

**THE RISE  
OF THE CHINESE  
PEOPLE'S COMMUNES  
—AND SIX YEARS AFTER**

**ANNA LOUISE STRONG**

SIX years have passed since the establishment of the Chinese People's Communes in 1958. Denounced and even declared "dead" by China's enemies, they have in fact demonstrated their unparalleled usefulness and vitality as a form of socialist organization in the rural areas. In this book Anna Louise Strong, the famous American writer, gives an eyewitness account of scores of communes she has visited in various parts of China. Its first part is the full text of her well-received "Rise of the Chinese People's Communes", originally published in 1959. The second, "The Three Hard Years", is her on-the-spot reporting of the cardinal role of the communes in

*(continued on back flap)*



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*There's no Jade Emperor in heaven,  
No Dragon King on earth.  
I am the Jade Emperor,  
I am the Dragon King.  
I order the three mountains and five peaks:  
"Make way! Here I come!"*

(Popular song in 1958)

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Weights, measures and money are given in the Chinese form. Sometimes, but not always, the English equivalent is also given in the text. For reference, the approximate equivalents are given here.

1 catty = 1.1 pounds or 1/2 kilo; 2,000 catties = 1 metric ton.

1 mou = 1/6 acre or 1/15 of a hectare.

1 yuan roughly = 40 cents U.S.A. or 2.8 shillings; 1 fen = 2/5 cent.

## FOREWORD

*This book incorporates my previous "The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes" plus new material of more than the original length. It now contains three parts, each covering a different period of history. The title is altered to indicate that the communes have now existed six years.*

*As published in early 1959, the first book told of the rise of the people's communes in 1958. I have thought it best to preserve that text practically unchanged, including even some grossly exaggerated statistics and the over-enthusiasms on which they were based. The period was historic, the extravagances were part of the exuberant mood of creation in which hundreds of millions of people became conscious of collective power. That edition in substance, makes up Part I of the present book, with a few footnotes added.*

*That story ended with the New Year celebration of 1959, when six thousand delegates from the new communes came from all parts of China and met in Peking to plan their future. The reader naturally asks: What happened next? In the next three years the people's communes, whose rise expressed the theme of man's conquering power over nature, were challenged by natural disasters of drought, typhoons, flood and pests unprecedented in the century. The struggle of those years appears in Part II. "The Three Hard Years," based on articles I wrote in 1959-62. Each chapter in this part is dated, to show the period it covers. Its last three chapters appeared in a small pamphlet "China's Fight for Grain," in early 1963.*

*It seemed important to conclude with a picture of the communes as they are today in 1964. Most of the material in Part III was collected especially for this book, to show "Communes in 1964" on the scale of a province, of some regions within the province, some individual communes and their constituent brigades and teams and*

*the relation of the nation's industry to the communes. Two of the chapters had preliminary publication in my "Letter from China"; three of the communes described were seen in 1962 but brought up to date in 1964.*

*The present edition thus covers the rise of the people's communes in Part I, their fight against natural disasters in Part II, and their present form and condition in 1964 in Part III. It does not attempt to be a full or a balanced history. It is rather a predominantly eye-witness record of repeated observations over a period of six years.*

*I did not spend all of my time in those years observing communes. In 1959 I went to Tibet, the only American woman who ever saw Lhasa, and recorded the freeing of the serfs in that darkest of earth's serfdoms and the beginnings of land reform in two books: "Tibetan Interviews" and "When Serfs Stood Up in Tibet." In 1961 I went to Indo-China and wrote "Cash and Violence in Laos." In September 1962 I began sending a news-letter to friends; this expanded so that it now appears in four languages and takes nearly all of my time.*

*From all these excursions into what might seem to some wider fields, I returned to China's internal growth in which the people's communes play important, even decisive part. A nation's greatness shows itself to the world in many ways but always the foundations lie in its internal life. The people's communes are the form of China's rural life today, a base of her internal strength.*

*Thanks are due to several friends who helped me to gather and arrange the reports I wrote over a long period, and to do such editing and elimination of repetitions as occur when separate writings are combined in book form.*

*Peking, July 1964*

*Anna Louise Strong*

## PART I

# THE RISE OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES

(1958-59)

## 1. SOME MISCONCEPTIONS

People's communes swept all China at the end of last summer, the summer of 1958. By December they contained over 120,000,000 households, ninety-nine per cent of the peasant population. They became the base on which rests China's immediate future, and the units from which the more distant future is expected to grow. They are discussed abroad by everyone from Secretary Dulles to Marshal Tito, neither of whom has any idea how the people's communes work.

I have therefore made preliminary collection of facts from four personal visits to widely scattered communes -- in Honan, Kiangsu, Kwangtung and near Peking -- and from interviews separately held with some fifty men and women members of communes from all parts of the country, and from nine months' perusal of commune news. The facts suggest that we have here a new form of social organization which is widely misrepresented but which has great significance for China and the world.

I leave to theoreticians the relation of communes to Marx. The term "commune" has historically been used with various meanings, the early French use to designate merely a community, the revolutionary use in the "Paris Commune," the many idealistic communal settlements in early America, of which Llano Colony and others were as late as the period after the First World War, and the communes in the U.S.S.R.'s first period of collectivization,\* which were dropped in the thirties as premature.

The people's communes in China differ from all of these; we must define them not by preconceptions but by the Chinese facts.

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\* To which they were compared by Nikita Khrushchov in his November 17, 1958 conversation with U.S. Senator Hubert Humphrey, as reported by the latter. Khrushchov also spoke in this vein to the late Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and therefore may be regarded as one of the first anti-commune propagandists.



They are large mergers of agricultural co-operatives, which at once assume new, wider functions. They handle not only farming but industry, commerce, education and home defense on their territory, which is commonly that of a township or larger. They run the local schools, and some of the local branches of the state bank and state trade. They thus differ from past communes in other parts of the world by the wideness of their powers, which include state power and military affairs.

It is not strange that many peasants, in their first enthusiasm over these wide powers, declared that they were "entering communism," with "each according to his needs" and even "absorbing the state." The Chinese Communist Party promptly corrected these enthusiasts, and made it clear that communism demands a much higher stage of production than can exist in China for many years. The people's communes, it stated, should at present pay according to work rather than according to needs. It may thus be seen as the introduction of the "wage system" to a peasantry that has hitherto lived by subsistence farming. However, even at the beginning, this wage system is modified by a certain amount of "free supply," depending on local decision. Most spectacular of these was the rapid and wide introduction of "free food," which came as the result of the bumper crop. Other free items, maternity care, free schools and kindergartens and old people's homes, are less revolutionary, since they exist also in capitalist lands, either as free education or as community relief.

In China, however, these free items are based on a new concept. The local people of the township — or of the county — directly own and develop to the limit of their abilities all the resources of the area, whether land, water-power, timber or mineral ores, and from this development look after their community livelihood from cradle to grave. This is not alien to the old Chinese concept of county and village but is a far greater decentralization of economic and political power than is common today. It is expected to promote the rapid growth of production and prosperity in socialist forms under local initiative, and eventually to facilitate the transition to a communist society, in which the people's communes will remain as basic units.

The Chinese people's communes thus differ, economically and politically, from past organizations called communes. As I write, in March 1959, they have been in existence for half a year, the first constitution of a commune having been adopted on August 7, 1958. Each of the 26,000 communes differs from every other, each being tailored to its community. All of them change and develop week by week. It is far too soon to pass final judgment on their future.

Why then should one write at all about this phenomenon? The answer is that serious misconceptions have appeared abroad about the communes, and are being spread for the purpose of attacking China, and even for the purpose of portraying the Chinese people as lawless and sub-human creatures who might with clear conscience be atom-bombed from the world in the next Taiwan Straits war. Since there are plenty of facts to prove such attacks baseless, they should be answered at once. The best reply is a description of the communes as they are of present date.

One may note, in a preliminary way, the chief charges. These are that communes enslave the individual, break down the family, and militarize the people under the militia, spoken of as "Peking's cops." Even on present facts, one can show that these charges are ridiculous. The process of industrialization does indeed change the individual's relation to society and to the family; this has happened in every land thus far industrialized. But the changes made thus far by the Chinese communes seem less of a strain on either the individual or the family than by any industrialization in history.

The much-advertised "destruction of the patriarchal family" which the people's communes proclaim, has not yet, in the communes I have seen, removed the grandparents or the children from the homes of the married couples. Long ago this "destruction" happened in America, where the young couple usually abandon both parental homes on the day of their marriage. In China the "big family" still lives together, not only in the ancient village houses, but also according to the new blue-prints for housing thus far approved by people's communes, all of which include rooms for grandparents as well as minor children. The "Homes of Respect for the Aged"

are for those who have neither sons nor daughters to care for them; they do not thus far cater to the aged who have sons.

Two changes have been made by the communes which destroy the patriarchal rule. The first is that wages for work are paid to the actual man or woman worker, and not, as heretofore, to the head of the household. The Old Man, who ruled the home by collecting his son's and daughter-in-law's wages, loses this power. The second change is the establishment of a wide net of public dining-rooms, nurseries and kindergartens, which "liberate" the able-bodied young housewife from domestic labor and enable her to earn wages on an equality with her man. For women who formerly did both field work and household chores, including the grinding of the grain daily, this is a very welcome liberation. In any case the parents themselves decide whether they wish to use the local nursery or kindergarten. Thus far I have not yet found in China even that form of coercion which every small town in America uses ruthlessly, the truant officer compelling attendance at the primary school. What the West calls compulsory school attendance, enforced regardless of the will of parents, may later develop also in China: but as of early 1959, even in matters of primary schools, the parents still decide.

As for the "slavery of the individual" through industrial routine, let us recall how the westward drive of the United States was bought by two generations of migratory workers, "bindle-stiffs" deprived of all normal home life. Let us recall the rug factories of Peking a generation ago, or the textile factories in Japan — not to mention early Britain — where men or women workers slept in long rows on floors, deprived by years of contract labor of any home. That, if you like, was slavery, degrading the individual. In China the people's communes avoid all this. People stay in their village homes, or build better homes in more convenient places in the same township. Meantime they make arrangements whereby able-bodied men and women cultivate the fields, develop local industry and trade, while the strongest go on temporary assignment to build roads or irrigation projects for their own community use. What slavery is here?

As for "militarization" through the "militia," here I note only that most peasants I have met welcome the bugle or bell that enables field gangs to assemble on time, in communities which still have few clocks, and like to plant flags in the fields to mark gains in production. Most peasants also are proud that their democratically-elected people's commune has its own "home guards," directly responsible to the commune and not thus far under any Ministry of Defence in Peking. The need of such home guards was recently emphasized by the flare-up of war in the Taiwan Straits, and is kept in mind by the occasional capture of agents of Chiang Kai-shek,\* sometimes in the act of planting bombs in schools or theaters. The political significance is hardly that of "militarization by Peking," but rather that of the rather amazing trust placed by the central government — in a China so short a time removed from the warlord period — in locally-chosen and locally-responsible home guards.

The basic fact that needs from the start to be stressed is the extent of the Chinese people's own initiative in the organizing of the people's communes. As Dr. Joseph Needham, the eminent authority on China and Chinese science, stated in the *New Statesman and Nation*, on December 20, 1958, "the West cherishes the idea that the population is dragooned to perform its tasks. On the contrary, everywhere one sees spontaneity, often out-running government planning . . . a new type of social engineering, the product of leadership from within, not from above." Those words should be read often; they are a clear, incisive description of the forces operating in today's China. To illustrate them will take the entire book.

Let us here note, however, that the people's communes arose in China as a mass movement in the rural areas, in which local conditions and organization by local Communists played a part, that they existed in slightly differing forms in wide areas before Peking

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\* To cite later instances, in the second half of 1963, people's commune militia, acting on their own or with regular border defense units, were cited as participating in destroying or capturing 18 groups of heavily armed Chiang Kai-shek infiltrators, totalling 280 men, who attempted coastal or parachute landings along China's seaboard, particularly in Kwangtung Province.

officially took notice, that they acquired their name and clearer formulation during the discussions of Mao Tse-tung and other leaders with local peasants in the fields, and that the first official resolution by the Central Committee of the Communist Party about the communes was published on August 29, 1958, at a time when thirty per cent of all China's peasants had already joined, while the more complete formulation by the Communist Party came only on December 10,\* when ninety-nine per cent of the peasants were already members of communes. The peasants, moreover, encouraged by a bumper crop and the belief that hunger was conquered forever, had already widely voted "free food for all members and their families," a step which no Party resolution had foreseen. Nothing in this history indicates "dictation from Peking." The facts do, however, indicate a remarkable technique of leadership, which should be studied and understood.

To me, as a western American, what is most impressive is that the people's communes have given China an economic mechanism that incites every township and county to get irrigation, roads, water-power, steel and modern industry by local initiative, as fast as the local people can do the work. At the same time it enables China as a whole to get highways, irrigation systems and a vast network of industry, in an incredibly short time by local energy without building a vast central bureaucracy and without strain on the nation's taxing power. In these respects it seems to combine the local initiative that built the American westward drive with the social planning that built the U.S.S.R.

No final word can yet be said on the people's communes. So far the most authoritative word is the resolution of the Chinese Communist Party, passed on December 10, 1958 by its Central Committee. No government decree yet exists: one may be passed by the National Assembly when it meets in April 1959. The final decision will not be made by the Chinese Communist Party or even

\* These two resolutions of the Central Committee in 1958, the first adopted at Peitaiho, the next at Wuhan, are the basic documents on the communes of which any serious student must take note. They may be found in *Peking Review* for September 16, 1958 and December 23, 1958 respectively.

by the Chinese People's Government. It will be made by the Chinese peasants, in all the length and breadth of China, through their intelligence and work.

Locally, the people's communes have already absorbed the political form of the township: in some places they have absorbed the county. The statement of this in constitutional law is yet to come. A leading Chinese Communist told me at the time: "We think the people's commune good, but it will take ten years of testing to know its potential. Some communes will fail this winter: then they will reorganize better and we shall all learn from them. Others will succeed brilliantly and inspire the rest."

This sense that the future is fluid, and will be determined not by decrees or fiats, but by trial and error, by wide experimentation of all the people, by the sowing of a hundred flowers of which some will show strength to reproduce themselves, is the source of the initiative and creative energy so marked in China today.

\* \* \*

## ROOTS TO ROOTS

MING DAO

*Pine trees beside each other  
Have roots that intertwine.  
Our village by the others  
Merges its bits of land  
Into great fields.  
Each commune member lets  
His heart combine  
With others.*

## 2. HOW THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNES AROSE

The common idea of the West that people's communes came in China by orders from Peking is of course sheer myth. No government ever existed that could force such an organization on a nation of six hundred and fifty million people. The description given by the December 1958 resolution of the Central Committee—"a new social organization appeared"—is accurate but inadequate. What natural and human forces produced it? In studying this, one also studies the role of communist leadership in China and the nature of the "mass line," which may be briefly defined as "from the people, through the leadership, to the people."

When 1958 began, most of the five hundred million peasants of China were organized in 740,000 agricultural co-operatives, with an average membership of 160 families. When the year ended, these had merged into 26,000 people's communes,\* with average size of a township or more, and with functions that included not only farming but industry, commerce, education and home defense. We must trace the causes of such change.

The farming co-operatives were themselves the result of eight or nine years' growth, which began with the land revolution and the policy of "land to the tiller": this policy was part of the Liberation in 1949. Mutual-aid teams came quickly, for without aid the poorer peasants, lacking draft-animals and implements, could not have worked their new land. These "teams" were small groups of neighbors who helped each other in farmwork, while keeping private property in land, animals and tools.

\* After briefly dropping, through mergers, to 24,000, the communes increased, by subdivision, to over three times that number. Now there are more than 74,000, roughly one to every ten co-operatives that existed in 1957.

The mutual-aid teams grew, with encouragement by Communists and aid of state loans, into farming co-operatives, buying animals and better implements for joint use. For a time, in what was known as the "lower stage," the private ownership of land and many draft-animals was recognized by extra payments at harvest. In a few years, however, the co-ops grew into the "higher" or "socialist" form, holding land, animals and larger implements as joint property, and dividing the harvest in proportion to labor performed. This change was made not by confiscation but by the increasing part played by labor in the joint crop, and by buying the members' livestock for the co-op at market prices on the instalment plan, a process made possible by state loans.

In winter of 1955-56, a nation-wide "socialist upsurge" swept most remaining mutual-aid teams into co-operatives, and raised most of the lower type of co-ops to the socialist type. By winter of 1957-58, a large proportion of these co-operatives had paid much of the debts incurred in the purchase of their joint property and had even begun to save "accumulation funds." They were ready to think of wider advance.

The first joint aim deeply felt by China's peasants is control of the water supply. For centuries they have lived at the mercy of rains and rivers, with floods and droughts decreed by the climate and the long-eroded soils. In the eight years after liberation, the national government accomplished many remarkable feats of water conservation, increasing the irrigated area by some forty million acres, doubling the total irrigated land which the past centuries had achieved. This achievement was still far below the peasants' needs.

"To conquer floods and drought forever," as a popular peasant slogan has it, would clearly take generations if done by the national government, and would cost an unbearable amount in taxes. Moreover the great state projects had limits: many reservoirs and canals of past dynasties had been silted up by soil draining steadily from eroded hills. The problem began not with great floods but with millions of small streams washing down ravines. If the local peasants could retain these, their own farms would profit at once by the locally-saved soil and water, and at the same time this would

materially help control the greater floods. By winter of 1957-58 this was widely understood, not only by experts but by the peasants. For China's peasants today are literate and avidly study any information that they find of use.

Great drives began in many parts of China in winter of 1957-58 which dwarfed all irrigation work previously done in world history. Of these drives I mention only two.

Honan Province in north central China was notoriously poor and subject to famine. It suffered for centuries the floods of the Yellow River and these were often followed by drought when the waters fell. "Ten seasons, nine calamities," said the local proverb. When I visited Honan in October 1958, they gave me figures. The province had inherited from past centuries some 1,266,670 irrigated acres. In seven years the national government, aided by local people, built projects that irrigated 4,500,000 acres more. Then, in winter of 1957-58, the local farmers organized "to banish flood and drought forever." Millions turned out and built reservoirs, dams, wells, cisterns, ponds of every kind, and stored enough water for 13,750,000 acres, three times what the national government achieved in seven years!

The projects were not all well done by the local farmers. Some dams and reservoirs were washed away. Only a small part of the stored water was in completed irrigation systems: it was in ponds and wells from which human labor must still carry it by pails to the fields. This did not worry Honan farmers; they had the water where they could get it and within another year or two they could add the electric pumps to lift it into channels for the fields. With water already stored on their land, they felt secure.

