectives the ‘gradual elimination of the rich peasant economy’ and the ‘gradual replacement of capitalist ownership by state [lit. ‘entire-people’] ownership.’⁷ At the same time, and rather in tension with the latter aim, the constitution also pronounced that the state ‘protects capitalists’ property rights 所有权 in their means of production and other capital.’ Moreover, the constitution also had clauses proclaiming the protection of the property rights of farmers, handicraftsmen, and other ‘individual labourers’ in their means of production 生产资料, and of all citizens 公民 in their ‘legal income, savings, housing, and all kinds of means of subsistence 生活资料.’⁸

⁴ The Soviet experience was of course very different, involving an initial full-frontal assault on private property in the form of war communism, followed by gradual and partial concessions with the introduction of the New Economic Policies, and eventually the enshrinement of rights to ‘personal’ (as opposed to ‘private’) property, understood as that used by the owner only for his own person and family, in the 1936 constitution (Kucherov, ‘Property in the Soviet Union.’). This ‘opened the door to a new emphasis on an acquisitive Soviet property culture in the 1930s’ (Betts, ‘Private Property and Public Culture,’ 2), a tendency that further developed in the post-war years.

Cf. Kligman and Verdery’s contention that ‘in every country where communist parties came to power in the twentieth century....private property came under immediate and sustained attack’ (*Peasants under Siege*, 2). I do not disagree, but wish to suggest that the CCP, more than other communist parties, went to some effort to deny that it was carrying out such an attack, and was genuinely concerned to limit practices of outright expropriation in urban areas.

⁵ ‘中国人民政治协商会议共同纲领’ [Common Programme of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference], 1949.9.29, *RMRB*.

⁶ On the reassurance of capitalists, see Engman, ‘Shanghai’s Dispossessed,’ 48-9, 58-9; on the protection of the right to rent out urban property and the justification for doing so, see ‘关于城市房产、房租的性质和政策’ [On the nature of urban real estate and rent and our policies [towards them]] 1949.8.12, *RMRB*; on the right to buy, sell, and lease land after land reform, see ‘Land Reform Law’, clause 30; on issuing documentation, see ‘保障土地改革后农民土地所有权’ [Guarantee peasants’ property rights to land following land reform], 1951.1.27, *RMRB*.

⁷ ‘1954 Constitution’, articles 8 and 10.

⁸ ‘1954 Constitution’, articles 10, 9 and 11.

The socialist transformation of the economy that took place over 1955-56 was carried out in a manner that nominally respected these property rights, by means of the principle that entry into agricultural co-operatives and public-private partnerships was voluntary, and the mechanism of ‘buying out 赎买’ through which capitalists were compensated as ‘public-private partnership’ was transformed into state ownership. It became clear fairly soon that, for capitalists, having been ‘bought out’ by the state was not to be understood as the contractual transfer of property rights, but rather as a mechanism for the easing of the socialist transition.⁹ As for agricultural households, while withdrawing one’s property and leaving the co-operative was never explicitly prohibited, the Party presented such behaviour as evidently against the interests of all but a small number of class enemies and wealthier households. As a September 1957 headline in the *People’s Daily* put it, ‘landlords, rich peasants, and some prosperous [middle] peasants have incited people to withdraw from the co-operatives, then seizing on the opportunity to carry out exploitation; peasants who were tricked into withdrawing have come to their senses and are once again on the great socialist road.’¹⁰

As the socialist transformation of the means of production was being carried out, the fact that significant amounts of housing in large cities was owned and rented out by private individuals or companies inevitably became the object of disapproval. The largest urban ‘landlords’ – *fangzhu* rather than *dizhu* – were said to be ‘the descendants of feudal nobles, the descendants of warlords and bureaucrats, and former speculators 投机商’.¹¹ Eighty percent of large *fangzhu* in Beijing were of this kind. In Shanghai, the descendants of Li Hongzhang were said to own some 100,000 square meters of housing. Other categories included ‘compradors, large landlords [meaning those who had owned a lot of land in rural areas before land reform], and urban usurers.’ Socializing this property was seen as part of the broader socialist transformation, and it was to be carried out following the same principles as the socialist transformation of capitalist enterprise: ‘in a manner similar to buying them out, the state will, for a certain period, pay a fixed rent [to the original owners], so as to gradually transform the system of ownership.’ At the same time, ‘owners who rely largely on entirely on rent from housing as their means of existence are to be gradually

⁹ Engman, ‘Shanghai’s Dispossessed,’ 76-78.

¹⁰ ‘广东陆丰县发生的事情有很大说服力’ [The events that have taken place in Lufeng County, Guangdong, have great persuasive force], 1957.9.3, *RMRB*.

¹¹ ‘中共中央批转中央书记处第二办公室《关于目前城市私有房产基本情况及进行社会主义改造的意见》’ [Party Centre approves and circulates [report by] the Second Office of the Central Secretariat on ‘The basic situation of privately owned real estate and opinions on carrying out its socialist transformation’], 1956.1.18, in Guan Zhihui 关智慧 and Zheng Zhongyan 郑仲彦 (eds.), *Lishi yiliu sifang jiu fen de zhengce yu falü wenti yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Chubanshe, 2016), 205.

educated and transformed, from exploiters to self-sufficient labourers.¹² This was a considerably friendlier approach than that taken towards those who had, or were claimed to have, lived primarily off rent from agricultural land, to which I shall now turn.

The Expropriation of 'Feudal Landlords'

The New Democratic Revolution involved the confiscation of the property of imperialists, bureaucratic capitalists, and feudal landlords. The first two of these operations were relatively straightforward: there were popular narratives concerning imperialism and KMT corruption that led to these property rights being widely perceived as illegitimate, most of the property in question could be identified with relatively little difficulty, and there was little to no direct interaction with the former owners, since foreign powers had been or were being expelled, while 'bureaucratic' (as opposed to patriotic) capitalists were precisely those who had fled with the KMT – it was 'a category without demography.'¹³

The expropriation of 'feudal landlords' was an operation of an altogether different nature. As argued in Chapter 1, this category bore a tenuous connection with Chinese social reality. Those who owned surplus agricultural land in China were mostly small- rather than large-scale landowners, and their titles to their land were part of a complex, commercialized system of property rights that had developed over hundreds of years. The CCP called this the 'feudal system of land ownership' as distinct from the partly imperialist, partly capitalist property relations in urban areas, but in fact there was no distinct *system* of property ownership that distinguished rural from urban areas, and rural areas were economically integrated with a network of market towns, which in turn linked them to larger county towns and cities. This was especially characteristic of the commercialized and fertile rice-growing regions south of the Yangzi, where it was common for rights in a particular plot of land to be divided between surface and subsoil rights (see Chapter 1), with

¹² Ibid., 204. 'The difficult question, as with most such policies, was where to set the boundaries, since the point was not to socialize *all* privately owned housing, or even necessarily all housing rented out, but only that seen to constitute part of the capitalist economy. This boundary was called the 'transformation starting point' 改造起点, and was described as, 'the policy boundary between housing the ownership system of which will be transformed, and private housing that citizens can retain as their means of living 生活资料 ('城市服务部张永励副部长在第二次全国厅局长会议上关于城市房产管理工作的讲话 (节录)') [Speech by Zhang Yongli, vice-head of the Urban Service Bureau, on the management of urban real estate at the Second National Conference of Department and Bureau Heads at the Urban Service Bureau (excerpts)], 1957.10.28, in *Lishi yiliu sifang jiuifen*, 211.

¹³ Engman, 'Shanghai's Dispossessed', 50.

subsoil rights functioning as an investment vehicle – bought and sold ‘like bonds and stocks,’ according to Fei Xiaotong – for merchants and other property-owning town-dwellers.¹⁴

For these reasons, identifying ‘feudal landlords’ and justifying their hostile expropriation was a very complex task, even against a background of strong public support for the ideal of ‘land to the tiller.’¹⁵ As traced in Chapter 1, CCP policy and practice underwent a complicated sequence of swings between moderation and radicalism. After 1945, the CCP started with a differentiated approach that limited hostile expropriation to ‘traitors’ and ‘tyrants’ – people whose means of acquiring their property and their exercise of power made them the targets of widespread popular hostility – while experimenting with a variety of means to pressure ordinary landlords to sell or give away their surplus land. By the spring of 1947, however, the Party had shifted to a mode of radical mass mobilization in which all those designated as landlords were to be dealt with as enemies, completely expropriated of their land, homes, and moveable wealth, and only then allowed the means of survival as an act of grace. As explained in Chapter 1, the CCP never returned to its earlier differentiated approach: from this point onwards, being a ‘landlord’ *ipso facto* meant being an ‘enemy,’ whose property, like that of war criminals and counterrevolutionaries, was subject to ‘confiscation 没收.’

After the Party swept to victory and founded the People’s Republic, it seemed that a more moderate approach might be carried out, as a number of the practices of 1947 were criticized as leftist excesses. Specifically with respect to property, the practices of expelling people from their homes 扫地出门, violently forcing people to hand over precious metals and other moveable wealth, and confiscating commercial and industrial (i.e. non-‘feudal’) property were deemed as mistakes to be avoided. The 1950 land reform law defined the scope of expropriation as follows:

Landlords’ land, livestock, and agricultural tools, as well as their surplus grain and surplus housing in rural areas, are to be confiscated. Their other property is not to be confiscated.¹⁶

It is now well-documented that expropriation during post-1949 land reform systematically went beyond this scope, in many cases coming to resemble the leftist phase of pre-1949 land reform. As recent scholarship has shown, extracting wealth other than land from the upper stratum of rural society was among the CCP’s major objectives in its early campaigns, a need

¹⁴ Quoted in Huang, *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice*, 103.

¹⁵ This was a slogan attributed to Sun Zhongshan, ‘father of the nation’, and was in principle also endorsed by the KMT.

¹⁶ ‘Land Reform Law’, 1.

which became even stronger with China's entry into the Korean War. After the establishment of the People's Republic, everyone knew that land reform was coming, but the Party delayed the actual redistribution of land in order to justify imposing a series of burdens on those whose land was to be expropriated: high taxation, returning deposits, and various kinds of fines.¹⁷ The purpose of this was to extract as much wealth as possible without resorting to the kind of direct violent extortion that had taken place in 1947. However, instances of 'extractive' violence were frequently recorded, particularly after the move to oppose 'peaceful land reform' that began in late 1950 (see Chapter 1).

As with the pursuit of hidden wealth, the practice of expelling people from their homes was also referred to as a leftist error of 1947 that was not to be repeated. The precise meaning of 'surplus' housing, and how to deal with the problems arising from confiscating it, were left unaddressed by central regulations, and were up to regional governments to specify. Public pronouncements on the matter from the governments of Guangdong, the Eastern China Region, and Northern Sichuan all stated that landlords should be left part of the houses in which originally resided.¹⁸ However, internal communications were clear that this was not to be understood as an absolute principle. The Jiangxi Provincial Committee proposed the following:

Given that peasants aren't willing to live in the same house as landlords, during the distribution of housing, large and medium landlords should be ordered to move entirely and be assigned worse housing by the peasants, while small landlords can be allowed not to move house, but cannot choose where they will live in the original house.¹⁹

The Central-South Bureau commented that

this method need not be explicitly decreed, as it is in conflict with the Land Reform Law [which just called for the confiscation of 'surplus housing'] and will lead to criticism from among the People. Moreover, once the peasants have truly been mobilized to become masters of the village, they won't fear living together with landlords. In those places where the peasants have

¹⁷ Liu and Cao, 'Determining the Political Identity of "Businessperson-Landlords"'; Liu, 'Grain Requisitioning, "Spring Famine", and the Reduction of Rents/Returning of Deposits'; Cao, Li, and Zheng, 'Research on the Movement to Reduce Rents and Return Deposits in Jiangjin County'; Zhang, 'Research on the Compensation and Fines Movement in the Western Sichuan Administrative Region.'

¹⁸ '华东军政委员会颁布华东土地改革实施办法的规定' [East China Military-Administrative Committee promulgates Regulations on the Methods of Implementing of Land Reform in the East China Region], 1950.11.25, *CCPM*; '方方关于广东土地改革问题的报告' [Fang Fang's report on the issue of land reform in Guangdong], 1950.10.8, *CCPM*; '川北区土地改革实施办法' [Methods of Implementing Land Reform in the North Sichuan Region], 1951.3.10, *CCPM*.

¹⁹ '中南局对江西省委所提“七项土改政策问题”的覆示' [Central-South Bureau's instructions in response to the 'seven land reform policy questions' raised by the Jiangxi Provincial Committee], 1950.12, *CCPM*.

already expelled the landlords, moved into the good houses, and assigned the landlords bad housing, this can be approved. But leading organs should not actively call for this, as it will lead to landlords universally being 'swept out the door' 普遍扫地出门.²⁰

In practice, a combination of local dynamics and the behaviour of work teams determined how much, if any, of their original housing and furniture those classified as landlords were able to retain. One memoirist, whose family was from Anhui, recalls that their family was allowed to keep most of their original house, but, with the exception of one table, all of their furniture was redistributed. They were left this table because the head of the peasant association, who had been their tenant and was on good terms with the author's father, told them to cover the table with straw before the confiscation proceeded. It later emerged that he had helped two other landlord families retain some furniture in a similar way.²¹ Another memoirist, from Hubei, whose family was initially designated as 'small land rentier,' received news that his family had been reclassified as 'landlord' while he was at boarding school; a fellow student from the same village told him of the reclassification and that his family home's 'door had been sealed' 封门 in preparation for confiscation. The house was confiscated, and they were allotted a different, smaller house.²²

The practice of 'sealing doors' 封门 in advance of confiscation appears to have been widespread; there was certainly no policy against it, nor any assumption that those designated as landlords would have any say in what was deemed 'surplus.' For the reasons discussed in Chapter 1, it is unlikely that this whole process was generally an orderly one. Potter and Potter describe how the process unfolded in one village in Guangdong:

To make sure that the landlords were not hiding anything, the peasants' association and the militia ransacked their houses, talking 'surplus' furniture, clothes, money, and whatever else they could find. Things got out of hand during the frantic and disorganized searches, as members of the militia and association argued among themselves about who should get the things taken from the landlords... The violation of accepted mores implied in the ransacking of the landlords' houses terrified the ransackers as well as the landlords. [One man] was a member of the militia and participated in the searches of landlords' houses in his village. The experience so upset him that he became mentally deranged, paralyzed by the fear that the landlords would somehow regain power and take revenge on him.²³

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Li, *The Fate of a Landlord Large Family*, 151-52, 155.

²² Tang, *The River of Life*, 24.

²³ Potter and Potter, *China's Peasants*, 52.

In sum, while the confiscation of imperialist and bureaucratic-capitalist property – like the confiscation of the property of ‘counterrevolutionaries’, understood as a form of punishment – can plausibly be seen as exceptional measures linked to the broader project of post-war justice, this is much less true of the expropriation of those designated as ‘feudal landlords.’²⁴ While the ideal of ‘land to the tiller’ enjoyed much public support, those who owned surplus land did not do so as part of a separate ‘feudal’ system that could be abolished, but as part of a long-standing system of contractual arrangements that enjoyed considerable popular legitimacy. Just as importantly, land reform involved the expropriation of much property other than land, and the manner in which this was done set an important precedent whereby those deemed reliable by the CCP could violently force people to give up their housing and possessions in rural areas.

Between the Urban and the Rural

On the eve of the revolution, China was not neatly divided between urban and rural areas – between major urban centres and villages lay a network of towns of varying sizes that were economically integrated with the surrounding countryside, and through which the processing and trading of agricultural products was carried out.²⁵ Town and country were economically integrated, and one blended gradually into the other. This led to two major complications in the course of land reform. The first, which has been explored by Liu Shigu and Cao Shuji, was how to determine the treatment of people who rented out land in the countryside, but also had businesses or jobs in urban or semi-urban areas.²⁶ On this question, CCP policy endorsed the competing objectives of meeting the requirements of the rural poor while protecting commerce and industry. According to policy guidelines, those whose income from land rent was secondary to their other income ought not to have been treated as ‘landlords’, but Liu and Cao show that the economic and physical security of urban residents with fairly small rural landholdings were frequently infringed upon. Although their study concerns one county, the basic policy conflict they identify and the reasons for it was a constant throughout the entire process of land reform.

The second complication, which seems not to have appeared in the existing literature, concerned real estate belonging to ‘landlords’ in the towns of varying sizes between villages

²⁴ See Engman, ‘Shanghai’s Dispossessed,’ 57, for the argument that the expropriation of landlords can be understood as part of this broader project.

²⁵ The classic exposition of this structure is Skinner, ‘Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China.’

