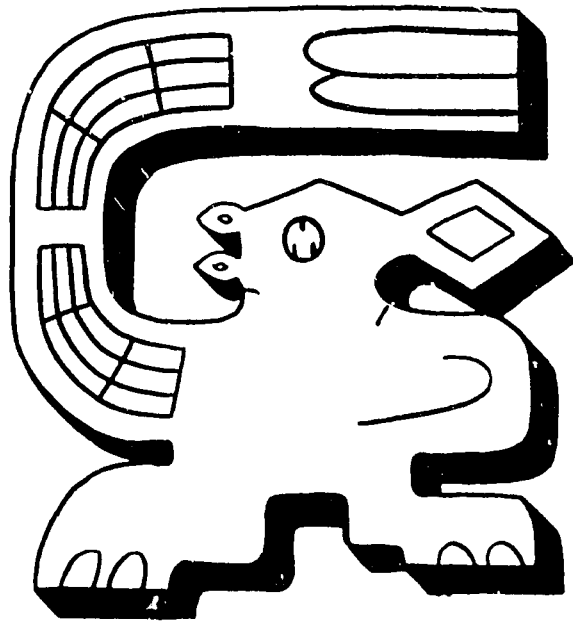


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Chinese Land Reform in Retrospect

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P R E F A C E

A decade ago the author began his study of Chinese land reform and later wrote a doctoral thesis on this subject for the University of London (1966). To some extent, this monograph is based on parts of the thesis. The main objective of this monograph is to give a succinct account of the nature and operation of the Chinese land reform, focusing on the salient features of the policy and its implementation. In this limited exercise, no attempt is made to analyse the various impacts of the land reform. The author is currently preparing a separate study which will deal with other aspects of the Chinese land reform in greater detail as well as place it in a longer time perspective by linking it to the subsequent changes in the institutional structure of Chinese agriculture which have taken place during the last two decades. It is hoped that this short monograph will be of interest to scholars of modern Chinese studies as well as land reform planners in developing countries who may want to have a good glimpse of the land reform practice in China.

The original draft of this work was completed in late 1971 when the author was a Visiting Research Professor with the John C. Lincoln Institute, University of Hartford, Connecticut, which specializes in land reform and land policy studies. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. A.M. Woodruff, the Director of the Institute, for arranging the visit, and to the other colleagues at the Institute for their generous help and encouragement, especially Dr. Ted Smith and Mr. Sein Lin.

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There are very few useful sources in English on this subject. For a general overview of the land reform policy, see Chao Kuo-chun, *Agrarian Policy of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1959* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1960). For land reform in the Kiangsi-Soviet period, see Tso-liang Hsiao, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959). For the translated version of the Outline Land Law of 1947, see William Hinton, *Fanshen, A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Paperback, 1966). For the Agrarian Reform Law and other related documents in English, see *The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1951).

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CHINESE LAND REFORM IN RETROSPECT

THE LAND reform on the Mainland of China, involving over 500 million rural population, was by far the world's greatest rural movement. However, it was little known to the outside world, partly due to the paucity of published information and partly due to its ephemeral nature — the institutional reorganization of agriculture was not stabilized after land redistribution but was continued with little time lag until the formation of the people's communes. Thus on the subject of the Chinese land reform, there remains to be written a critical and unemotional, if not entirely impartial, account of its operations and impacts, not based on incoherent reports focusing only on the revolutionary violence or rhetorics glorifying various aspects of the peasant liberation or the peasants' revolutionary zeal. This monograph will give a succinct treatment of the Chinese land reform movement, focusing on the salient features of land reform policy and its special techniques of implementation.

Development of Land Reform Policy

Pre-War Experiment

Strictly speaking, it is difficult to separate the history of the agrarian movement in modern China from the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was founded in 1921. When Sun Yat-sen was advocating the familiar tenet of "Land to the tillers" in the early 1920's, the most active support came from the Communist faction inside the Kuomintang (KMT). Following the break with the KMT in 1927, the Communists established the Chinese Soviets in Kiangsi. During this period, the CCP put forth the most

extremist land reform programme, which sought to expropriate not only land lords but also rich peasants, and — in the redistribution — to deny land to landlords while only giving poor land to the rich peasants.¹

The next phase was a tactical retreat. By late 1934, the KMT had finally succeeded in dislodging the CCP from the Kiangsi Province. As the CCP established itself in new bases in North and Northwest China after the Long March, the drastic measures of its former land reform policies in the Kiangsi-Soviet period were largely withdrawn. Later on, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 resulted in the suspension of land expropriation operations altogether in favour of only a mild programme of rent and interest reduction, for the CCP had now formed a "United Front" with the KMT for the better execution of the War.² The conciliatory war-time policy had paid off in terms of the increase in the political popularity of the CCP and the increase in production in the economies of its bases.³ Above all, the CCP was able to expand its power rapidly so that by the end of the War in 1945, it had most of the countryside in North China under its control.

Post-War Policy Consolidation

The Civil War broke out not long after the end of the Sino-Japanese War. The resumption of land redistribution was only to be expected in so far as the wartime lull was not a change in the fundamental commitments of the CCP towards land reform. Further, the upheavals and disorganization in the rural areas in North and Northeast China in the past few years had created a precondition for a genuine socio-economic revolution.⁴ In order to exploit such a dynamic situation, the CCP issued a directive on May 4, (the "May 4th Directive") which continued to support the wartime practice of rent reduction but sanctioned a limited degree of direct expropriation mainly against the big landlords and landlord-collaborators.⁵ Individual areas under the CCP control put forth their own land reform programmes which ranged from the campaign for a voluntary land contribution from landlords

land redistribution through government purchases to downright confiscation. Within a year or so about 60 million peasants were reported to have conducted some form of land reform which was usually designed to co-ordinate closely with para-military operations (Mao's type of guerrilla war) and agricultural production (through co-operative production teams).⁶ As the scale of military struggle with the KMT increased, the land reform policy line was increasingly radicalized, culminating in a large-scale ultra-Leftist deviation which followed the promulgation of the Outline Land Law in October, 1947.