Even more spectacular was the achievement in Anhwei Province, at the joining of the Yangtze and Hwai rivers and the Grand Canal. In the years after liberation, the national government built here the great Hwai River project, a gigantic flood-control job which became famous around the world. This relieved the great floods, but left the local problems of lesser floods, drought and water-logging, which Anhwei shares with much of the North China Plain. The daring peasants proposed to handle this problem by criss-crossing the prov-

ince with wide canals, which should then be connected with the Yangtze, the Hwai and Yellow rivers and the Grand Canal, and furnish irrigation, drainage, water-power and water transport to every township. It was an idea which, starting in Anhwei, was within a year to be discussed as a serious plan for the whole North China Plain.

In spring of 1958 the Anhwei peasants announced that in the irrigation and water-control jobs north of the Hwai, they had done a total of 3,900,000,000 cubic meters of earth removal during the previous winter, and that this was "seven times what the government did in the same area in the preceding eight years," which included the Hwai River project. The statisticians then added an even more astounding detail of a type dear to the hearts of the thrifty Chinese. When the national government removed the earth, it cost 364 yuan per thousand cubic meters, but when the local people did it, it cost the state just 2.30 yuan, only 1/158th as much. The cost per thousand cubic meters of water stored was 290 yuan when the state did it, but only 1.80 yuan when the peasants did it, just 1/160th as much. The state had paid for some bridges, tunnels, arches, tools and wages of technicians. The local farmers did the rest.

Who paid for this incredible achievement? This of course is where Mr. Dulles says "forced labor," and where the Chinese Communists say "the peasants' political consciousness." The peasants tell you it was "improving our own land." In point of fact, the individuals doing the work were paid, but not by the state and not, in most cases, in cash. They were paid by local co-operative farms, which credited their work on irrigation as work done for the farm, and hence payable by an increased share in the joint harvest. A tax economist would therefore find that the work was actually paid by a local taxation, assumed by the co-operative farms because they saw its immediate benefits, because they could easily spare the labor in winter, and because everybody hailed it as the surest way to guarantee the coming harvest.

In many other parts of China great water-control projects were begun or completed that winter of 1957-58. In Kansu Province they were bringing the waters of the Tao River over the mountains to

irrigate two and a half million acres of hitherto arid soil. In Kwangsi they were controlling the Lunkiang, in Hopei the Haiho. In Sinkiang deserts they were renovating ancient irrigation systems after centuries of disuse. In Inner Mongolia and other parts of the arid northwest, they declared war against the moving sand dunes of the Gobi which in slow centuries have been swallowing the settlements of men. In Shansi, one of the worst eroded areas, where soft loess soil ran down treeless slopes with a total loss of three hundred million tons of soil a year, work began which within a year announced the terracing of four million acres of sloping land, and the consequent cutting of erosion by one-third, saving the province a hundred million tons of soil per year.

No Westerner will find it easy to accept such figures, but it is not wise to discount them, for every Chinese child eagerly counts the achievements of his village and every province checks on other provinces. The Westerner can at least note, what may be more important, that everywhere in China appears a great poster whose design has been copied by hundreds of thousands of local amateur artists on frescoed local walls—as common as Coca-Cola in the U.S.A. It depicts a giant peasant splitting a great cliff and ushering a swift river through, and it bears the words: “Let the mountain lower its head; let the river course be moved.” It appears on the jacket-design of this book. It is the theme of rural China today.

None of these great actions were begun by the people's communes. But out of them the people's communes were born.

\* \* \*

A fascinating motion picture by one of China's many film-producing companies tells a typical story of the birth of a commune. It is called “County Secretary” and portrays with drama and humor the struggle of twenty small co-operatives in the office of a Party secretary, for the one modern irrigation pump the county had so far obtained. The chairman of Co-op Number Three, a doughty one-legged veteran of the liberation war, wins the pump on merit but loses it through the weakness of the county office to the greedy Co-op Number Eighteen. Unwilling to start a feud, he suggests

that if the other co-ops will help him with labor to dig a ditch from Blue Dragon Fall for irrigation, this will be “better than the pump.” The county secretary, inspecting the fall with a technician, finds that the best proposal is a big reservoir, useful on county scale, but inundating half the land of Co-op Number Three. Out of this and other dramatic conflicts between local interests and county-wide development, the result is clear. All the co-ops form a federation, which builds the dam and uses it for everyone's interest. This is a simple, dramatic statement of the actual type of situation from which communes arose.

Spontaneous merger of farming co-ops into larger units began in many parts of China in spring of 1958. They took various names, such as “federation of co-operatives,” or “enlarged co-operative.” Most of them, but not all, came as a result of needs discovered in the irrigation drive of the previous winter. Thus forty-eight small co-ops on the Tanshui River in Honan built eighty small water-control projects during the winter, but because of small scale, poor quality and inability to select the best site, which might be on another farm's land, many of these projects were damaged in the summer flood. When the small co-ops merged, they were able to plan thirteen larger reservoirs, which eliminated the menace of flood and drought.

All these new mergers, whether they grew from the irrigation drive or from other causes, came because the farming co-ops felt a shortage of labor. This is another fact which will seem incredible to the West. Has not China had peasant labor in great excess? But it was a fact that the small co-ops could not deploy labor on the scale needed for all the new activities they wanted. This lack expressed itself in many ways. The Kuochuang Co-op had iron-ore on its land but lacked coal; the nearby Tienchuang Co-op had coal but no iron. Neither co-operative had funds or labor enough to buy from the other and start the making of iron. When the two merged, it was simple to begin the making of iron and steel by native methods for farm implements. . . .

The Sputnik Co-op in Suiping County of Honan, formed in April 1958 by merger of twenty-seven smaller co-ops, and which called

itself at first an "enlarged co-operative," later claimed to have been the first people's commune.\* There are reasons for this claim, for the Sputnik's new constitution was published and widely copied, and Honan was indeed a main basis for the first great expansion of communes. But enlarged co-ops appeared also in many other provinces at about the same time as Sputnik. Liaoning, Szechuan, Kwangtung provinces all have claims. It may be of interest to note here two other widely differing communes, which began in different manners, and which show how varied the new tendency was.

A small island off the Chekiang coast, known as May the First Island, had actually a people's commune, though without the name, as early as 1954. Its total population is 2,700 souls, all fisherfolk. In 1953 they organized four fishing co-operatives. In 1954 these merged into one, thus ending quarrels over the rich but limited fishing grounds. The merger gave funds and manpower enough to launch into deep-sea fishing. The co-op took over the functions of the township government, which later was the typical mark of a people's commune. It absorbed small handicraft co-ops, a credit and marketing co-op and a small farming co-op which grew the locally-consumed vegetables.

When the movement for communes began, this little island not only took the new name at once but was ready for a big drive. It set up a fish-processing industry, established trade with the mainland, and sent a number of young men to Shanghai to learn to operate motor junks. By December they had built eighteen motor junks and ordered two trawlers: some of the young men already commanded motor vessels at sea. They had also a dozen small factories for motor repair, iron smelting, making fish-nets. They had a broadcasting station, a library, a "palace of culture," a school for fishery, a maternity home, electric lights and telephones. The 1958 gross income was five times that of 1957, a total of three million yuan, 1,100 yuan per capita, which is \$450 U.S.A. Much of this would at once be reinvested, but all the fisher families now had bank accounts, while fifty of the poorest had moved into new

\* For further details see p. 21.

homes during the year. This amazing advance showed what an already-organized community could do on the basis of the new form.

The Changshih Commune in Kwangtung, which also can claim to be one of the earliest, as it started in April 1958, is interesting for another reason. It grew out of the failure of some co-ops in 1957, and it illustrates the part played by Communist leadership in arresting and reversing a failure. This township had some 20,000 people, and there were eight farming co-operatives, none of which was doing very well. The area was mountainous with thick forests and rich ore deposits which the peasants exploited spasmodically. The small co-operatives proved unable to handle two kinds of work at once. In 1956 they got a good rice crop but neglected the side-occupations; in 1957 they developed the side-occupations but the grain fell to 219 catties per *mu* for the late rice crop. This was partly because the better-off middle peasants, dissatisfied with the income from the co-operative, had taken to private jobs such as peddling ore in Canton, so that entire field gangs were absent from the fields as long as two months. Members in one co-operative drowned sixty pigs in order to eat them. One township official went in for peddling watches without a license, thus evading the tax laws. In short, the drift towards capitalism, which always exists in a peasant economy, was breaking up the Changshih co-operatives.

The contrast of nearby successes with their own failure aroused the local Communists in late 1957. They reacted by holding a "rectification campaign" followed by a "great debate," a process then common in China. A mass meeting of the eight hundred local Communists was first held to criticize and analyze their own errors: this lasted several days. Then a "great debate" began for all the peasants on the subject: "Which road is best for China, for Changshih, for YOU personally, capitalism or socialism?" Since the Communists in their own discussion had already confessed their shortcomings and developed some useful ideas, they were able to show the peasants that the road of individual enterprise, however attractive at first, led to the splitting of the community, the exploitation of some by others, the return of the "old society." The way to cure the lacks of the co-operatives was to combine them, thus gaining enough

labor power to organize division of labor. Permanent groups should specialize for each occupation. One-eighth of the total labor force should be permanently assigned to the timber and mines, and keep this work going with a skeleton force even during the height of field work: then, when field work lessened, large numbers of workers could be thrown into the side-occupations under leadership of the permanent staff. Thus Changshih moved towards modern division of labor.

The eight co-operatives merged in April 1958, took over also the local handicraft co-operative, tailors' co-operative and some transport workers, and were soon given the state-owned marketing establishment. With these changes, and working with the new, united conviction that socialism was the best road for everyone and that they must make it work, the new combination, later renamed a people's commune, secured a total income of 13,000,000 yuan in 1958, five times the income of 1957. Of this somewhat more than half came from timber, ore, and newly-organized small industries, but the most spectacular progress was in the late rice crop, which had a yield of 1,717 catties per *mou*, eight times the yield of 1957. The income per capita is still extremely low by Western standards: it was reckoned at 650 yuan gross income, or 400 yuan net income per capita, counting children and dependants: but the commune put so much back into new investment that its workers will draw only 10 yuan per month, about \$4.00 U.S.A. However, in the past most of the peasants never drew any wages, and Changshih today offers its members not only wages, but three good meals daily for everyone, children and aged included, for which they have not only more rice than they can eat, but also pork, fish, chicken, vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, peanut oil, tea and honey, all produced by themselves. "Salt is the only thing we have to buy," they boast.

One learns from the Changshih Commune that, because the leadership of the Communist Party penetrates and connects all areas, no local failure is final, but is discovered, analyzed, and made a starting-point for a wider success. This was even more strikingly illustrated by Honan Province, which, partly because of mistakes made in 1957, became in 1958 the leader in the organization of communes.

In 1957 there was controversy in Honan as to whether small co-operatives or larger ones were best. Conservatives in the provincial Party committee supported the richer peasants' demand for small co-operatives, and induced a fairly large proportion of Honan's co-operatives to split into smaller groups. All those which did so found themselves at harvest of 1957 far behind the record of the co-operatives which had persisted in keeping a larger size. The lesson was learned. Honan peasants at once reversed the trend and promoted wider and wider amalgamation with confidence born of harsh experience. The winter irrigation drive strengthened this tendency. By April 1958, Honan, somewhat ahead of other provinces, brought forth the enlarged co-operatives that became people's communes.

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It is therefore convenient to start the history of the communes with the Sputnik Commune in Honan, even though it began at about the same time as several others. For the Sputnik was the first in Honan and Honan established the trend. It was a trend not only towards larger size but wider function. The agricultural co-operatives, in merging, took over also local handicraft, marketing and credit co-operatives, practically all of which served the farms. With the greatly increased labor force, a greater discipline was needed. Permanent labor groups were formed, assigned to special tasks or special fields. They set out "to attack a mountain" with drums and banners, and proudly called this "the military form," not knowing—and probably not caring—how Mr. Dulles would later abuse this term. The tendency to set up nurseries for the convenience of mothers engaged in field work, which had begun in the smaller co-operatives, now widened; these services, which the smaller co-operatives usually charged for, began to be offered free. Public canteens, to save the women from the heavy drudgery of peasant households, and to carry food to the field gangs during harvest, appeared and grew.

All these changes began in the small co-operatives and increased in the larger ones. They marked the beginning of a new form.



But the peasants were not yet aware of this, nor had the new form yet a name.

The new name and the precise definition of function, came from Mao Tse-tung's research and especially from his trips that summer to these new enlarged co-operatives. The Central Committee was of course carefully watching these developments: Mao himself, as well as the other Party leaders, spent much time in summer of 1958 travelling to the farms and talking with the peasants and the local leaders.

In early August, about the time when Sputnik adopted its constitution as a people's commune, some Shantung peasants, seeking wider organization, proposed that they become a state farm. Mao told them that a state farm was confined to agriculture and this was not what they wanted. They wanted to absorb not only farming, but local industry and trade. This, he said, was a "people's commune" and they should add education and home defense as well.

This remark was published in the press: it crystallized action across the country. Dozens of peasants have told me this. All rural China at the time was discussing the enlarged co-operatives and asking in what manner they themselves might gain new strength. Evergreen Commune near Peking told me they sent a delegation to study the new form in Honan. Kansu farm women said they did not travel so far and why should they?

"When Chairman Mao said: 'People's communes are good,' and that they should include all those things we wanted, we said at once: 'Then why wait?'"

A leading Communist thus put it to me later: "The peasants already knew that they wanted to handle as a unit everything in their locality. They did not have the science to formulate this. The Central Committee had already discussed the future form of expansion but had reached no decision. Chairman Mao supplied the science and analysis. From his discussions with Shantung and Honan peasants that summer, the people's communes in their present form were born."

\* \* \*

The first publicly-announced people's commune was the Sputnik Commune of Honan, which adopted its new constitution on August 7, 1958. It comprised at the time four townships with 9,300 households and 43,000 people. The constitution was published and the fame of the Sputnik so spread that it recorded 85,000 visitors from all over China in six months. This constitution is therefore historic.

The people's commune, in this constitution, was declared to be "a basic unit of society" whose task is "to manage all industrial and agricultural production, trade, cultural and educational work and political affairs within its own sphere." "Military affairs" were not listed among essential functions but Article 10 provided for "a system of citizen soldiery."

The commune took over all members of the merging co-operatives who had reached the age of sixteen. Members had the right to elect the management, to be elected, to vote on all the commune's affairs. Individual peasants might also join by turning over to common ownership their means of production, except for small domestic animals and small farm tools which were privately retained. Property turned over to the commune was partly taken as "share capital" as in the former co-operative, but any excess over a modest "share capital" was listed as "investment" to be repaid. All past investments by members of co-operatives, such as livestock and tools turned over at various periods, were also assumed by the commune as debts. The commune took over all collectively-owned property and reserve funds of the constituent co-operatives and also all debts, except for the current funds and debts of the operating year, which the co-operative must complete.

The commune's tasks were to develop "an expanding agricultural output," to build "industry as rapidly as possible," to build roads, dredge waterways, build modern communications. One item provided "one or two postmen" for each "production contingent," a quick way of getting rural free delivery without cost to the state. The commune took over the local branch of the state bank and state trading organs, ran them under regulations fixed by the higher organs, and divided the profits. It absorbed local government, taking over one or more townships: this meant in practice especially

the tunning of local primary and middle schools. The commune thus also became the registrar of marriages.

All local resources of nature and man were thus unified, and under democratic control. For the highest organization was the "congress of the commune," made up of elected representatives from all production brigades and all sections of the people, such as women's organizations, youth, old people, educational workers, personnel of industrial enterprises. This congress, elected on a functional basis, then elected a "management committee" and a "supervisory committee" for checking and inspection. The management committee set up departments for different tasks: agriculture, forestry, water control, livestock, fishery, industry, finance, trade, culture and education, armed defense and the like. All these had force of government at township level.

Members were to be paid "according to work." A "wage system" would be set up when the commune "acquires stability of income." This would replace the system common under the co-operatives of paying by workdays, reckoned at harvest. The wage system made local industry possible, and began the transition from peasant life to the life of industrial workers. Far down in Article 15, the constitution mentioned the possibility of free grain to members "when the grain supply reaches a higher level and all members of the commune agree. . . ." This free supply to everyone, including children and aged unable to work, was to be introduced only when the harvest was enough to do it, "while increasing and not decreasing the income of members supplying the labor power. . . ." The commune did not intend that any ultra-left voting by large, hungry families should introduce any free distribution that might discourage the actual laboring force.

The commune was to organize the labor force in "production brigades," or working units usually ranging from one hundred to a hundred and fifty able-bodied adults, and these were to be combined in what we may translate as "production contingents," usually over five hundred workers. Community canteens were to be organized and also nurseries, kindergartens and sewing teams "to free

the women from household labor." These services were to be run at cost, "without losses or profits." In practice, with the bumper harvest that soon came, they were usually run without any charge at all. An important provision noted: "Members need not use the canteen or nursery service if they do not want to."

Other articles provided for "universal, compulsory education," for "health and medical service on a co-operative basis," not necessarily free, for "Happy Courts" for the aged and disabled "who have nobody to depend on" — which implied a system of old-age relief, and certainly not "splitting of the home."\* Other provisions were for financing and planning, reserves and expansion.

The full daring and originality of this new organization becomes clear from careful study of the constitution. The citizens of the local area, usually of township size, assumed ownership and management of all local natural resources, land, minerals, livestock, industries, subject only to normal taxes to the state. They were to manage these properties democratically, and expand them, and take responsibility for caring for all children and disabled, for paying steadily-increasing wages to all workers, for developing education and health services, roads, communications, irrigation works from their own resources and suitable to their needs.

Any student of government or of economic forms can at once think of many problems which this type of organization will face. But the comment quickly made abroad — that the communes were "militarization by Peking" seems singularly untrue. For no such decentralization of government, of economic assets and management had ever been seen before. It was now being proposed in the most populous nation on earth, with 650,000,000 people, who had been mostly illiterate ten years earlier, and who were now being offered, in local organizations, the ownership and management of the local resources, with the responsibility of using these to develop not only food production, but industry, trade, education, government, and all they desired of a good life.

\* These institutions, throughout China, are now called "Homes of Respect for the Aged."

The peasants of China saw this new form as unprecedented opportunity for rapid progress. The Communists of China saw it as the basic cell in what would become the future communist society. But in the rest of the world, which, far more than China, is today disturbed by the threat of annihilating, thermonuclear war, there must have been those who saw at once that the communes made China invulnerable far beyond other nations. Short of a war destroying the human race on the planet—a possibility in which the Chinese do not believe—what major harm can be done to a nation whose great central irrigation dams are supplemented by millions of small reservoirs in every township, whose central steel plants are reinforced by local iron and steel works in every county, whose citizens are organized to the ends of the land as mobile warriors, with every small unit able to raise food, make clothing and steel, and govern itself on a township basis? The strategic invulnerability which the people's commune gives to China, as well as the great economic potential, possibly accounts for the virulence of the foreign attack.