²⁶ Liu and Cao, ‘Determining the Political Identity of “Businessperson-Landlords.”’

and urban centres. The kinds of people who owned surplus agricultural land were also likely to own buildings in such towns, but the Land Reform Law made no provisions for the confiscation of such property, and buildings used for industrial or commercial purposes were explicitly protected. In November 1950, the regulations for land reform in the suburbs of cities were promulgated, and these excluded landlords' non-rural housing from the scope of expropriation.²⁷ However, these regulations only applied to the suburbs of large cities with populations over 500,000. In February 1951, the Centre further specified that landlords' housing in small cities and towns that was suitable for peasants to live in, or already had peasants living in, should be confiscated, but otherwise not.²⁸ The following month, however, the Southwest Bureau transmitted a request from the West Sichuan Region which suggested that the scope of expropriation be expanded:

[last month the Centre instructed that] 'in smaller cities and towns, surplus housing belonging to landlords that is being used for industrial purposes or is not suitable for peasants to live in should not be confiscated.' However, in the small cities in our region, there are many mansions 公馆, storefronts, and linked units of housing owned by landlords. Some of these are being rented, while others stand empty. Their confiscation would have no harmful effect on industry and commerce, and it would be beneficial for forcing landlords to engage in labour. Although they wouldn't be good for peasants to live in, they could serve [co-operatives and other public functions].²⁹

The Centre approved these suggestions. Two months later, the East China Bureau formulated a set of regulations for the confiscation of landlords' housing in small cities and towns which likewise found that existing regulations did not provide for enough confiscation:

In [the original regulations for the implementation of land reform in the East China Region], surplus housing in towns belonging to landlords that had already been rented out prior to the publication of the land reform law was not to be confiscated (with the exception of housing rented by peasants), and no housing in cities was to be confiscated. But in the course of actually implementing land reform, [it was discovered that] most housing belonging to landlords is concentrated in small cities and towns, so if we only confiscate their land and housing rented to peasants, landlords could continue to live idly off rent from housing, which the peasants would

²⁷ '城市郊区土地改革条例' [Regulations on land reform in the suburbs of cities], passed by the State Administrative Council on 1950.11.10, appeared in *RMRB* on 1950.11.23.

²⁸ '中共中央关于城市郊区土改问题的补充规定' [Party Centre's supplementary regulations on the issue of land reform in the suburbs of cities], 1951.2, *CCPM*.

²⁹ '西南局关于小城镇中地主多余房屋的处理意见' [Southwest Bureau's views on dealing with landlords' surplus housing in small towns], 1951.3.15, *JDZX*, 253-254.

not accept, and which would not be beneficial for the development of industry and commerce in small cities and towns. Moreover, the supply of buildings in the Jiangnan region is very limited, and there are pressing needs for the army and for warehouses...³⁰

The regulations distinguished between more and less agricultural towns, with harsher policies of confiscation in the former, with the rule of thumb being whether the population was above or below 20 thousand. Large and middle-sized cities were to follow later, but when the East China Bureau proposed to begin experimental sites, the Party Centre responded by instructing the East China Bureau to call this off:

If we begin dealing with the houses of landlords, bureaucrats and other feudal remnants in large and medium-sized cities, it will invariably have a widespread impact, and might also exacerbate the problem of insufficient urban housing [presumably by causing indeterminacy about ownership and tenancy rights]³¹

Three years later, when the Anhui Provincial Committee asked if they could proceed with confiscating surplus housing belonging to landlords in medium sized cities of above 50,000 residents ('surplus' in this case specified as meaning not where they resided or worked), the Centre maintained its position that 'in dealing with landlords' surplus housing in cities, we cannot import 引用 the methods for dealing with landlords' surplus housing used in rural areas and small towns,' except in the specific cases in which this had been done previously: as part of punishment for counterrevolutionary or other crimes, or to settle compensation claims or fines imposed during the campaign to 'return deposits.'³² In the cities, outright confiscation was to remain an exceptional measure.

The Great Leap and Personal Property

It is a considerable irony that while in the cities, even 'feudal landlords' were shielded from the outright confiscation of their surplus housing, just a few years later, many among

³⁰ '华东局关于执行《华东小城市和集镇中地主多余房屋的处理办法（草案）》的指示' [East China Bureau's directive on implementing the 'Method for dealing with landlords' surplus housing in small cities and market towns (draft)], 1951.5.19, *JDZX*, 254-55.

³¹ '中共中央关于处理地主在城镇中多余房屋问题给华东局的批复' [Party Centre's reply to the East China Bureau on the issue of dealing with landlords' surplus housing in cities and towns], 1952.11.19, *CCPM*.

³² '中共中央批复安徽省委《关于中等城市地主多余房屋处理问题的请示》' [Party Centre responds to Anhui Provincial Committee's 'Request for instructions on the issue of dealing with landlords' surplus housing in medium-size cities], 1955.5.15, in Dangdai Zhongguo Yanjiusuo (ed.), *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shi biannian (1955 nian juan)* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 2009), 356-57.

the rural masses came to be deprived of their basic necessities. It is well known that the communization movement of the Great Leap Forward involved widespread infringement of the personal possessions of rural residents; perhaps best-known is the confiscation of pots and pans to be melted down to meet targets for the production of steel.³³ As Felix Wemheuer notes, ‘while the houses of “class enemies” had often been plundered during Land Reform in the early 1950s [and the late 40s], 1958 was the first time that those with good class backgrounds had their possessions removed in this way.’³⁴ Less well-known but similarly consequential was the confiscation and demolition of large amounts of housing.³⁵ This was done partly to supply fertilizer (from old mudbrick and thatch), construction material for mess halls and other new facilities, and fuel; and also as part of the GLF project to collectivize everyday life. However, in the absence of plans and resources to construct sufficient new housing, the result was generally to force people to live in crowded or makeshift accommodation. This was surely not what Mao had meant in August 1958 when he talked about the future of rural housing under communism:

...[within a certain number of years, rural areas] will move from a collective system of ownership to a communist system of ownership, coming to resemble factories—food, clothing, and accommodation will all be publicly owned. While the Soviet Union is still encouraging private individuals to build houses, we are going to abolish the private ownership of housing.³⁶

A major corrective measure taken by the Party Centre in the aftermath of the Leap was to pronounce the inviolability of rural commune members’ housing, furniture, clothes, bicycles, sewing machines, deposited funds, and tools, and to call for restitution or compensation of housing that had been expropriated over preceding years.³⁷ This had to involve some kind of compensation in many cases, as so much housing had been torn down in 1958-1960.³⁸ In the absence of much statistical data is difficult to be precise about the extent of this

³³ See, for example, Zhou, *The Great Famine*, 75.

³⁴ Wemheuer, *A Social History of Maoist China*, 125.

³⁵ The most sustained treatments of this issue in English are Wang, ‘An Introduction to the ABCs of Communization,’ 150-60, and Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine*, 163-73.

³⁶ ‘八月三十日上午讲话’ [Speech on the morning of August 30th], in ‘毛泽东在北戴河会议上的讲话(记录稿)’ [Mao Zedong’s speech at the Beidaihe conference (transcript)], 1958.8.30, *CCPM*.

³⁷ ‘中共中央关于农村人民公社当前政策问题的紧急指示信’ [Party Centre’s urgent directive on current policy issues concerning rural People’s Communes], 1960.11.13, *CCPM*; ‘农村人民公社工作条例(修正草案)’ [Work regulations on rural People’s Communes (revised draft)], 1961.6.15, *CCPM*.

³⁸ ‘天花大队狮子弯生产队平调房屋的情况和退赔处理意见’ [The situation of uncompensated housing transfer in Shiziwang Production Team, Tianhua Brigade, and opinions on dealing with compensation], in ‘中共湖南省委批转长沙县广福公社工作队关于处理房屋问题的两个文件’ [Hunan Provincial Committee comments on and circulates two documents of the Changsha County Committee’s Guangfu Commune Work Team on dealing with housing issues], 1961.5.24, *CCPM*.

phenomenon, but its scale is indicated in a letter from Liu Shaoqi to Mao in May 1961, in which he reported that ‘according to comrades from the Hunan provincial committee, 40% of [rural] houses in the province have been demolished,’ and an unspecified further proportion had been requisitioned by state organs and communes.³⁹ After some of the requisitioned building were vacated, cadres took the lead in occupying them, with other commune members fighting to get in too; Liu himself witnessed multiple instances of such ‘chaotic moving 乱搬家’. In the specific production brigade that he was investigating at the time, Liu found that a third of houses had been demolished, and that sixty percent of commune members were having to live in someone else’s house.⁴⁰

Liu also found that theft of food and personal property was rampant. He reportedly asked some commune members why they hadn’t planted sweet potatoes, taro, or beans on uncultivated mountain land, and was told that they didn’t think it was worth the effort, since it would be stolen anyway. Liu then wrote:

The reason for this atmosphere of chaotically taking other people’s things 乱拿别人东西的风气 is firstly that there’s not enough to eat, and secondly, the ‘communal wind’ of these past few years has shaken the foundations of both commune members’ individual property 社员个人的那一部分所有制 and of state and communal property. Some commune members said to the work team, ‘if they [cadres] can take other people’s things without compensation, then why can’t I?’ People thus take things from each other at will, leading to chaos 你也拿，我也拿，就拿乱了. For this reason, the things that have been taken without compensation must be resolutely returned or compensated... Previously we thought that this could be done in a couple of months, but it’s impossible. To manufacture the things that have been destroyed, and especially to rebuild the many houses that have been demolished, will take at least three to five years.⁴¹

The 60 Articles of June 1961 declared that ‘commune members’ housing belongs to [those] commune members in perpetuity, and they have the right to buy, sell, and rent housing.’ ‘No organization or person’, it went on to declare, ‘can be allowed to force a commune member to move house.’⁴² The immediate aftermath of the Leap thus saw an attempt to re-establish norms of individual property that had been eroded by land reform and collectivization, and which had been radically undermined during the Great Leap. In this

³⁹ ‘刘少奇给毛泽东的信’ [Liu Shaoqi’s letter to Mao Zedong], 1961.5.11, *CCPM*.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² ‘农村人民公社工作条例(修正草案)’ [Articles on rural People’s Commune work (revised draft)], 1961.6.15, *CCPM*.

context, those labelled class enemies were also deemed to be eligible for compensation for the GLF-period confiscation of things that were clearly identified as belonging to them following land reform.⁴³

6.2 Property Claims as Threats to the Political Order

The Crime of 'Fangong Daosuan'

During the Civil War, there was an extended period during which the CCP did not have secure control over many of the territories in which it had carried out some form of land reform, and when the KMT retook such areas, it sought to instigate those who had been dispossessed to 'settle accounts in reverse 倒算账' (hereafter *daosuan*).⁴⁴ The CCP therefore launched initiatives to oppose such actions, centred around the inevitability of KMT defeat.⁴⁵ During post-1949 land reform, the term continued to be used, but less frequently than during the civil war. In the years after land reform, there was relatively little use of the term in the national media, though the campaigns to 'transform backwards districts' of 1953-4 (which were restricted to about 10-15% of areas) saw its use to mobilize class struggle, and there is evidence from some areas that it was also used as a general-purpose accusation against class enemies whenever there were difficulties with the sale of 'surplus' grain and

⁴³ '新华社济南讯：对退赔中若干具体政策问题的研究' [Report from Xinhua Jinan Bureau: research on some specific policy issues in the process of returning and compensating property], 1961.9.4., *CCPM*; '中共广东省委关于贯彻执行当前农村人民公社政策中对五类分子若干政策问题的意见' [Guangdong Provincial Committee's views on implementing some policies in connection with five-type elements during current rural People's Commune work], *GAJS*, 1961 no. 7: 7-8.

⁴⁴ The first use of this term in the People's Daily was on November 19th, 1946, when it was described as being carried out by 'treacherous tyrants and secret agents 奸霸特务', not by landlords in general ('结合反"倒算账"开展游击战' [Begin guerrilla war joined together with opposition to 'settling accounts in reverse'], 1946.11.19, *RMRB*). Indeed, when the term next appeared four days later in an editorial, it was claimed that many landlords didn't really want to '*daosuan*' at all and were forced to by KMT forces: "...Jiang Jieshi goes around spreading rumours about how badly landlords have been treated by the CCP and the peasants, and that the landlords are on his side. In reality, after eight years of resistance against Japan and following land reform, landlords in the liberated areas support the CCP. In the liberated areas they can have a peaceful and democratic life. This is why after Chiang's army arrived, some landlords said they'd rather have the Eight Route Army settle accounts with them than to have the KMT's army stay another day... When the reactionaries forced them to carry out a '*daosuan*' movement, most landlords pretended to demand return [of their property] but actually did not." '再祝冀鲁豫前线大捷' [Once again wishing a great victory to the Ji-Lu-Yu front line], 1946.11.23, *RMRB*.

⁴⁵ At this time (December 1946), politically progressive landlords were still understood as part of a broad anti-imperialist, anti-KMT united front, and those who did not respond enthusiastically to the KMT's efforts to get them to 'settle accounts backwards' were themselves to be protected ('晋冀鲁豫边区政府布告' [Notice of the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu Border Region Government], 1946.12.11, *RMRB*).

the co-operativization movement.⁴⁶ This broader use of the term then spread to the national media during the 1957 re-intensification of class struggle, often combined with reports of physical violence and murder by class enemies against cadres and activists.⁴⁷ The sense of retrieving property also continued to exist, but what appeared as the object of *daosuan* was not land, but the many other kinds of property – housing, small buildings, furniture, trees – that were also redistributed during land reform, and which had not been collectivized.

The most widely publicized incident of this kind occurred in Haikang County, Guangdong, where the vice-county head and Democratic Alliance member Wu Lin had allegedly assisted nearly 80 landlord households in retrieving houses that had been confiscated during land reform. Wu, whose father had been a county-level imperial examination graduate, was a member of the sub-county educated elite in Haikang who had a longstanding connection with the CCP and had actively assisted the Party during the civil war. After 1949, he became the principal of the regional normal school; in 1957, he participated in the People's Congress of his home county and was elected vice-county head.⁴⁸ In this capacity he carried out an inspection tour of his home county, which was when he carried out his activities:

Wu Lin went around clamouring on behalf of landlords, saying: “these people are elderly and their life is so hard – isn't the government supposed to take care of poor people [lit. 五保户]? Why not simply return their houses to them?” In the county town, Wu Lin even went to the office of a local cadre and forced him to return landlord Tang Quanmu's orchard. Lin Zeying, a teacher at the Haikang County Number One Middle School and a landlord element, demanded that his house be returned and gained Wu Lin's support; on multiple occasions, Wu demanded that the County People's Congress and the town CCP Committee act according to the landlord element's preposterous demand.⁴⁹

Given what we know about land reform in general and in Guangdong in particular, it is quite possible that the people on whose behalf Wu had acted had been treated more harshly than had been sanctioned by policy. In the political context of 1956 and the first half of 1957, Wu, like many others, thought that an opportune moment had come to rectify some of the excesses of the earlier political campaigns. An editorial in the *Nanfang Ribao* republished in

⁴⁶ Jing and Cao, ‘Land Rights and “Rich Peasants Carrying Out *Daosuan*”’; Wang, ‘Research on “*Fangong Daosuan*”’.

⁴⁷ E.g. ‘人民的天下绝不容地主横行; 凶手张明堂被处极刑’ [The People will absolutely not tolerate landlords rampaging; the murderer Zhang Mingtang has been sentenced to death], 1957.8.5, *RMRB*.

⁴⁸ Guo, ‘Remembering Wu Lin.’

⁴⁹ ‘海康右派煽动地主疯狂倒算’ [A rightist in Haikang incites landlords to wildly *daosuan*], 1957.7.26, *RMRB*.

the *People's Daily*, titled 'They dare to reverse verdicts! Ox monsters and snake demons in the countryside', interpreted the episode in very different terms.⁵⁰ Referring to Wu Lin, it wrote:

Rightist elements are so bold and reckless, their criminal actions so profound—if their proposals were to be followed, the country would be lost, and the People would not only lose all of what they have gained and the bright future ahead of them, but would be thrown into the deepest pit of hell. The struggle against the Rightists is therefore a struggle for the survival of the state and the nation, one that must be carried out resolutely.⁵¹

In this way, claims on housing, orchards, and other property not part of the collective economy by those dispossessed during land reform were presented as grave threats to the entire post-land reform political and social order. However, this theme was subsumed fairly quickly by the Great Leap Forward's vision of impending material abundance, which promised to render such issues irrelevant.

Civil Disputes or Class Struggle?

The Great Leap's actual effect, however, was precisely the opposite: it raised rather than lowered the importance of individual claims to property. Following the revival of class struggle from 1962, the issue of landlords and rich peasants seeking to regain their property once again became prominent in official discourse. The first manifestation of class struggle identified by the Former Ten Points was the following: 'the overthrown exploiting classes—landlords and rich peasants—are always seeking to restore their power, waiting for a chance to *fangong daosuan*, to carry out class vengeance, and to attack poor- and lower-middle peasants.'⁵² Among the reports attached to this directive, one stated that a particular landlord had 'threatened a poor peasant living in the same courtyard, saying that "the building you live in is mine—if I tell you to move out, you must move out."' ⁵³

The connection between individual pieces of property and the broader political and social order was most vividly manifested in a widely performed operatic play that debuted

⁵⁰ On the introduction of the term 'ox monsters and snake demons' 牛鬼蛇神 into the political lexicon by Mao in early 1957, see Schoenhals, 'Demonising Discourse', 470-72.

⁵¹ Unlike most of those labelled Rightists, Wu Lin was also given a criminal sentence as an active counterrevolutionary. He was sentenced to death by the county court, a sentence upheld by the prefectural court but reduced to life in jail by the provincial court. He died in jail in 1960 (Guo, 'Remembering Wu Lin').