With the military initiative passing into its hands towards the end of 1947, the CCP was able to establish itself firmly in North and Northeast China and to experiment for the first time a large-scale land reform operation bearing its own ideological patent mark. The 16-articled Outline Land Law only sought to confiscate land from individual and institutional landlords and its position on the rich peasants was vague.⁷ In redistribution, landlords and rich peasants, and in fact, everybody in the village who was willing to till, was given a share of land. However, the Outline Land Law was ambiguous on the method of redistribution. Besides, the implementational structure to accompany the Outline Land Law was weak. Consequently, the Outline Land Law touched off a wave of "deviations" or implementational errors at the local level. Formally speaking, deviations were implementational mistakes committed by field staff in the course of conducting land reform, which could be due to one of the following: *i*, incorrect interpretation of laws and regulations by the practising officials; *ii*, under- or over-performance of the officially sanctioned tasks (e.g. excessive zeal or lack of it in liquidating the landlords); or *iii*, simply as political scapegoats for certain policy failures on the part of the high-level authorities. During this period, deviations were manifested not only in the indiscriminate attack on the rich peasants but also on many middle peasants, in the infringement of commercial and industrial enterprises and in outrages such as physical excesses against the landlords.⁸

Runaway deviations in the land reform areas led to correctional response from the Party centre in the form of rectifications.⁹ In the process, the

CCP was alive to the need for a more realistic policy and a stronger policy framework. Thus rectifications led to the consolidation of the land reform policy. In the end, a new land reform policy was developed, which was later fully incorporated into the Agrarian Reform Law after Liberation.¹⁰

Specifically, the "new" land reform policy after 1948 consisted of three significant developments. First, it recognized the economic importance of the rich peasants not only in the land reform campaign but also in the rural economy of China as a whole. In general, rich peasants constituted about 5% of the rural population but owned over 20% of the land and the greatest proportions of draught animals and agricultural implements. In fact, they were *de facto* successful farmers, and their productivity was known to be higher than that of any other classes. Together with the middle peasants, they formed the backbone of agricultural production in China. The attack on the rich peasants often involved the middle peasants because the line that separated the former from the latter was so flimsy. Thus the most productive segment of the Chinese peasantry was affected. The liberalization of policy in respect of the rich peasants would not only lessen the potential opposition to land reform and minimize economic disruption but also reduce the administrative complexity in implementation. Second, the new policy was committed to rejecting the egalitarian method of land redistribution. During the high-tide of "deviations", some land reform officials misinterpreted the Outline Land Law and effected a very disruptive reshuffle of agricultural resources by pooling all land and agricultural capital in the villages together for a completely equal redistribution. Such was the absolute egalitarianism which Mao had strongly criticized for being "reactionary, backward, retrogressive".¹¹ Besides, the CCP came to recognize that egalitarian method of redistribution would immensely complicate the problem of implementation as relating to the dual process of confiscation and redistribution. The decision to protect the rich peasants against expropriation was by itself a *de facto* recognition of the principle of disparity in land holdings. Third, the new

policy gave more attention to the administrative problem by refraining from the use of "shock methods" so characteristic of land reform operations in the guerrilla age, and demanding adequate preparatory work, such as the establishment of law and order, before starting the process of land redistribution. This marked the new era of "planned" land reform in China.

Post-Liberation Land Reform, 1950-52

As the People's Republic officially came into being on October 1, 1949, a transitional period of "New Democracy" of unknown length was proclaimed. The basic tenets of the "New Democracy" were to oppose foreign domination and to eliminate internal "feudal forces". Land reform was destined to be a major policy instrument in this period, as it constituted the first stage of transforming the agricultural economy of China. In particular, its anti-feudal nature fitted in well with the ideological structure of "New Democracy". On June 30, 1950, the Agrarian Reform Law (ARL) was promulgated amidst the spirit of a new United Front, because the "New Democracy" provided for co-operation and compromise among various classes in Chinese society except for the landlords in the rural areas and the "bureaucratic capitalists" in the cities.

As the land reform had now become a major national programme, it was no longer conceived and planned in the context of political and military expediency. Instead, it took on a new dimension embodying a multiplicity of implicit and explicit objectives. Among these, economic conditions had immediately assumed greater importance due to the urgent task of rehabilitation as well as the long-term developmental needs of the country. Thus Article 1 of the ARL stipulates:

The land ownership system of feudal exploitation by the landlord class shall be abolished and the system of peasant land ownership shall be introduced in order to set free the rural productive forces, develop agricultural production and thus pave the way for New China's industrialization.¹²

The CCP's strong commitment to the expropriation of the landlord class and its advocacy of peasant proprietorship had indeed become a platitude. But the economic aspects as expressed in the notion of liberating the agricultural productive forces for industrial development was something new.

On the economic role of land reform, the official contention sounded a little oversimplified: land reform would create a new institutional framework whereby, in Marxian terms, production relations would no longer fetter production forces so that the expansion of agricultural production could follow suit, almost automatically. To fulfil that purpose, a purely distributionist land reform would be sufficient. Land reform was only concerned with transferring a large proportion of land from landlords to poor peasants and the landless in order to satisfy the land hunger of this large underprivileged section of the rural population. The ARL was not equipped to cope with the problem of land development or problems arising from defects in land use. The question of the low ratio of both capital and land to labour, uneconomic holdings, small farming scale, low productivity, and the whole range of issues along this line, were left out. How far could a land reform with strong "redistribution mechanism" but weak "development mechanism" be expected to achieve its expected economic objectives? Admittedly, this question had certain ideological premises. In the CCP's own dialectics, the question did not arise: an attack on "feudalist" landlordism was *per se* a precondition for agricultural development.¹³

As the national land reform movement was due to start, many basic technical problems relating to land reform remained unsolved while new ones cropped up. Vital information on the quantity and quality of the cultivated land, and the size of rural population and its composition was not available to the land reform planners. Above all, the CCP met with a demand for a "peaceful land reform", which was a programme of land redistribution without first staging a class struggle and the liquidation of the landlord class by violent force. The demand was most commonly voiced among the articulate and the usually influential sections of the population in the coastal provinces such as Southern

Kiangsu, Chekiang, Fukien and Kwangtung. The advocacy was centred on the theme that there was "no feudalism in South China" because the land tenure system in the south was markedly different from that of the north. Accordingly, South China would warrant a different kind of land reform — one without class struggle or other possible violence against the landlords.¹⁴ But the agitation alarmed the authorities which viewed it as a counter-land reform movement. It was difficult for the CCP to accept the argument that there was no "feudalism" in China, because anti-feudalism was the fundamental premise for the movement. The CCP had made it abundantly clear that its land reform not only aimed at attacking the exploitative acts of the "feudalists" but also the "feudal class" itself. Its basic philosophy in implementation was that land reform was not the affair of the State or the Party, but of the peasants and for the peasants. It was not enough just for the Government to make it mandatory for landlord to give up their holdings in favour of the peasants. A confrontation between landlords and peasants had to be staged in which the peasants would stand up to challenge the landlords before seizing their land. Instead of accommodating the demand of the "peaceful reformers", the CCP energetically mobilized its propaganda resources to defeat it.