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The constitution of Sputnik Commune, adopted on August 7, was widely published "as reference material." This gave it prestige but no authority over any people except its own members. The Communist Party of China had not yet spoken any authoritative word as to the commune's detailed form. During August, the provincial Party committees everywhere promoted experimental communes, encouraging sample "enlarged co-operatives" to develop their own ideas. By the end of August it was reported that all the peasants in Honan and Liaoning provinces had joined the communes, and that on a national scale thirty per cent of all China's peasants had joined.

Then, and then only, did the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issue its first official resolution on the communes, adopted at Peitaiho on August 29, 1958.

This resolution, the first official statement of nation-wide policy, was a modest document of six pages, somewhat more conservative than the Sputnik constitution. It stated that "people's communes...



Bringing fertilizer to the cotton field. "Garden-farming" in Hopei Province

Cultivating close-planted rice with special tools, Kwangtung Province





Chairman Mao visits cotton field in Honan Province



Close-planted wheat,  
Szechuan Province

have made their appearance," that "it is highly probable that there will soon be an upsurge," and that, because of the "unprecedented advance . . . in farming . . . and the demands of rural industry for manpower . . . this new form has become the proper form to accelerate socialist construction . . . and carry out the gradual transition to communism." The township is recommended as the normal size, but larger or smaller communes may appear through local conditions. Mergers of local co-operatives should depend on local decision and this "should not be hastened." No changes of ownership should be pushed "beyond the desires of the owners."

All large, merged co-operatives should now be called "people's communes." They should embrace not only farming but also industry, trade, education and military affairs at the lowest level. They should seek to introduce a wage system instead of the earlier indefinite payment by shares of harvest. Payments were still "on the basis of work done" and not "according to needs." But in future the communes are the best form "for transition to communism" and will develop into "basic units" of the future communist society.

No mention was made in this short restrained resolution of anything like "free food." The Sputnik constitution had mentioned "grain supply" as a future possibility: the Communist Party's resolution did not go so far. But within a month the communes, organizing across all China, were to raise the banner of "free food" in a happy assertion that, to China's peasants, even wages were less important than the great dream that nobody in the area should be hungry, that famine of centuries was conquered at last.

\* \* \*

As one traces the history of the rise of the people's communes, one is struck by the constant presence of communist leadership and yet by how little it takes the form of "orders from Peking." Communist leadership exists from the township to the nation's center. The local Communists seek to organize the local people for the satisfaction of their demands for a better life. When they lead badly, as they did in 1957 in Changshih through apathy and in Honan

Province through choice of a mistaken line, they are brought up short by actual failure, shown by small harvests and a poorer life. Mistakes of this kind provoke their own correction and may even introduce a new advance.

Meantime the Central Committee publicizes the successes in the press, studies the failures, and analyzes in what ways and forms the people's demands may best be achieved. A popular drive is encouraged; this goes as far and as fast as the people will take it, and gives birth to hundreds of new ideas and forms that at first are not restrained by criticism from above. "The first requisite of a people's movement is that it shall move," said a Peking Communist to me, "and premature comment might halt it." After a few weeks it is clear that the people have chosen a direction but that many details are disputed or tend to excess. Now is the time for analysis, criticism, the crystallizing of a form. Then the Central Committee speaks, fixing the new line in a formal resolution. It is significant that the line thus fixed does not go as far as the most advanced examples; it goes as far as the Central Committee judges the great mass of the people are ready to go. But it also indicates a future trend further than the most advanced have gone.

This technique of leadership, deriving policy from the demands and actions of the people, analyzing them and giving a clear form and returning this to the people to encourage a greater drive, is what is called the "mass line." The Party Resolution on Communes of August 29, was passed after thirty per cent of the peasants had joined communes. It predicted "an upsurge" and the upsurge quickly came. By September's end ninety per cent of the peasants were in communes and many of them, excited by their bumper crop, were going far beyond the Party resolution and declaring "free food." Many of them were competing somewhat to excess in the number of free items they offered.

Through October and November they advanced in a dozen directions with a force of explosion, creating new industries, mines, forestry, fisheries, dining-rooms, schools, housing, according to local demand. Not until ninety-nine per cent of the peasants were in

communes, and two months' experience again began to show what methods were succeeding and which bore seeds of failure, would the Central Committee intervene again.

\* \* \*

#### SLEEPING ON THE HILL

*With iron pick for pillow  
And feet against a rock,  
With earth beneath for mattress  
And sky my bedding quilt,  
The north wind woke me,  
But I turned over and said:  
"Blow there!  
Blow the moon down!  
You won't blow me off the bill  
Till our dam is done."*

(Shantung)

### 3. AUTUMN UPSURGE

The upsurge predicted by the August resolution came in September. The month began with thirty per cent of China's peasants in communes: 8,634 communes with thirty-seven million households. Honan and Liaoning provinces led; almost all their peasants were in communes. By September 10 five more provinces reported their rural areas entirely thus organized: Hopei, Shansi, Chinghai, Kwangsi and Heilungkiang, from farthest north to farthest southwest and west.

On September 23 the Ministry of Agriculture released incredible figures. The grain crop — this includes potatoes and sweet potatoes on a ratio of four pounds to one pound of grain — was estimated at 350,000,000 tons, a ninety per cent increase over 1957. No such increase had been seen in history. The figure was to be revised upward two months later after the late rice crop brought the grain to more than double the previous year. But the September estimates were startling enough.\*

Reasons for the gain were found especially in the increased irrigation. Since the previous National Day, October 1, 1957, new irrigation had brought water for eighty million acres, more than twice the increase during the five years of the First Five-Year Plan. China now watered 166,000,000 acres, one-third the world's total of irrigated farmland. Soil erosion had been checked on over 320,000 square kilometers, more than had been done in the previous eight years. Over sixty million acres had been planted to trees, half again as much as in the previous eight years.

The organized effort of the peasants, the ministry deduced, had accomplished far more than centralized direction by the state. These results "exploded the theory" that agriculture could advance only

\* They were over-enthusiastic estimates, later officially scaled down. See p. 105, par. 4.

by mechanization. For this advance was made "without many tractors or much chemical fertilizer, by peasant initiative, by water conservation, farmyard fertilizer, deep plowing, soil improvement, close planting, selected seed, pest and disease control, much cultivation and improved tools." . . . "The triumphal results have forced industry to run forward to catch up with agriculture," claimed the ministry, noting that the new drive for a doubled steel production was partly to meet the new peasant demand for tools.

"A revolution in agricultural science" was given as the third result. "The peasants have asked the agronomists how much grain a *mu* of land can be made to yield. But their own results on experimental fields are now far beyond what the scientists said were possible."

"This swiftly-rising farm production is causing the rise of people's communes," concluded the report. "China is now in an epoch when, in the words of Marx, 'twenty years are concentrated in a day.' The aim is to change the face of China in three years' hard battles. The peasants are achieving miracles."

Reports from the new communes began to appear in September. Honan, with all of its peasants now organized in 1,378 communes, reported that 262,000 public restaurants and 341,000 creches and kindergartens had been organized and these had "freed seven million women from household tasks." The increase of labor power thus available and its better organization had made it possible for Honan to set up 380,000 workshops, mines and factories under the communes, 53 per cent of these having been established since June. Seventy per cent of Honan's communes were providing their members and the members' families with a free supply of staple food, and competition had developed in the number of free services offered, which often included clothing, housing, education, medical care, maternity care, costs of weddings and funerals, and even haircuts, theater tickets and fuel. These reports were highly stimulating to the rest of China, though later it was felt that Honan had gone too far in some ways.

Kansu, that arid, sparsely-settled province of the northwest, was the tenth province to announce that all of its peasants were in communes. "Except for the pastoral areas" was the qualification made.

Kansu also had had "a massive water-conservation campaign" at the year's beginning, which had brought rice cultivation to three million acres (1.2 million hectares) "of dry hills that had been drought-stricken for centuries." This, with other measures, had given Kansu a crop of ten million metric tons of staple grains, two and a half times the crop of the previous year. Wushan County of Kansu announced that through "better organization of labor," it had been possible to send one hundred thousand people to work on soil and water conservation, and they had thus completed the control of erosion on 144,000 square kilometers. Kansu proudly announced that in yield the province had already reached "the twelve-year agricultural target" ten years ahead of schedule, and that for 1959 the goal was to become an area of "thousand-catty counties," counties averaging 110 bushels per acre in grain.

On September 30, in an announcement made for National Day, it was stated that 90.4 per cent of all peasant families in China had now joined people's communes: there were 23,394 communes, averaging 4,797 families each. The movement "went much faster and more smoothly" than any previous drive of the co-operative advance. Everywhere it was being celebrated with drums, cymbals, fire-crackers, and by joyous gatherings, featured by locally-produced poems, songs, dances and operas.

Everywhere the reports showed also a sudden, many-sided advance in the rural areas. What was called "the military organization of labor" — stable working-squads going together to the fields — was estimated to have raised efficiency twenty to thirty per cent. Water conservation, road building and manure accumulation were going ahead at unprecedented rates. The communes had also brought rapid growth in industries, forestry, livestock, fisheries and other sidelines. Primary and middle schools, libraries, and the organized exchange of knowledge known as "Red and Expert\* Universities" were also booming, as were drama groups, cinemas and hospitals.

Details of the famous Sputnik Commune's achievements were published in October. Organized in April as an enlarged co-

\* "Red and Expert," a popular term in China, means revolutionary political thinking and scientific knowledge or skill combined in the same person.

operative, though its constitution as a commune was adopted only in August, it had now a history of a full half year. The management, elected by the congress of the commune, consisted of fifty-five members. Under it came seven departments: agriculture and water conservation; industry and communications; forestry and animal husbandry; finance and trade; education and health; labor and welfare; internal affairs. There was also a planning commission and an inspection commission.

The labor force was organized in twenty-seven "production corps or contingents" (there is no exact English equivalent), and these contained eighty-seven "production brigades or teams." The larger group, or corps, pooled the draft-power and implements and kept the accounts for a cluster of villages: the "team" or smaller group, usually contained the labor force from a single village, from eighty to one hundred and fifty workers. Public canteens, nurseries and kindergartens were organized by the hundreds, convenient to every village and home. The "Happy Courts" for the aged who had no relatives, and the "Red and Expert Universities" for self-education, were organized under the larger unit, the production corps.

In agriculture, the Sputnik reported that the autumn grain harvest averaged fifteen metric tons per hectare (220 bushels per acre). This was partly due to "more than fifty water-control projects" built since April which ensured water for eighty per cent of all arable land. A thousand acres of low-lying land, formerly of little use, had been drained and converted to rice-paddy, with excellent crop. The superiority of the commune form was shown by the fact that in early spring two of the smaller co-operatives had tried to build a joint reservoir but had been unable to agree on division of funds and labor. Each therefore built its own smaller reservoir but had been unable to finish in time to save its fields from a dry spell. When the commune was organized, it had quickly completed these two reservoirs as well as many others.

Industry also had prospered. Formerly the only industry in the area had been a small carpentry co-operative and two blacksmiths' forges. In six months the commune had set up 1,142 workshops and factories in which 10,000 people worked. The largest was an

iron-mine with three thousand workers in shifts. Other shops turned out clothing, paper, edible oils, pottery, porcelain, iron tools, fire brick, cement and fertilizer. The commune had plans for seven hundred more shops by the end of the year; industrial output was expected to surpass agricultural output in value in 1959.

The commune had taken over the former township administration, as well as the branch banks, shops, grain offices of the national government. These changes were reflected in the local market. Former peak seasons came twice yearly, at crop accountings, but since the commune began in September to pay monthly wages, the market showed a monthly peak. Fewer small tools were bought; the commune itself had made 14,154 small farm tools for its own use. Large purchases had, however, been made of horse-carts, water-wheels, double-share ploughs and big cooking utensils for public canteens. Cash purchases had greatly decreased, being replaced by check purchases, since most commune members as well as the commune itself had bank accounts. With the realization of the autumn crop, the commune had placed orders for three hundred more horse-carts, twelve lorries, sixty tractors, one hundred gas engines and two hundred and twelve horse-drawn harvesters. Such were the six months' successes reported by Sputnik Commune.

Similar successes were reported from other pioneer communes, now in existence for six months or more. Changshih Commune in Kwangtung and May the First Fishing Commune have already been noted; in both of them the 1958 income ran five times that of 1957.

From Liaoning Province in Manchuria reports came from the eight communes of Kangping County, which also claimed to be "among the earliest in China." Formed in April 1958 by the merging of thirty-five agricultural co-operatives, they averaged 5,500 households each. Their county suffers from drought and water-logging; part of it, on the west of the Liao River, had always been menaced by shifting sands from the north. Their yield was always low.

The release of 26,000 women for farm work, through the canteens and creches, and the better general organization of labor, made it possible in summer of 1958 to spare 100,000 people for watering

the fields in a bad spell of drought. Threatened fields were watered from one to three times, hoed several times, and sub-fed with manure several times, a practice never used before. Kangping County's grain crop came to 1,400 catties per capita, twice that of the previous year. Water reserves for the future also made headway, six reservoirs having been built between June and September and a hundred deep wells begun. These projects, when finished, would store all excess water, eliminate water-logging and ensure against any ordinary drought.

Industry also was booming. The county, which formerly had little industry, was already dotted with 1,900 small factories, mines and workshops, including thirteen coal-mines, many cement plants, tile and brick kilns, some iron-smelting, many fertilizer factories. Industrial output was expected to be more than six times that of 1957. One commune had sent out a team of one hundred and fifty people to survey all the township resources with intent to bring them into full use. Others would follow suit.\*

As these earlier communes announced successes, new areas, in which even the small farm co-operatives had not been well developed, now followed the trend towards communes. From pastoral regions of Inner Mongolia news came in November that half of the herdsmen had joined people's communes and set up creameries, and workshops for tanning hides and dressing furs, as well as iron and carpentry shops. Herdsmen's co-operatives had been first formed in 1952; they had shown an annual increase in herds at least twice that of the individual herdsman. More than a million head of their sheep were now "of improved strain." Because of better stock, better winter protection and better methods, 84 per cent of the

\* After 1960, commune industries were more closely oriented to service to agricultural production (making and repair of farm tools, primary processing, fertilizers, etc.). They were also required not to divert more than a small set percentage of rural manpower from actual farm work. On this basis they continued to develop and came to provide a major portion of the funds of the communes, leaving the earnings from farming almost wholly in the hands of the lower units (teams and brigades), which in turn divided most of them among the members with smaller amounts set aside for collective re-investment. See section on "Brigades and Teams" on p. 192 of this book.



mares and ewes had in 1958 produced offspring, an unheard-of figure. Convinced by such facts, individual herdsmen were now flocking directly to the new communes.

From the high pastoral areas of Chinghai Province, next to Tibet, news came of other grazing communes. Here also spectacular records in breeding were publicized. One shepherd in Yushan Commune reported that of 429 ewes he tended, 91 per cent had lambed and 140 ewes had lambed twice, giving a propagation rate of 116 per cent. Since even a rate of 100 per cent had always been deemed impossible, this shepherd had become famous, and his methods were studied by all the others. Stable settlements were appearing among the Chinghai nomads, based on creameries, soap factories, tanneries, wool textile mills and supplied through the commune with public dining-rooms, nurseries, kindergartens and schools. In Hoka area where only twelve children attended the primary school in 1957, now all the 275 children of school age went to school. The same area had only twenty-five adults learning to read and write in 1957, but now there were 600 adults enrolled in twenty-eight classes for illiterates. The nomads were settling down.

A "timber commune" appeared in the far north in Kirin Province. Six farming townships with forty thousand peasants and a vast forest area with twelve thousand lumberjacks combined. The area has valuable minerals, fur-bearing animals and medicinal herbs. The Ministry of Forestry had wished to develop its resources but had lacked labor power, and had even had to import all commodities needed for the lumber workers. By merging with the township farms, all labor would be used for farming in the busy season and would fell timber in winter. The entire area would quickly be self-sufficient in food and many commodities. It planned for self-sufficiency in iron and steel in 1959 and in all locally-needed machinery by 1960.

Even more significant was the combination formed of timber workers and peasants in Fukien Province, the coastal province still under fire from Chiang Kai-shek's troops on Quemoy. The province is mountainous with much valuable timber: it had in the past few roads. As a result of the new form of joint organization, an army

of one hundred thousand peasants and lumberjacks got out in a few months three million cubic meters of timber, doubling the previous year's output. Replanting of trees was adopted at the same time as felling. Some 70,000 hectares (175,000 acres) were thus reforested and 270,000 hectares (675,000 acres) closed as forest reserve, both these figures being greater than the totals for the past eight years combined. The peasants and timber workers were now planning the entire area, part for crops and part for forests according to soil.

From many parts of China came news of reclamation plans based on the new strength. The plans of Anhwei peasants to criss-cross their entire area with canals, bringing irrigation, drainage and water transport to every county, which were noted the previous winter, now began to be discussed for other parts of the North China Plain. Other spectacular reclamation work appeared. I here note that of two provinces, Kansu and Shansi.

Kansu, which was already bringing the Tao River waters over the mountains to irrigate two and a half million acres, introduced another project, the reclamation of "Big Barren Mountain," an arid region of 1,575 square kilometers in central Kansu, ruined by centuries of over-grazing and tree-cutting. The farm co-operatives had halted the loss of soil and water in 1953, but had not been strong enough to undertake positive reclamation. The area was potentially rich with good soil but lacking in water. In autumn of 1958, the provincial Party committee drew up a plan, and four adjacent counties combined to handle the work. They sent 37,000 workers to the area, terraced 56,800 acres of sloping lands, built ponds and check-dams on 7,400 acres, planted trees on 3,700, and deep-plowed 4,000 acres of arable land. They announced that they had "preliminary control of soil and water, guaranteed against a hundred days of drought."

Achievements in Shansi were to set a new precedent. This mountain province southwest of Peking, on the middle reaches of the Yellow River, was one of China's worst erosion areas; its soft loess soil ran down ravines in an annual loss of three hundred million tons. Its loess highlands rise nine thousand feet above sea level; winters are long and cold. Half of its former eleven

million "arable acres" were classed as "sloping." In the past, these areas being sparsely settled, the peasants tried to make up for low yield by extensive cultivation, for which they lacked adequate labor power, tools and manure. Long years of such practice had reduced grain yield to a provincial average of eleven bushels per acre, and lower than that in bad areas or bad years.