⁵² 'Former Ten Points', 3.1.

⁵³ '河南省偃师县三级干部会议的作法' [The method of [conducting] three level cadre meetings in Yanshi County, Henan], attached to 'Former Ten Points'.

in 1963, *Inspecting the Chair*.⁵⁴ Apparently inspired by an actual incident of theft by a landlord, it revolved around the drama that unfolds as the production team leader tries to figure out who was responsible for the disappearance of one of the team's chairs. It is clear from the beginning that it was the landlord Wang Laowu, whose schemes to try to evade responsibility and frame someone else form much of the plot, but it is only at the end, as a result of the dramatic process of 'inspecting the chair,' that we discover that the reason landlord Wang is so attached to this object confiscated from him during land reform is because inside it is hidden his 'ledger for a change of regime.'

Figure 6.1. Cover of a comic book based on the play *Inspecting the Chair*⁵⁵



⁵⁴ Li, *Inspecting the Chair*.

⁵⁵ 史锡宝 Shi Xibao (ad.), 陶天月 Tao Tianyue and 孔琨 Kong Kun (ill.), '审椅子' [*Inspecting the Chair*] (Hefei: Anhui Renmin Chubanshe, 1966).

The way this play embodied the connection between the class enemy's desire to retrieve a piece of property and his desire to subvert the entire political order of the People's Republic was explained in the journal *Juben* with such clarity that it is worth quoting in full:

A landlord who has been reformed for ten years, whose 'hat' [i.e. landlord label] has been removed and who is a commune member—although economically speaking he is no longer a landlord, and politically his rights as a citizen have been restored, he nevertheless harbours class hatred deep in his heart, constantly thinking of his influence and power in the past. Every lunar new year, tenants would have to *koutou* to him as he sat on this mahogany chair—this chair is inseparable from his class interests as a landlord, and his feeling towards this chair are a kind of class feeling 阶级感情. And so when he heard that his boss 主子, the bandit Jiang was planning an attack on the mainland, he sought every means to retrieve his chair on the eve of the lunar new year... What a treacherous enemy—a class enemy who has risen from the grave of the buried landlord class. This figure really causes one to think, and its most important effect is to cause one to recognize the profound meaning of the truth that class struggle will continue for a long time...

A chair would seem to be no more than a piece of furniture, and a prop that appears frequently in plays of all kinds...but this is no ordinary chair, it is the 'throne' of a landlord family that has been passed down through the generations, in which the landlord's genealogy and 'ledger for a change of regime' are hidden. After land reform, the landlord's 'throne' was taken away by the People, and was then placed in the production team's headquarters, reflecting the historical transformation of rural society in our country. Now, landlord Wang Laowu's desire to restore his power leads him to seize back this chair and make it his 'throne' once again. The battle for this chair is tantamount to a battle for political power, it is the struggle between restoration and counter-restoration—it carries a profound message.⁵⁶

Thus, when Socialist Education Movement work teams descended on villages, they had every reason to interpret conflicts over property—of which there were many in the aftermath of the Leap—in such stark terms whenever a someone with a class enemy label was involved.

In August 1963, the Supreme People's Court noted that in the foregoing years, there had been a notable rise in the number of disputes concerning property 财产权益纠纷.⁵⁷ Those

⁵⁶ 元欣 Yuan Xin '大处着眼, 小处着眼—《审椅子》读后' [Having Read *Inspecting the Chair*], *Juben*, 1963 no. 7, 61-62.

⁵⁷ '最高人民法院关于贯彻执行民事政策几个问题的意见 (修正稿)' [Opinions of the Supreme People's Court on some issues in implementing policies on civil cases (revised draft)], 1963.8.28, in *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo falü guifanxing jieshi jicheng* (Changchun: Jilin Renmin Chubanshe, 1990), 411.

greatest in size concerned disputes between collectives, and between collectives and the state, but the greatest in number were smaller-scale disputes about housing. The resolution of such disputes was to 'first ensure that housing belonging to the state and collectives is not infringed upon', and then to 'protect housing that belongs to individual citizens.' After listing principles concerning a number of more specific issues—notably, affirming that it was legitimate for citizens to 'collect a fair and reasonable rent on property that belongs to them'—the court concluded by listing separately the following: 'landlords and rich peasants engaging in *fangong daosuan* are to be resolutely attacked, and are not to be dealt with as ordinary housing cases.'⁵⁸ In October, legal scholars in Beijing held a discussion about 'how to correctly distinguish and deal with the two different kinds of contradiction'; on the issue of civil disputes, they noted that while most of these were disputes among members of the People, 'complex class struggle is also reflected in civil disputes, including ideological struggle between the two lines among members of the People, and sometimes also us-enemy contradictions', such as when 'enemies use the cover of "civil litigation" to carry out *fangong daosuan* and restorationist activities 复辟活动.'⁵⁹ The same month, the thirty-third draft of the Criminal Law was completed; this was never publicized, but it included a clause on 'fangong daosuan and other restorationist activities.'⁶⁰

The Geng family's fangong daosuan

In 1963, the Nanjing Teacher Training College, like other institutions throughout China, organized its students and teachers to 'recall the bitter and ponder the sweet.'⁶¹ One student, Wang Fengchun, spoke of how a landlord had tried to seize back his family's property just the previous year with the help of her son Geng Dingfa, who was employed by the army as an instructor at the Harbin Institute of Military Engineering. Incensed by this instance of 'class vengeance,' Wang and his classmates proceeded to write to the institute to call on them to take action.⁶² A cadre at the institute tasked with political security began an investigation in the spring of 1964, and found that, indeed, the house in question had been

⁵⁸ Ibid., 414.

⁵⁹ '在政法工作中如何正确区分和处理两类不同性质的矛盾的问题—北京法学界讨论会简介' [Correctly distinguishing and dealing with the two different types of contradiction in the course of political and legal work: a synopsis of the symposium held by legal scholars in Beijing], *Faxue Yanjiu*, 1963 no. 3, 42, 24.

⁶⁰ 高铭暄 Gao Mingxuan '中华人民共和国刑法的孕育与诞生' [*The Genesis and Birth of the PRC's Criminal Law*] (Beijing: Falü Chubanshe, 1981), 3, 148.

⁶¹ Teng, *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa*, 96.

⁶² Ibid.

redistributed to the Wang family during land reform in 1947. The Jiangsu Provincial court was at first doubtful about this, but yielded to the pressure, revoked the judgments made between 1950 and 1954 that affirmed the Geng family's ownership of the building, pronounced invalid the purchase agreement made in 1962, and called on Mrs Geng to return the 1650 yuan that the Wangs had already paid.⁶³

On July 31st, a temporary military court pronounced that Geng Dingfa was to be expelled from the army.⁶⁴ At the same time, he was expelled from the Party as a 'class alien element.'⁶⁵ These decisions, and an account of the investigation, were then communicated at a large meeting that all students and teachers at the institute were obliged to attend.⁶⁶ The meeting was concluded by a reading of the PLA Heilongjiang Regional Military Court's verdict:

Geng Dingfa was born into an exploiting class family, and in 1947 during land reform, three *jian* of his family's property was redistributed to his family's hired hand, Wang Shengkang. Driven by class hatred, Geng Dingfa would not resign himself to this. In 1962, during a so-called 'family visit' to his hometown, he relied on his status as a member of the military to coerce the local cadres into helping him evict the Wangs...eventually forcing them to pay the high price of 2050 yuan for a property that belonged to them (of which he has already extorted 1650 yuan)...

Geng Dingfa has stubbornly held onto his exploiting class stand, protecting his exploiting class interests, using his military status to undertake restoration and property seizure, closely co-ordinating with the reactionary plots of the Jiang bandits to attack the mainland...⁶⁷

In a context of rising political tension and increasing paranoia about class enemies, people like the investigator at the Harbin Institute had strong incentives to frame this case in such terms, and this context in turn made it difficult for those in the Jiangsu court to resist this framing. But the fact that it could be framed in this way was the consequence of the ambiguous economic and political status of the Geng family. The 1964 judgment made the following claim about what had happened during land reform:

At the time of land reform in 1947, [Mrs Geng] ran a wine shop, owned 24-5 *mu* of land, over 30 *jian* of housing, and employed 5-6 labourers year-round [including, it was claimed, the head

⁶³ This judgment is reproduced in *ibid.*, 116-118.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 106

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 108-9

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 109

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 111

of the Wang family]. She was dealt with as an escaped landlord 逃亡地主, so her surplus housing was confiscated by the Peasant Association.⁶⁸

Later, the judgment referred Mrs Geng as a businessperson-landlord 工商业兼地主—a notable difference, since people with this designation were supposed to be dealt with as businesspeople rather than as landlords. But in fact, the reality was more complicated still, as investigators found in 1980 when they interviewed those who had participated in land reform in the area.⁶⁹ The town where Mrs. Geng lived was overwhelmingly commercial with little agricultural land, and so land reform was not actually carried out, nor were its residents assigned class statuses. When land reform reinvestigation was carried out in the area in 1950-51, these towns were again left out due to their mainly non-agricultural nature, so class statuses were not assigned, nor were ownership titles distributed. Mrs Geng had not actually hired any labourers year-round, and the head of the Wang family, Wang Shengkang had not worked for her (he had been employed in the restaurant of Mrs Geng's great aunt, who had introduced him to Mrs Geng and asked that he and his family might stay in their building in the early 1940s). Some members of the local poor peasant association recalled that the Geng family had been internally designated as 'businessperson-landlord' in 1947, since they owned commercial buildings and a small amount of farmland that they rented out, but this was never made public. Mrs Geng was never dealt with as an 'escaped landlord', since she lived there until 1952.

As a result of these ambiguities, the Geng family had basically existed until 1964 without an official class status—a situation that does not appear to have been exceptionally uncommon, since, as a 1964 document by the Ministry of Public Security noted, 'in cities and towns, there have basically been no mass movements involving systematic class struggle, nor have class labels generally been assigned.'⁷⁰ In their 1954 appeal to the provincial level, the Wangs had already attempted to press their case by claiming that Mrs Geng was a 'tyrannical landlord,' but the court investigators at the time were not under political pressure to interpret this as a case of class struggle, and so did not accept this interpretation in the absence of any evidence that Mrs Geng had been, or should have been, so classified.⁷¹ The court had found that, on the one hand, as a non-class enemy, Mrs Geng's property

⁶⁸ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁹ Liu, 'Recollections Concerning Reversing the Verdict on the Geng Dingfa Counterrevolutionary Restoration Case,' 59-60.

⁷⁰ '公安部讨论对敌对阶级分子的改造问题' [Ministry of Public Security discusses the issue of transforming hostile class elements], *GAJS*, 1964 no. 15, 6.

⁷¹ The 1954 court judgment is reproduced in Teng, *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa*, 86-88.

rights in this small town were to be protected, but on the other hand, the Wangs relied on the restaurant they ran from this property to make a living, and so ordered the two parties to enter a rental agreement.⁷² This never happened, as the court ruling was not transmitted to the Geng family by the local cadres. In 1962, the 60 Articles had recently been issued, which established the inviolability of rural rights in housing, including the right to dispose of it freely and rent it out.⁷³ This helps to explain why, despite the socialist transformation that had taken place, the Gengs and the cadres who dealt with the case thought it was completely legitimate for them to try to enforce their ownership of this house. They had no way of knowing that within a year, the entire orientation of Chinese political life would shift from rectifying the excesses of the Great Leap to the prosecution of class struggle, and that this would lead—through, to be sure, some twisting of the facts—to the reclassification of the dispute between them and the Wangs from an ordinary civil dispute to a case of *fangong daosuan*.

A Similar Case in Reverse

It is instructive to compare the outcome of the Geng case with one that is structurally very similar, but with one key difference: the army man seeking to enforce property rights was from an impeccably pure background, whereas those relying on false accusations to press their claims to property that they genuinely did have a need for were unambiguously ‘class enemies.’⁷⁴ Du Shunde, a soldier from a poor peasant family training in Xi’an to become a guided missile operator, was given leave to return from his base in Xi’an to his home village near Nanchang in December 1963. When he returned home, he saw a crowd in front of his house, and learned that part of it had been occupied by Zhao Caogen, who had been a landlord before the revolution. The entire village was a ‘socialist new village’ constructed in 1958 after the original village was submerged as part of an irrigation project, and people had been assigned newly built housing based on the size of their houses in the original village. The house in question had belonged to Du’s uncle, who had died the previous year. Du was told that since his uncle had no descendants, the house was taken over by the commune and then assigned to the Zhao family. Du went to the brigade to protest, on the grounds that he had been designated as his uncle’s legal descendant, but he

⁷² Ibid., 87.

⁷³ ‘Articles on rural People’s Commune work (revised draft)’, 1961.6.15, *CCPM*.

⁷⁴ The following is based on Du, *My Life*, part 2, 23-27.

was not able to speak to the leaders of the brigade; he was told by the accountant that they were deliberately avoiding him. The following day he was received by a women's team head 妇女队长,⁷⁵ whom he asked to clarify whether Zhao's taking over the house had been approved by the brigade. She said that it had: '[your uncle] died, you were in the army with no intention of moving back, and the house was unnecessarily large for your mother, while Zhao Caigen's family didn't have enough housing, since their houses had been redistributed during land reform [and the amount of housing they were assigned in the new village corresponded to their family's post-land reform situation]. So the production brigade asked your mother to move in with your brother, and assigned the house to Zhao Caigen.' Du explained that he thought this was unreasonable, suggested that Zhao immediately be asked to move out, and explained that he would ask the army to deal with the matter upon his return to Xi'an. The following day Zhao moved out, and Du spent three days in the house without event.

About ten days later, while waiting to get on a train to Xi'an in Nanchang, Du was warned by a cousin that Zhao Caogen had hired someone to write an accusatory letter against him, and that the letter had already been sent to his army division. The letter accused Du of threatening the masses with a gun, forcibly seizing property, and cursing brigade cadres. The army division took this accusation extremely seriously and dispatched a pair of officers to investigate. Although a couple of people were willing to testify that they had seen Du brandishing a gun, most were not. When they interviewed villagers privately, it emerged that those who had testified had all been beneficiaries of Zhao Caogen in some way. They also learned that the letter had been written by the village head and 'local bully' who specialized in finding ways of extorting people. When they asked Du's mother whether there were any grudges between her and Zhao Caogen, she said: 'His father was a wealthy landlord in the old society, and during land reform, his family's belongings were distributed to the poor. My family was given some of his family's clothes, so he hates us.' After three days of investigation, the investigators concluded that this was clearly a case of a 'landlord trying to carry out class vengeance.' Du's name was cleared, the author of the accusatory letter was ordered to write a statement of repentance, and Zhao Caogen was placed under *guanzhi* for two years.

As in the case of the conflict between the Geng and the Wang families, there was a conflict between entitlement based on property rights and entitlement based on need. Du

⁷⁵ This was a position within the production team, distinct from that of team head 队长. See Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development*, 182; Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China*, 133.

had been designated as his uncle's legal descendant, and based on the principles embodied in the 60 Articles, it ought to have been legitimate for the property right to be transferred through inheritance. On the other hand, the idea that the state could legitimately reallocate housing based on need was also well-established, and it is likely to have seemed especially reasonable in a case like this, where the entire village had been uprooted and rebuilt just a few years prior. The Zhao family was already in a weak position given the emerging narrative of former class enemies seeking to bribe cadres to get their way. They attempted to strike first by using another emerging narrative – of powerful cadres abusing their positions of authority – to portray Du as the guilty party, but, in light of their respective class labels, this attempt was very likely to fail.