Analysis of the Agrarian Reform Law

The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China is exceedingly simple, comprising 5 sections with a total of 40 articles.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Heading</u>	<u>No. of articles</u>
1	General Principles	1
2	Confiscation and Requisitioning of Land	8
3	Distribution of Land	6
4	Treatment of Special Land Problems	12
5	Organization and Methods for Carrying Out Agrarian Reform	7
6	By-laws	6
		<hr/> 40

A few outstanding features need elaboration:

1. The basic contents of the Agrarian Reform Law are primarily concerned with the ways and means of transferring land ownership from the landlords to the poor peasants. Like all its predecessors, the ARL was committed to the expropriation of the rentier landlord class. When coming to the termination of the "tools of feudal exploitation" in the hands of the landlords, the ARL only sought to confiscate their land, draught animals, farm implements, surplus grain, and surplus houses in the village (not in the town), i.e. only those items directly relevant to agricultural production; but the landlords' "other property" and money were not subject to confiscation as happened previously in the Pre-Liberation land reform.

"Requisitioning" was used in lieu of "confiscation" when it was applied to such categories of people as rich peasants and merchants who were not regarded as "class enemies" of the people under New Democracy. Originally the term "requisitioning" suggests some form of compensation. Since there was no evidence whatsoever that the Government had actually made compensation to the people concerned, "requisitioning" was virtually a euphemism for "confiscation".¹⁵ The two terms merely reflected a difference in the political treatment. Nevertheless, the ARL did take a firm stand to protect rich peasants by ruling that land owned by them and cultivated by themselves or by hired labour was not to be "requisitioned".

2. On the principles and methods of land redistribution, the ARL had profited immensely from past practices. By far the most significant was the operation of the principle of differentiation in redistribution, which rested on the following provisions in the ARL:

- a. Only the excessive portions of the rented land of the rich peasants were subject to requisitioning.
- b. The holdings of the middle peasants which were generally a little above average, were to remain basically intact.
- c. The poor peasant receiving a portion plus his original holdings should have holdings totalling "slightly and suitably" more than that allotted to the landless agricultural labourers.

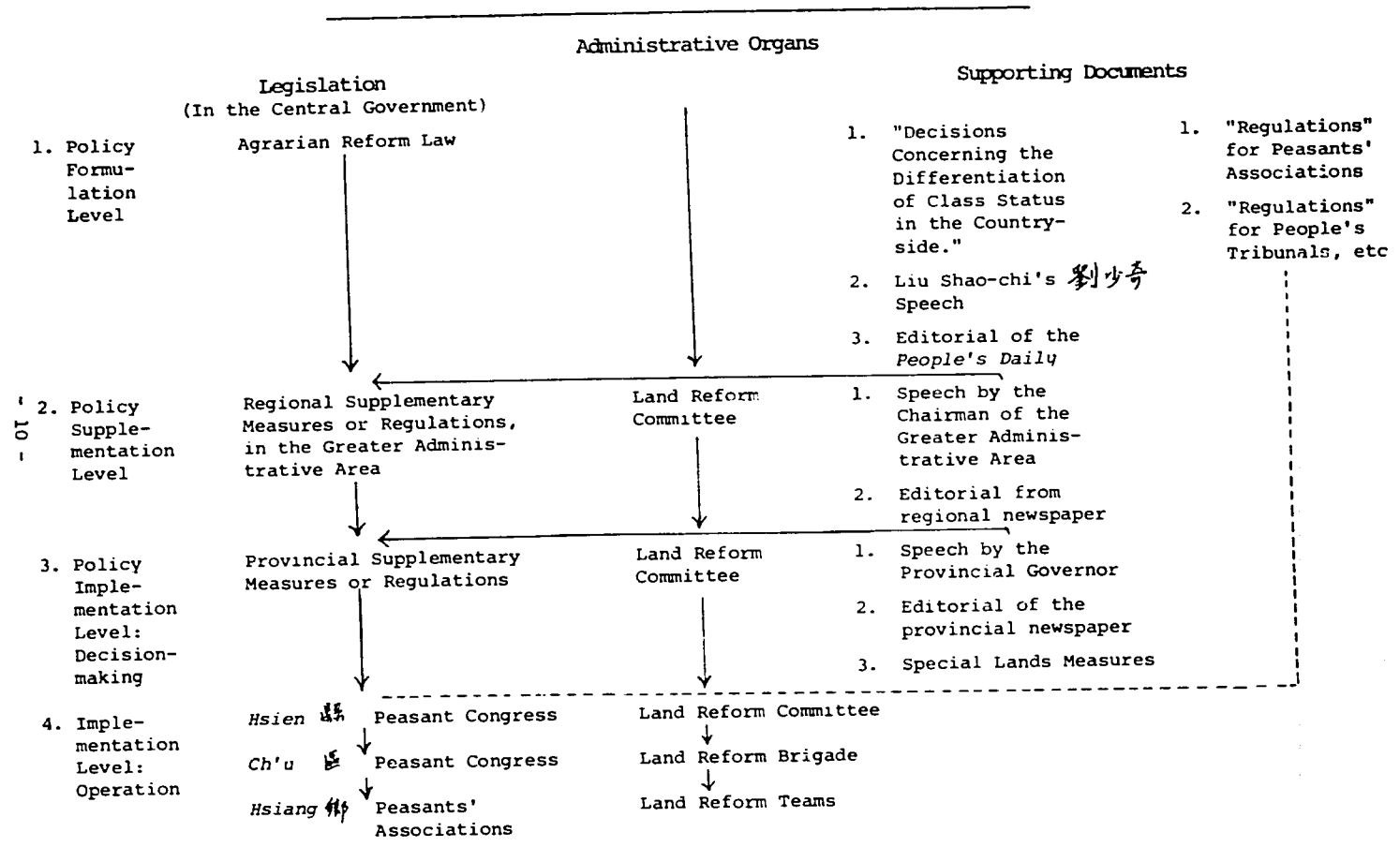
- d. Under certain conditions a poor family of one or two able-bodied members might be given an above-average quota whereas certain people like rural handicraft workers would be given a below-average quota; and
- e. The small lessor was permitted to hold more land for renting.

Application of these provisions would not only work against any egalitarian tendency but would also tend to reinforce certain inequalities in the old land system.