Harvests increased after liberation, but this went slowly; the extended areas and poor tools left little surplus strength for soil improvement. From these efforts, however, the provincial Party committee finally unearthed an important fact. Some farming co-operatives in the Luliang Mountains, a bad area east of the Yellow River that had averaged only eight bushels per acre, were increasing yield year by year. They had stopped tilling the worst lands and concentrated labor on the better lands. They got not only higher yield on these lands but a higher total crop. Results were published; all over the province the peasants discussed it and made visits to the Luliang co-operatives. In 1958 the province adopted what they called the "basic farmland plan," the cutting of acreage to increase the total crop.

In 1958 Shansi planted to grain only 6,125,000 acres, just 65 per cent of the previous year. Its peasants ploughed this land to a depth of thirteen to forty inches. They manured it deeply, with an average of fifty tons per acre. They levelled it as much as possible and built irrigation works to water it. They "garden-farmed it." The land taken out of cultivation was planted to trees or fodder grass.

Results in crops were striking. The wheat yield for spring and winter wheat combined averaged fifty bushels per acre, four times the 1957 figure. The total crop was ten million tons, which was 130 per cent higher than the best previous crop, that of 1956 on a much larger acreage. Records of individual counties were even more remarkable. Shihlou County in those Luliang Mountains where previous crops had been eight bushels per acre and where long erosion had made fifteen hundred ravines, cut its sowing area drastically, tilling only 20,000 acres of the best, most level land — just thirty per cent of the previous area — and got by intensive cultiva-

tion 110 bushels per acre, with a total crop six times any they had ever had before.

In late August the province formed people's communes everywhere, because "they wanted a wider, more flexible organization for bigger jobs." During the year they recorded the terracing of nearly four million acres, and the planting to trees of twenty-three million acres, most of this being done in the last four months of the year. Shansi Province announced that within one year erosion had been cut by one-third, saving to the province a hundred million tons of good loess soil annually. As winter approached, Shansi announced that acreage would again be reduced and even more intensively cultivated. Shansi would be "garden-farmed."

Visitors to the Taihang Mountains in Shansi already noted a new type of landscape. Instead of the barren hills there are wide, level valleys, criss-crossed by irrigation ditches, deep-plowed and neat as gardens, from which rise grassy slopes to groves of saplings on the hills. Fish are for the first time bred in the province, in reservoirs built for irrigation. Seven thousand new irrigation projects were planned for the winter of 1958-59 and all of these also would be used to add to the local fish supply. Other subsidiary jobs appeared for winter. Shansi hills have excellent coal; the communes opened mines and began to make coke and tar products as well as iron and steel.

The "basic farmland system" of cutting acreage to increase total crop was tried in 1958 in several provinces, but nowhere so widely as in Shansi. Its success led to its adoption as a nation-wide plan in the Communist Party's December resolution.\*

The livelihood of the people changed swiftly as a result of these changes in crop. In late November the harvest of late rice in southern provinces, much of which was cultivated and reaped after

\* In the years of natural calamities that followed, the cutting of acreage was of course out of the question. But work on the positive side, the improvement of the land, continued steadily with irrigation and drainage turning large tracts into "guaranteed crop areas" which would produce harvests regardless of any excess or lack of rainfall. The fine 1963 harvest in Kwangtung Province, achieved despite a serious drought, was a signal success of this policy. (See p. 170 of this book.)

the communes were formed, came in at well above twice that of the previous year and raised the crop estimates of the entire country to 375,000,000 tons of broad grains,\* more than double that of 1957. Canton announced that the per-capita grain production of Kwangtung Province was 1,870 pounds, almost a ton. On this basis, all commune members and their families would get three daily meals without payment, with steamed rice at every meal as well as other dishes, no limit being placed on the amount.

Meetings and celebrations were held to greet this announcement, with songs, dances and "operas," and speeches contrasting the "old society" with the new. Yang, leader of a production team in Chien-chin County, told how in the old society his father had died of hunger, and his mother had sold his sisters for food. Now hunger was conquered in Kwangtung, that province from which so many hundreds of thousands of Chinese in the past migrated overseas to live. This result had been expected, for Kwangtung is a strong province. But when Kweichow Province, that hilly southern area known as one of China's poorest, also announced a grain crop of 1,470 catties per capita, with free meals served by its 1,806 people's communes to all the three million-odd households in the province, then people all over China cheered.

Let us see how the communes came even to the primitive people, like the Lisus, a minor nationality in western Yunnan. For ages unknown they have lived in trackless mountains on the upper rapids of the Salween, locally called the Nu. Their primitive life had not even reached the stage of slavery, much less feudalism or capitalism. They grew maize by the slash-and-burn method, without metal tools. They neither fertilized nor cultivated and the yield was very small. So winter brought empty bins and the people fed on grass roots and tree bark. Sometimes a child was sold for grain; sometimes corpses were found in spring in the melting snow, of men who tried to carry packs over the passes for small pay and couldn't make it. The life of primitive man was neither comfortable nor secure. Thus they had lived for ages.

\* See footnote on p. 28.

Liberation brought roads, national equality, some welfare funds and some tools. Grain crops had doubled by 1955 but were still not enough. By this time the Lisus had an autonomous district and a few Lisu organizers. These took the situation in hand. In winter of 1957-58 the Lisus dug hundreds of irrigation ditches and opened 13,200 acres of rice-paddy, piling on manure. When a bumper crop gave them three quarters of a ton per capita, the Lisus were in happy trouble. No Lisu had ever built a barn. They filled tubs and baskets; the people crowded together and filled the vacated houses with grain. Finally they just had to build new buildings for grain, and discovered the problem of plenty.

Next came the problem how to eat the stuff. Lisus had never cooked rice: they were used to ground maize, parched in a cauldron on a bonfire. So Han cooks were sent into the area to teach the cooking of rice and the making of bean-curd. But next came trouble with the maize. It had always been ground in wooden mortars, but what with the bumper crop and the public kitchens, the mortars wore out. So carpenters and masons came to the hills and taught the Lisus how to make water-wheels for grinding corn, in a technique practised in China for thousands of years, which Lisus had never known.

Lisus now have communes with all the fixings, including public canteens and free food. The canteens serve both rice and cornbread, with one soup and one vegetable dish at every meal and meat once a fortnight. In most of China this is now considered a low standard. But the Lisus think they have jumped right over slavery and feudalism and capitalism into socialism, skipping everything between. Their current song runs:

*Everyone eats full without pay,  
Our ancestors never heard of it!  
Is it a dream?  
No, it's a fact!  
Where?  
Right here!  
The east is red!  
Hail to Mao Tse-tung!*

Such was the great variety of people swept into the people's communes, in the upsurge of late 1958.

\* \* \*

*In Peking a flower bloomed  
And to the vale of Da Liang Shan  
Came fragrance.  
In Peking a red flag rose  
And the glow carried  
All over Da Liang Shan.*

(New folk song of Yi people)

#### 4. SOME PERSONAL VISITS

Nobody in the West believed the story of the people's communes at first. Nor can I blame them; I myself sat in Peking and could not believe. I travelled to Chengchow in Honan and nodded politely when the provincial Party secretary told me that all peasants in the province were now in communes. Privately I thought it a tall tale; doubtless he had them all listed, but down at the grass roots they could not organize so fast. I visited some communes and was duly impressed by them, but doubted still if they were as widespread as claimed. Only when my friend, the New Zealand poet and educator Rewi Alley came back from long trips in the back country, telling how every distant mountain village and coastal fishing settlement had joined the communes, did I at last believe.

The first commune I visited was a cotton-growing one in Honan. Somewhat more than an hour by car from Chengchow we turned from the highway to a dirt road under a decorated arch which proclaimed that we were entering the lands of the Kushing People's Commune. It was another hour's drive through cotton fields, sweet potatoes, Chinese cabbage, and past several small villages before we reached the commune office in a former township center.

Li Chun-yi, manager of the commune, was a native of the area, now aged thirty-one, wiry and efficient-looking in his blue cotton suit. He had been left fatherless at the age of ten and had become the support of a mother and younger brother. Working the family's small bit of land, he borrowed a neighbor's draft-animal and paid for it by also working on the neighbor's land. Only after liberation did he "join the revolution"; he became a Party member, rose to be township organizer and later to handle grain and finance for the township. Somewhere along this hard road Li had managed to get five years of school. The commune congress had elected him

manager because of his local past, his schooling, his proved energy, his knowledge of organization and accounts.

Kushing Commune, Li told us, was set up on August 17, 1958, by a merger of twenty-seven farming co-operatives. It included four townships, 123 villages, 11,000 households with 55,000 people of whom 20,642 classed as able-bodied workers. The land ran twelve miles north to south and nine miles east to west, mostly flat but becoming mountainous towards the west. Some 25,000 acres were arable: they were fertile but suffered from drought. Water storage was thus a main problem. Cotton had been promoted after liberation and was now the main cash crop. They also grew sweet potatoes, wheat and vegetables for their own food.

Productivity rose steadily after liberation, said Li. Before liberation cotton yield was around 623 pounds of unginned cotton per acre; in 1951 the mutual-aid teams got 770 pounds; in recent years they reached 1,150 pounds but with ups and downs from flood or drought. This year, the first in which they stored water, they were getting 3,000 pounds per acre. Much higher yields were reached on the "bumper-crop field" of 43 acres, which this year would yield from 11,000 to 15,000 pounds per acre: and highest of all was the small "experimental plot" less than a quarter acre in size, which produced at the rate this year of 43,000 pounds, or twenty-three tons per acre!

Figures like these had all China excited. Farm competed with farm, and province with province, getting incredible yields by labor so intensive that nobody but a scientist or an awakened Chinese peasant would think it worthwhile. They dug land to a depth as high as five feet, and fertilized it deep down in layers, using as much as five hundred tons of manure and compost per acre. They watered, cultivated, and sub-fed with liquid manure at intervals, discussing details with other farms and comparing results. They claimed that many experimental plots already "surpassed world records." Of course the labor involved was far more than the immediate crop was worth. But the Chinese peasants, only lately literate, had fallen in love with "science," and pursued this science

with passion, setting standards and working out new methods on "experimental fields."

Kushing Commune's biggest achievement of the year was its water storage. Like most of Honan Province, they had spent the previous winter building reservoirs and digging wells. Almost every depression I passed seemed to have been turned into a pond, some of which were now drying up into shallow pools from the sun and also from the frequent dipping pails. Of their 25,000 acres they now watered 20,500, though only 4,300 of this was by direct gravity into the fields. The rest was lifted from "2,332 plain wells and 217 electric wells," the latter being wells pumped by electric power. From the "plain wells," water still had to be drawn by manpower or bullocks and carried to the fields. Next year's task would therefore be electrification, and especially electricity for pumps.

"Already we store enough water on our land so that if no rain comes we can still water and grow," said Li proudly. It was a signal achievement for a province in which for thousands of years, survival had year by year depended on the will of heaven, and where the proverb ran: "Ten seasons, nine calamities." Even two years ago, said Li, they had not fully fed themselves from their land in a dry spell, but now they could count on feeding themselves from half their land, using the rest for cash crops.

The commune's income for the year was 17,000,000 yuan, about \$7,000,000, of which 580,000 yuan went to the state as tax. It left a gross income of \$600 per family but the income would not be divided that way. The final plan was still under discussion—the commune congress would determine it—but some things were clear. Everyone agreed that they must at once extend electricity to their entire area—it now reached half the area. All hand pumps must be replaced by electric pumps, so that fields could be easily watered. A motion-picture projector was already bought—it arrived during our visit—and phones had been installed at least one per village so that every village could be reached quickly from the central office.

Tractors also were on the list. Thus far they had only two tractors and one truck, not for want of money but because there was

a long waiting list for all machines. Now, however, many places in China made tractors, and Loyang Tractor Center had agreed to sell them eighty tractors, thirty trucks and one jeep during the coming year. All these things were considered by the members more important than any immediate wage.

"We go on a wage system this month," said Li, "but its details are still under discussion. There will be different wage levels according to kind and amount of work. We shall also provide free food, free medical care, free nurseries, kindergartens and 'Happy Courts' for those aged and disabled who have no relatives to care for them. There is free schooling in primary and middle schools and in an agricultural college which we are setting up right here on our land. For good students who need to go elsewhere to study we shall provide some scholarships."

Statistics are dull, and I shall not list them in every commune. Even in this single commune a full inventory of carts, plows and other properties would cover many pages. It is, however, worth noting that the commune had acquired or developed a large number of small industries, including 15 cotton gins, an oil press for making cotton-seed oil, 15 shops for making cotton padding for winter clothes and quilts, 45 flour mills, 30 carpentry shops, 15 iron working shops, 28 potteries making tile and brick and pipe, 85 shoe-making shops, 36 tailoring shops, 35 hand laundries, 6 places making chemical fertilizer and 82 making bacteriological fertilizer, one machine repair-shop and one bakery to make bread from sweet potatoes. This bread came in for lunch, warm and fluffy, but not as good to the taste as wheaten bread. Here, as in other communes, I found that sweet potatoes, the "poor man's crop" for centuries, would be lessened in the coming year and more land given to wheat.

For social amenities there were 254 public dining places, 216 nurseries, 93 kindergartens, 60 primary schools and nine secondary schools, 21 maternity homes and 20 "Happy Courts" for the aged. There was a "Red and Expert University," a kind of do-it-yourself college where people exchanged knowledge on the principle "the able teaches and the unable is apprentice." Subjects taught included

"law, finance, engineering," probably on a simplified scale . . . for local needs.

The large number of these workshops and "factories" suggests that they were not large in size. Most of them in fact were very small, confined often to a single room or to an open or half-open shed in a back-yard. In these crude premises, on home-made tables and benches and even on the ground, young folks were developing soil bacteria in test-tubes according to instructions sent by the county or provincial agricultural authorities, and local handicraftsmen were doing carpentry or iron work or hammering out ball-bearings. It was the inclusion of all types of handicraft in the commune that marked its initial difference from the farming co-operatives, and gave the members a sense of a rounded strength.

What most intrigued me in the workshops was that they actually made ball-bearings by hand and had put ball-bearings during the summer on all their 1,169 mule-carts as well as all wheel-barrows and water-wheels.

"Everything that turns," said Li.

One thinks of ball-bearings as made in enormous plants with a million dollar investment. I recall how proud Moscow was when its great Ball-Bearing Works went up in the Five-Year Plan. China today buys ball-bearings from Europe, contracting for the output of entire plants, but these cannot begin to supply her needs. There must be countless millions of carts, wheel-barrows and water-wheels in China, each needing many sets of bearings. They are not standardized and even if enough factory-made bearings could be bought, they would not all fit. So in summer of 1958 when the bumper crop clearly could not be handled without quickly improved transport, the drive came to put China on ball-bearings in three months. . . . It was accomplished in that time in almost half of China.

In Peking I had seen exhibitions of these home-made ball-bearings in all kinds of material: steel, iron, glass, porcelain. Szechuan even made ball-bearings of bamboo for the casings and round acorns for the balls, and these were said to hold a weight of half to three-quarters of a ton. Very round acorns are a peculiarity of Szechuan oaks.

All those I had seen in Peking. Now in Kushing Commune I saw them making the bearings in a couple of sheds in a back yard. From somewhere they got thin iron rods and cut these into small cubes, about a quarter inch in size. Each cube was put in a mould and hammered by hand until it was roughly round. It went through several processes of smoothing and polishing. Then a pan of these small balls was heated to white heat and suddenly dunked into water to give a hard surface. The cases were also hand-made, and fitted to the carts. By this tedious process Kushing Commune had put all its carts and barrows and water-wheels on ball-bearings, and thus more than doubled the load they would handle.

A very proud group of girls took me to the cotton experimental plot which, Li said, produced at the rate of 23 tons of unginned cotton per acre. I cannot testify to the tons, but I can bear witness that, unlike the usual cotton plant two or three feet high, these plants grew six feet high, so close together that I could not force my way through them, and they bore bolls all the way up the stalk, sometimes more than a hundred to a plant. There was certainly far more cotton to the square yard than I ever saw in a cotton field. This, said the girls, was due to the deep plowing and deep fertilizing, which enabled the roots to go down very deep, and to the ceaseless cultivation and manuring during growth.

We trudged down a dusty road to the nearest "Happy Court." There was one of these in every large village or cluster of small villages, since the old people would wish to be near their old friends. The building was one of the better structures in the village, bright, clean but still crude and backward from a Western view. Twelve women shared three fairly large rooms, but the outer door to the middle room seemed to give the only ventilation, for while all rooms had large windows, these had been nailed shut. However, tastes differ and nails can be pulled out when the women wish, which they surely will in summer. They were proud of having their own house and they poured out of it to drag me in and show me through the rooms. Most of them had no living relatives and had been living in the homes of other villagers with some help from the farming co-operatives. This house was not "poor relief"



Food-processing factory, Kwangfu Commune, Kiangsu Province



Making bacteriological  
fertilizer, Hopei Province

Opera group sings during noon break,  
Sputnik Commune, Honan Province



but their right as commune members, their own place where they were hostesses. This gave them a happy dignity. They said it was much better than before the commune: "better beds, better food and more company."

One of the women had a grandson who was an officer in the People's Liberation Army. She had held a grudge against the government for taking him and against the grandson as "unfilial" for leaving her, for even though he sent her money, she felt he owed her personal care. Now that the new society gave her a place like this with other women of her own age, she declared herself reconciled to her grandson's career. After all, the "new society" had to be defended, and her grandson had taken that honorable job. Her sense of feeling bereft, in a broken home, had changed to a proud feeling of being part of a big home, for which her grandson fought.

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This visit to Kushing Commune made it clear that even a rather small commune could not be properly seen in a day or even in several days. Each commune included all the complex life of a township or of several townships. It would take a day at least to study the finances, which include budget, wages, free distribution, relations to state bank, state grain purchase and local market. It would take days to cover the industries even superficially, and days more for the field work, and other days for schools, nurseries, and the changes in family life. Beyond this came questions of the new combination of township government with the production organization. How were they related to the county? Who built the roads? Who ran the jails? It meant studying the entire structure of a new society.

I had neither time for such complete study, nor did I think the period for it had come, since the communes were still in process of consolidation, and many forms were fluid. I decided in future visits to specialize on seeing in each commune one or two new things. My future descriptions will therefore be briefer and concentrated on new details.



Paimao Commune, two hours by car from Shanghai, was visited by a small group of Americans in late October. It had been formed on September 15 by a merger of fourteen farming co-operatives and one fishing co-operative: it had therefore existed for only five weeks. The special struggle that made these peasants feel the need of wider organization was the fight against schistosomiasis, also known as blood fluke, a wasting and finally fatal disease, which has been for centuries a scourge of many rice-producing areas, since the parasite lives in an intermediate host, the small water snails of rice fields. Eighty per cent of the people in Paimao had suffered from blood fluke until recently but within the last years the disease had been brought under control, partly by medical treatment and partly by eliminating water snails, which had to be buried under nine feet of earth to destroy them.