6.3 *Fangong Daosuan* and Socialist Legality

From late 1978 onwards, phrases like *fangong daosuan* and 'class enemies taking revenge' were no longer the politically explosive accusations they had been, with varying intensity, over the previous decades. With their labels removed, class enemies were now ordinary citizens who had a right to defend their interests. As the recently de-labelled wife of a rich peasant put it when the vice-head of the production team accused her husband of stealing a chicken, 'in the past, even a three-year old child could bully us, but not anymore!'⁷⁶ In May 1979, the Anhui Public Security Bureau reported that some former class enemies were emboldened to demand the return of property confiscated from them during land reform, including houses, gold, and, in one case, a table used at the production brigade headquarters.⁷⁷ The primary response they called for was that all de-labelled class enemies were to receive a round of 'education on abiding the law 守法教育,' and were to be told that 'the allocation of their property to poor and lower-middle peasants during land reform had been legal 合法.' The term *fangong daosuan* continued to be used, and severe instances were to be punished by re-labelling or even arrest.⁷⁸

The Criminal Law of the PRC that came into effect in July 1979 did not, however, contain a clause on *fangong daosuan*. As the eminent legal scholar Gao Mingxuan put it in his

⁷⁶ '中共安徽省委关于处理四类分子摘帽后反攻倒算问题的通报' [Anhui Provincial Committee's circular on dealing with the issue of four-type elements carrying out *fangong daosuan* after the removal of their labels], 1979.5.25, 4, AC.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6.

explanation of the decision to omit this clause, “*fangong daosuan*” and “restorationist activities” are specialized political terms 政治上的术语, and are too unclear to be written into law as conditions for constituting a crime.’ To include this clause would have been to risk ‘artificially manufacturing “class struggle.”’⁷⁹ The possibility of re-labelling referred to by the Anhui Provincial Committee was not endorsed at the central level, and in 1984, the Party Centre declared that the final batch of four-type elements had been successfully reformed.⁸⁰ During these years, a series of principles and guidelines were established for dealing with property disputes connected to the political campaigns of the Mao era, the overriding objective of which was to establish continuity with the policies and regulations of the pre-Cultural Revolution period.⁸¹ The general principle concerning housing that was redistributed during land reform was that the titles established following land reform were valid, which meant that some former class enemies were successful in retrieving property taken from them in subsequent periods.⁸² In 1958, the supply and marketing co-operative of a district in Baiyin, Gansu, had asked to ‘borrow’ 5 *jian* of the 8 *jian* house that landlord Wang Jinting was allowed to keep after land reform; in light of his class status, Wang did not have the courage to turn down this request or to ask for a written agreement.⁸³ His requests for the return of the housing during the 1960s were turned down. Starting in 1979, he petitioned the co-op on multiple occasions to return it, and was offered 280 yuan; he rejected this on the grounds that he wanted his house, but was told that this was the extent of the compensation he would get. He therefore accepted this low sum of money, but continued petitioning. In 1990, Wang, now 70 years old, decided that since the 5 *jian* of was standing empty, he would break the lock and move in. As a result, he was sued by the co-operative for infringing on their property. The first trial found him guilty, but Wang appealed, and succeeded in having the judgment overturned: his breaking the lock and moving into the property was found not to constitute a violation of the co-op’s rights. Wang was successful because there was no policy or law that had justified the co-op’s taking over 5 *jian* of the 8 *jian* he had been allowed to keep as his own residence following land reform.

⁷⁹ Gao, *The Genesis and Birth of the PRC’s Criminal Law*, 4, 149.

⁸⁰ ‘十一届三中全会以来党中央的一项重要决策’ [An important policy decision of the Party Centre since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee], 1984.1.2, *RMRB*.

⁸¹ On the broader efforts to draw a line under the ‘lawlessness’ of the Cultural Revolution and to establish a continuity with the 1950s, see Altehenger, *Legal Lessons*, 172-74.

⁸² ‘最高人民法院关于贯彻执行民事政策法律若干问题的意见 (节选)’ [Opinions of the Supreme People’s Court on some issues in implementing policies and laws on civil cases (extracts)], 1984.8.30, in *Lishi yiliu sifang jiu fen*, 284.

⁸³ 杨炳芝 Yang Bingzhi (ed.), ‘房地产业法律指南’ [*Guide to Property Law*] (Beijing: Falü Chubanshe, 1993), 2187-2190.

More difficult were cases where the redistribution carried out *during* land reform was in contradiction with regulations. The general principle was to not go into such questions—whatever titles were given out after land reform were taken to be *ipso facto* legitimate—with one major exception: when the people who had been expropriated were overseas Chinese landlords.⁸⁴ In 1950, a special policy was formulated according to which only housing in which farmers were already living was to be confiscated from overseas Chinese landlords, and the rest they could keep, but this policy was widely violated in practice.⁸⁵ As major United Front targets and potential investors in the 1980s, the Party decided that all housing confiscated from overseas Chinese during land reform was to be returned.⁸⁶ This was a difficult and delicate issue, as this property had been redistributed more than three decades prior, and since then the public had been regularly told that questioning the legitimacy of this redistribution was an attack on the entire revolutionary order. In Shenzhen, some of those being asked to return their houses cursed the overseas Chinese affairs cadres tasked with explaining this to them with terms like ‘*fangong daosuan*’ and ‘*huanxiang tuan* 还乡团’ (the latter being the standard term for primarily Civil War era ‘landlord restitution corps,’ whose cruelty was a frequent subject in Mao era culture); the cadres were apparently unfazed and continued with their ‘persuasion work’ until everyone eventually signed a written statement of agreement to leave their house 退房协议书.⁸⁷

For ‘ordinary’ landlords and rich peasants, however, the Party’s message was clear: redistribution during land reform could not be called into question. This was a principle that required restating on a number of occasions in the decade and a half following the removal

⁸⁴ The first point was very clearly explained in a set of ‘legal lessons’ compiled by the Guangdong Provincial Justice Department in 1984: ‘As for houses confiscated or requisitioned from landlords or rich peasants during land reform... they belong to whomever it was decided they belong to at the time—there are no further changes to be made’ (广东省司法厅 Guangdong Provincial Justice Department (ed.), ‘普及法律常识讲义’ [*Lessons on Common Legal Knowledge*] (Guangzhou: Guangdong Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1985), 93. On the programme to institutionalize the popularization of ‘common legal knowledge’ that this text was a product of, see Altehenger, *Legal Lessons*, Chapter 6.

⁸⁵ ‘政务院关于土地改革中对华侨土地财产的处理办法’ [State Administrative Council on the method of dealing with the land and property of overseas Chinese during land reform], 1950.11.6, *CCPM*. On the fact that this policy was widely violated, see Mo, *Research on Land Reform in Guangdong*, 299. Mo cites Liao Chengzhi’s concluding speech at the first Overseas Chinese Affairs conference in early 1953, where Liao stated that despite the policies to the contrary, in practice, some 80-90 percent of overseas Chinese landlords had had some of their housing confiscated.

⁸⁶ ‘Houses in rural areas and small towns that belonged to Overseas Chinese and were confiscated or requisitioned during land reform are to be returned without exception.’ (‘国务院关于加快落实华侨私房政策的意见’ [State Council’s views on speeding up the implementation of policies on the privately owned housing of overseas Chinese], 1984.11.19, *MLD*). No exception was made for the one situation in which redistributing overseas landlords’ houses had been sanctioned by policy, namely when it was already occupied by farmers; it is unclear whether this was because it would have been too complicated, whether the number was too small, or both.

⁸⁷ 深圳市人民政府侨务办公室 Shenzhen Municipal People’s Government’s Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs (ed.), ‘深圳侨务史志’ [*Historical Gazetteer of Overseas Chinese Affairs*] (Shenzhen: Haitian Chubanshe, 2012), 145.

of class labels. In 1988, a column specializing in legal advice for rural residents in the Jiangxi-based journal *Laoqu Jianshe* received a letter from a Mr. Yang asking for advice on how to deal with a former landlord who had instructed his son to occupy the house that Mr Yang had been distributed during land reform.⁸⁸ The former landlord's justification was simply that 'my label has been removed...so you should return my house.' The editors made clear that this was a 'question of principle on which there could be no compromise': housing confiscated from landlords during land reform was the property of whomever it had been distributed to. In 1991, the Supreme People's Court received a request from the Higher People's Court of Henan concerning how to deal with cases in which the relatives of the targets of land reform and the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries carried out *fangong daosuan* against those who had been cadres and activists at the time. The Supreme People's Court made clear that such cases needed to be dealt with seriously: 'no person must be allowed to carry out "*fangong daosuan*" in any manner, much less can we allow "*fangong daosuan*" activities to spread—this is a matter of protecting the People's Democratic Dictatorship.' Depending on severity, they were to be dealt with through administrative or criminal punishment; '[those] carried out with the objective of counterrevolution are to be dealt with according to the regulations on counterrevolutionary crime in the criminal code.' The Court further suggested that 'typical' cases were to be communicated to the public through radio, television and newspaper.⁸⁹

In 1994, an employee of the Qiandongnan Prefectural Procuratorate in Guizhou published an article on how to determine the nature 定性 of *fangong daosuan* cases, which began with categories entirely continuous with those of the Mao era:

Fangong daosuan is a kind of attempt to reverse verdicts 一种翻案活动, it is the negation of the great achievements of the New Democratic Revolution and the Socialist Revolution, it is a new way in which class struggle manifests itself within a limited context; its nature is without a doubt that of class vengeance, and its motivation that of class hatred.⁹⁰

It went on, however, to argue that not all such cases could be dealt with as counterrevolutionary crimes, since the people who had carried them out did not necessarily have counterrevolutionary objectives: 'the accused may have carried out *fangong daosuan* motivated by class hatred, but it is not possible from this fact alone to conclude that he had

⁸⁸ '农民法律之友' [Legal advice for peasants], *Laoqu Jianshe*, 1988 no. 3, 34.

⁸⁹ '最高人民法院关于如何处理“反攻倒算”案件的答复' [Supreme People's Court's response on how to deal with '*fangong daosuan*' cases], 1991.7.12., 法(研)复[1991]第2号.

⁹⁰ 龙后然 Long Houran, "“反攻倒算”案件定性之我见' [My views on determining the nature of '*fangong daosuan*' cases], *Faxue Tansuo*, 1994 no. 4, 29-30.

counterrevolutionary objectives.’ The author proceeded to analyze a number of different cases and to determine the nature of the crime in each. The first concerned Mr Guo, a middle-school teacher whose grandfather, a KMT regiment commander, had allegedly killed 114 CCP cadres and was executed in 1951. In 1990, Mr Guo invited dozens of guests to a banquet at which he ‘openly gave vent to his dissatisfaction with the government’ and erected a tomb for his grandfather with the characters ‘leaving a good name for a hundred generations 流芳百代.’ This case was said to meet the criteria of ‘counterrevolutionary propaganda and incitement.’ The other cases, by contrast, all involved non-counterrevolutionary crimes by former landlords who took action after their requests for the return of their houses confiscated during land reform were denied: ‘theft’ in the case of one who organized dozens of people from his clan to dismantle and carry away the house; ‘illegally entering someone else’s home’ in the case of one who entered the house, damaged the furnishings, and took the owner’s chickens and ducks; and ‘disturbing public order 扰乱社会秩序罪’ in a case where the house in question was used as the village committee headquarters and the former landlord had moved into it and had occupied it for five years.⁹¹

In 1995, the CCP General Office circulated a notice on ‘dealing strictly with the issue of *fangong daosuan*.’⁹² The notice referred to recent cases in Yunnan and elsewhere in which ‘a small number of the relatives of land reform-era landlords and rich peasants have openly demanded the return of housing, land, and forests; some have surrounded and attacked those who were Party members, cadres, and activists at the time of land reform and their family members; some have made a big scene of commemorating people executed by the government, erecting memorial tablets for them and claiming they were the victims of injustice; in a few places, even attacks on people’s lives have taken place.’ The document quoted the following ‘important instruction’ from CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin: ‘This kind of *fangong daosuan* case must be dealt with strictly, particularly if party members or cadres are involved [in carrying it out]—otherwise a chain reaction might lead to big problems.’ This document, too, referred to *fangong daosuan* as ‘a kind of manifestation of class struggle within a limited scope in the current period,’ and stressed that there could be no ambiguity on the need to ‘protect the great achievement of the New Democratic and Socialist Revolutions.’ However, the possibility of these constituting counterrevolutionary crimes was not mentioned. The emphasis was on strengthening party organization and

⁹¹ It’s not clear why ‘theft’ or ‘damage to property’ is not included for the third case.

⁹² ‘中共中央办公厅关于严肃处理反攻倒算问题的通知’ [Notice of the Secretariat of the Party Centre on dealing strictly with the issue of *fangong daosuan*], in Li Gengchen (ed.), *sun* vol. 2 (Beijing: Changcheng Chubanshe, 2000), 457-59.

discipline, so that situations in which grassroots cadres were supporting those carrying out *fangong daosuan* would not occur, and on using and disseminating relevant policies and laws, with the ultimate objective of ‘ensuring the social stability of the countryside.’

6.4 Epilogue

As the property that remained private in the collective economy, housing and furniture were the kinds of possessions that those dispossessed during land reform could hope to regain, short of the change of regime that they were often accused of hoping for.⁹³ In periods of intensified ‘class struggle’, these kinds of property could thus become the focal points of accusations of the distinctive PRC crime of *fangong daosuan*—of seeking to undermine the entire revolutionary order by, in these cases, reversing part of the non-land element of land reform. The Geng family’s misfortune was that their enforcement of their property rights—which they had carried out feeling secure in their membership among the People, and in a context when infringements on property were being rectified—was followed so soon by the return to class struggle, and that their actions could, with some modification of the facts, serve as a perfect example of the Party Centre’s new narrative.

In 1979, the Geng family’s petition for rehabilitation was taken up by the Jiangsu Higher People’s Court, which organized a team composed of cadres from the provincial, prefectural, and county courts, from the county reinvestigation office, and from the successor to the Harbin Institute of Military Engineering. Through consulting archival material and interviewing dozens of locals who had been involved in or witnessed land reform, they established that the house in question had never been redistributed and that Mrs Geng had not been designated as a landlord, and so pronounced as valid the sale of the building that had taken place in 1962. It is not clear whether the Wangs were compelled to pay the 2040 yuan; more important for the Gengs was their political rehabilitation, which enabled them to return to the jobs they had before 1964.⁹⁴

⁹³ There is evidence that such transfers of property did indeed happen, not least because, for the reasons suggested in the first part of this chapter, not all of the recipients of property felt that they were actually entitled to it. It is doubtful that most landlords and rich peasants actually made any such attempt, and those that did more often did so through some kind of consensual channel, as when Wu Lin argued in 1957 that elderly landlords might have their houses returned by the government, or through the kinds of channels corresponding to moral norms in village society described in Hu and Feng, ‘Research on the Distribution of Housing’.

⁹⁴ Liu, ‘Recollections Concerning Reversing the Verdict on the Geng Dingfa Counterrevolutionary Restoration Case,’ 57, 63.

For the Gengs, 1979 meant a restoration of their pre-1964 status as members of the People. For most of those with landlord and rich peasant labels, however, this was the first time they enjoyed this status. Many and perhaps most of them responded in the way the Party hoped, expressing their gratitude to the Party under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and putting the past behind them, but others used their new status as full citizens to pursue property claims—and, especially in the case of ‘counterrevolutionaries,’ commemorative activities as well as interpersonal conflicts—that challenged the legitimacy of the PRC’s founding political campaigns. Even well into the 1990s, the Party-state used the Mao-era language of *fangong daosuan*, class struggle, and class hatred to describe such incidents, but in the new era of socialist legality, such acts were only punishable in accordance with the criminal code, according to which seeking to retrieve property confiscated during land reform was not in itself evidence of counterrevolutionary intent.

Conclusion

Those classified as landlords and rich peasants during land reform were among the few groups victimized during the Mao era that—with the sole exception of the favoured group of overseas Chinese—did not subsequently receive any material or moral restitution; but for most of them, the fact that they were no longer considered non-People was enough to consider the removal of labels their own ‘liberation’ or *fanshen*.¹ They could now participate in social life on an equal footing, and they no longer had to worry more about their children’s and grandchildren’s prospects for getting married than other parents and grandparents.² In addition to drastically improved marriage prospects, those with ‘landlord’ and ‘rich peasant’ ancestors could now compete for educational and material advantage without facing political discrimination, in the greatly expanded domains constituted by the revived *gaokao* and the partially reintroduced market economy. Memoirs often portray this as the moment that these families had been hoping would come sooner or later: a time when good political labels and the approval of grassroots cadres were no longer the *sine qua non* of social advancement, and when those who had abilities rewarded by the educational system and the market would have a chance to improve their fortunes.³

Recent quantitative studies by economists and sociologists confirm what some anecdotal evidence from memoirs suggests, namely that those from landlord and rich peasant families have fared better than average in both educational and economic terms in post-Mao China. The most recent and thorough study finds that, as of 2010, those whose grandparents or great-grandparents were classified as ‘landlords’ or ‘rich peasants’ have a 16-17 percent higher income, and have completed over 11 percent more years of education, than those whose grandparents were not so classified.⁴ Since landlords and rich peasants were

¹ These terms have been ‘appropriated’ in some memoirs; for example, Li, *The Fate of a Landlord Large Family*, 252, in which the entire section on the reform era is called ‘liberation’; and Zhou, *Cuotuo, Xuanwo*, 95, who writes: ‘after reform and opening, landlords and their children were able to *fanshen*.’

² This is a common theme in reporting on the success of the policy to end the system of class labels; see, for example, ‘Remove one label, mobilize multiple generations’, 1979.2.5, *RMRB*; “‘光棍堂’引来4只‘金凤凰’” [The ‘bare-stick hall’ attracts four ‘golden phoenixes’], *Tianjin Ribao*, 1979.8.19.

³ On academic success, see Li, *The Fate of a Landlord Large Family*, 246, 259; Li, ‘The Best Way to Remember is to Inherit’, 110. On commercial success, see Cai, *Landlord*, 502-504; Zhang, ‘That Year, I Participated in Class Struggle’, 234; Zhou, *Cuotuo, xuanwo*, 95.