3. It is important to note that the post-1950 land reform in China was not conducted with the sole guidance of the 40-articled ARL alone, as was sometimes assumed. Commentators outside China used to extol or criticize the Chinese land reform solely on the merits of the ARL. In fact, the generality of the ARL made it imperative that more detailed rules and more explicit provisions, especially pertaining to the implementation side, were to be available in the form of supporting documents. Some of the documents emanated from the Central Government but others were issued by the regional authorities as supplementary measures. In decentralizing the land reform administration, the CCP also delegated some legislative responsibilities to the lower levels whilst the consequence of decentralization was the proliferation of official promulgation, directives and announcements concerning land reform, with some amount of redundancy.

Thus a typical land reform handbook for the field staff would contain, in addition to the ARL, speeches, editorials from the main Party organs, government directives and supplementary measures emanating from regional and provincial governments, all of which had the effective power of law and were, for implementation purpose, more important than the ARL itself at the operational level.¹⁶ The whole land reform policy structure can be summarized in the Chart on the following page, which was closely tied in with the administrative structure of China at that time. (Table 1)

Chart of Policy and Implementation Structure of the Post-1950
Land Reform



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Implementation of Land Reform

THE MOST challenging part of the land reform lies not in the formulation of policy but in its implementation. Since the Chinese land reform is primarily distributionist in nature, attention should be focused on its distributive machinery and the distributive process in order to bring out its chief characteristic features.

Distributive Machinery

After the promulgation of the ARL and other supporting laws and regulations of national concern, the Central Government passed down all land reform responsibilities to the regional governments of the Greater Administrative Areas which took over the work of interpretation, adaptation as well as planning and implementation. There was no National Land Reform Commission or *ad hoc* organ at the central level to take charge of the over-all land reform administration. The whole distributive machinery was made up of five components:

1. Land Reform Committees were to be set up at various levels from the Greater Administrative Area down to the *hsien* 縣 (county). These committees were supposed to be semi-representative bodies especially at the county level, but higher up they were actually run no less like government departments.
2. The People's Tribunals, basically at the county level, were set up more as the legal arm of the Land Reform Committees than as an arbiter for mediating disputes arising from land reform. Their main responsibility was to maintain "revolutionary order" in the countryside under land reform. By regulations, the presiding judge, deputy judge and half of the jurors were to come from members of the county governments while the other half were to be elected by conferences of people's representatives or by "mass organizations".¹⁷ Most of the "judges" were not known to have any formal legal training, and they were in fact frequently referred to as "judiciary cadres" rather than as "judges".

During land reform the People's Tribunals often operated in makeshift courts commonly known as *kung-shen* 公審 (mass trials). The *kung-shen* was a meeting organized by the land reform cadres jointly with the judiciary cadres from the People's Tribunals, for the public trying of the accused landlords or local despots who were known to have opposed land reform or oppressed the peasants. The public to witness the trial was a huge crowd of villagers. During the trial, political speeches were made while mass hysteria played its role. Any participant could level charges, or *tou cheng* 鬥爭 (struggle against) the accused. The *kung-shen* carried a distinct non-judicial function, i.e., the political mobilization of the peasants. Those who are steeped in the Western legal tradition would naturally consider People's Tribunals and their *kung-shen* system as a kind of judiciary outrage. However, Western legal principles and institutions were hardly well-established in China even before the CCP's accession to power. In old China, courts were often crudely organized and the "judges" had a strong bureaucratic complexion.

3. The Peasants' Associations were mass organizations created below the county level, which were the bodies officially designated as the legal executive organs for reforming the agrarian system. They were formed on voluntary basis, with membership open to agricultural labourers, poor peasants, middle peasants, rural handicraftsmen and the impoverished intellectuals in the rural area.¹⁸ The most effective peasant associations were those organized at the *hsiang* 鄉 (administrative village level), with the power controlled by a handful of hard-core peasant activists. From the administrative point of view, the Peasants' Associations were of semi-official nature, for they had close channels of communication with the local governments either through the cadres (discussed below) or through their Party members. For land reform in a non-revolutionary situation, it may be essential to separate the peasants' organizations from the local administration, which is usually under the influence of the landlord class. In the Chinese case,

the integration of the Peasants' Associations into the government machinery actually helped raise the implementational effectiveness because the Government was basically anti-landlord in nature.

As the large-scale land reform was about to get under way in the autumn of 1950, the Government had succeeded in recruiting more than 50 million peasants into the Peasants' Associations. In the following year, the total membership increased to 88 million, with 30% women.¹⁹ In general, about 30% of the rural population in the locality were in the Peasants' Associations. 4. People's Militia were formed as the law enforcement officers during land reform, by enlisting poor peasants in the locality. They worked closely with the People's Tribunals and the Peasants' Associations. Except in the pre-land reform phase of final military operations against the KMT remnant forces on the Mainland and against the local banditry, the regular army remained behind the scene throughout the movement. With the cessation of military hostilities after the liberation, the planned land reform was detached from military connections.

By the winter of 1950, the CCP had successfully organized a formidable militia force of 3 million in the four Greater Administrative Areas where land reform was being carried out. A year later, the total strength was increased to 7.5 million.²⁰ Considering the estimate of landlords in China as 4% of the rural population, this would yield the landlord/peasant ratio of 1 to 8, or that for every landlord in the land reform area there were 8 organized peasants of whom 1 was armed. It was therefore extremely difficult for the landlords to organize any effective opposition.

5. The Cadres (*kaipu*) were the officials who formed the implementation field staff. Their role was crucial. Their functions ranged from being promoters and agitators to organizers and supervisors, or all in one role at the same time. Since the CCP wanted land reform to appear as a spontaneous peasant movement, the peasants would have to keep their own identity in the movement. So once the cadres had organized the peasants and set land reform in motion,

the movement was to be left to the peasants themselves as far as possible. But the cadres had the responsibility to get the peasants to abide by the laws and regulations so as to ensure that the movement did not get out of hand. A good model cadre was expected to be readily accessible to the peasants, holding no special title of respect. He must have the ability to establish close personal relationship with the peasants and gain their complete confidence by manipulating the "comradely" friendship with the peasants through such disarming tactics as the *am-tung* 三同 (Three together system: or working together with the peasants in the field, eating together with them and sleeping with them in the same house). But a good cadre had to integrate personal relationship with impersonal Party lines.

In short, the cadres formed the most important single organizational feature of the Chinese land reform. The ARL and other regulations were designed in such a way as to leave considerable leeway for interpretation and manipulation by the cadres on the spot. In any locality, the individual cadres in charge could alone swing the success or failure of the land reform. The bulk of the cadres came from the "positive" elements of the peasantry, the army, government departments and the Party. But the rank and file were sometimes reinforced by a motley group of professors, teachers, students, writers and workers. It was the CCP's deliberate policy to send urban intellectuals to the countryside to participate in land reform as a part of their "thought remoulding" process.