This commune of some 21,500 people of a very miserable past, was not content to plan for just an ordinary present. Its slogan ran: "Equal Shanghai in conveniences and the West Lake of Hangchow in beauty." This they proposed to do in just three years! Since the area had as yet no electricity, they had some distance to travel. But already a twelve by twelve foot table model of their future way of life stood in the room, with a large painting of it on the wall above. No more buildings were to be repaired. They would build new ones, and the old buildings could rot and be taken apart for fertilizer. The new "Town for Industry and Commerce" would be on high land by the river, and the river itself would be drained and straightened for transport into Shanghai. The residential areas would be three in number, in sites chosen for beauty some distance from the industrial town.

They expected to do all this without asking the government for any money or even for any credit. "We make our own bricks, we cut our own lumber, and all we need for building is some structural steel from Shanghai and even this we might be making ourselves within the year. . . ." They had worked it out — Chinese above all people love to calculate — that whereas formerly the people were all sick and the crops very small, now with the people mostly well and with better tools and much bigger yield, they could feed them-

selves on 19 per cent of the harvest, and put everything else into a "collective improvement fund." This fund already amounted to a sum nearly equivalent to \$3,000,000 in U.S. money, turned over by the co-operatives to the commune. The first \$600,000 would go for a modern irrigation system with electric pumps; the rest would go, step by step, towards the new town. . . .

Meantime they were going "high, wide and handsome" in their immediate plan for free commodities. Besides the normal free food, education and nurseries, their free list included: "free clothing, up to the limit of the cotton ration, all tailored to individual taste," free medical services, for which already they had 52 medical personnel, and a hospital of 32 beds now set up in a village but which would be moved to the new town. Free education was contemplated "up through the university"; free theater and cinema right in their midst; free haircuts and baths and barbers; free weddings, including needed photographs and wedding feast up to twenty guests; free funerals up to a cost of fifty yuan; free tooth-brushes, tooth-paste and cosmetics for "women between 16 and 45 years of age"; free laundry and mending.

The personal income was only to be this year some \$48 per capita, or about \$250 per family, but they thought this pretty good, considering that before liberation they got about \$20 per capita, and now they have all those lavish free things besides. "We could take much more income if we wished," they said loftily, "but we would rather use the money for a new town."

I personally judged, on the basis of other communes, that Paimao was a little "dizzy with success," and that their gaudy list of free commodities would be pared down when the provincial Party committee got around to see them, and gave appropriate warnings against voting too many free things too soon. However, it was a fine dream, and it was all their own, and they might go faster and further with the dream of a new town in three years than with a less giddy vision.

More interesting than even the commune itself was the new "steel base" to which the commune had sent some two hundred men. Being one of the 46 communes in a now much enlarged

county, they had been asked by the county to send workers to one of five designated places where "our county will be making steel." Their "steel-making field" was at the base of a mountain named Yushan, not far away and easily visited on the same trip with Paimao.

Here, on a large area of wasteland at the foot of a mountain containing ore, some 11,000 people had come between September 15 and October 15, camped and dug in, erected furnaces and begun making steel. They had built 1,100 furnaces, 800 of them small ones while 300 were relatively large, some five feet in diameter. They made coke and charcoal in pits dug in the earth. They camped in every kind of structure, often only a lean-to turned towards their furnace for warmth in the night. Among the 11,000 were not only the workers sent by the communes, but city volunteers, hospitals with nurses, and "music all over the place" from bands, orchestras and opera troupes. When the visitors from Shanghai appeared in autos, a band quickly formed to greet them with music. A good time was being had by all.

In five weeks they had not only built the furnaces but had begun turning out forty tons of steel per day which would reach 200 tons easily within ten more days. This was one of five approximately equal steel-making places chosen by the county, all of which had begun in mid-September, building furnaces from scratch. By the end of October the county expected to turn out a thousand tons per day. This was one of two thousand counties in China and all of them were doing it, some more and some less. At this stage, all labor was volunteer and nobody even asked who would pay for the coke or who would get the steel, or how much would go for farm implements and how much for rails.

They were making steel because it was patriotic, because China made steel before Europe existed and now China would "overtake Britain" again; because steel was needed for everything, for farm tools, rails and defense, and to industrialize their country; because they themselves thus became steel workers, no longer mere peasants; because the American Seventh Fleet rode flauntingly in sight of their coast and an American "Sidewinder" missile had just brought down

a Chinese plane far inland in the province to the south. . . . Making steel they felt themselves one with 650,000,000 people, all making steel and entering the modern world.

This was how China, in a single year, doubled steel production from 5.35 million tons to more than eleven million.\* At the height of the drive it was said that sixty million people made steel. Foreign experts stared in amazement, and said that if the cost of labor were counted, this steel cost a good deal more than gold. Chinese experts, from central and provincial governments, were busily studying the newly-found ore deposits, the new sites in relation to ore, coal, transport, labor, and deciding which localities should quickly be built into permanence by government loans and engineers and a steady purchase price for the steel, and which should be allowed to close down when the first snow sent the open-air campers home.

Steel would henceforth be made in every province and in most counties as a result of that autumn drive of 1958 — in giant plants, medium ones and small ones, according to conditions. The steel produced was doubtless very costly, as foreign experts said, if labor time was reckoned. But a nation-wide steel industry was built faster and at less cost than any similar industry was ever built. This was one of the first fruits of the new communes.

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Till mid-November I thought of communes as only one of the many new things that appeared in China in the year of the Big Leap. But on November 14, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles picked them out for a special attack in a speech in Seattle to the eighteen "Colombo nations." He declared that China, through the communes, was "imposing mass slavery on 650,000,000 people,"

\* The communique of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party dated August 26, 1959 noted that of the 11,080,000 tons of steel produced in 1958, 3,080,000 tons were made by indigenous methods and met requirements of rural areas. Eight million tons an increase of 49.5% over 1957 were produced by modern equipment and met the requirements of industry. For a retrospective view of the mass steel drive see my 1963 talk with Vice-Premier Po I-po quoted on p. 211.

that they "degraded the dignity of the human individual," destroyed the family, plowed up ancestral graves and made "a vast slave state." Since the Colombo powers included many of the states of South Asia, Mr. Dulles was clearly using the communes as a weapon to destroy the friendly admiration most Asians feel for China's remarkable advance.

The attack seemed to me so false and so injurious to international understanding that I felt I must at once gather more material on the communes. I wanted especially to know how much democracy and individual initiative existed in the communes and how the peasants themselves would react to Dulles' remarks. So I drove out from Peking two hours and drew up at the first place where signs of a commune appeared. Peasants gathered around and escorted us into a large, sunny room furnished with tables, chairs and three cots against the wall. It was the office.

A sixty-year-old man received us. He had lost most of his teeth and his thin, gnarled body bore other signs of long, hard years, but his shrewd, kindly intelligence became apparent as soon as he talked about the fields. His name was Shen To and the others introduced him with a rather formal flourish as their "Minister of Agriculture," a title which he accepted with a smile. The commune, he said, had decided to name its department heads "ministers," probably influenced by their nearness to Peking. Sometimes, in using the title, they would glance at us with a grin that said plainly: "Aren't we grand?" Shen To had been a poor peasant of this area. He learned to read and write after liberation and had been chairman of one of the small co-operatives that merged to form this commune.

A younger man with glasses proved to be teacher of literature from the People's University, who had come to help the commune as a volunteer. His name was Chou Kun. He slept on one of the office cots, for his home was still in the city and his salary still came from the university. He had been two weeks with the commune and did not know how long he would stay. He might decide to join permanently, in which case he would give up his city job and apartment and the commune would give him a room and ordinary

member's pay. I asked if he were free to decide. He replied: "Of course I decide for myself, but the commune also decides whether it wants me."

The commune's name was "Evergreen," or literally "Four Seasons Green," referring to the fact that it produced crops through the winter, growing tomatoes, cucumbers, beans and paprika in green-houses and frames. For their own food they grew wheat, sweet potatoes and vegetables. Their cash crop consisted of vegetables and fruit for the Peking market.

"Peking," they said, "contracts to buy all we can grow."

During our subsequent talk, miscellaneous members drifted in and out, curious to see the foreign visitor. There were men both young and old, girls with long black braids or with bobbed hair and an occasional older woman. Shen To gave most of the facts but others interjected comments. All were very free in talk.

Evergreen Commune, they said, was formed in August 1958 by eight co-operatives because the members, after investigation and discussion, decided they could irrigate and electrify their area more quickly and raise their standard of living by a larger combination. Their land ran twelve miles north to south by eight miles east to west, but not all of it belonged to the commune, since it was penetrated by various institutions of the city of Peking, chief of which was the People's University. The relation of the commune to the other institutions and residents was still to be worked out: the university gave a good deal of co-operation and since one of the commune's dreams was to give all members a university education, there was talk of some kind of joint membership . . . not yet very clear.

The commune had about 40,000 members, which included the old folks and children and some 13,000 able-bodied workers. They farmed 10,000 arable acres, of which one-third produced their own food — sweet potatoes, wheat, peanuts, fruit, vegetables — while the rest grew vegetables for Peking. When I asked the number of households Shen To replied that there were 8,823 households but that he had given me the number of individuals, because the com-

mune now listed people, not as households, but as individuals, since every worker now gets paid for his own work. Formerly all wages were paid to the head of the household, but this was no longer done.

It was clear at once that, contrary to Mr. Dulles' claim that the commune suppressed the individual, the commune was giving the individual for the first time his own wages and rights, whereas formerly he had been a dependant in a feudal family.

To my question how they came to organize the commune, Shen To replied: "The people demanded it." Everyone nodded. They said they had read in the papers about the communes in Honan and had sent delegates to see them. (I noted that they could read and write and travel, which for peasants was something new.) They discussed it in all the co-operatives and people wrote *tatsepao* about it. These are strips of paper several feet long and about a foot wide on which people write opinions, posting them in the streets and in halls. This posting of *tatsepao* continued until everyone put himself on record, not once but many times.

"The people wrote over 200,000 poems about the communes," said Shen To. To which Chou Kun added: "One of my tasks here is to classify these poems and bind them into books."

Chou brought out more than a dozen paper-bound scrap-books, each of which was a collection of short verses, all produced by members of the commune. All over China, I knew, people were writing verses, and tens of millions of such poems had been produced, which students were collecting and classifying. The verses from Evergreen did not reach the standard of some I have seen, but I like them because they were given to me personally, a few days after my visit, in a small booklet of one hundred selections published by the commune. Here are a few samples:

#### THE PARTY AND THE PEOPLE

*Melon and leaf are on one vine,  
Fruit and branch are from one root,  
Red flower, green leaf are from one tree,  
The people and the Party are of one heart.*

#### A VERSE BY A SMALL GIRL

*Sugar is sweet but honey sweeter,  
Cotton is warm but warmer fur.  
Mother and father have loving kindness,  
But Chairman Mao has more.*

The custom of commune brigades of planting a red flag in the field to indicate their place of work or some advance in position gives meaning to the following verses by a woman:

#### RED FLAG

*We lift our heads to the Red Flag flying,  
Strength fills us that soars through clouds,  
Not to be stopped by high hills or great seas,  
Six hundred million people with one heart!*

*How many martyrs gave away lives  
That the Red Flag should fly so high.  
Now it is waving just as they wished  
Over city and village and hill.*

There was much variety, as might be expected from 200,000 poems. I turned over pages of several of the scrap-books. Not all of them dealt directly with the commune. Those that did were apt to be rather prosaic, either exhorting:

*The People's Commune is now here,  
Let all with energy work,*

and continuing with a list of duties, or celebrating:

*The People's Commune is just grand,  
A blissful life is here,*

and then listing benefits such as the kindergartens for children, the "Happy Courts" for the aged.

Many of the verses were illustrated by amateur drawings and cartoons. My attention was quickly drawn to a cartoon showing the

heads of Dulles and Eisenhower, attached to two frogs who looked hungrily at a swan. It bore words of a defiant youth:

*Their gaping jaws are ambitious,  
The swan's flesh is delicious,  
But they will not get a bite,  
Their "Sidewinders" won't save them,  
In the end King Death shall have them.*

At this point a girl with two long black braids insisted on showing me her favorite. It was a description, too long to give in full, of how "the Great Dragon of the East soars through the skies" and seeks out Chang Ngo, the fabled "Lady of the Moon," to call her attention to "your old country," which is "not like the old days." The verse goes on:

*Now songs dance all around and a hundred flowers bloom together.  
Show her the rippling rice and the wheat still higher and the factory chimneys like forests,  
People taking wealth from mines, building great water-works,  
shouting down the Mountain God, chaining the Dragon King.  
She asks: "Who made this vast work of ten thousand years?"  
The Communist Party and six hundred million people.*

\* \* \*

After some weeks of posting *tasepao*, in which everyone put himself on record, it was clear that everyone was for the commune, except some twenty or thirty ex-landlords. These opposed the commune, apparently quite openly, on the ground that it would "interfere with their freedom."

"In the former co-operatives," explained Shen To, "they would work when they felt like it, and sometimes they would not work but would do individual trading on the outside. This broke discipline and the co-operative could not know on what work to count. But in the commune, if they were given free food, and then did not

work, their neighbors would criticize them." This "criticism of neighbors" was all the penalty Shen To envisaged.

When it was clear that "the people demanded it," each co-operative elected delegates to a General Meeting, in proportion to the numbers in the co-operative. This General Meeting of 320 delegates became the Congress of the Commune: it elected a Preparatory Committee of fifty people to prepare a "plan of amalgamation." The Congress of 320 delegates discussed and accepted the plan, and then chose a Commune Committee of thirty members, with eight chairmen, one from each co-operative. These met and divided the functions into eleven "departments" which they called "ministries." They had a Ministry of Agriculture, under old Shen To, a Ministry of Forestry, of Livestock, of Planning and Statistics, of Finance, of Provisioning, of Culture, Health and Education, and even a Ministry of Armed Forces, which ran the local militia, or home guards.

Each co-operative turned over to the commune enough food to feed its own members until May, when the first food crop would come in. They also turned over all their reserve funds from past years. Each co-operative, however, kept all other income from 1958, from which it paid its working costs, its debts and made payments to members until the end of the year. With 1959 the commune would take over.

Evergreen Commune began with a reserve fund of about one million yuan, or some \$400,000. The co-operatives, said Shen To, had had to get loans from the state, when they were first organized. But in recent years they had paid back these loans and most of them had a surplus. Together it made a sizable sum. "What will you do with it?" I asked. "Have you a plan?"

They certainly had a plan. They were opening an exhibition of their three-year plan that very evening and I must see it. The first needs of course were electrification of the entire area, with irrigation pumps so that all the land could be easily watered, and then a factory for chemical fertilizer. These two things would take most of the million yuan but would repay it in the next harvest.

At this point I brought out the report of Mr. Dulles' speech and asked them what they thought of it. Most of them laughed. Some of the younger ones got angry. The older peasants were more patient. One of these considered Dulles carefully and then said: "I never cursed anyone in my life," and turned away. He apparently meant that he would have to curse if he discussed Dulles and this was beneath his dignity.

Kindly old Shen To tried to reason with Dulles. His quality as local leader came out as he explained the advantages of the commune: the overall plan, with forestry, livestock, fishing, the larger area and larger manpower, permitting

*From each man according to ability,  
From each soil according to fertility.*

"What Dulles says is not according to conditions," he stated, clearly avoiding the use of harsh words like "That's a lie." "It is not true what he says about homes and ancestors' graves. . . . We have the same homes but we will build better ones. We have our ancestors' graves but a nice cemetery will be healthier and, if the descendants wish, they can move their ancestors to a nicer place with trees and park."

I asked whether graves would be moved against the wishes of the descendants. Shen To was horrified at the discourtesy of the idea. . . . I recalled how, in the days of the empire, foreign-owned railways uprooted graves and thereby caused riots. The moving of graves is overdue but with men like Shen To it will be gently done. Later I knew co-operatives that called the new cemetery the "ancestors' co-operative," in the faith that ancestors would surely approve new ways.

The younger folk were angrier than Shen To. One youth spoke up: "For me, I laugh because Dulles is silly. But I am angry because he discusses my ancestors and they are not his ancestors anyway."

A girl whose clothes showed recent arrival from field work said emphatically: "For me, I am very angry. Dulles says the Communists make us work a lot and eat little. This is just a lie. Before

liberation we were starving and now we eat more than we ever had. We have homes and ancestors' graves. Dulles slanders us to make other people distrust us."

I asked her age and learning that she was twenty, I asked if she was yet married.

"A month ago," she said shyly. She had moved to the young man's home in the old Chinese manner but she thought the commune would be building new homes. Later I learned that she was one of many people whom the commune had enabled to marry, for the young man came of a family with many small children, the cost of whose food would now be handled by the entire commune.

"Do you want to cook at home or go to the public canteen?" I asked the young wife.

"I like the canteen," she said emphatically. "They have all kinds of dishes and without any trouble. Nobody likes cooking at home now except on holidays. They can if they like."

They took me in early evening to their exhibition, in a large barn-like structure, temporarily very gay with posters. They dragged me from room to room and overwhelmed me by the size of the prize vegetables, the bigger size of statistics and the utterly incredible size of the future dreams. Two-thirds of their arable land was this year irrigated: next year they would irrigate it all with electric pumps. Fertilizer had increased from a quarter million tons in 1957 to a million and a half tons in 1958. Facilities for community life included: 134 public canteens (most of them rather bare rooms without running water as yet), 12 maternity homes, 86 nurseries, 68 kindergartens, 6 "Happy Courts" for the aged — a cartoon showed old men playing Chinese chess. Not only was there free food for everyone but there were 39 tailor shops with 132 sewing machines which would soon be making "free clothing at choice."

I was especially struck by two posters at the entrance and a table model at the end. One gaudy poster showed a man and woman holding a Bowl of Plenty from which fruits poured in unending stream. Another showed a stalwart man pushing back a mountain to let a river through. It bore the words — these are now a slogan

across China: "Let the mountain lower its head; let the river course be moved." I began to laugh at the thought of Dulles' words about "degrading human dignity." These people gave orders to the earth!

In the last room a 10 by 20 inch table model showed Evergreen Commune as its members intended to make it by 1961. A dream of paradise just outside Peking. It had an "industrial area," where thirty factories ministered to the members' needs or processed their products—meantime giving them jobs in slack season. It had a residential area with apartment houses three and four stories high. . . . I quarrelled with the high stories and was pleased to note that many women agreed with me. Most peasants begin by thinking apartment houses "modern and citified," but after discussion they are apt to cut the height. Everything was surrounded by gardens and fruit trees with yield increasing year by year. Culture would increase so fast that everyone could go to the university by 1961. . . .