⁴ Alesina et al., ‘Persistence through Revolutions’, 3. Sato Hiroshi and Li Shi have published a pair of papers on this issue, first on education and then on wealth, relying on a different survey to the one used by Alesina et al (‘Class Origin, Family Culture, and Intergenerational Correlation of Education’; ‘Influence of Family Background on Current Family Wealth’). Sato and Li use a 2003 survey conducted under the aegis of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, with a nationally representative sample of 9200 households; Alesina et al use a 2010 survey conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences Survey at Peking University, with a sample of nearly 15,000 households. In neither

approximately the wealthiest 10 percent of the rural or semi-rural population at the time, the income gap implies a 14.5 percent chance of staying in the top decile for their grandchildren—a persistence rate higher than that of the US, at 14.1 percent.⁵

The authors explain this remarkable ‘persistence through revolutions’ as the consequence of an intergenerational transmission of positive attitudes towards hard work, wealth, and market competition, which, together with a revealed preference for working longer hours, are measurable in the descendants of those designated as landlords and rich peasants who were born after 1965. In the absence of sociological panel surveys about attitudes to these issues in pre-revolutionary China, their claims about the values of the ‘grandparents’ generation—those designated as landlords or rich peasants at the time of land reform—are based on this being the best explanation for the contemporary data; but some of the most striking evidence for their hypothesis, ironically enough, is provided by Mao Zedong. In his Xunwu Investigation of 1930, Mao identified ‘small landlords’ as 80 percent of all landlords in the county, of whom in turn nearly half were the ‘newly rich’: ‘peasants who got rich from farming or from small businesses’ (these were at least partly ‘rich peasants’ by Mao’s later definition). Mao’s description of this stratum—‘they are serious about money, and their special trait is stinginess’, ‘getting rich is their central concern’, and ‘they toil all day’, is essentially a more pejorative version of what Alesina et al. identify as ‘productive cultural traits and attitudes.’⁶

What Alesina et al. give very little attention to, however, is the possibility that the discrimination faced by these families under Maoism *itself* contributed to these families’ emphasis on hard work, educational attainment, and (to use an anachronistic sounding but not inaccurate term) ‘marketable skills’, since, from the Socialist Education Movement

case is it clear whether the questionnaires asked specifically about paternal grandparents’ class labels, or the ‘highest’ label of anyone from that generation, or simply left it up to the respondent to interpret what was meant by ‘their family’s class status as the time of the revolution’. A similar finding is reported in Treiman and Walder, ‘The Impact of Class Labels’, 1156-57, based on a separate 1998 survey, but their study is more urban-focused, and combines landlords and rich peasants with counterrevolutionaries and capitalists into the category of ‘bad’ class labels. In a sample of nearly 500 contemporary economic elites, Goodman found that over half claimed that at least one member of their family had been part of the pre-1949 local elite (‘The Changing Face of China’s Local Elite’, 119); however, Goodman does not explain how this question was asked, or the implications for family class labels after 1949.

⁵ Alesina et al., ‘Persistence through Revolutions’, 3.

⁶ Mao, ‘Xunwu Investigation’, 1930.5, *MRP* 3, 376. The values Alesina et al are interested in are meant to be revealed by answers to the following four questions (each answered on a scale from 1 to 5): 1) How important is being rich to you? 2) Do you agree that for the economy to thrive, one needs to enlarge income inequality in the population? 3) Do you agree that fair competition is essential to harmonious interpersonal relationships in society? 4) Do you agree that the most important factor that determines someone’s success is how hard she works? (Alesina et al, 30-31). They find that those with landlord or rich peasant ancestors systematically answer these questions more positively, and report about 10% more hours worked, and find that the difference is greatest for those who live together with their parents, indicating vertical transmission of attitudes.

onwards, it was abundantly clear that they had no other hope for social advancement.⁷ This could be understood as a complementary rather than competing explanation—after all, pre-existing family traditions emphasizing such values, and family precedents for educational or commercial success, would have made such a response to their predicament more likely.⁸ Whatever the exact causal mechanisms are, the descendants of landlords and rich peasants must be receiving some kind of informal inheritance: the observed difference in income and education levels cannot be explained by reference to direct transfer of wealth or formal educational opportunity, since those channels were completely eliminated during the Mao era, and of course there has not been any favourable policy towards these groups since 1978.⁹ Indeed, as far as the reform-era and contemporary Party-state is concerned, ‘descendants of landlords and rich peasants’ is not a significant way of grouping the citizens of the People’s Republic, and the surveys that have collected this data have done so for academic reasons.

Do these descendants themselves consider it significant, or even know, that their (great-)grandparents were among the wealthier stratum of the rural population before the revolution, and were treated as ‘enemies’ during the Mao era?¹⁰ Given that there is no official context in which this fact is relevant, nor is it a socially or culturally salient marker *per se*, it depends on choices about the transmission of memories within particular families. In the postscript to her 2016 novel *Soft Burial*, the author Fang Fang (b. 1955) reveals that the novel’s protagonist, an elderly woman in reform-era China haunted by memories of what happened to her family during land reform, was directly inspired by a friend’s mother.¹¹

⁷ The only hypothesis they consider in which Mao-era discrimination itself has a causal role is the very specific one that harder work and a desire to succeed among those who were born after 1965 is the direct outcome of resentment about the treatment of their parents and grandparents. They suggest this hypothesis is unlikely, citing as evidence, first, that whether parents were alive in 2010 makes no difference (the assumption being resentment should be stronger if parents died due to persecution; though this is hardly a perfect proxy given that many of the parents’ generation, and virtually all of the grandparents’ generation, would have died of natural causes by then), and second, that the ‘children’ generation (those born any time after 1965), who don’t necessarily know their family’s class labels and therefore are less likely to be motivated by resentment than their parents, display stronger work ethics and pro-competition/pro-wealth attitudes than their parents. They do not consider the hypothesis that experiences during the Mao era caused those in the ‘parents’ generation (those born between 1940 and 1965) to develop certain attitudes which they then passed on to their children.

⁸ Sato and Li propose an explanation along these lines: an ‘intergenerational cultural rebound’ created by an ‘education-oriented family culture’ (‘Class Origin, Family Culture, and Intergenerational Correlation of Education’, 3). On the role of family histories in motivating economic activity in contemporary China, see Goodman, ‘New Economic Elites’, 35; ‘The Changing Face of China’s Local Elite’, 123-24.

⁹ Alesina et al.’s analysis of the figures shows that, as one would expect, the ‘parents’ generation from landlord and rich peasant families received less formal education and were less likely to be CCP members than the average; they were also more likely to have experienced hunger during the Great Leap (*ibid.*, 22-23).

¹⁰ Of course, those who responded to the survey indicating that their grandparents were landlords or rich peasants must know, but they might not have known prior to being prompted to find out by the survey.

¹¹ 方方 Fang Fang, 软埋 [*Soft Burial*] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 2016), 291-92.

This elderly woman was mortified when her daughter bought an expensive house at some point in the 1990s, saying people would ‘come to divide up hidden wealth 分浮财的要来的,’ and she would often cry out in the middle of the night due to pains in her back where she had been beaten during land reform. But what Fang found most striking was her frequent insistence, after she had begun suffering from dementia, that she not be buried without a coffin—the ‘soft burial’ of the novel’s title, and apparently the fate of many of those killed during land reform. Fang then adds:

What I wrote in this novel about land reform...is not just what [my friend’s] family experienced, it is what my parents’ families, and those of many friends and neighbours all experienced...These people’s lives are different in all kinds of ways, but the misfortunes of their families are strikingly similar... To be a [five-type] element,¹² or their child, meant that your life was full of humiliation 屈辱. This humiliation extended from your body to your soul, and penetrated into your bones. For this reason...after ‘class status’...was no longer the criterion that distinguished a good from a bad person...almost all of these people decided to take [memories of] those days of living without dignity, those experiences full of pain, and to keep them hidden away. They didn’t mention them, they didn’t think back to them, and they had no intention of telling their children and grandchildren about them, as if talking about these experiences were like tearing open a healed wound.¹³

Fang came to think of ‘soft burial’ as a metaphor for this refusal to remember—the outcome of which was that she herself barely knew anything about her grandparents’ generation—and to think of her novel as an attempt to prevent the past from sinking into oblivion.¹⁴ After winning a major literary prize, Fang’s novel swiftly drew the ire of the defenders of Party orthodoxy, who argued that by re-narrating land reform as trauma, Fang had negated the achievements of the Party’s foundational political campaign, and sought to ‘reverse verdicts’ on behalf of the entire ‘landlord class.’¹⁵ Officials deemed that it was better for the discussion not to go on, and the book was quickly taken off the shelves.¹⁶

¹² The term Fang uses is ‘*dí, fu, fan, huai, you fenzi*.’

¹³ Ibid., 292.

¹⁴ Ibid., 296-97.

¹⁵ These criticisms are summarized in 卫群 Wei Qun, ‘当前意识形态领域里的一场严肃争论—批判《软埋》的文章综述’ [A serious controversy in the current ideological sphere: a summary of the essays criticizing *Soft Burial*], in *Wenhua Ruan Shili*, 2017 no. 2, 81-90.

¹⁶ Oiwen Lam, ‘China Bans ‘Soft Burial’, an Award-Winning Novel About the Deadly Consequences of Land Reform’, *Global Voices*, 2017.6.8. <https://globalvoices.org/2017/06/08/china-bans-soft-burial-an-award-winning-novel-about-the-deadly-consequences-of-land-reform>.

It goes without saying that land reform, which completely transformed economic, political, and social relations throughout rural China, meant different things to different people, but it is also indisputable that for tens of millions – primarily, but by no means only, its targets – it was indeed highly traumatic.¹⁷ To be labelled a landlord during land reform was not merely to become the target of expropriation: it was to be excluded from the newly formed moral community of the People, and to become the legitimate target of violent and degrading treatment. As this thesis has shown, however, it was not supposed to imply membership of a permanent underclass. Applied right as their material foundation was being destroyed, it made no sense for these labels to be conceptualized as permanent; nor was there any ideological or practical justification for considering them heritable. Contrary to a widespread perception in existing scholarship, the policy that landlord and rich peasant labels could be removed after three to five years was not simply abandoned, and was implemented on a significant scale in 1956-57, with label removal averaging 50 percent in the quarter of areas where land reform had been carried out before 1949, and 20 percent where it was carried out after the founding of the PRC.¹⁸

The Party's response to the crises of 1957 made clear that it was not willing to abandon the us-enemy framing that it was so used to, and presaged its response to the far greater crisis that followed the failure of the Leap, but it was Mao's 1962 declaration that 'class struggle' would continue for a long time under socialism that ensured that landlord and rich peasant labels would, in practice, become mostly permanent and hereditary for the rest of the Chairman's life. At the level of ideology and policy, however, matters remained far less clear-cut, as indicated by the continued discourse of reform, and the oft-repeated slogan that the Party placed 'emphasis on performance' rather than family background. Indeed, official discourse was consistent throughout the Mao era, even during the periods of most virulent demonization, that the Party's ultimate objective was to transform class enemies into People, and the Party-state, particularly the public security system, dedicated considerably energy to this project. The Party promoted an ideal of struggle through 'speaking reason', but this ideal, like the entire ideal of reform, was premised on a series of highly problematic claims: that those labelled landlords and rich peasants were 'bad' people who needed to 'bow their heads' and seek redemption, and that the CCP was leading the rural population towards material sufficiency which class enemies, too, could enjoy. Reality generally involved a far higher degree of moral complexity and material scarcity, which meant that few were likely

¹⁷ On killings during land reform as a traumatic experience for non-class enemy villagers, see Kiely, 'Afterword', 900-901 and Ruf, *Cadres and Kin*, 87.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2.

to feel the emotions of guilt and gratitude that they were supposed to, while 'surveillance and reform' provided an institutionalized structure for a set of coercive and demeaning practices that would continue until the end of the Mao era.

Surveillance and reform by the masses required their good-class neighbours to think of landlords and rich peasants as class 'others' rather than as fellow villagers or kinsfolk, but was this othering really assimilated into the thinking of ordinary people? Did a bad class status become, as scholars have argued, a kind of stigma akin to caste, ethnic, or even racial discrimination? While it is impossible to give a direct answer to such a complex question about social reality in all of China, it is nevertheless clear that official discourse and policy had elements that closely resemble such naturalizing discrimination: the notion of a malevolent essence beneath a benign appearance, and the aim of exclusion from the domain of ordinary social interaction, were both major features of Party propaganda and policy from 1962 onwards. This demonization and exclusion certainly contributed to motivating and justifying much violent and degrading treatment, but it is less clear that it produced a perception of fundamental otherness among those who lived and worked alongside class enemies.

If fellow villagers were unlikely to come to view most landlords and rich peasants as on the other side of a chasm separating the People and their enemies, their children were even less likely to, yet this is precisely what was expected of them if they were to demonstrate that they had chosen the side of the People. But what could it mean to view one's parents as enemies while also being expected to provide for them in old age? The answer was the elimination of filial affection, an emotion that came to be construed as a political failing for those from landlord and rich peasant families: affection towards class enemy parents was construed as tantamount to filiality towards the exploiting classes. In periods of reduced us-enemy conflict, this requirement was not necessarily enforced, but especially from the SEM onwards, it became necessary to visibly 'draw a clear line', which could involve having to send elderly parents back to the countryside, or to participate in the ritual of class struggle by providing evidence about their 'crimes.' There were also those who saw themselves on the side of their family in an us-enemy conflict against the Party, but this became very difficult to conceal, as ever more personal documents became the targets of politicized scrutiny.

Based on the account given following his expulsion from the Party and military, Geng Dingfa was just such a 'filial descendant of the landlord class,' using his position in the military to assist his landlord mother in retrieving property confiscated during land reform.

This story reminds us that land reform was not just about land, but about much other property, from houses to chairs, that was not subsequently collectivized, and which the Party proclaimed its commitment to protecting from infringement following the ‘communal wind’ of 1958-60. The accusation of *fangong daosuan* could elevate disputes around such property from minor civil affairs to threats against the entire revolutionary order, and in post-1962 China, there were strong incentives and pressures to accept such an interpretation whenever it was put forward. The category of *fangong daosuan* continued to be used by the Party-state after 1979 to refer to designs on property confiscated during land reform, and official discourse and policy made clear that there was to be no questioning of the outcome of this foundational campaign—but, with class enemy labels removed and the us-enemy divide no longer framing political and social life, almost all instances of *fangong daosuan* had, in effect, become mere ‘contradictions among the People.’

Fang Fang’s characterization of the experience of being a class enemy or their child during the Mao era—‘a life full of humiliation’ of a kind that ‘penetrated into one’s bones’—cannot have been universal among those classified as landlords and rich peasants during land reform. Of those whose labels were removed during collectivization, some must have made it through the rest of the Mao era without further persecution, since there was no policy of systematic re-labelling; and if the argument made in this thesis about the difficulty of ‘othering’ landlords and rich peasants is correct, the phenomenon of ‘class struggle’ as mere performance may not have been that exceptional. It is important to keep in mind, however, that it did not require most ordinary villagers to perceive landlords and rich peasants as class aliens for their lives to be characterized by regular humiliation and mistreatment—for that, it was sufficient for local cadres and activists to be serious about ‘class struggle’. This condition probably obtained more often than not, since grassroots cadres’ own positions were so often tied to their role in the violent overthrow of the old order. Fang may well also be right that the feelings of humiliation and stigma connected to these labels led to a systematic tendency towards forgetting in the post-Mao era.¹⁹ That this thesis has been able to rely partly on memoirs indicates that this has not been universal, but if there has indeed been a widespread tendency not to tell descendants about life under the People’s Democratic Dictatorship, it would not be difficult to comprehend. The transmission of painful memories is a fraught matter in any context, and for those affected by landlord and rich peasant labels in the Mao era, these memories are directly connected to a foundational narrative of the organization that has continued to rule China.

¹⁹ For a similar observation, see Lin, *My Hometown*, 297.

Appendix 1: The Demography of Non-People

The shorthand for non-People for much of the Mao era was ‘landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist five-type elements’; during the Socialist Education Movement, rightists were generally not included in this list, and the shorthand was ‘four-type elements.’ The number of those designated as rightists was around 550,000.¹ Concerning the other four types, an article in the *People’s Daily* announcing the removal of the last batch of labels referred to this as ‘the victorious completion of the historical mission of educating and reforming over 20 million four-type elements since the founding of the state.’² This figure probably does not include those who were deemed to have been incorrectly labelled, nor those dealt with as ‘elements’ in practice, but not actually recorded as such in any bureaucratic manner (e.g. probably most children and grandchildren of landlords and rich peasants who had ‘inherited’ the label despite clearly not having been old enough at the time of land reform to justify such designation according to policy). The following table summarizes available evidence about the proportions among four-types.

Table A1.1. Proportions among the four-type elements

Source	Landlords plus rich peasants as percentage of all four-types (followed by breakdown of landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, and bad elements)
Lu Ruojian’s estimate based on ‘scattered data from various locations’ ³	65-85 (35-45, 30-40, 10-15, 5-10)
Zhejiang Provincial Public Security Gazetteer, data for 1956 ⁴	88 (without ‘bad elements’, as this category was not yet introduced) 48, 40, 12
Guizhou Provincial Public Security Gazetteer, data for 1960 ⁵	82 (51, 31, 8, 10)
Heilongjiang Provincial Public Security Gazetteer, data for 1958 ⁶	61 (28, 33, 11, 28)

¹ This is the standard figure; I am not sure about its precise origin, but it is referred to, for example, by Bo Yibo *Recollections*, 618-19.

² ‘十一届三中全会以来党中央的一项重要决策——全国给最后一批地富反坏分子摘帽’ [An important policy of the Party Centre since the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee: labels are removed from the last batch of landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, and bad elements throughout China], 1984.11.2, *RMRB*.