As can be expected of a movement of such magnitude, there was a shortage of cadres in the first phase of the movement in 1950, when the small pool of experienced cadres was heavily drained for competitive priority tasks which the new government had to attend to. Thus the CCP had to set up crash training programmes. But the training course was usually crude and of low standards, with stress on political studies. Admittedly, most cadres learnt their land reform techniques by actually doing it on the job. In view of the heterogeneous sources of recruitment and the rather crude form of training, the

quality of many of the land reform cadres naturally left a great deal to be desired.

Distributive Process

Apart from its politico-ideological content and the special implementational requirements, the uniqueness of the Chinese land reform also lay in the process of its implementation, which was composed of different stages:

1. *The prelude.* This refers to the preparatory stage which consisted of forming Peasants' Associations, establishing new political and administrative apparatus as well as implementing rent reduction. The provisions for rent reduction were based on the pre-1950 practice of a 25% reduction of rent on the main crops, but its significance lay in the economic benefits yielded to the peasants as rewards for participation in the government-sponsored rural programme. To the cadres in charge, the degree of success of rent reduction was a good indicator of the political susceptibility of the peasants towards land reform. During the programme many cadres were trained and potential peasant activists identified.

For any village, the actual operation of land reform commenced with the arrival of a group of field cadres who formed the "Land Reform Corps". The immediate task of the cadres was to penetrate into the peasant masses and organize them. To these ends various forms of propaganda techniques and mass psychology were exploited. By far the most subtle and effective form of mobilizing the peasants was achieved through personal persuasion, e.g. via the "Three together system". Formal process of indoctrination included the effort to get over the peasants that all their misfortunes and ills were the direct and indirect consequences of the feudal system symbolized by the exploitation of the landlords. Rhetorical questions such as "Who labour and who reap?" or "Who has made whom rich?" were frequently used.

2. *Differentiation of rural classes.* Once the preliminary work was concluded, the cadres would launch land reform into this crucial and technically most complicated stage. The dual process of confiscation and redistribution rested upon its outcome.

In accordance with the three documents concerning class differentiation issued by the Government Administrative Council in August 1950, the rural population were generally classified into five categories: landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and agricultural labourers. The whole process of class determination was an intriguing exercise marked by complicated norms, based on ownership, exploitation, participation in labour or even political criteria.²² From the implementational standpoint, the CCP had not succeeded in formulating any commensurable scales for the classification of different classes, in spite of its experience in handling class struggle. The inter-class and intra-class ambiguities such as the narrow demarcation between a rich peasant and well-to-do middle peasant, and the lack of comparability between a middle peasant in one village with another one in a separate village, had never been successfully resolved. But the CCP argued that the peasants were supposed to know each other's status in the same village well enough to ignore complicated methods and to safeguard against wrong classification. Landlords were too obvious to be misclassified by their tenants while small errors concerning poor peasants could easily be glossed over on account of their proletarian unity and class brotherhood.

Article 31 of the ARL provided that differentiation was to be conducted by "democratic estimation" and by the "method of self-assessment and public discussion". Local ramifications were expected to occur in the actual implementation. Available information suggests one popular method involving different operations.²³ First, the cadres would collect data in respect of ownership, exploitation and labour-participation in the village. They would look into land records and other evidence. To determine income for the purpose of calculating exploitation, they would resort to such rough

indicators as house possession, expenditures at ceremonies and conspicuous evidence of wealth. Second, at peasants' conferences, the individual's class status could be pushed up or down, not infrequently with a great deal of "horse-trading". When arguments broke out the cadres would act as adjudicators. Landlords and rich peasants were also invited to be present in the meeting, but few went away with a change in their status. More appropriately, they came to the meetings to receive official confirmation of their old designations.

3. *Confiscation and redistribution.* This stage was the climax of land reform which was the reallocation of agricultural resources. The Peasants' Associations were entrusted with this task.

The ARL and other supplementary measures only provided the broad principles but no detailed operational guidelines. The ways and means under which land was confiscated and transferred to the recipients were subject to variation from place to place. The CCP made no attempt to introduce a uniform method and it seemed to rest content with a rough approach — so long as the confiscated properties were redistributed roughly in accordance with the general principle and the recipient-peasants were not unhappy with the arrangements.

There has been a great deal of misconception from outside China about the pattern and scope of the Chinese land reform. It was wrongly thought that all land, draught animals and farm implements in a village were pooled together and divided up amongst all peasants *equally*. That would indeed be a very thorough and radical distributionist land reform. In actual fact, the Chinese land reform, however radical it appeared from the political and ideological angles, sought only a partial reshuffle of agricultural resources. Not all the land in the village was involved in the redistribution just as not all the population were entitled to receive a full share of free land. Nor was the distributable pool divided up equally due to the operation of the principle of disparity. In the formal

official concluding summary to the land reform movement, Liao Lu-yen 廖魯言, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Government Administrative Council, stated that "700 million *mow* 畝 of land had been redistributed among 300 million peasants."²⁴ This works out to be only about 43% of the known total cultivated land in China at the time. Evidence from other parts of China could also substantiate this, as shown in Table 2. This 43% level would rank China behind many developing countries in the scope of redistribution.²⁵

The extent of redistribution appeared to be even more limited when other means of production such as draught animals and farm implements are taken into account, as is evident in a survey in Kwangtung Province. (Table 3). To the extent that the Chinese land reform was committed only to expropriating the feudalist ownership of land, only the landed properties of the landlords were involved in the confiscation and redistribution. In other words, the size of the distributable pool in any locality was a function of the extent of the economic domination of the landlord class. In no area in China were there only landlords and tenants, while the mere presence of the rich and middle peasants, who always presented a kind of countervailing balance to the economic power of the landlords, set a limit to the amount of redistribution. The scarcity of other forms of agricultural capital in redistribution came from the fact that most farm equipment was in the hands of the rich peasants, while most landlords were either absentees or just rentiers not directly engaged in farm work. Thus the Chinese land reform had effected only a limited degree of redistribution of land and other related income-producing property. It did not generate any drastic "lopping-off" effects beyond flattening the top and narrowing the base of the existing traditional economic pyramid in the countryside.