I argued a bit on this point: I said they couldn't all be ready to enter in just three years. They demurred: "If the People's University combines with our commune, we can," they declared.

Dreams are dreams: they may yet become reality or it may take longer to get a university education than Evergreen Commune dreams. But one thing is clear: people who dream such dreams and base them on the power of their own organized labor bear little resemblance to Mr. Dulles' "slave state."

Dulles is wrong in his basic philosophy when he says that human beings have only two ways to change their material environment: either by "duress," which he claims is the way in China, or by "consent," which he asserts is the way of the West. Dulles never heard, it seems, of a third way, so much stronger than either "duress" or "consent" that it makes the word "consent" seem in China a pale and passive term. There is the way of a great people's initiative, when six hundred million say: "Let the mountain lower its head; let the river course be moved," . . . knowing that nature can be conquered when many men act as one.

\* \* \*

*We work at such white heat,  
If we bump the sky, it will break,  
If we kick the earth, it will crack.  
If the sky falls, our commune'll mend it.  
If the earth splits, our commune'll patch it.*

(Hsueh Shan, Szechuan)

## 5. WOMEN AND THE FAMILY

My first hint of what the communes might mean to their women members came when Rewi Alley returned from a long trip into the least accessible areas of China's northwest. He had been caught in late October by a snowstorm in the Shansi highlands and while waiting to have his jeep dug out had attended a women's meeting.

"There were at least forty bound-foot women among them," he told me, "whose lives might have been considered finished, since their bound feet both handicapped them physically and tied them to the past. But they had walked as far as ten to fourteen miles on slushy mountain trails to organize the community dining-rooms, nurseries and kindergartens and old folks' homes. They were 'officers' of the provision department of the 'military form.' Regular Salvation Army martinet type, laying down the law on teachers, nurses, cooks and premises."

Till recently China's older women seemed almost a "lost generation." In youth they had suffered, being sold in marriage and sometimes sold as actual bondslaves; they had submitted to parents and parents-in-law. When their turn came by right of age to give orders, the young folks had broken free, defying the right of the old to rule. Now the commune gave them again an honorable authority, to organize the care of the children and the aged on a community scale.

For the younger women the commune's gift was more substantial. Despite their legal and political equality with men, asserted since liberation, the old patriarchal dictatorship was not broken by one blow. For thousands of years the Old Man of the family had ruled his sons and sons' wives, and the mother-in-law had ruled the daughters-in-law. The land reform shook the foundation of this rule by giving the women a share of land equally with the men. The

marriage law shook it still further, declaring marriage an equal partnership based on affection and outlawing the purchase of brides. The co-operative farm again shook it, when it reckoned women's work in "workdays." But, while the woman's work was thus recognized, the payment at harvest still went by custom into the hands of the father-in-law or mother-in-law and the young wife still had to beg for enough of the money she had earned to buy a spool of thread. So the saying went: "Workdays for women are nice like a picture of fruit on the wall: it is pretty but you can't eat it."

The commune dealt to the patriarchal rule what may well be its final blow. Not only were wages henceforth to be paid monthly and direct into the hands of the worker, but a vast network of community dining-rooms, nurseries, kindergartens "liberated" the women from household bondage and gave them the chance for the first time to work on a full equality with men. The word "liberate" will be taken ironically by many American women, who have developed a love for their shiny kitchen and its many conveniences, and refuse to consider their housework as bondage, though, even in America, it deprives them of taking part in many rewarding community tasks. In rural China's peasant households, the woman's work was close to slavery. Often, though not always, she worked in the fields, and she also ground the grain for the household, cooked the meals on a primitive stove, hauled water from a considerable distance and then found a husband grumbling because the meal was not ready when he wanted it, or parents-in-law grumbling because they wanted their food at different hours.

To such women the commune's gift of direct wages plus relief from household drudgery meant a very welcome "liberation," and they took active part in promoting the communes. Many women told me: "With liberation we received legal and political equality, but only this past year did we attain real equality with the coming of the commune."

In Rocky Mountain Commune, in Greater Peking, the women were active for months before the men got under way. All through the spring and early summer of 1958 the women had been trying to take part in various community drives: for clean streets, for scrap-



iron collection, for eliminating "the four pests: flies, mosquitoes, rats and grain-eating sparrows." In order to have time for such activities, they set up "child-watching stations" in which four or five households combined, leaving the children in one house under the care of older women while the younger women went out on the campaigns. The men were so concerned with the problems of organizing this large commune, which included both farmland, urban areas and a section of the Western Hills parkland, that they neglected the facilities the women needed. Finally the women attacked by a campaign of *tatsepao*, those posted statements in which the people express their opinions.

"You think we aren't needed for socialism?" they asked. "If we are, why don't you help us organize?"

As a result of the women's energy, Rocky Mountain now has an excellent system of nurseries and kindergartens of three types, according to parents' demand. There are full-time kindergartens where children can be boarded, coming home on week-ends or at the parents' convenience, there are day-nurseries where the children are cared for during the parents' working day, and there are nurseries from which the children go home to lunch and for the mid-day nap. In Rocky Mountain the word "nursery" includes kindergartens, these being here combined in one institution, which is not usually the case. In most communes I have seen, nurseries for children under four are separate from the kindergartens for children between four and seven; children under four are not taken as "boarders."

\* \* \*

In early December 1958 a congress of more than two thousand women met in Peking, chosen by their counties for some outstanding contribution to the country's life. Their sessions were in a big school auditorium in the southwest part of the city, to which they came by special buses from hotels all over town. Almost all of these women had been illiterate nine years ago, but I was struck by the efficiency with which they now handled a modern-style congress, with elected presidium, committee reports, printed speeches distrib-

uted each morning for the addresses of the day. Already they could not only read but run public affairs.

The hotels were full of them. Every morning they flooded the corridors of the Peking Hotel where I was living at the time, on their way to their autobuses lined up in the hotel's court. Often in the afternoon they flooded the corridors again. Since they were as curious about America as I was about China, I easily collected them in my room, sometimes by individuals, sometimes by small groups. Many were chairmen or vice-chairmen of communes, or commanders of production teams in the fields. The feats of others ranged from scientific research to voluminous production of poems and dramas or records in driving water-buffalo at the plow.

The first that came to my room were five women from Kansu, that arid province of the northwest. All were from people's communes and each from a different county but they had travelled in a group to Peking. "Before liberation, peasant women like us would never have had the chance to see the capital," they boasted at once. They had been enjoying the sights.

The youngest was a girl of seventeen named Yueh Lan-hsiang, chosen to come to Peking for her "work in water conservation." In the previous winter the men in her co-operative farm had shirked working on a canal which the farm needed; it was eight kilometers long and the part through the mountains was, they said, "too cold and rocky." Young Lan—her given name means "Orchid," a popular name in China—had organized a group of three girls with the same name. "The Three Orchids" agitated for the canal and went themselves to the hills to dig until they shamed the men into finishing the job.

Since Lan was one of the few unmarried delegates I asked her what she thought the proper age for marriage. She replied that girls were formerly married off at thirteen or fourteen but now the law says eighteen, and she thought twenty was better or even twenty-two.

"You should study and your character should be formed before you take the responsibility of having children," she declared. The four others in the group, already married, nodded agreement.

I recalled what Dr. Ma Hai-teh, the American physician George Hatem who has been with the Chinese revolution for thirty years and has a Chinese family, told me about the attitude of young people today in China towards marriage. Their courtship is shy, he said, but he lives on a lake where a path makes a popular lovers' lane and he often overhears passing talk. "They walk sedately holding hands and they talk about her ideology, his ideology and their mutual steel furnaces," he said. "To American youth they would seem naive, but in things that count they are less naive than Americans. A girl will make a list of the ten things that matter most in her thinking, and will check the young man on them before she lets her feeling go too far. They are choosing with great care the partner they expect to keep for life. You see almost none of the type of frivolity towards sex that is frequent in America."

The second of the Kansu group, Wang Sha-wa, was twenty-three and married. "A feudal marriage," she said. She had been chosen to come to Peking for general excellence in farm work, steel-making, and in organizing the nursery and the old folks' home. She lived with her husband's parents in the old-fashioned way, but her five-year-old son went to the kindergarten every morning.

"Does your mother-in-law approve?" I asked, wondering, since the marriage was "feudal," if there was a clash over child control.

"She likes it fine," declared Wang. "He was a naughty boy at home, but he is much better since he went to kindergarten. They all line up with a bugle and shuck corn." Young Wang clearly approved of starting them young with useful labor in "the military form."

All these women "just loved the military form." They said that in the former co-operatives, it was very hard to get the field gangs to the fields together on time because of the lack of clocks.

"But now a bugle blows at six and you know it is time to get up, and it blows again for breakfast and again to go to the field. Everyone comes at once and the work goes better." I must add that, no sooner was I convinced of the use of a bugle than I found communes that used dinner-bells instead. Some communes marched to the field with flags; others used flags only for competitions.



"Home of Respect for Aged" in commune, Hopei Province

Dinner at home on rest day, commune near Harbin





Kindergarten, Shansi Province

Chang Chiu-hsiang  
in her cotton field



Some marched home from the field with a drum and found this "very good"; others did not. One woman told me that "bugles are most popular but they are all bought up; there is a waiting list for bugles."

The women were all annoyed at the comments made by Mr. Dulles and other foreigners about communes "destroying the home." They insisted that "home life is much better now" since so many sources of friction are removed. They insisted that community dining-rooms, nurseries and kindergartens were conveniences that made home life easier, instead of destroying it. They insisted firmly that they had "freedom."

Wang especially expressed herself on this. "For good field work there must be discipline," she said. "We have discipline at work in the day. But all of the regulations are agreed in general discussion. When we come home at night we have freedom."

The great variety of women's achievements in today's China was shown by a group of four who came to my room the following day. Dr. H. C. Ching of Shanghai was a pediatrician who knew some English, and who had made important achievements in research into children's diseases. Her neatly-curled hair, prim spectacles and brown velveteen jacket were a city style that might have come from Europe. Next to her on the divan curled fifteen-year-old Hsieh, a mountain girl from Kweichow, dressed colorfully in a figured jacket, bright red hair-ribbons and vivid plaid pants. Her claim to fame was that she could handle six buffaloes at once on six plows. She had finished primary school "just last year."

Formerly, said Hsieh, girls were not allowed to handle buffaloes. One man drove one buffalo which drew a heavy wooden plow. "Now we have double-share metal plows and girls are allowed to plow and most girls can handle two or three buffaloes, but I handle six. That is the county record but I'm trying next for ten."

Young Hsieh showed me by motions and diagram how to handle a water-buffalo. No reins are used. The buffalo plods slowly ahead with a plow attached behind. The driver walks alongside and hits the beast to slap him into place. When Hsieh handles six buffaloes, they walk one behind the other, and the trick is to keep

each far enough behind and just enough to one side so that all the plows will make parallel furrows the right distance apart. It was a feat as brilliant and worthy of pride as a performance of a professional acrobat.

I note briefly Mrs. Chuin, a placid woman of forty, who spoke Chinese with difficulty because she was a Chuang, a minority nationality from Kwangsi, head of the women's section in a large commune of mixed nationalities, and directly handling a working team of four thousand women who farmed an area two kilometers square. "When a plow breaks, I can mend it," she said. "My own plow and also the plows of the others. . . ."

The last in this group was the most restless young person I have met in China. She had been moving all over my room while the others talked and had absorbed three bound volumes of *China Reconstructs* in fifteen minutes—the pictures, not the words—and had then seated herself in a deep chair where she constantly changed position and expression, sometimes smiling like a droll child of six, and sometimes squinting with half-closed eyes like an old shrewd mandarin, as old as China. When she came to rest, she was a small, compact girl of eighteen, my most colorful visitor yet, with bright blue trousers, floral blouse, red ribbons on each of two tight braids that stuck straight out at the sides of her head, and edges of different colored blouses and sweaters showing at neck and wrist. When she kicked her legs, which was often, the blue trousers rose, revealing long socks in circular colored bands.

Tsao was her name. She said she "commanded" a labor detachment in a commune in Kiangsi, but didn't know its size "because they elected me after I left and I have been travelling ever since to the county, the province and Peking. Just meetings all the time." The tone was *blasé*.

When I asked how her battalion managed without her, Tsao assured me that there were plenty of good deputy-commanders, and she was sent to Peking, not as a commander but because she "wrote fourteen plays and four hundred poems since July." Her election as detachment commander thus seemed to be a literary honor!

Tsao began to write in May of 1958. Her co-operative had organized a drama group and found no plays to suit. "It never occurred to us at first that we could write, but after we tried many plays and found nothing we liked, we decided that nobody outside our county could tell our ideas anyway and we must write for ourselves." So Tsao began to write, and produced three short plays between May and July.

"Then came this idea of 'Leap Forward' and the county decided to publish my plays, so I hurried up and did fourteen more of them and four hundred verses besides," said Tsao. The county had published the plays and they were being performed everywhere in the county. The book sold outside the county but Tsao had forgotten to ask how many sold.

"Get any royalties?" I asked with a smile.

Tsao kicked both legs so high in glee that the blue trousers rose above the colored socks and showed her bare brown legs. "Oh, no," she cried. "I'm not that much of a writer."

To my query whether Tsao had a husband she replied that she had married recently. "Just a month before I left." I asked what her husband did without her, and she said prosaically that he worked on the farm.

"He's a very quiet person," she volunteered. "Wherever I go, he comes and just sits." I could well believe it. Tsao had enough motion for two.

If these are not enough to show that the women in communes are not "slavishly regimented" to a single type, I should mention twenty-eight-year-old Fan of Anhwei, who, against all the advice of the local blacksmiths, made the first ball-bearings for the big water-wheel in her farming co-operative, and thus started in her area the drive to put ball-bearings by local effort into "everything that turns." And eighty-four-year-old Liu Shu-po, whose knowledge of cattle is so good that even in advanced age she "supervises" a livestock farm on the western plains and came a thousand miles to the congress in Peking.

I conclude this gallery of women with Chang Chiu-hsiang of Shensi, with whom I talked the longest and who told me the most

about details of commune organization. She is a forty-nine-year-old grandmother, illiterate at the time of liberation, and now the first peasant woman admitted to the Academy of Sciences, because of her research into cotton yields.

With shining eyes Mrs. Chang talked three hours about the commune of which she is vice-chairman, but suddenly her eyes filled with tears as she said: "In the old society you could see your head in the bowl." When I did not get her meaning she explained that in former days she could seldom afford to eat whole grain rice or millet, but only gruel, diluted more and more with water as the supply of grain grew less until there was so much liquid that it reflected your head when you bent over to eat.

For Mrs. Chang and the millions of peasants like her, the "free food" now supplied by the commune, good steamed rice or millet, with vegetables and even occasional meat or fish, seems a very good life indeed. What meant to her more than her own improved living standard was the fact that, in all her area, no man, woman or child need suffer hunger now.

Mrs. Chang still works in the fields; her vice-chairmanship of the commune is not a paid office. In daily life she is an ordinary member of a production team in a village of sixty-three families. She is pleased that her married daughter, who by Chinese custom now belongs to another family, still lives in the same village and is on the same production team. The mother-daughter closeness, broken by the daughter's marriage, now reappears to cheer Mrs. Chang in the closeness of joint work.

Cotton, of course, is the crop in which they specialize, the crop in which Mrs. Chang won fame. Before liberation, she said, three hundred catties per *mou* (1,980 lbs. per acre) was considered a bumper crop. In those days the plant grew only two or three feet high. For the past four years, Mrs. Chang's fields have averaged over a thousand catties per *mou*. This year she took special pains and when she left the farm to come to the Peking congress, she had already 2,436 catties per *mou* and was still picking. The cotton grows over her head now, from two to three times as high as it used to be.

Three groups of Soviet experts visited her field and one group gave her a badge. Mrs. Chang, however, modestly states that her record is now by no means the highest in China. Some places have better soil and better climate; the highest record, she said, was 8,437 catties on a small experimental plot in Hupeh Province. Mrs. Chang is known for the fact that she gives all her ideas to her competitors and helps them beat her. When her production team argued against this, she convinced them that the aim of the competition is not to beat others but to help all China's cotton fields get good crops. This is doubtless another reason why she was admitted to the Academy of Sciences, because she teaches methods well. She has, moreover, a scientific attitude towards her work, keeping records of plots, making experiments, and recording just what methods produced which results.

She gave a clear picture of the organization of life in the village of sixty-three families where she lives. There are one hundred and forty able-bodied men and women, and they form one production team with three squads of some forty-five members each. Each squad has its own canteen, or community dining-room, where one man and three women prepare the meals. Normally the meals are served in the village but at harvest the canteen moves with the working squad to the fields. It suits time and place to the needs of the workers.

"The bell rings at six in the morning," said Mrs. Chang—in her village they use a bell and not a bugle—"and the workers get up. But the old people and children do not get up yet: they have meals later."

The nursery for small children of three years and under is patronized by only about half the children in Mrs. Chang's village. The choice, of course, is made by the parents, and usually depends on whether there is a "granny" in the home. In the homes without "grannies," the mother normally gets up and goes straight to breakfast and to work, leaving the baby asleep, unless she has to nurse him. "The nurse calls and takes the baby to the nursery," said Mrs. Chang.

The kindergarten is different. All children attend between the ages of four and seven. This is because of an unusual arrangement worked out between the kindergarten and the "Happy Court," the name given to the old folks' home. Only six people sleep in the "Happy Court" in Mrs. Chang's village, but sixty people eat there. The six who sleep there are old people who have no living relatives to care for them. Old folks who have sons live with their sons' families but go to the "Happy Court" for their meals.

"This is because the food for old people is different: it is softer and tastier and not so hearty. Also they prefer to eat at different hours. And since the best food is for the old and also for the children, the kindergarten goes for meals to the 'Happy Court,' because their grandparents like to have them there. The whole family, of course, comes home at night."

This cozy arrangement of grandparents mingling with the smaller children is not the usual one in the communes. It probably came from the small size of Mrs. Chang's village and other local conditions. I have found a similar arrangement in a few places but it is more usual for the entire family to patronize the same community dining-room, sometimes with a special room in which the old people get their special food. The noon-day meal is in most places taken separately, the kindergartens and the old people having their own meals, apart from the working teams . . . though even this is not absolute. Breakfast and evening meals vary greatly: in some places the family eats together, in others the children get all their meals in the kindergarten and nursery and come home only for the night. Some places combine nurseries and kindergartens in single premises: in other places they are apart. . . . These community facilities are organized by the mothers according to their desire.