³ Li, ‘From Atoning for One’s Crimes to Becoming a Scapegoat’, 118.

⁴ Zhejiang Provincial People’s Public Security Gazetteer, 247.

⁵ ‘贵州省志 公安’ [*Guizhou Provincial Gazetteer, Public Security*] (Nanyang: Guizhou Renmin Chubanshe, 2003), 581.

⁶ These are data for a subset of four-type elements, slightly less than half of the total, who had to participate in *jixun*; this is likely to mean ‘bad elements’ were overrepresented (‘黑龙江省志 第 63 卷 公安’ [*Heilongjiang Provincial Gazetteer, vol. 63, Public Security*] (Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2001), 236.

Last 'batch' of four-types remaining in all of China in 1983 (a total of just under 80,000 people who had not been de-labelled between 1978 and 1983, among which 'bad elements' were almost certainly overrepresented) ⁷	54 (36, 18, 20, 26)
Anhui Province, Wuwei County, sample of nearly 500 class status modifications of 'four-type elements' (1965-66) ⁸	70 (29, 41, 10, 20)

An estimate of 70-75% of four-type elements as landlords and rich peasants would correspond to about 15 million of the 'over 20 million' (20 多万) referred to in the *People's Daily*.

We can compare this figure to the number of landlords and rich peasants designated during land reform. According to the State Statistical Bureau's figures, 4 million households were categorized as 'landlord' and 3.25 million as 'rich peasant', with populations of 21,880,000 and 21,440,000 (the average size of landlord households was thus 5.47 people, and of rich peasant households 6.6 people).⁹ Some of these households ceased to exist due to deaths during land reform (e.g. if the head of household was killed and the wife remarried, or if the parents committed suicide and the child or children were adopted by relatives). If we make a very rough assumption that the disappearance of households was more-or-less offset by subsequently 'discovered' landlords and rich peasants who had 'escaped the net', so that the number of landlord and rich peasant households after land reform was somewhere around 7 million, then the figure of 15 million 'elements' would correspond to an average of slightly more than 2 'elements' per household. This seems like a realistic figure, not only due to there being multiple adult males within households, but also because women were also frequently recorded as landlord or rich peasant 'elements'. See the discussion in the Introduction on how landlord and rich peasant labels differed from other kinds of labels in gendered terms, and see Appendix 2 for preliminary statistical evidence from one county.

⁷ 'An important policy of the Party Centre', 1984.11.2, *RMRB*. The reason to assume the overrepresentation of 'bad elements' is that this label usually concerned recent transgressions of a non-political nature, which therefore did not lose their salience after 1979 in the same way that the reasons for landlord, rich peasant, and counterrevolutionary labels did. See Li, 'From Atoning for One's Crimes to Becoming a Scapegoat', 118.

⁸ See Appendix 2 below.

⁹ *JDZX*, 410.

Appendix 2: Findings from Wuwei County (1965-66)

I have analyzed reports of nearly 500 class status changes from Wuwei County, Anhui Province, that took place between January and July of 1966, right before the Socialist Education Movement morphed into the Cultural Revolution.¹⁰ The documents reporting these changes are from the archival files of the County People's Government, and were produced by the committees of the Four Clean-ups sub-groups of each of district (the headers read 中共无为县某某区四清分团委员会文件).¹¹ All of the changes pertain to four-type labels, since it was only such changes that required approval at the county level (changes among the ranks of the People did not need to be submitted to the county level for approval). Unfortunately, the documents are incomplete—of Wuwei county's eleven districts, files for four are highly incomplete or missing.

I have divided the changes into two broad categories: 'upward' and 'downward', meaning from a better to a worse label, and vice-versa.¹² Changes 'downward' could take place due to successful reform (referred to as 'de-labelling' below), or due to the correction of previous errors. Changes upwards to 'landlord' or 'rich peasant' status could occur in three ways. The two ways referred to in central SEM documents were the purported discovery of landlords or rich peasants who had had escaped classification during land reform, and the return of labels to those from whom they had been previously removed on account of recent transgressions (referred to as 'reclassification' and 're-labelling' below). The third way was for someone from a landlord or rich peasant family—typically the wife but sometimes the child of the head of the household—whose individual status had not been separately recorded (referred to as 'supplementary [classification]' below, as a translation of the term 补划 used in the original documents).

A further complication is that reclassification and supplementary classification could also occur without being given a landlord or rich peasant 'hat 帽子,' (referred to below as 'classification without "hat"'). This possibility was introduced by the Revised Latter Ten Points, which, after insisting on the need to uncover all those who had escaped classification

¹⁰ For the policy background here, see Brown, 'Moving Targets', 58-62.

¹¹ Data aggregated from WCA 15-1-1-1966-102 to 109 (each folder titled '关于某区关于改变成份、摘带帽子问题的批复、决定' [Responses and decisions concerning issue of changing class status and removing or applying labels in x district]).

¹² This potentially counterintuitive directional metaphor corresponds to Mao-era usage, in which having a 'high' class status 成分高 meant a politically unfavourable one. See also Brown, 'Moving Targets', 62, who explains that 'going down 下降' was a favourable change and a 'rise 上升' was an unfavourable one. On the use of vertical directional metaphor in Chinese, see Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese*, 155-62.

during land reform, added that only those who had engaged in ‘destructive activities’ needed to be given a ‘hat.’¹³ Finally, I also encountered a small number of cases where someone’s family background was changed to ‘landlord’ or ‘rich peasant’ from a non-enemy family background.

Table A2.1. Types of changes involving four-type element labels in Wuwei County¹⁴

			L	R	C	B	Other/ unclear	Total
Upwards	Labelling	Supplementary	26	17	-	-	0	
		Reclassification	6	11	-	-	0	
		Relabelling	8	2	2	0	0	
		Other ¹⁵	7	13	16	56	1	
		Total	47	42	18	56	1	
	Classification without ‘hat’	Supplementary	11	4	0	0	0	
		Reclassification	1	2	0	0	0	
		Other	0	0	1	0	0	
	Only class background		5	1	0	0	0	
	Total		64	50	19	56	1	190
Downwards	De-labelling		42	62	22	13	0	
	Correction	Incorrect status	19	50	10	29	2	
		Correction to family background instead of individual status	15	26	0	0	0	
		Family background	0	9	0	0	0	
	Total		76	147	32	42	2	298
No change			2	2	0	0	4	
Unclear			0	0	0	0	2	
Total			142	199	51	98	9	499

¹³ ‘Revised Latter Ten Points’, 9.

¹⁴ L, R, C and B correspond to the four types of ‘element’, in the usual order: landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary and bad.

¹⁵ For landlord and rich peasant labels, this means when the reason was unclear; for counterrevolutionary and bad element labels, this simply means the application of the label by reference to historical or recent transgressions.

It may be surprising that more than half of the changes – roughly 60% – were ‘downwards’, that is, from a worse to a better classification, and there were more downwards than upwards changes for each category except for ‘bad element’. The proportion of downward changes was 53% for landlords, 74% for rich peasants, 63% for counterrevolutionaries, and 43% for bad elements. Why do downward changes outnumber upwards changes among rich peasant cases by such a large extent, and by a notably larger extent than in the case of landlords? The difference is accounted for almost entirely by ‘correction’ rather than ‘de-labelling’ (i.e. ‘successful reform’): ‘de-labelling’ accounts for about 30% of both landlord and rich peasant status changes, but ‘correction’ accounts for over 40% of rich peasant cases and less than 25% of landlord cases. As the case files indicate, many ‘rich peasants’ in Wuwei were in fact well-off middle peasants who were pushed into the rich peasant bracket during the first round of land reform in 1948 in order to justify their expropriation. While some of these mistakes were corrected following the second round of land reform in 1951, many were not.¹⁶ Macro-level evidence for this phenomenon can be found in the land reform statistics recorded in the Wuwei county gazetteer, which show that families classified as ‘rich peasants’ owned 3.3 *mu* of land per capita, which is barely higher than the national average for middle peasants of 3.05 *mu*, and just over a third of the national average for rich peasants of 9.6 *mu* (that this is a rich peasant specific phenomenon indicated by the fact that the landlord average in Wuwei of 21.5 *mu* is only slightly lower than the national average of 26.32 *mu*).¹⁷ The fact that Four Cleans work teams in the first half of 1966 were carrying out such corrections suggests that they were genuinely interested in finding the ‘truth’ about class categories in terms of official guidelines.

The above statistics do not include gender. Of the 499 files, 312 include gender data; the following table summarizes the proportions for each category.

Table A2.2. Gender ratios of four-type element label changes in Wuwei County

	Number of men and women in each category (men – women)			
	L	R	C	B
Upwards	18 – 26	18 – 15	8 – 0	36 – 2
Downwards	26 – 31	65 – 29	13 – 1	21 – 1
Total	44 – 57	83 – 44	21 – 1	57 – 3

¹⁶ ‘无为县志’ [*Wuwei County Gazetteer*] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 1993), 123-24.

¹⁷ Ibid.; *JDZX*, 410.

What is immediately evident is that, while counterrevolutionary and bad element labels almost exclusively concerned men, landlord and rich peasant labels involved both genders, and in the case of landlords, included more women than men. For more detailed comparison, here is a table with gender ratios for each specific type of change that could take place with landlord and rich peasant labels:

Table A2.3. Gender ratios of landlord and rich peasant label changes in Wuwei County

		Number of men and women in each category	
		Landlord	Rich Peasant
Upwards	Reclassification	3–2	9–3
	Supplementary	8–19	6–12
	Re-labelling	3–1	1–0
Downwards	De-labelling	9–23	24–18
	Correction	11–4	26–7
	Correction to family background	6–4	15–4

It is not possible to make any major generalization on the basis of such a small number of cases, but the data are consistent with the view that by the mid 1960s, women were formally coming to be considered landlord and rich peasant ‘elements’ to a similar extent to men. The only changes where there are large and consistent gender differences for both landlord and rich peasant status (highlighted in bold) support the view of gradual convergence. Corrections ‘downwards’ affected men more than women because the land reform-era pool of landlord and rich peasant elements had more men in it than women (i.e. the wives of the men whose status was being corrected can be assumed not to have been separately recorded as ‘elements’). By contrast, supplementary classification of people from landlord and rich peasant households as ‘elements’ primarily affected wives who had not been separately labelled before. Indeed, a number of the files specifically state this. The men in this category were young adults the time of land reform whose fathers were labelled, and who were now being ‘promoted’ to being elements themselves, on the grounds that they were already 18 at the time of land reform and were actively involved in the running of the household.

Bibliography

Note on referencing

Scholarly publications and memoirs appear in footnotes with short English citations, with full information in the bibliography. Chinese publications typically do not have separate volume numbers, and so issue numbers are to be understood within the context of year indicated.

All other sources, except for the important official documents listed below, are fully cited in the footnotes on first appearance, and do not appear separately here. On subsequent citation, short English titles are given, with (if relevant) date and repository.

Abbreviations used in footnotes:

AC: Author's collection

CCPM: Song Yongyi (chief ed.), *Database of the History of Contemporary Chinese Political Movements* (<http://ccrd.usc.cuhk.edu.hk>)

GAJS: 公安建设 [Public Security Construction]

GKWX: 杨学为 Yang Xuewei (ed.), 高考文献 1949-1976 [*Documents Relating to University Entrance Examinations, 1949-1976*]. Beijing: Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2003

JDZX: 中国社会科学院, 中央档案馆 Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Central Party Archives (eds), '中华人民共和国经济档案资料选编, 1949-1952: 农村经济体制卷' [*Selection of Archival Materials on the Economic History of the People's Republic of China, 1949-1952: Volume on the Rural Economic System*]. Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 1992

MLD: Maoist Legacy Database. <https://www.maoistlegacy.de/>

MRP: Stuart Schram and Nancy Hodes (eds.), *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*, (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1992-2005)

MSWS: '毛泽东思想万岁' [*Long Live Mao Zedong Thought*] (Wuhan, 1968). Available at <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/maozedong/1968/>

NCA: Neixiang County Archives (Henan Province). Consulted at the Shanghai Jiaotong University Centre for Social History

RMRB: 人民日报 [*People's Daily*]

RMGA: 人民公安 [*People's Public Security*]

SW: Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1961-65)

WCA: Wuwei County Archives (Anhui Province). Consulted at the Shanghai Jiaotong University Centre for Social History

ZGQN: 中国青年 [*China Youth*]

Archives consulted in person

‘A’ County Archives, Fujian Province (see Introduction, fn. 30)

Hangzhou Municipal Archives, Zhejiang Province

Mei County Archives, Guangdong Province

Meizhou Municipal Archives, Guangdong Province

Important documents referred to in footnotes using short titles

Land Reform Law: ‘中华人民共和国土地改革法’ [Land Reform Law of the People’s Republic of China], passed on 1950.6.28, appeared in *RMRB* on 1950.6.30.

1954 Constitution: ‘中华人民共和国宪法’ [Constitution of the People’s Republic of China], passed on 1954.9.20, appeared in *RMRB* on 1954.9.21.

Decision on Class Status: ‘中央人民政府政务院关于划分农村阶级成分的决定’ [Decision of the State Administrative Council of the Central People’s Government on the assignment of class status in rural areas], passed on 1950.8.4, appeared in *RMRB* on 1950.8.21.

Draft Programme: ‘1956 年到 1967 年全国农业发展纲要（草案）’ [Programme for China’s agricultural development, 1956-1967 (draft)], proposed on 1956.1.23, appeared in *RMRB* on 1956.1.26.

Former Ten Points: ‘中共中央关于目前农村工作中若干问题的决定（草案）’ [Party Centre’s decision on some issues in current rural work (draft)], 1963.5.20, subsequently referred to as ‘前十条’. *CCPM*.

Latter Ten Points: ‘中共中央关于农村社会主义教育运动中一些具体政策的规定（草案）’ [Party Centre’s regulations on some specific policies in the rural Socialist Education Movement (draft)], dated 1963.9, circulated on 1963.11.14, subsequently referred to as ‘后十条’. *CCPM*.

Revised Latter Ten Points: 中共中央关于农村社会主义教育运动中一些具体政策的规定（修正草案）’ [Party Centre’s regulations on some specific policies in the rural Socialist Education Movement (revised draft)], dated 1964.9.19, circulated 1964.9.18. *CCPM*.

Scholarly publications

- Alesina, Alberto, Marlon Seror, David Yang, Yang You, and Weihong Zeng. 'Persistence through Revolutions'. *NBER Working Paper Series* Working Paper 27053 (2020).
- Alexopoulos, Golfo. *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926 - 1936*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Altehenger, Jennifer. *Legal Lessons: Popularizing Laws in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1989*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2018.
- Apter, David and Tony Saich. *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Barnett, Doak A. *Cadres, Bureaucracy and Political Power in Communist China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.
- Betts, Paul. 'Private Property and Public Culture: A Forgotten Chapter of East European Communist Life'. *Histoire@Politique. Politique, Culture, Société*, no. 7 (2009).
- Billeter, Jean-Francois. 'The System of "Class Status"'. In *The Scope of State Power in China*, edited by Stuart R. Schram, 127-69. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1985.
- Bo Yibo 薄一波. *Recollections on Some Important Decisions and Incidents (2 Vols.)* 若干重大决策与事件的回顾 (上、下). Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, 1993.
- Brown, Jeremy. 'Moving Targets: Changing Class Labels in Rural Hebei and Henan, 1960-1979'. In *Maoism at the Grassroots*, edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, 51-76. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- — —. 'PRC History in Crisis and Clover'. *Positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (November 2021): 689-718.
- Cai Jiasheng 蔡嘉生. 'Review of Research on Early PRC Land Reform in Guangdong 中华人民共和国成立初期广东土地改革研究述评'. *Shiji Qiao*, no. 3 (2018): 93-94.
- Cao Shuji 曹树基. 'Differentiation in Land Rights and Class in China's Southeast — Research on Mao Zedong's "Xunwu Investigation" 中国东南地区的地权分化与阶级分化 — 毛泽东《寻乌调查》研究'. *Nanjing Daxue Xuebao (Zhhexue, Renwen Kexue, Shehuikexue)*, no. 5 (2012): 68-83.