The low egalitarian content of the Chinese land reform are reflected in a national survey two years after land reform. As shown in Table 4, economic disparity among different rural classes was still distinct, indicating

that changes in their relative economic position during land reform and in its aftermath were rather moderate. With the exception of landlords, the main economic fibres of the different rural classes had not been destroyed. Thus the rich peasants were still rich, middle peasants still at or slightly above the mean; and the poor were still poor, though landlords had been reduced to poor peasants status, while agricultural labourers were given land. Despite all the radical appearance, the ARL only aimed at establishing the principle of peasant ownership and not equalizing the distribution of land ownership. Despite all the talk of equality among the rural proletariat and the strong class motives embodied in the ARL, economic pragmatism still prevailed in so far as the pattern of land distribution was concerned. The role of the Chinese land reform as an income equalizer should not be over exaggerated.

4. *Epilogue.* The last stage was marked by the issue of title deeds to the new owners which "recognized the right of all landowners to manage, buy, sell or rent out the land freely". (Article 30) Big celebrations were usually staged in which old title deeds were burnt in public, to symbolize the destruction of "feudalist ownership of land". Meanwhile, inspection teams were formed at various administrative levels and dispatched to the land reform areas for evaluating the results. The inspection teams had a variety of objectives, apart from checking up the performance of land reform. For instance, some had the primary objective to see that the cadres had not been "divorced from the masses". However, the activities of the inspection teams did not imply that the CCP had devised an elaborate system of accountability and evaluation.

Many inspection teams apparently returned with some misgivings about the performance in a wide area. Admittedly, they geared their evaluation to the stereotyped official standards, e.g. the degree of thoroughness in the expropriation of the landlord class and the extent of mobilizing the peasants. The surveys run by three regional Land Reform Committees after

land reform showed that only 20-30% of the villages had achieved satisfactory work in the sense that the landlord class had been definitely deposed and the peasants politically awakened, with the same proportion of cases with unsatisfactory results because the landlord class still dominated rural life.²⁶ This use of political criteria to rate the land reform implementation provided no true indicator as to the actual technical performance. It would be unrealistic to draw the conclusion that the overall implementation was generally displeasing to the CCP. In fact, there were only an extremely limited number of cases where land reform had been so crudely implemented that work had to start all over again. Most "deviations" had been rectified at the early stage.

Progress of Land Reform

THE LENGTH of time for the whole movement diverged considerably from locality to locality. In general, it could take from 3 to 6 months, depending largely upon how well the preparatory work had been undertaken and how thorough had the political and psychological mobilization of the peasants been.

Most of the old CCP bases in North and Northeast China had carried out land reform between late 1947 and mid-1948 in accordance with the Outline Land Law of 1947. The situation at the promulgation of the ARL in June 1950 was that, of the six Greater Administrative Areas in the country, two had basically accomplished the land reform programme. On the third anniversary of the People's Republic, Liao Lu-yen was able to celebrate the "victorious completion of land reform in the main" for China, after the elapse of slightly over two years since the promulgation of the ARL. Over 90% of the rural population in China was reported to have accomplished land reform, with only 30 million rural people had yet to finish it either in the winter of 1952 or the spring of 1953. The movement so far was not designed to cover the national minorities in Sinkiang and Tibet. The overall progress can be

roughly summarized in quantitative terms in Table 5. The progress of land reform is seen as the number of rural population completing land reform in a particular period. The impressive record of progress was due largely to the success of the rapid consolidation of the CCP's power which was, in turn, a reflection of the regime's dedication and efficiency in the early 1950's. This was true not only of land reform but also of many major measures such as the rehabilitation of production and the curbing of hyperinflation.

Conclusion

THE MOST striking feature about the Chinese land reform was its pragmatic nature. In its long history of involvement with land reform, the CCP was always inclined to treat the theoretical issues and policy polemics as secondary and subordinate to the down-to-earth problem of implementation. The CCP was more concerned about whether in the end the poor peasants had actually received land and the landlords actually been expropriated, than whether the land reform law had been properly drafted and well-written. To anyone used to the Western legalistic approach and formal methods of administration, the frequent use of Party directives in lieu of land reform legislation as policy guides must appear to be an aberration; some of the directives like the "May 4th Directive" were not even published. The Outline Land Law was not much better in terms of technical codification. By comparison, the ARL was a great improvement, but it was still crude and its implementational framework weak. The land reform procedures were anything but formalized. Throughout, no effort had been wasted on such issues as the constitutional sanctity of private property, the social function of landownership or equity in the methods of compensating landlords, all of which had been great controversies in land reform in many Asian and Latin American nations. These problems simply did not arise in China.

The CCP made no secret of its lack of interest in the technical details of land reform at the implementation level. It may indeed be true that the heavy emphasis on informal and often personalized approach on the one hand, and the profound antipathy towards elaborately codified regulations and highly bureaucratized implementational machinery on the other, reflected the reality of its field staff who were technically under-trained, albeit politically dedicated. Cadres were not lawyers; many were just poor peasants, who could not be expected to comprehend sophisticated legal provisions. The CCP was most realistic in not insisting on meticulous legalistic interpretation of its land reform regulations, or rigid adherence to its operational directives even though the land reform regulations were already highly simplified and operational directives were few in number. The CCP thus avoided the grotesqueness of land reform in a court room that had been a phenomenon in some countries. Instead, the cadres were expected to learn conducting land reform in the field through practice and personal experience, and not in a class room. Good cadres were not judged by how well they were versed in the land reform regulations but by how well they could work with the peasants.

However, the contempt for formalism was not without its costs. The path of development of the CCP's land reform was full of deviations and rectifications, with sporadic swingings from one extreme to another. It was not till after 1950 that the CCP managed to stabilize its policy by steering a more reasonable middle-to-the-left course. The immediate contributing cause to constant deviations came from the pragmatic approach in the implementation. Since in the decentralized operations, where flexibility and individual initiative were considered virtues, chances are the cadres would not always be able to grasp the official central line but could easily be carried away, taking the law into their own hands, which thus sparked off deviations. The lack of a sophisticated administrative framework and the absence of an effective accountability system tended to reinforce the growth of deviations when they occurred. When deviations ran wildly out

of control, as in 1947, the CCP would counter them with rectifications. But not all deviations would evoke correctional response from the Party. In particular, some deviations were glossed over; injustices inflicted upon the expropriated were not likely to be redressed. In short, there was a price for the efficiency of the pragmatic approach.

TABLE 1

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE DURING LAND REFORM, 1950-53

Greater Administrative Areas (GAA):	North-east GAA	North China GAA	North-west GAA	East China GAA	Central-South GAA	South-west GAA	Inner Mongolia Autonomy	Total
Provinces:	6	3	5	6*	6	4	-	<u>30</u>
Special Districts or equivalent:	2	27	28	41	52	42	6	<u>198</u>
Hsien or Counties:	163	361	287	399	518	408	38	<u>2,174</u>
Ch'u or Sub-counties:	1,782	2,059	2,279	3,797	3,150	2,953	310	<u>18,330</u>
Hsiang or Administrative Villages:	27,848	84,732	20,283	44,105	86,816	17,954	2,888	<u>284,626</u>

* including Taiwan.