Cooking in the home is not entirely ended. Even the new housing plans contain small kitchens and individual apartments. People may choose either to eat in the community dining-room, or to take their food home and cook it, or to use the community facilities for grinding the grain, and then do the cooking at home. Most people prefer the community dining-room on working-days, but often cook at home on holidays and festivals.

"It is a pleasure to cook with the family sometimes, especially on holidays, and especially when you do not have to do it every day," said Mrs. Chang.

Like all the women I met from the communes, Mrs. Chang assured me that all those statements made by foreigners about communes "breaking up the home" are "very silly talk." On the contrary "the home is much happier now, because the heavy burdens are removed." Formerly the young wife in poorer families would have to work in the field and rush home to get the meals on a very slow stove, and then stay up half the night to grind the grain, "which must be ground daily if the bread is to be fresh." Then perhaps she would be kept awake the rest of the night by the baby. The husband would grumble if the meal wasn't ready at once when he came from work, and the old people would complain because they wanted their food earlier. . . .

"Now all of this grumbling is over," said Mrs. Chang.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Chang's statement is doubtless more sweeping than she, as a scientist, should make; men and women are still human. But that grumbling has greatly diminished is testified on all sides. I talked for an afternoon with Li Pao-kuang, a secretary of the All-China Federation of Women, and herself a mother of six. She was full of tales of women whose marital happiness had been improved by the new facilities in the commune. Some were cases of women who had felt able to marry only because of the help the communes now gave, others of women whose friction with the "in-laws" had diminished, still others of women whose husbands had grown away from them because they were tied to the household chores, but who now gained a new companionship in "studying and going to meetings together."

Young Wang, for instance, was a girl leader of a production team in a farming co-operative, who fell in love with a young man but was deterred from marriage because he had a family of fifteen persons — Chinese families include parents and often brothers and sisters. Young Wang feared that if she tried to cook for fifteen, her career

in production was over. As soon as the commune made plans for community dining-rooms, she decided to marry at once.

"The commune was your go-between," teased her friends. There are enough cases of this kind so that one may expect the birth rate to rise as a result of the "free meals," and this will still further scandalize the commentators in the West.

More sympathetic to Western view are cases like Fan and his wife Peng, whose household includes three children and Fan's old father. All use the community dining-room and both husband and wife draw wages. . . . From their first month's wages they bought a new padded-jacket for grandpa, possibly to assure him that he would benefit from their love even if he no longer collected their wages. Peng said: "Since I don't have to cook any more, Fan and I go to meetings and study together." Behind this remark one feels the yearning of many women, who in the past were unable to keep up with their husbands in knowledge and development, and so lost contact, but who now are free to study as well as to work.

Statistics compiled by the All-China Federation of Women for International Women's Day, March 8, 1959, showed a total of 4,750,000 nurseries and kindergartens and 2,650,000 community dining-rooms in communes. This implies an average of 200 nurseries and kindergartens in each of the 26,000 communes and indicates that these are small, intimate institutions, close to the homes. Such seems to be the case. A single production team may have several nurseries and kindergartens. Thus the Hsiashan Production Team in a commune in Fukien has five nurseries for its 150 small children and two kindergartens for 157 older children. These are staffed by 66 people, an average of one adult for every four or five children. Thirty of the children are "boarders," the rest come by the day. They all get regular physical check-ups and it is reported that "they have all formed hygienic habits and are well-mannered." Singing and dancing are taught and the older ones are given some elementary knowledge.

The teachers in these kindergartens are local women, chosen for their ability to handle children. They are all expected at once to take special study in child care. The provincial educational authori-

ties set up courses, both for women who can come to the provincial capital and for those who must study in their homes. Figures from Anhwei and Kweichow Provinces show that seventy per cent of all the women, as soon as they "liquidate their illiteracy," enroll in some kind of study course, usually in connection with their new speciality in the commune, whether this be child care or cotton raising.

The teachers give special attention to the elimination of quarrels and fighting, and the proudest boast of any kindergarten is when they can state that "quarrels disappear." All women's magazines blossom with tales of how this is accomplished, and of successes which appear minor to all but the participants. . . . In a Honan kindergarten, when a boy named Hsiao accidentally knocked down in a game a girl named Pao, and both got up, while Hsiao solicitously dusted off the small victim and play was resumed with smiles, the onlooker would have seen little but the teachers put down a triumph. They knew that little Pao, when she arrived, had cried on the slightest provocation, while young Hsiao had picked quarrels everywhere, struck people and lied about it. The teachers had given much thought to produce the change in these two small children. Incidents like these are published as examples to be followed rather than as universal facts, but the general testimony is that kindergartens make the children better behaved.

From the standpoint of national construction, and the tasks of the great "Leap Forward," the organization of the communes has probably added close to a hundred million women to China's available labor force. The change began in autumn of 1958. The All-China Federation of Women claims that most of the autumn harvesting and the ploughing and sowing of winter crops was done by the women, the men having gone on irrigation jobs and to local steel-smelting fields.\*

In Sputnik Commune of Laoan County in Kiangsi, four-fifths of the 9,700 able-bodied men worked last autumn in irrigation or iron-

\* Present policy, 1964, is not to take large numbers of men out of farming for any purpose. (See chapter on "Readjustment" of Industry in Part III of this book.) As mechanization advances, the number going into non-agricultural pursuits can once more grow.

smelting, and the 9,400 women members became the main labor force in farming. They plowed, harrowed and seeded 34,000 acres of land, after first taking training courses in how to do it. From the extra income thus acquired they now expect speedily to mechanize their farming, besides having irrigation for all their land. For even while all hands at present work hard, they have already set the eight-hour day as normal, and the six-hour day as a not-too-distant ideal.

Women also start and manage new industries in the communes. In the Leap Forward Commune, Taiho County, Anhwei, they set up a ball-bearing works, of which 64 per cent of the labor force consisted of women. In a commune in Hangchow, twelve women set up a cement plant, first sending a representative to a big cement works to learn how: their plant within a few weeks was employing 103 workers, making 60 tons of cement daily for their own use in building. In Kaolung Commune, in Kiangsi, eleven girls set up a pig farm and found ways to save grain by using fermented wild grasses as fodder, on which the pigs did well. They also learned to inoculate against infections and became amateur veterinarians.

To many American women these jobs will seem not only unrewarding but unwomanly, even degrading, no road to Utopia but perhaps to the break-down of health. Chinese women would reply that women have always done the hard, unrewarding jobs of the world and that now they seek no special privilege, but recognition of the dignity of their labor and equality with men in all the choices of life. As for health, they think they are better protected than when they came as child-brides to the rule of their mothers-in-law, or even perhaps than Western women in factories with inspectors paid by a distant impersonal state. The rules to protect women's health are devised by the women's own committees. Three universally-accepted rules are these: that women shall work in no wet places during menstruation, that expectant mothers shall have light work, and nursing mothers shall have work near their homes.

The women in China's communes can point not only to maternity leave on pay, but also to the rapid growth of a system of maternity care such as no country in history has set up in such a short period,

if indeed at all. The communes today have 100,000 maternity homes, an average of four to a commune, small places, with only a few beds, but near at hand for every home.

A typical example is Changyang Commune in Shantung which has eleven "maternity wards" grouped around one "maternity center," with a total of sixty-five beds. The "wards," each staffed by two or three midwives, are within quick reach of every home; they are planned only for normal deliveries. The "center" is equipped for simple operations, and in close touch with a hospital for difficult cases. All the service is free.

\* \* \*

Just who invented the legend that the communes in China are moving their members from homes to live in barracks, is hard to learn. I have neither seen nor heard of any barracks in any commune that has come to my attention. But every school of architecture in China has been sending out hundreds of its students and teachers into the rural areas to help the communes design new homes to their own desire. There is here space to notice only two examples.

The South China Institute of Engineering in Canton announced at the end of December that four hundred teachers and students from its Department of Architecture had been in the field since October, helping the communes in four counties design buildings. They had written four hundred treatises on the subject, because all their former planning related to cities and did not take into account the building materials available in the countryside. They had designed buildings for over a million square feet of floor space, and construction had begun on 180,000 square feet. This included hospitals, factories, palaces of culture, old folks' homes, community restaurants and housing projects. Complete plans had been made for nine communes.

More intimate was a news item December 22 from a multi-national commune in Chinghai, that high mountain province whose development has just recently begun after thousands of years of lonely desolation. A production team of sixty families were moving to new homes. The Planning Institute of the provincial capital Sining had submitted three designs to the commune; the prospective tenants



had discussed them, criticized and modified them until the final plan was made.

The houses were wood and brick on a brick foundation with tile roofs. They were long one-storey structures in the shape of a big E, facing south, with several apartments in each structure. Each family had a separate apartment, depending in size on the size of the family. Thus the Chiu family, a couple in their early forties with a marriageable son who might be expected to add a wife, and two younger daughters who might be expected to leave the home, got four rooms, two large and two small, plus a kitchen which does not count as a room. Each group of two or three houses was set in a walled compound, which had space for gardens and for domestic animals, including poultry. A question still debated in communes is whether pigs are domestic animals to be allowed near homes: the tendency grows to keep them further away. Eventually this may also apply to poultry.

What most struck me was the cost accounting in the final sentence. "The cost in cash per room is 50 yuan, mainly spent for glass, nails and varnish, since the commune makes bricks, tiles, lumber and other materials from raw stuffs on its own ground." I suggest you read that several times and ponder it, for a hint why outcry arose in the capitalist world against the people's communes.

An organization that can build its own brick and tile housing at a cost of \$20 per room plus its own labor is not dealing only in housing as a home convenience, but is showing an economic potential that challenges the economies of the world.

\*           \*           \*

*We fear nor heaven nor earth,  
For a thousand families  
Have become one family,  
And though for three years  
Heaven denies us rain,  
See how our land has water  
And golden flowers laughing.*

(Laiwu, Shantung)

## 6. WINTER CONSOLIDATION

As the autumn upsurge carried ninety-nine per cent of China's peasants into the communes, the Central Committee of the Communist Party prepared for consolidation. They have a technique in popular drives which can best be given in the terms of battle.

Any swift advance, in battle or social organization, produces rough edges. The foremost troops outrun the main force and take posts where the new front cannot yet be stabilized. The time to halt them is not when they are rushing forward, for this advance helps the general offensive and nobody yet knows how far the main force will go. Countless new ideas will be born of this popular initiative. A hundred flowers will bloom and this is the time to let them. But the drive has natural limits and a pause comes for regrouping. The general staff must be ready to fix the new front line to which the main forces may quickly advance and which they can firmly hold. Some of the foreposts can be fortified, the rest drawn back for safety and the rear brought up. A new front is consolidated for some later advance.

The time to consolidate the communes was clearly December 1958. The peasants had all joined, the harvests were all in, and four winter months lay ahead for tidying details of organization. The Central Committee prepared. Through November Chairman Mao and other Party leaders moved south through Honan, studying communes in the province which had organized earliest. In early November they conferred with local Party leaders in Chengchow; in late November they held a wider conference in Wuhan, and provincial leaders from all over China met. Anyone acquainted with methods of leadership in China knew that a Central Committee meeting was building up in Wuhan. It took place from November

28 to December 10. The most important resolution was modestly entitled: "Some Questions Concerning the People's Communes."\*

The first thing about this resolution that strikes an outsider is that it was adopted after practically all the peasants had already joined the communes: it was therefore not an attempt to push people into communes but an attempt to consolidate the communes' work. The second thing clear to any conscientious news-gatherer is that, while this resolution is much longer and contains much more detail than did the early resolution of August 29, it makes no change in the basic line. All attempts of the foreign press to claim that the communes had "failed," or had "back-tracked" were sheer invention. The Party suggested that some local organizations might profitably back-track from too advanced positions, but had not itself back-tracked from the August position. It had gone forward, carrying the main forces to a new, stabilized front.

The third thing that especially delighted me as a writer, was the beauty of clear style in which the resolution is expressed. I quote in full the first paragraph, which describes the communes more clearly, briefly and beautifully than any words I could choose:

In 1958 a new social organization appeared, fresh as the morning sun, above the broad horizon of East Asia. This was the large-scale people's commune in the rural areas of our country which combines industry, agriculture, trade, education and military affairs and in which government administration and commune management are integrated. Since their first appearance the people's communes with their immense vitality have attracted widespread attention.

After this terse, yet comprehensive, description of the form, the next paragraph noted that "the movement has grown rapidly" and that "within a few months starting with summer of 1958, the more than 740,000 agricultural producers' co-operatives . . . reorganized themselves into 26,000 people's communes," and that this means "over 120 million households, or more than 99 per cent of all China's peasant households."

\* Published in *Peking Review* Dec. 23, 1958.

From this point one must condense and comment, for the document covers twenty-four legal-size typewritten pages. The commune is defined as "the basic unit of the socialist social structure of our country," and "at the same time . . . the basic unit of state power." Its "obvious benefit" is stated to be that "labor power and means of production can be managed in a unified way . . . on a larger scale." Already all kinds of local activity have developed under "unified leadership." "Tens of thousands of small factories have mushroomed. . . ." "Large numbers of community dining-rooms, nurseries, kindergartens, 'homes of respect for the aged' have . . . emancipated women from thousands of years of kitchen drudgery." The "mass of peasants have begun to receive wages and . . . are able to eat without paying." This is the "most reliable form of social insurance. For the peasants all this is epoch-making news."

The importance of this new form goes beyond the increase of living standards for the peasants. "It has shown the country the way to the gradual industrialization of the rural areas, . . . the way to the gradual transition from the socialist principle 'to each according to his work' to the communist principle 'to each according to his needs,' the way gradually to lessen and finally to eliminate the difference between town and country, between worker and peasant, between mental and manual labor, and the way gradually to lessen and finally to eliminate the internal function of the state."

From this clear and glowing description, Western commentators in Hongkong hastened to file cables which told the world that the Chinese Communists had changed their policy, were dropping the communes because they had failed and were firing Mao from the presidency because of that failure! How was such an absurd conclusion ever reached?

In part they reached the conclusion by wishful thinking, in part because the Western press had already built up a fantastic picture of the people's communes, and the resolution made it clear that their picture was incorrect. They had portrayed militarized gangs of slave labor, living in barracks, with complete and purposeful smashing of the family, and with all people eating from the same pot and dressed from the same cotton bolts . . . a slave system, an ant-hill

life. The resolution smashed that picture, hence the Western press declared it abandoned the communes.

Some sections need special attention: those on production, on distribution, on family life, on the military form.

The section on "production" makes it clear that communes are no longer "farming co-operatives" but develop industry and farming and trade, "both for consumption and for exchange." For farming the methods advocated are "deep plowing and intensive cultivation" with reduction of acreage but bigger total crop. The goal set is "a ton to a ton and a half of grain" per capita within "a comparatively short period": China had in 1958 passed the half-ton mark per capita, which was twice what she ever had before.

In a lyric passage well worth noting, the future ideal for China's farming is stated. By the "basic farmland system," tried in several areas in 1958, acreage is to be steadily reduced\* but each acre is to be "garden-farmed" with more water, manure, cultivation until China feeds herself from one-third of her present farmland, gives another third to "fallow rotation, pasturage and green manure" and the rest to "afforestation, reservoirs, flowers, shrubs and trees, to turn our whole land . . . into a garden."

Communes "should go in for industry in a big way" according to local conditions. They should produce first of all for their own needs and also for commodity production "on as wide a scale as possible," switching an appropriate part of the labor force "step by step from agriculture to industry to develop . . . fertilizer, insecticides, farm implements and machinery, building materials, the processing of agricultural produce, manufacturing of sugar, textiles, paper, mining, metallurgy, electric power and other light and heavy industries."

This is a clear call for widest development of industry on a decentralized plan. In addition to the big centrally-owned industries, which of course still continue to expand under central government ownership, the communes are to develop, under local ownership, every kind of industry their conditions and labor power permit.

\* See footnote on p. 37.



Maize harvest, Pioneer Commune, Shantung Province

Cotton pile, Honan Province





Good sorghum in Heilungkiang Province

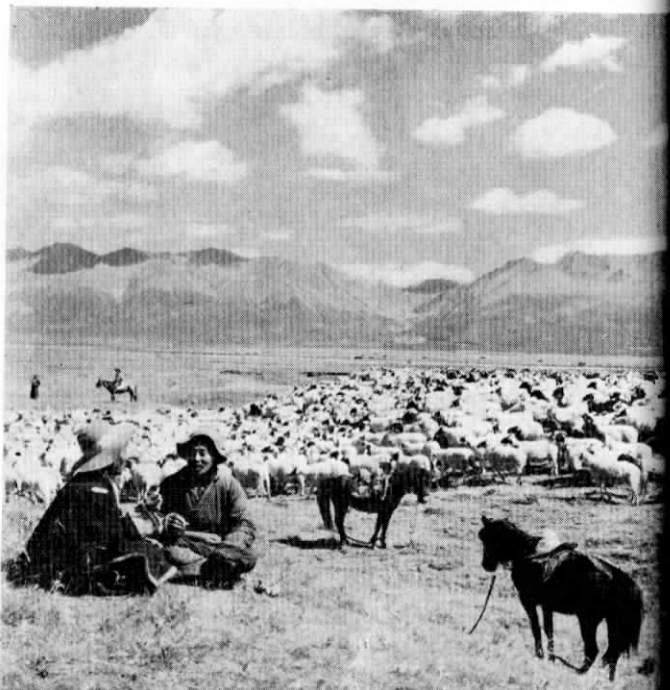
The people in each commune are to benefit directly by developing all the resources they can. This is the essentially new aspect of China's communes. Following China's tradition of decentralized social control, they combine economic and government power on township or county scale. Federations of communes on a county scale "have power to deploy" a certain part of the manpower for constructive undertakings on county scale or even beyond the county. This permits irrigation works and afforestation, the building of railroads and highways . . . beginning with the county but going beyond it. One might call it "the socialism in one county" plan. . . .

The section on distribution makes it clear that, for the present, the wage system is to be stressed. From the net income, after taxes and production costs are met, a considerable proportion is to be set aside as "accumulation fund" for new development, but the amount paid to members is to be large enough to keep wages rising year by year. Members' income consists both of wages according to work, and of free supply according to needs. But the resolution warns against putting too many items too soon on the free list. "Wages must take first place. . . ." They must "increase faster than the system of free supply." Any attempt to replace "distribution by work" with "distribution by need," is branded as "trying to enter communism before conditions are mature," . . . a "Utopian concept which cannot succeed."

This is doubtless one of the sections which caused Western commentators to say that the communes were "back-tracking." A comparison of this resolution with that of August will show that the Central Committee never advocated much "free supply," that even the "free food" came through peasant desire rather than through any Party demand, and was accepted by the Party because the demand was so universal. During the autumn upsurge, however, there had been a wide tendency of communes to compete in the number of things they put on the "free list," until this included clothing, theater tickets, barber, baths, fuel and many other amenities. This tendency was discouraged by the resolution.