- — —. 'An Overt Conspiracy: Creating Rightists in Rural Henan, 1957–1958'. In *Maoism at the Grassroots*, edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, 77–101. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Cao Shuji 曹树基 and Li Wankun 李婉琨. "'Additional Levies on Rich Households': The 1949 Movement to Requisition Grain in Jiangjin County '大户加征' : 江津县1949年的征粮运动'. *Jindaishi Yanjiu*, no. 4 (2013): 94–109.
- Cao Shuji 曹树基, Li Wankun 李婉琨, and Zheng Binbin 郑彬彬. 'Research on the Movement to Reduce Rents and Return Deposits in Jiangjin County 江津县减租退押运动研究'. *Lishixue Bao*, no. 4 (2013): 798–813.
- Cao Shuji 曹树基 and Liu Shigu 刘诗古. *The Structure of Land Rights in Traditional China and Its Transformations* 传统中国地权结构及其演变. Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong Daxue Chubanshe, 2015.
- Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger. *Chen Village: Revolution to Globalization (third edition)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- Cheek, Timothy. 'Making Maoism: Ideology and Organization in the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1942–1944'. In *Knowledge Acts in Modern China: Ideas, Institutions, and Identities*, edited by Robert Culp, Eddy U, and Wen-hsin Yeh, 304–27. Berkeley: University of California Institute of East Asian Studies, 2016.
- Chen, Theodore H.E. *Thought Reform of the Chinese Intellectuals*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960.
- Chen Yung-fa 陳永發. 'The Civil War, Mao Zedong, and the Land Revolution: Mistaken Judgment or Political Scheme? 內戰、毛澤東和土地革命：錯誤判斷還是政治謀略？'. *Dalu Zazhi*, nos. 1–3 (1996).
- Cheng, Anne. 'Filial Piety with a Vengeance: The Tension between Rites and Law in the Han'. In *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, edited by Alan Chan and Sor-Hoon Tan, 29–43. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Cheng Yinghong 程映虹. 'Was Mao Zedong's Original "Class Analysis" Backed Up by Data? What Was Later Deleted from It? 毛澤東的「階級分析」，原版有「數據支持」？後來刪掉了什麼？'. *Initium Media*, 25 July 2021.
<https://theinitium.com/article/20210725-opinion-maotheory-data/>.
- Czellér, Mark A. 'Local Reassessment versus Central Prestige: Tao Zhu, Land Reform and the Pine Hill Incident'. In *Justice after Mao: The Politics of Historical Truth in the*

- People's Republic of China*, edited by Daniel Leese and Amanda Shuman.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.
- DeMare, Brian James. 'Casting (Off) Their Stinking Airs: Chinese Intellectuals and Land Reform, 1946–52'. *The China Journal* 67 (January 2012): 109–30.
- — —. *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- — —. *Mao's Cultural Army: Drama Troupes in China's Rural Revolution*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Diamant, Neil J. *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China, 1949–1968*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- — —. *Useful Bullshit: Constitutions in Chinese Politics and Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022.
- Dikötter, Frank. *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1955–1962*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Dirlik, Arif. *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Du Runsheng 杜润生, ed. *China's Land Reform 中国的土地改革*. Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1996.
- Du Xing 杜兴. "The 61 Class Brothers and Their Class Enemies 61个阶级兄弟和他们的阶级敌人". *Beijing Wenxue*, no. 5 (2009): 146–51.
- Du, Yue. *State and Family in China: Filial Piety and Its Modern Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Duara, Prasenjit. *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.
- Dutton, Michael. *Policing Chinese Politics: A History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Engman, Puck. 'Shanghai's Dispossessed: The Capitalist Problem in Socialist Transition'. PhD. Diss., Freiburg University, 2020.
- Esherick, Joseph W. *Ancestral Leaves: A Family Journey through Chinese History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- — —. 'Number Games: A Note on Land Distribution in Prerevolutionary China'. *Modern China* 7, no. 4 (1981): 387–411.
- Esherick, Joseph W., and Mary Backus Rankin. 'Introduction'. In *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*, edited by Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

- Eyferth, Jacob. *Eating Rice from Bamboo Roots: The Social History of a Community of Handicraft Papermakers in Rural Sichuan, 1920-2000*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- — —. 'State Socialism and the Rural Household: How Women's Handloom Weaving (and Pig-Raising, Firewood-Gathering, Food-Scavenging) Subsidized Chinese Accumulation'. *International Review of Social History* 67, 2 (2022): 231-249.
- Fein, Helen. *Imperial Crime and Punishment: The Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and British Judgment, 1919-1920*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1977.
- Feng Xiaocai 冯筱才. 'Identity, Ritual, and Politics: The CCP's Thought Reform of Capitalists after 1956 身份、仪式与政治: 1956年后中共对资本家的思想改造'. *Huadong Shifan Daxue Xuebao*, no. 1 (2012): 32 – 38.
- — —. 'Between Class Struggle and Family Loyalty: The Mobilisation of Businessmen's Wives and Children during the Five Antis Movement'. *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (2014): 284-304.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. 'Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia'. *The Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 4 (December 1993): 745-77
- — —. *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Friedman, Edward, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden. *Chinese Village, Socialist State*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- — —. *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Fu, Hualing. 'Re-Education through Labour in Historical Perspective'. *The China Quarterly*, no. 184 (2005): 811-30.
- Gao Hua 高华. 'Class Identity and Difference: The Political Stratification of Chinese Society, 1949-1965 阶级身份和差异: 1949-1965年中国社会之政治分层'. In *Zai Lishi de Fengling Dukou*, 297-361. Hong Kong: Shidai Guoji Chuban Youxian Gongsì, 2008.
- — —. 'The Great Famine and the Origins of the Four Cleans Movement 大饑荒與四清運動的起源'. *Ershiyi Shiji*, August 2000: 56-68.
- — —. *How the Red Sun Rose*, trans. Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian. Hong Kong: CUHK Press, 2019.
- Gao Mobo. *Gao Village: Rural Life in Modern China*. London: Hurst, 1999.

- Gao Wangling 高王凌. *A New Theory of the Land Tenancy Relation: Landlords, Peasants, and Land Rents* 租佃关系新论：地主、农民与地租. Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Chubanshe, 2005.
- Ge Zhimo 葛治漠. 'The "Four Clean-Ups" Movement in Jin County 金县的“四清”运动'. In *Shehuizhuyi Jianshe Shiqi de Jinzhou, 1956-1978*, 79-94. Dalian: Dalian Shi Jinzhou Qu Shizhi Bangongshi, 1997.
- Gerth, Karl. *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Science Research Centre, 1956.
- Goodman, David S.G. 'New Economic Histories: Family Histories and Social Change.' In Sujian Guo (ed.), *State Society Relations and Governance in China*, 15-38. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014.
- — —. 'The Changing Face of China's Local Elite: Elite Advantage and Path Dependence in Business Communities.' *Chinese Political Science Review* 3, 2 (June 2018): 115-28.
- Guo Dehong 郭德宏. *Research on the Peasant and Land Questions in Modern China* 中国近现代农民土地问题研究. Qingdao: Qingdao Chubanshe, 1993.
- Guo Dehong 郭德宏 and Lin Xiaobo 林小波. *A Record of the Four Cleans Movement* 四清运动实录. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2005.
- Guo Qingshi 郭庆时. 'Together through Thick and Thin: Remembering Wu Lin 风雨同舟——记吴林'. *Haikang Wenshi*, no. 2 (1990): 32-34.
- Guo Wu. 'Recalling Bitterness: Historiography, Memory, and Myth in Maoist China'. *Twentieth Century China* 39, no. 3: 245-68.
- — —. 'The Social Construction and Deconstruction of Evil Landlords in Contemporary Chinese Fiction, Art, and Collective Memory'. *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25, no. 1 (2013): 131-64.
- Guo Yuhua 郭于华 and Sun Liping 孙立平. 'Speaking Bitterness: An Intermediary Mechanism for the Formation of Peasants' Concept of the State 诉苦：一种农民国家观念形成的中介机制'. *Zhongguo Xueshu*, no. 4 (2002): 130-57.
- Harrison, Henrietta. *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man's Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

- He Jiangsui. 'The Death of a Landlord: Moral Predicament in Rural China, 1968–1969'. In *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, edited by Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, 124-52. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- Hershatter, Gail. 'Notes from the alleyway: Zhang Jishun's *A City Displaced* and the promise of archival research'. *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 10, no. 1: 106-112.
- Hinton, William. *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008 [1966].
- — —. *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village*. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.
- — —. *Through a Glass Darkly: US Views of the Chinese Revolution*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006.
- Ho, Denise Y. *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao's China*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Ho, Denise Y., and Jie Li. 'From Landlord Manor to Red Memorabilia: Reincarnations of a Chinese Museum Town'. *Modern China* 42, no. 1 (January 2016): 3-37.
- Hsiao, Tso-liang. *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934: A Study of Documents*. Seattle: University of Washington P, 1969.
- Hsu, King-yi. *Political Mobilization and Economic Extraction: Chinese Communist Agrarian Policies during the Kiangsi Period*. New York: Garland, 1980.
- Hu Ping 胡平. 'China's "Jews" 中国的"犹太人群体"'. In *Zhanzheng Zhuangtai*, 308-19. Nanchang: Ershiyi Shiji Chubanshe Jituan, 2015.
- Hu Yingze 胡英泽 and Feng Xi 冯希. 'Research on the Distribution of Housing during Land Reform and Subsequent Changes, from the 1950s to the 60s: The Example of Yongji County, Shanxi 20世纪五六十年代土改房屋分配及其变迁研究 — 以山西省永济县为例'. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 5 (2019): 130-51.
- Huang Daoxuan 黄道炫. *Tensions and Limits: The Revolution in the Central Soviet, 1933-34 张力与限界：中央苏区的革命 (1933-1934)*. Beijing: Shehui Keixue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2011.
- — —. 'The Rectification Movement: A History of Souls 整风运动的心灵史'. *Jindaishi Yanjiu*, no. 2 (2020): 4-26.
- Huang, Philip C. C. *Code, Custom, and Legal Practice in China: The Qing and the Republic Compared*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- — —. *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

- — —. 'Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution: Representational and Objective Realities from the Land Reform to the Cultural Revolution'. *Modern China* 21, no. 1 (January 1995): 105–43.
- Huang Shu-min. *The Spiral Road: Change in a Chinese Village Through the Eyes of a Communist Party Leader*. Boulder, San Francisco, and London: West View Press, 1989.
- Javed, Jeffrey A. *Righteous Revolutionaries: Morality, Mobilization, and Violence in the Making of the Chinese State*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2022.
- Jing Wenyu 景文玉 and Cao Shuji 曹树基. 'Land Rights and "Rich Peasants Carrying Out Daosuan" : The Case of Li Xuhai in L County, Shandong 土地产权与 20 世纪 50 年代的“富农倒算” — 以山东 L 县李绪海倒算案为中心'. *Zhongguo Jingji Shi Yanjiu*, no. 4 (2019): 56–68.
- Johnson, Matthew D. 'Reconsidering Post-Revolutionary Cultural Change: Rural Film Projection Teams in Shaanxi Province, 1949–1956'. In *Rural Cinema Exhibition and Audiences in a Global Context*, edited by Daniela Treveri Gennari, Danielle Hipkins, and Catherine O'Rawe, 237–60. Berlin: Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- Kiely, Jan. 'Afterword'. *Positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (November 2021): 895–906.
- — —. *The Compelling Ideal: Thought Reform and the Prison in China, 1901–1956*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Kim, Ilpyong J. *The Politics of Chinese Communism: Kiangsi under the Soviets*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- Kligman, Gail, and Katherine Verdery. *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Knapp, Keith N. *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China*. University of Hawaii Press, 2005.
- Kraus, Richard Curt. *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.
- Kuchеров, Samuel. 'Property in the Soviet Union'. *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 11, no. 3 (1962): 376–92.
- Kuhn, Philip A. 'Local Self-Government under the Republic: Problems of Control, Autonomy, and Mobilization'. In *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, edited by Frederic Wakeman and Carolyn Grant, 257–89. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

- — —. 'Chinese Views of Social Stratification'. In *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolution China*, edited by James L. Watson, 16-28. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Lanza, Fabio. 'Introduction: The Politics of (Maoist) History'. *Positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (November 2021): 675-688.
- Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- — —. *The Stranger and the Chinese Moral Imagination*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Leese, Daniel. 'Revising Verdicts in Post-Mao China: The Case of Beijing's Fengtai District'. In *Maoism at the Grassroots*, edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, 102-128. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Leighton, Christopher Russell. 'Capitalists, Cadres, and Culture in 1950s China.' PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2010.
- Lewin, Moshe. 'Who Was the Soviet Kulak?' In *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia*, 121-41. New York: The New Press, 1994.
- Li Fangchun. 'What Does It Mean to "Explain Antiquity"? On the Classics, History, and Dao of the Chinese Revolution—An Exploration Based on the Land Reform Movement in Northern China's Liberated Areas "释古"何为? 论中国革命之经、史与道——以北方解放区土改运动为经验基础'. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 6 (2015): 12-28.
- Li, Huaiyin. *Village China under Socialism and Reform: A Micro-History, 1948-2008*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Li Hui 李辉. 'The Best Way to Remember Is to Inherit 最好的纪念是传承'. In *Juxing Ba Jin, Guang Hai Liangzhe*. Chengdu: Sichuan Wenyi Chubanshe, 2019.
- Li, Jie. 'Cinematic Guerrillas in Mao's China'. *Screen* 61, no. 2 (1 June 2020): 207-29.
- Li, Lifeng. 'From Bitter Memories to Revolutionary Memory: On Suku in Northern China During the Land Reform of the 1940s'. *Chinese Studies in History* 47, no. 1 (October 2013): 71-94.
- — —. 'The Method of Law and the Method of Lawlessness: Reconsidering the "Excessive Radicalization" of the Land Reform Movement in Northern China in the Late 1940s 有法之法与无法之法—1940年代后期华北土改运动“过激化”之再考察'. *Shixue Yuekan*, no. 4 (2013): 80-91.

- Li Ren 李任. 'Five Stories from My Life as an Education Youth 知青生活五则'. In *Yongyuan de Jiaoyin: Fuzhou Zhiqing Wendang*, edited by Tang Xi and Shi Xiaoyu 施晓宇, 208–21. Fuzhou: Haifeng Chubanshe, 2002.
- Li Ruojian 李若建. 'A Preliminary Investigation of Reeducation through Labour and Guanzhi during the Great Leap Forward 风起于青萍之末：大跃进时期的劳动教养与管制初探'. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 2 (2013): 137–55.
- . 'From Atoning for One's Crimes to Becoming a Scapegoat: A Preliminary Study of the "Four-Type Elements" 从赎罪到替罪：“四类分子”阶层初探'. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 5 (2006): 113–30.
- Li Tian and Yan Yunxiang. 'Self-Cultivation of the Socialist New Person in Maoist China: Evidence from a Family's Private Letters, 1961–1986'. *The China Journal* 82 (2019).
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of 'Brainwashing' in China*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Lin Da 林达. 'China's Disappeared "Jews": A Brief View of the Cultural Revolution's Social and Theoretical Background 已消失的中国“犹太人群体”：文革的社会、理论背景一瞥'. In *Wenge Wushi Nian: Mao Zedong Yichan he Dangdai Zhongguo (xia)*, edited by Song Yongyi 宋永毅. New York: Mingjing Chubanshe, 2016.
- Lin Yunhui 林蕴晖. *A Utopian Movement: From the Great Leap Forward to the Great Famine, 1958-1961* 乌托邦运动—从大跃进到大饥荒（1958-1961）. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2008.
- Link, Perry. *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rhythm, Metaphor, Politics*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Lippit, Victor D. *Land Reform and Economic Development in China: A Study of Institutional Change and Development Finance*. New York: Routledge, 1974.
- Liu Jun 刘军. 'A Study of Policy on the Four-Type Elements 四类分子政策研究'. MA Diss., Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao, 2006.
- Liu Shigu 刘诗古. 'Grain Requisitioning, "Spring Famine." and the Reduction of Rents/Returning of Deposits: A New Understanding of Land Reform 征粮、“春荒”与减租退租：对土地改革的再认识'. *Xueshujie*, no. 6 (2013): 177–93.
- Liu Shigu 刘诗古 and Cao Shuji 曹树基. 'Determining the Political Identity of "Businessperson-Landlords" in the Course of Early PRC Land Reform: A Study Based Primarily on the Example of Nanchang County 新中国成立初期土地改革中“工

- 商业兼地主”的政治身份认定—主要以南昌县为例’. *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, no. 2 (2011): 66–75.
- Liu Zhi 刘志. ‘Method and Evidence: Rethinking the Question of the Distribution of Land in Modern China 方法与实证：近代中国土地分配问题再研究’. *Huadong Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Zhhexue Shehui Kexue Ban)*, no. 2 (2020): 48–59.
- Long Denggao 龙登高 and He Guoqing 何国卿. ‘Examining and Explaining the Distribution of Land Rights on the Eve of Land Reform 土改前夕地权分配的检验与解释’. *Dongnan Xueshu*, no. 4 (2018): 150–61.
- Lu Huilin 卢晖临. ‘The Model of Differentiation in Rural China at the Time of the Revolution and Its Transformation: The Findings of Local Studies 革命前后中国乡村社会分化模式及其变迁—社区研究的发现’. *Zhongguo Xiangcun Yanjiu*, no. 1 (2003): 138–71.
- Lü Xiaobo 闫小波. ‘Between the Discourses of Citizenship and Class: The Investigation of the Right to Vote during the 1953 General Election Movement 公民话语与阶级话语的张力—1953年普选运动中的选民资格审查’. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 5 (2017): 166–81.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick. *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Vol. 3: The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961-1966*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- MacFarquhar, Roderick, and Michael Schoenhals. *Mao’s Last Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Madsen, Richard. *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Man Yong 满永. ““Back-to-Back” Politics: The Emergence of a Revolutionary Spectacle during the Movement to Oppose Tyrants—A Study Centred on Linquan County, Northwest Anhui “背靠背”政治: 反霸中的革命场景生成—以皖西北临泉县为中心的考察’. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 8 (2011): 78–95.
- . ‘Identity and Fear: Suicide during Land Reform in Fuyang, Anhui 身份的恐懼—安徽省阜陽地區土改中的自殺現象’. *Ershiyi Shiji*, February 2017: 53–67.
- Man Yong 满永 and Ge Ling 葛玲. ‘Relations Depend on Class: Research on the Changes in Social Relations in the Early 1950s—An Analysis Against the Background of Rural Society 亲不亲阶级分：1950年代初社会关系变革研究 - 以乡村社会为背景的分析’. *Dangshi Yanjiu yu Jiaoxue*, no. 6 (2009): 76–82.
- Markovits, Inga. *Justice in Lüritz: Experiencing Socialist Law in East Germany*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2010.