The number of *hsiang* and *ch'u* was just about to change by the end of land reform.

Source: *Shih-chieh chih-shih shou-ts'e* 世界知識手冊 (World Knowledge Handbook), Peking, 1953. p. 25.

TABLE 2
LAND TRANSFERS AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL IN THE
PROCESS OF CONFISCATION AND REQUISITIONING

	<u>% of Total Cultivated Land</u>
1. Northwest: for Kwanchung District	20
2. East China: 87% of total number of <i>hsiang</i>	40-60
3. Southwest: for areas of 13 million people	60
4. Central-South: from 100- <i>hsiang</i> sample survey	43
5. All China*	43

* Not as an average of the above 4 regions shown here, but from a separate source.

Sources:

1. *Chin-pu jih-pao* 進步日報 (Progress Daily), Tientsin, June 29, 1951
2. *Chieh-fang jih-pao* 解放日報 (Liberation Daily), November 29, 1951, p. 1.
3. *Hsin-hua jih-pao* 新華日報 (New China Daily), May 16, 1951, p. 3.
4. *Chang-chiang jih-pao* 長江日報 (Yangtze Daily), December 16, 1952. p. 2.
5. Liao Lu-yen's speech, "The Great Victory of the Land Reform Movement in the Past Three Years", *Hsin-hua yueh-pao* 新華月報 (New China Monthly), No. 36 October, 1952. pp. 13-15.

TABLE 3
 THE EXTENT OF CONFISCATION AND REQUISITIONING IN LAND REFORM
 IN KWANGTUNG PROVINCE, EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES,
 OF TOTALS, OF VARIOUS ASSETS

	<u>Land^a</u>	<u>Draught^b Animals</u>	<u>Houses^b</u>	<u>Agricultural^b Tool</u>
Landlords	80%	90%	70%	80%
Institutional Landlords*	100%	-	-	-
Rich Peasants#	15%	-	-	-

* Or "Collective landlords", who do not possess draught animals, tools, etc.

Taking land out from the rich peasants is officially termed "requisitioning", and only land, and no other means of production belonging to the rich peasants, was subject to "requisitioning".

Sources:

- a. Kwangchow jih-pao 廣州日報 (Canton Daily), July 25, 1957, p. 1. This is based on a survey of 509 rural households.
- b. K'u ta-chun 古大存, "Work Report of the Provincial Government During the Past Three Years", Nan-fang jih-pao 南方日報 (Southern Daily), August 16, 1954. p. 1.

TABLE 4
THE PER-HOUSEHOLD DISTRIBUTION OF INCOMES AND AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES, 1954

	A		B		C		D		E	
	Total Gross Incomes		Land		Draught Animals		Ploughs		Water Wheels	
	<u>Yuan</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Mow</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Head</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Piece</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Piece</u>	<u>Index</u>
Average	762	<u>100</u>	15.25	<u>100</u>	0.64	<u>100</u>	0.54	<u>100</u>	0.10	<u>100</u>
Poor peasants and agricultural labourers	489	65	12.46	82	0.47	73	0.41	76	0.07	70
Middle peasants	774	102	19.01	125	0.91	142	0.74	137	0.13	130
Rich peasants	1297	170	25.09	165	1.15	180	0.87	161	0.22	220
Landlords	497	76	12.16	80	0.23	36	0.23	43	0.04	40

Note: A: based on a sample survey of 15,292 rural household from 22 provinces.
B, C, D, & E: based on sample survey of 15,432 rural households from 23 provinces.

Sources: A: *Tung-tsi Kung-tso 統計工作*, (Statistical Work), No. 12, 1957. p. 32.
B, C, D, & E: Su Hsing, 蘇星, "The struggle between socialist and capitalist roads in China after land reform," *Ching-chi yen-chiu 經濟研究* (Economic research), No. 7, July 20, 1965, p. 13.

TABLE 5

PROGRESS OF LAND REFORM IN CHINA: IN TERMS
OF RURAL POPULATION HAVING UNDERTAKEN IT

Greater Adminis- trative Areas	A		B		C		D		E
	Before Spring (or before the ARL) 1950		Winter, 1950- Summer, 1951		Summer 1951- Summer 1952		Total Rural population having taken L.R. c. May, 1952		Total Rural population in China
	(,000)	%	(,000)	%	(,000)	%	(,000)	%	(,000)
North	60,000	100*	-	-	-	-	60,000	100	60,000
Northeast	33,000	100	-	-	-	-	33,000	100	33,000
Northwest	1,800	7	7,300	25	15,400	53	24,500	85	29,000
East	45,000	34	60,000	46	17,500	13	122,500	93	132,000
Central-South	17,000	12	50,000	34	50,000	35	117,000	81	144,000
Southwest	-	-	11,000	12	62,070	69	73,000	81	90,000
All-China	156,800	32	128,300	26	144,900	30	430,000	88	488,000

- Notes: 1. Except in Column D, the percentages are calculated on the basis of the total rural population in Column E. The percentage for "All-China" in each period is not the average of the six regions.
2. * In North China land reform was not actually 100% complete, even up to 1952; for 200,000 people in Suiyan Province (Inner Mongolia) where yet to have land reform after 1952. See *Chieh-fang jih-pao* 解放日報 (Liberation Daily), July 1, 1952, p. 4.
3. The total rural population of China in Column E was calculated by the total rural population having done land reform up to the summer of 1952 against the percentage in Column D.

- Sources: 1. The percentages in Column D come from: *Chieh-fang jih-pao*, July 1, 1952, p. 4; *Jen-min jih-pao* 人民日報 (People's Daily), July 5, 1952, p. 2.
2. The rest is from: *Jen-min Sou-tse* 人民手冊 (People's Handbook), 1952, pp. 37-38; *Honan jih-pao* 河南日報 (Honon Daily), July 4, 1951, p. 1.

NOTES

1. For a detailed study of the land reform policy in the Kiangsi-Soviet period, see Tso-liang Hsiao, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934: A Study of Documents* (Seattle & London, University of Washington Press, 1969). See also his previous works: *Power Relations Within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934: A Study of Documents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1961); and *Power Relations Within the Chinese Communist Movement, 1930-1934: Vol. II, The Chinese Documents* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967). Also Chao Kuo-chun, *Agrarian Policies of the Chinese Communist Party, 1921-1959* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1960).