- Meng Liye 孟犁野. *A History of the Art of Cinema in New China, 1949-1965* 新中国电影艺术史 1949-1965. Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 2011.
- Meng Qingyan 孟庆延. 'Ideals, Strategy, and Practice: A Study of Mao Zedong's Early Rural Investigations from the Perspective of Historical Sociology 理念、策略与实践：毛泽东早期农村调查的历史社会学考察'. *Shehuixue Yanjiu*, no. 4 (2018): 1-27.
- — —. 'Political Parties, Politics, and Policies: On the Multiple Logics of the "Rich Peasant Question" in the Early CCP Revolution 政党、政治与政策：论共产党早期革命中的“富农问题”的多重逻辑'. *Shehui*, no. 5 (2018): 70-105.
- Mo Hongwei 莫宏伟. *Research on Land Reform in Guangdong during the Early PRC* 新中国成立初期广东土地改革研究. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2010.
- Mühlhahn, Klaus. *Criminal Justice in China: A History*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Noellert, Matthew. *Power over Property: The Political Economy of Communist Land Reform in China*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020.
- Oi, Jean C. *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Pan Xuefang 潘學方. 'The Transformation of Four-Type Elements: A Case Study of Guangming Commune, Huangyan County, Zhejiang 四类分子的改造：以浙江黄岩縣光明公社為例'. *Ershiyi Shiji*, February 2019: 80-97.
- Potter, Sulamith Heins, and Jack M. Potter. *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Raddock, David M. 'Between Generations: Activist Chinese Youths in Pursuit of a Political Role in the San-Fan and in the Cultural Revolution'. *The China Quarterly*, no. 79 (1979): 511-28.
- Rue, John E. *Mao Tse-Tung in Opposition, 1927-1935*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965.
- Ruf, Gregory. *Cadres and Kin: Making a Socialist Village in West China, 1921-1991*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Sato, Hiroshi, and Li Shi. 'Class Origin, Family Culture, and Intergenerational Correlation of Education in Rural China'. *IZA Discussion Papers*, no. 2642 (February 2007).
- — —. 'Influence of Family Background on Current Family Wealth in Rural China'. *Hitotsubashi Journal of Economics* 54 (2013): 95-117.

- Schoenhals, Michael. 'Demonising Discourse in Mao Zedong's China: People vs Non-People'. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, 3-4 (2007): 465-482.
- Schram, Stuart R. 'Introduction: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1927-1930'. In *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*, edited by Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, 3:xxi-lxv. Armonk, NY; London, UK, 1995.
- — —. 'Introduction: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1931-1934'. In *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*, edited by Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, 4:xxvii-xciv. Armonk, NY; London, UK, 1997.
- Schwarcz, Vera. *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Shen Xiaoyun. 'The Sudden Rise and Fall of Tao Zhu, the "Number 4 in Command" in the Cultural Revolution'. *Modern China Studies* 23, no. 2 (2016): 119-39.
- Shi Yun 石耘. 'The Story behind "For 61 Class Brothers" "为了六十一个阶级兄弟"背后的故事'. *Wenshi Jinghua*, no. 11 (2009): 38-45.
- Shue, Vivienne. *Peasant China in Transition: The Dynamics of Development toward Socialism, 1949-1956*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Skinner, G. William. 'Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China (Part 1)'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (1964): 3-43.
- Slyke, Lyman P. van, and Stuart R. Schram. 'Introduction'. In *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*, edited by Nancy J. Hodes, Lyman P. Van Slyke, and Stuart R. Schram, 7:579-80. Armonk, NY; London, UK, 2005.
- Smith, Aminda M. 'Long Live the Mass Line! Errant Cadres and Post-Disillusionment PRC History'. *Positions: Asia Critique* 29, no. 4 (November 2021): 783-807.
- — —. *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.
- Smith, Stephen A. 'Class'. In *The Making of the Human Sciences in China*, edited by Howard Chiang, 201-19. Leiden: Brill, 2019.
- — —. *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Snow, Edgar. *Random Notes on Red China, 1936-1945*. Harvard East Asian Monographs 5. Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University, 1968.
- — —. *Red Star Over China*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973.
- Song Guoqing. "'Healing the Wounds?" Redressing State Crimes in Guangxi after the Cultural Revolution'. PhD Diss., Freiburg University, 2020.

- Stacey, Judith. *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Strauss, Julia C. 'Morality, Coercion and State Building by Campaign in the Early PRC: Regime Consolidation and After, 1949-1956'. *The China Quarterly*, no. 188 (December 2006): 891-912.
- — —. 'Paternalist Terror: The Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries and Regime Consolidation in the People's Republic of China, 1950-1953'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002): 80-105.
- — —. *State Formation in China and Taiwan: Bureaucracy, Campaign and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Su, Yang. *Collective Killings in Rural China during the Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Tan Hecheng. *The Killing Wind: A Chinese County's Descent in Madness during the Cultural Revolution*. Translated by Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Tanaka Kyoko. 'Mao and Liu in the 1947 Land Reform: Allies or Disputants'. *The China Quarterly*, no. 75 (1978): 566-93.
- Tawney, Richard H. *Land and Labour in China*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932.
- Teng Xuyan 滕叙兗. *The Indomitable Geng Dingfa 硬汉耿鼎发*. Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe, 2015.
- Treiman, Donald J. and Andrew G. Walder. 'The Impact of Class Labels on Life Chances in China'. *American Journal of Sociology* 124, no. 4 (January 2019): 1125-63.
- U, Eddy. *Creating the Intellectual: Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019.
- Unger, Jonathan. 'The Class System in Rural China: A Case Study'. In *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolution China*, edited by James L. Watson, 121-41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- — —. 'Cultural Revolution Conflict in the Villages'. *The China Quarterly*, no. 153 (1998): 82-106.
- Walder, Andrew G. *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2017.

- — —. 'Anatomy of a Regional Civil War: Guangxi, China, 1967-1968'. *Social Science History* 46, 1 (Spring 2022): 35-63.
- Walker, Richard. *China under Communism: The First Five Years*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.
- Waller, Derek J. 'Review: *The Chinese Communist Movement 1921-1937. An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Materials in the Chinese Collection of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace*, by Chun-Tu Hsueh; *The Chinese Communist Movement 1937-1949. An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Materials in the Chinese Collection of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace*, by Chun-Tu Hsueh'. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 1 (1968): 156-58.
- Wang Haiguang 王海光. 'The Construction of Class Struggle in the Four Cleanups Movement: A Study of the "Taoyuan Model" 四清運動的階級鬥爭建構—「桃園經驗」研究'. *Ershiyei Shiji*, no. 105 (October 2019): 82-105.
- Wang Hongsheng. 'From Revolutionary Vanguard to Pioneer Entrepreneurs: A Study of Rural Elite in a Chinese Village'. PhD Diss., University of Amsterdam, 1995.
- Wang Weimin 王伟民. 'Research on "Fangong Daosuan" by Landlords and Rich Peasants in L County in the 1950s 1950年代L县地主富农"倒算案"研究'. MA. Diss., Huadong Shifan Daxue, 2018.
- Wang Yanni. 'An Introduction to the ABCs of Communization: A Case Study of Macheng County'. In *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*, edited by Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer, 148-70. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.
- Wemheuer, Felix. *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*. Yale Agrarian Studies Series. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014.
- — —. *A Social History of Maoist China: Conflict and Change, 1949-1976*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- White, Gordon. *The Politics of Class and Class Origin*. Contemporary China Papers 9. Canberra: Australian National University, 1976.
- Windscrip, Shan. 'How to Write a Diary in Mao's New China: Guidebooks in the Crafting of Socialist Subjectivities'. *Modern China* 47, no. 4 (2021): 412-40.
- Wong, John. *Land Reform in the People's Republic of China: Institutional Transformation in Agriculture*. New York: Praeger, 1973.
- Wu, Guo. 'Recalling Bitterness: Historiography, Memory, and Myth in Maoist China'. *Twentieth-Century China* 39, no. 3 (October 2014): 245-68.

- — —. ‘Speaking Bitterness: Political Education in Land Reform and Military Training under the CCP, 1947-1951’. *The Chinese Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (May 2014): 3–23.
- Wu, Tien-wei. ‘The Kiangsi Soviet Period – A Bibliographical Review on the Ch’en Ch’eng Collection’. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 29, no. 2 (February 1970): 395–412.
- Wu, Yiching. *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Yang, Jisheng. *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2013.
- Yang Kuisong 杨奎松. ‘A Historical Investigation of the Changes in the CCP’s Land Reform Policies On the Eve of the Founding of the PRC 建国前夕中共土改政策变动的历史考察’. In *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Jianguo Shi Yanjiu*, 1, 6–103. Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2009.
- — —. *A Record of Marginalized Individuals: The Tragic Stories of Ordinary People with [Political] Problems* “边缘人”记事: 几个“问题”小人物的悲剧故事. Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2016.
- — —. ‘How a “Bad Element” Was Made: The Discovery, Accusation, and Punishment of Zhang Qiren’. In *Maoism at the Grassroots*, edited by Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, 19–50. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- — —. ‘How and Why the CCP Centre’s Land Policies Changed in the Early Post-War Years – An Explanation Based on Documentary and Archival Evidence 战后初期中共中央土地政策的变动及原因 – 着重于文献档案的解读’. *Kaifang Shidai*, no. 5 (2014): 67–93.
- — —. ‘The Landlord-Rich Peasant Question Against the Background of Land Reform in the New China 新中国土改背景下的地主富农问题’. In *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Jianguo Shi Yanjiu*, 1, 104–67. Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2009.
- — —. ‘Reconsidering the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries’. *The China Quarterly*, no. 193 (2008): 102–21.
- Young, Graham. ‘Mao Zedong and the Class Struggle in Socialist Society’. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 16 (July 1986): 41–80.
- Yu Gezi 渔歌子, ed. ‘Partial Index of Cultural Revolution Newspapers, Divided by Location 文革小报（部分）分地区目录’. *Zuotian*, no. 29 (2014): 1–54.

- Zhai, Qiang. '1959: Preventing Peaceful Evolution'. *China Heritage Quarterly*, n.d.
http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=018_1959preventingpeace.inc&issue=018.
- Zhang Yang 张杨. 'Research on the Compensation and Fines Movement in the Western Sichuan Administrative Region during the Early Years of the PRC 新中国成立初期川西行署赔罚运动研究'. *Sichuan Daxue Xuebao (Zhhexue Shehui Kexue Ban)*, no. 5 (2021): 79-92.
- Zhao Gang 赵冈. *The Distribution of Land Rights in Traditional Rural China* 中国传统农村的地权分配. Beijing: Xinxing Chubanshe, 2006.
- Zhao Wenle 贺文乐 and Dang Zhiyong 党志勇. 'Continuous Revolution and the Reconstruction of Class : The 1960 "Pinglu Incident" 不断革命与阶级重塑 : 1960年“平陆事件”'. *Guangdong Dangshi Yu Wenxian Yanjiu*, no. 3 (2019): 71-81.
- Zhou, Chenshu. 'The Versatile Film Projectionist: How to Show Films and Serve the People in the 17 Years Period, 1949-1966'. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 10, no. 3 (September 2016): 228-46.
- Zhou, Xun, ed. *The Great Famine in China, 1958-1962: A Documentary History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Zou Lamin 邹腊敏 and Yang Liwen 杨利文. 'The CCP's Promotion of the "Zhang Yongtai Way" in the Early Stage of Land Reform: An Investigation Centred on the "Liberation Daily" 土改初期中国共产党对"张永泰道路"的宣传—以《解放日报》为中心的考察'. *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, no. 9 (2010): 74-82.

Memoirs

- Bi Xingxing 毕星星. 'The Tragic Lives of the Children of a Landlord 敬一家地主子女的人生悲歌'. In *Zhongguo Wenshi Jingpin Niandu Jiazuo 2015*, edited by Geng Li 耿立, 71-81. Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin Chubanshe, 2016.
- Cai Xinglai 蔡行来. *Landlord* 地主. Jinan: Huanghe Chubanshe, 2015.

- Chen, Da. *Colors of the Mountain*. New York: Anchor Books, 1999.
- Chen Yafang 陈亚芳. 'Remembering My Husband Chen Yutang 回忆我的丈夫陈友堂'. In *Fengqiao Jingyan Shilu*, 160–63. Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 2000.
- Deng Liqun 邓力群. *A Few Words on Behalf of Comrade Shaoqi 我为少奇同志说些话*. Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1998.
- Du Shunde 杜顺德. *My Life 我的一生*. Unknown: Author's Edition, 2009.
- Hu Jian 胡坚. *Eighty Difficult Years 风雨八十年*. Pingjiang, Hunan: Author's Edition, 2008.
- Huang Jian 黄健. *People from Jie'an 界岸人家*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 2017.
- Jiang Yigao 江义高. 'A Beautiful Myth 一个美丽的传说'. 故人旧事2020 (blog), 21 January 2021. http://www.360doc.com/content/21/0121/10/73461199_958108851.shtml.
- . 'The Early Death of a Schoolmate 一位同学的夭折'. In *Lao Zhaopian Di 37 Ji*, edited by Feng Keli 冯克力, 115–18. Jinan: Shandong Huabao Chubanshe, 2004.
- . 'The Good Landlord Li Yuanbin 好地主李元彬'. *Heiwulei Yijiu*, no. 7 (November 2010): 87–91.
- Li Yunwei 李云巍. *The Fate of a Landlord Large Family: Eighty Years and Four Generations, From the First Year of the Republic to 1992 一个地主大家庭的变迁: 八十年间四代人, 民国初年-1992年*. Hefei: Anhui Sheng Xinwen Chubanju, 2005.
- Lin Xianzhi 林贤治. *My Hometown 故园*. Wuhan: Wuhan Daxue Chubanshe, 2020.
- Liu Danian 刘大年. 'Recollections Concerning Reversing the Verdict on the Geng Dingfa Counterrevolutionary Restoration Case 关于平反耿鼎发等反革命复辟案件的回忆'. In *Huihuang de Licheng: Jiangsu Sheng Gaoji Renmin Fayuan Jianyuan 50 Zhounian Jinian Wenji*, 57–63. Nanjing, 2001.
- Lü Jianguang 吕剑光. 'The Whole Story of the "Fengqiao Model" "枫桥经验"的前前后后'. In *Fengqiao Jingyan Shilu*, 125–29. Beijing: Zhonggong Dangshi Chubanshe, 2000.
- Lü Wei 吕维. 'Landlord Elements in My Family 我家的地主分子'. *Heiwulei Yijiu*, no. 2 (August 2010): 48 – 55.
- Nan Xiaoshun 南小舜. *The Lives of Three Generations in the Nan Huaijin Family 人生路漫漫: 南怀瑾家族三代的人生浮沉*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2018.
- Qiu Yuanyou 邱远猷. *Eighty Years 八十春秋*. Beijing: Shoudu Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2012.
- Sun Yu 孙郁. 'My Guilty Conscience 心中的鬼'. In *Laoyin: "keyi jiaoyuhao ziniu de jiti jiyi"*, edited by Lin Xianzhi 林贤治, 177–81. Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 2010.

- Tang Shiyan 唐世彦. *The River of Life* 生命之河. Beijing: Zhongguo Wenlian Chubanshe, 2003.
- Wu Xinjian 武新建. 'A Portrait 一幅画像'. In *Women Cengjing Nianqing*, edited by Dong Hongyou 董宏猷, 159–62. Wuhan: Wuhan Daxue Chubanshe, 2013.
- Yang Daixin 杨代欣. 'Turning Bitterness to Joy: My Time as an Educated Youth 反苦为乐的知青岁月'. In *Wusheng de Qunluo: Wenge Qian Shangshan Xiaxiang Lao Zhiqing Huiyulu (Xu), Xia Juan*, edited by Deng Peng 邓鹏, 716–30. Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 2009.
- Zhang Mengjie 章孟杰. 'That Year, I Participated in Class Struggle 那一年，我参加了阶级斗争'. In *Wusheng de Qunluo: Wenge Qian Shangshan Xiaxiang Lao Zhiqing Huiyulu (Xu), Shang Juan*, edited by Deng Peng 邓鹏, 231–34. Chongqing: Chongqing Chubanshe, 2009.
- Zhang Taiping 张台平. *The Trials of Life: The Memories of an Ordinary Person* 风雨人生：庶民的记忆. Beijing: Tuanjie Chubanshe, 2015.
- Zhao Zhangwu 赵章武. *Early Morning* 卯时. Beijing: Zhongguo Dang'an Chubanshe, 2006.
- Zhou Yuanchuan 周元川. *Cuotuo, Xuanwo* 蹉跎，漩涡. Beijing: Tuanjie Chubanshe, 2016.