For Chinese sources, see Hsu Ti-hsin 許瀚新, 'The Development of History of the CCP's Land Policy', in Shen Chih-yuan 沈志遠, ed., *Chung-kuo t'u-ti wen-t'i yu t'u-ti kai-ko 中國土地問題與土地改革* (The Chinese land problem and land reform; Hong Kong, 1948); Ho Kan-chih 何幹之, *Chung-kuo hsien-tai ko-ming shih 中國現代革命史* (Modern Revolutionary history of China; Sanlien 三聯, Hong Kong, 1958); Li T'ien-min 李天民, *Chung-kung yu nung-min 中共與農民* (The Chinese Communists and the peasant; Hong Kong, Union Research Institute, 1958).

For Taiwan sources, see Li Ming-hua 黎明華, ed., *Chung-kung ti t'u-ti tou-cheng 中共的土地鬥爭* (The land struggle of the Chinese Communists; Institute of International Relations, Taipei, 1965) and The Planning Division of the Central Committee of the P.M.T., *Kung-fei t'u-ti cheng-cha yu nung-min tsu-tze tze yen-chiu 共匪土地政策與農民組織之研究* (Study of the land policy and peasant organization of the Chinese Communists; Yang Ming Shan 陽明山, Taiwan, 1964).

2. For the United Front period and the relevant documents, see Conrad Brandt, et al, *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1952).
3. For the political and economic development as well as rent reduction in the CCP's wartime bases in North China, see Mark Seldon, *The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China* (Harvard University Press, 1971), especially Chapter 3.

4. For the condition of the CCP-occupied areas in the turbulent aftermath of the war, see *Chieh-fang jih-pao* 解放日報 (Liberation daily), the CCP's organ, from late 1945 to the spring of 1946.
5. The CCP's directives from the Central Committee are comparable to law and indeed an unpublished law for all practical purposes. The May 4th Directive was not published in the official organ the *Chieh-fang jih-pao* of the time; nor did it appear in subsequent official publications in its original form. If it had been drafted by Mao, it would have appeared in his *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. But the Taiwan sources do contain the contents of this document, see Li Ming-hua, *op cit*. For sources in English, see Isable and David Crook, *Revolution in a Chinese Village: Ten Mile Inn* (London, 1959), Appendices.
6. For the land reform progress in the CCP-held areas, see *Ch'un-chung* 群眾 (The masses weekly), Vol. 13, No. 9, December 16, 1946.
7. The full text of the Outline Land Law is normally available in works dealing with land reform problems for this period. For a translated version, see William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), Appendix A.
8. See Tan Cheng-wen's 譚政文 report, 'How Land Reform was Carried Out in Hsiang hsien' [in Shansi], *Ch'un-chung*, Vol. 2, No. 13, April 8, 1948.
9. See Jen Pi-shih 任弼時, 'Some Problems Arising From the Land Reform', *Tsen-yang tsai t'u-ti kai-ko* (How land reform is being carried out; Hong Kong, 1948), pp. 19-41; and Mao's 'Speech at a Conference of Cadres in Shansi-Suiyuan Liberated Areas' (April 1, 1948), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. IV, pp. 227-239.
10. From February 2 to April 1, 1948, in the short span of two months, Mao drafted at least another six directives on behalf of the Central Committee of the CCP, dealing partly or entirely with land reform.

Most of the relevant documents for this period can also be found in *Ping-fen t'u-ti shou-tse* 平分土地手冊 (Handbook for land redistribution), published by the New China Bookstore in North China, 1948. (Xerox copy in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).
11. 'Speech at the Conference of Cadres', pp. 235-236.
12. *The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1959), reprinted.

13. See, for example, Hsin Hen, 'Land Reform and China's Industrialization', *People's China*, No. 6, September 16, 1950, pp. 4-6.
14. See 'No Feudal Exploitation in South China?' *Hsueh-hsi* 學習 (Study), Vol. 3, November, 1950, and Cheng Hsin-ju 鄭新如, 'The Question of United Front During Land Reform', Part I, *Hsin Kuan-ts'a* 新觀察 (New observer), Vol. 1, No. 3, August 1, 1950.
15. See *Hsueh-hsi t'u-ti kai-ko* 學習土地改革 (Study the land reform; Hong Kong, 1956), reprinted, p. 37.
16. See for example, The Land Reform Committee of the Central-South, *T'u-ti kai-ko shou-ts'e* 土地改革年冊 (The land reform landbook; Hankow, 1950).
17. 'General Regulations Governing the Organization of the People's Tribunals', issued by the Government Administration Council, on July, 1950. *T'u-ti kai-ko shou-ts'e*, *op cit.*
18. 'General Regulations Governing the Organization of Peasants' Associations', adopted by the Government Administration Council on July 14, 1950. *The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China*, *op cit.*
19. See Chou En-lai's 周恩來 'Political Report', Supplement to *People's China* Vol. 4, No. 10, November 16, 1951, p. 5.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *T'u-ti kai-ko yu ssu-hsiang kai-tsao* 土地改革與思想改造 (Land Reform and thought reform; Peking, 1951), published by *Kuang-ming jih-pao* 光明報.
22. See 'Decisions Concerning the Differentiation of Class Status in the Countryside' (3 documents), *The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China*, *op cit.*
23. See Jao Shu-shih 饒漱石, 'Summary of the Pilot Land Reform Experience in East China', *Jen-min jih-pao* 人民日報 (People's daily), December 20, 1950; She Chung-hsun 謝仲軒, 'Report on the Land Reform Plan for Northwest China', *Hsin-hua yueh-pao* 新華月報 (New China monthly), Vol. 2, No. 4, August 1950, pp. 794-796.
24. 'The Great Victory of the Land Reform Movement in the Past Three Years' *Hsin-hua yueh-pao*, No. 36, October, 1952, pp. 13-15.

25. Many developing countries had a higher scope of land redistribution in their respective land reform: 70% in Bolivia; 75% in Cuba; 60% in Iran; 59% in Iraq; 59% in Mexico; and 64% in U.A.R. China's 43% was higher than Taiwan's (37%) and Japan's (33%). See M. Riad El Ghonemy, 'Land Reform and Economic Development' in Sein Lin, ed. *Readings in Land Reform*. (University of Hartford Press, 1970), p. 88.
26. See *Jen-min jih-pao*, June 17, 1951; *Chang-chiang jih-pao* 長江日報 (Yangtze daily), December 9, 1951.