This is no statement of failure. This is the pulling back of the forward posts that have outrun the line which the main forces can

Pastoral commune in Chinghai Province



hold. Anyone acquainted with organization, especially in the field of co-operatives, knows that it is easy for a local enthusiast to get people to vote for a large free list. The people with large families vote for it because it is in their interests; the working couples without children also vote for it because they are not willing to appear selfish among their neighbors. But anyone also knows that those same working couples will become unhappy when they see their wages diminished by the need of clothing all the neighbors' children, and that friction will grow over how fast those children use up clothes. It is against such trouble that an experienced Central Committee must safeguard local enthusiasts.

Private property in certain things remains and is specified. People's houses, furniture, clothing and bank savings remain private property and this includes trees around the houses, small gardens, small poultry and small tools. This also was a needed safeguard, for trouble had arisen through different interpretations on this.

In Section Five, which discusses the way of life, the Communist Party felt the need of arguing with Mr. Dulles and pointing out to him that the communes do not destroy the home or the family. Nurseries, kindergartens, public dining-rooms first appeared under capitalism, and none of them are compulsory under the communes but are organized as conveniences. . . . The commune does indeed destroy "the patriarchal home," says the resolution, but creates "the democratic home." As far as the Western reader goes, this argument might have been better put. For while the patriarchal control is indeed destroyed by the individual wage direct to the worker and by the conveniences which permit the woman to work, the Chinese-style large family, which includes three generations, still exists in all the communes I have seen, and is still planned for in all the housing projects. . . . This combining of grandparents, parents and children under one roof is what the West rather loosely calls "patriarchal" and is by no means destroyed, as I have shown in the preceding chapter.\*

\* What the Chinese mean, more precisely, by "patriarchal" is the tyrannical authority of the eldest male member of the household, as in the feudal and to some extent the bourgeois family.

The resolution breaks new ground by demanding, for the first time in China, a basic eight-hour day in the rural areas. This was another detail made necessary by excesses of local enthusiasts — and of local peasants themselves — who tried to get everything done at once by working unduly long hours. . . . "Eight hours for work and two for study" is now set as standard in both city and country. This is part of the inclusion of industry in the commune's program. In special emergencies the hours may be temporarily extended, but "the way out of the present labor shortage" is flatly stated to be "not long hours but better tools and organization of labor. . . ." In the future, "six hours and even shorter" is the goal for the working day.

The Central Committee also feels the need of arguing with Dulles about "the military form." The resolution explains that what is meant is "the kind of disciplined collective work that is seen both in the army and in the factory" . . . and that large-scale farming also requires. The organization of the militia, which has been noted abroad as "militarization" is rather impatiently declared to be necessary because "the imperialist pirates" still try to wipe out the Chinese state. . . . If Americans are surprised that Chinese thus judge their intentions, let them recall that for more than a century foreign troops stood on Chinese soil and American armed forces still stand on China's Taiwan today, while the Seventh Fleet is visible along the China coast and American "Sidewinders" recently brought down a Chinese plane well inside the mainland. . . . The militia is civilian in control, part of the production teams and under the commune, a kind of county home guard.

"There must be both democracy and discipline in the communes," says Section Six, "both centralism and democracy in all organizations, including the militia. . . ." "It is impermissible" to use the military form or militia "to impair in the least the democratic life." The section concludes with words that deserve place in the anthology of democracy for their clear expression and sharp definition:

The people's commune is the basic organization of our country's state power; only by fully ensuring democracy in the commune

will it be possible to create throughout the country a vigorous and lively political situation in which there are both centralism and democracy, both discipline and freedom, both unity of will and personal ease of mind.

Such was the official statement of the form and goal of the people's communes in the December 10 resolution. The resolution also stated that the coming winter months should go to "tidying up" the communes, that every province should set up "inspection teams" of one or two thousand members to visit communes, spread news of the best methods and criticize shortcomings.

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In Peking the government ministries geared themselves to the communes. The first offer by the Ministry of Metallurgy to furnish blue-prints for "steel-rolling equipment for use on farms" sounded fantastic. It was followed quickly by other offers from universities and machine-building plants, of designs and equipment by which communes could roll their own steel. The most interesting was from a metal works in Kweichow which advertised a steel-rolling machine "weighing only five hundred pounds, costing only 2,500 yuan, needing only ten kilowatts of electric power or a small steam engine" to produce on the farms "angular bars, square bars or steel sheets of several kinds." The notice added: "Easy to operate in any commune." Farmers who last summer made their emergency local railroads of wood or porcelain could now roll rails from home-made steel, and make steel for building construction.

The Ministry of Chemical Industry announced "cheap and easy" processes for making sulphuric acid, synthetic ammonia, fertilizer of many kinds and even synthetic rubber in communes. In early autumn of 1958 several communes began to make synthetic rubber from sweet potatoes: the number has doubtless grown. A few hours south of Peking the synthetic rubber works of Shangchuang Commune took only two months to build, cost only \$125,000 and was expected to return an annual profit twice the total investment cost. Almost any commune with excess sweet potatoes could buy itself a rubber fac-

tory unless it preferred to use the money for a power plant or railway spur. This was only one of a hundred ways communes began to use surplus labor in the slack time between farm operations, in order to grow collectively rich.

Railroads also began to gear themselves to the communes. The Minister of Railways told me how arrangements made with communes helped solve the bottlenecks in freight handling caused by the bumper crop in summer and the steel drive in the autumn. A small freight station worked out a technique that quickly spread to other such stations. By arrangement with a local commune, a production gang of a hundred stalwart men worked in the fields within whistle call. When a freight train arrived, the whistle blew, the gang downed tools and went to the railway station and unloaded or loaded the train. In some cases, they were able to unload and reload cars without detaching them from the train, doing the work while the locomotive went for water and fuel. The minister said he believed China already has a record of fewer empty cars and less wasted time in freight handling than any country in the world.

From all these relations growing between the communes and the central government ministries, future lines of China's great forward leap began to appear. China was industrializing on three levels: the big, the medium and the small. Big modern industries like Anshan Steel Works, owned by the central government, would make the steel and other products for big central projects; medium-sized industries, owned by provincial governments, would supply provincial needs; small industries, owned by the communes, would fill in the local gaps, producing quickly the things the peasants need or the commodities processed from the farms.

It has always been assumed that big industry is more efficient than small industry. Nobody really knows: no fair test was ever made. Big industry beat small industry under capitalism: was it by greater efficiency or by monopoly control of raw materials and also of scientific brains, for which big industry paid much more? When scientists compete in "rolling mills for farms," we shall have a test. "Efficiency," moreover, is a word of many meanings. An industry which displaces populations or keeps men part-time idle is not so-

cially efficient even if it makes more per man-hour. Industry whose workers live on their farm and diversify their labor, has the advantage of small capitalization and maximum use of manpower. It also offers a more balanced human life.

The many meanings of the word "efficiency" were illustrated for me in Liangko Commune near Canton, a commune without fame which I visited only because the health resort in which I spent a winter month was located on its lands. I was surprised to learn that it had eight "paper mills." Paper mills to me implied fairly large enterprise: that a single commune should erect eight of them meant to me either an unusual demand for paper or an economic waste. I visited one of the paper mills and ceased to be surprised.

At one end of a large rice-field on a rise of land against a hill stood a wooden structure, a shed with walls shoulder-high and the upper part open, topped by an overhanging roof. Inside there was a brick stove with a metal boiler, and a dipping vat with a wire netting for lifting and draining pulp. Outside the building a large pool had been made of boulders with the chinks filled in by cement. This was the total equipment needed to turn rice straw into paper of several kinds and colors. The manager explained that the seven other paper mills were of even simpler construction, and were in the hills where there were wastes from bamboo.

Why did they have eight paper mills instead of one? I asked. He explained that all eight cost less than 10,000 yuan (\$4,000) and it was much cheaper and more convenient to make eight near the various sources of rice straw and bamboo waste than to haul the bulky refuse to the mill. The purpose of these mills, he said, was not to make a lot of paper, but to use up all their wastes and make all the paper they needed as well as make some income by selling paper. They expected, on the investment of \$4,000 and by the labor of some 85 people, to make about \$100,000 during the year. In the present state of China's transport, paper supply and wage scale, eight small paper mills were an efficient means of meeting a local problem. In the future, they might not always be.

Liangko Commune gave me another indication of the relativity of "efficiency" in its first power-plant. Because of its success, the

manager said, they were now starting work on twenty-four. Twenty-four power-plants in one commune sounded fantastic. Why not get all the power from one larger plant? The manager replied that the commune was large, about a hundred miles by sixty miles in area, and much of it was unused hillside without people, and the cost of poles and high-tension wire was considerable, while the cost of the small power-plant was small. It was much cheaper to build a small power-plant for every populated spot.

So indeed it proved when I saw the power-plant. A small irrigation ditch had been diverted to send a stream some twenty inches in cross section through a wooden flume where it turned continually a home-made wooden turbine. From this a belt of woven hemp connected with a motor and a switchboard. The cost of the project, including motor, switchboard and wiring to four hundred houses, was less than \$4,000 in U.S. money. It furnished only about fifty watts of light bulb per house, but this was brighter than kerosene and also cheaper.

"We can pay for it by one year's kerosene bills," the manager said.

These are the simple efficiencies with which the communes begin, but they do not stop with these. They go on to bigger industries, in some cases with incredible speed.

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Four farmers sat in my hotel room in Peking in late December and told me about their communes in four different parts of China. They were all delegates to the "Congress of Outstanding Units," i.e. representing the best communes. All of them had been illiterate ten years ago. Now all were managers of big business. A commune is big business, harder to manage than a single big factory, for it includes many factories as well as farming, trade, and the manifold details of public kitchens and nurseries, and other amenities of life.

Some of their comments came with a shock of surprise to my mind, accustomed to other ways of figuring. Han An-sen, a heavy-set man in blue shirt and light brown sweater, managed a big com-

mune in Kirin, Manchuria, which covered an entire county. I asked why they made it so big and he replied that it was "simpler that way." He added: "We needed a county reservoir, big enough for a large area."

This seemed a good enough reason till I asked what the reservoir would cost and Han answered that it wouldn't cost much because they had their own cement plant. He added: "We already built eighty-two small reservoirs in 1958 and some of them didn't cost anything at all."

Intrigued by his total omission of labor costs I asked who paid for roads, the province or the county.

"Nobody pays for roads," said Han cheerfully. "We just make them."

I later learned from more sophisticated officials that Han's debonair view of roads was not quite correct. Through highways of provincial importance are built by Provincial Highway Departments; county roads are built by the county; farm roads by the farm on which they lie. But Han was correct in assuming that, if the commune included the entire county, the farmers would "just make" most of its roads.

It was also intriguing to learn from Han that by taking over the county, the farmers "saved" about a million yuan of county taxes. "Not entirely," admitted Han. "Of course we have to use that money for schools and welfare, the same as the county did. But we save at least two hundred official salaries, and all those 'liberated' officials now work in industry and increase the commune's income. The county tax board was just dissolved, for the commune keeps books and pays all the taxes in one lump sum." Taxes, he said, were about five million, from a total farm income of thirty million plus an industrial income that wasn't calculated yet. Industry was mostly new and wouldn't be taxed this year.

Han seemed husky, efficient, and with much still to learn about cost accounting. What farmer wouldn't have?

The prize story in that group, and in all the groups I met, came from Kuo Pei-fang, a black-jacketed forty-six-year-old farmer from the Shansi mountains, with a lot of giddy badges of merit on his

coat. The idea that Chinese all wear blue denim today as a badge of uniformity is untrue: blue used to be usual peasants' wear and thus became Liberation Army wear, and is still widely worn. But other colors appear with a rising standard of living, and the girls especially blossom out in flowered prints and even in "perfumed cottons," one of the new fashions. But let us return to Kuo.

What drew my attention to Kuo was that last October, in the Shansi mountain area of his Red Flag Commune, some millions of dollars just began coming out of the earth. The area had never been good in farming: despite all efforts, it could not match the lowlands with their fertile fields. But coal existed; when fourteen townships combined on September 10 in a commune with 75,000 people, the county turned over to them twenty small coal-mines. There was also much iron-ore lying on the surface, undeveloped for want of technical know-how, capital and initiative.

"When the big steel drive began in October," said Kuo, "we began to dig out iron-ore. We sent delegates to steel mills to learn how to do it. We built one furnace and then another, and then we shot a big sputnik. (This is a special drive to see how much can be done in twenty-four hours.) And now we have seventeen iron works with 20,000 workers. When I left home in early December, we had made 76,000 tons of iron and 3,500 of steel. The government buys it at 200 yuan a ton for first quality and 168 for second grade, and some of our first iron was third grade and we smelt it over again for steel."

I did a bit of calculation and said: "You must have made seven to ten millions from iron in six or seven weeks."

Kuo replied placidly that it was "certainly millions. The accountants must say how much. There are expenses. But the ore is there for taking, and the coal is open-face and the workers are fed by the harvest for a whole year and can wait for wages till we sell the iron, and the government lends machines and blasts and power. So expenses are not much."

"How much capital to start?" I asked. Kuo worked it out. The commune treasury put up 18,000 yuan and the state bank loaned 20,000, and the people "contributed" 12,000 in money and also 5,000



timbers and 400,000 fire-brick. "There is good material for brick in the hills and they went and got it," said Kuo. It appeared that on an investment of 50,000 yuan, (some U.S. \$20,000) in cash, plus timbers and fire-brick, they had created seventeen iron works with millions of income in less than two months!

I put this up to Kuo and he said that was right. So I asked: "Do the iron works belong to the commune or to the state?"

"To the commune, of course," said Kuo, "but the commune is the lower basic unit of the state."

"What do you do with those millions?" I persisted. "Do you divide them among the members or send them to Peking?"

Kuo patiently explained that of course the state bank would get its loan paid, and the people would get the contributions paid. "They all got receipts." But nobody would take back money this year for everyone agreed all the money must go to expand and modernize the works. They had started with many small furnaces that one man could build in a day and that made only a ton of iron a day. Now they had bigger furnaces, making five tons a heat. But the works were far from modern; before spring they must be improved.

"We can't spare 20,000 workers for iron when the spring sowing begins," said Kuo.

Here was a commune manager who made millions in a few weeks from an initial capital of \$20,000, and who put them all back into production without worrying about details of ultimate ownership, but only about how best to apportion labor between farming and iron. So I inquired from more sophisticated officials in Peking. Who gets those millions? Does iron-ore belong to the township or to the nation? Can a single commune enrich itself beyond its neighbors on publicly-owned iron-ore? Nobody worried about it and the answers they gave were about what Kuo had given. Iron-ore was certainly the property of the nation. The millions would certainly go to the commune, and not to Peking because "rural development is what the country needs." The commune would not unduly outstrip its neighbors by monopolizing a national resource. . . . Some differences among communes would continue to exist. . . . How would all this be adjusted? There were many ways. . . . The

present funds would go, as Kuo said, to modernize the works, and also to raise wages of iron workers. Later, workers might come from other communes if the works grew. Taxes might redress any imbalance. Details were for the future to settle. That was about all.

I told a leading Communist, a friend of mine from Yen-an, what I thought of communes. I went overboard in enthusiasm for this organization that made millions on \$20,000 capital in a few weeks, and could "just make" roads and eighty-two reservoirs without cost. He pulled me up: fortunately for China, the Chinese Communist Party is more cool-headed than I.

"We put it this way: are the communes good or are they not good?" I stared at him, and he continued, "We think they are good but it will take us ten years to test."

Smiling at my deflation, he continued: "You have been seeing the best communes, the ones that send delegates to Peking, 'the outstanding units' which set example for the rest. The great potential you notice undoubtedly exists. But there are also communes which voted themselves free food yet do not have enough harvest to feed themselves till the next crop. These will have to be helped by the state. There are other communes which have established a wage scale but do not have enough surplus funds to pay these wages for very long. We think the communes are the form for us, but undoubtedly there will be some failures this winter. This does not matter. We shall all learn from the failures and they will reorganize and finally succeed." I recalled how Changshih Commune in Kwangtung and the great drive in Honan had been built on the lessons of previous failures. If all of China thus learned both from successes and from failures, they were indeed unbeatable.

The task for the winter, said my friend, is to "tidy up" the organization everywhere, so that successes may be many and failures few. The great bulk of communes, he said, were neither the big successes, nor the ones which had courted failure by voting free food when they had not enough. . . . The big majority really had enough food for the first time in their history but did not have much surplus for wages, and certainly could not afford waste.

Immediate demands were therefore these. First, avoid waste. Most communes have voted free food. Never in history have Chinese peasants eaten freely. "Who knows how much they will eat? Nobody knows. We know that one extra pound of pork per person per year will wipe out all our pork export, unless we quickly get more pigs. We know that even a small waste, multiplied by six hundred million, can be catastrophe."

Next, management. "To manage a big commune is harder than to manage a big industry: it is more complicated, for it includes industry, farming and the amenities of daily life. We have 26,000 communes and their managers are peasants who were illiterate a few years ago. They are honest and shrewd and trusted, because they were elected by the members, but they are not experienced in big affairs. Because of this there will be failures which can only be offset if everyone is watchful and ready to help.

"Then the communes must quickly develop commodity production. Nearly all communes have enough food, unless they waste it, but very few communes have much surplus besides. The farm co-operatives did not pay wages: they gave advances against harvest and then divided the harvest. The communes announce wages, even though small. They do not realize how fast these wages will eat up their surplus. They must at once develop commodity products in order to pay wages until the harvest is in."

It was clear why the Communist Party devoted the four months of winter to "tidying up." As the winter advanced and reports came in from inspection committees I began to glimpse the extent of the problems. I noted, for instance, the case of a former co-operative, now organized as a production team in a commune, which had kept back and hidden a large quantity of grain because they were afraid the commune would not have enough to last till the harvest and they wanted to make sure for their own dining-room. I was surprised when my Chinese friends suggested, not the disciplining of the team which had hidden the grain but an improvement of commune practice.

"Fear of hunger is natural, and suspicion is natural until people are used to working together," they said. "The commune should

avoid suspicion from the start by seeing that everyone knows where the grain is kept and how much there is; probably the grain should be stored in the areas that will eat it and checked out by the local dining-room and the commune officials combined. . . . The danger is that a small bad practice like holding out grain by a group, can soon become corruption and bribery of individuals who hide the action. It must be checked before it grows."

Despite abuses that indicate that Chinese peasants are human, that rivalries and suspicions occur, and inefficient managers exist, my conviction grew that the people's communes were one of the great inventions of this era, that they combine the economic potential of the early American westward drive, and its local initiative, with the social planning of socialism.

For as winter advanced I noted that the previous year's experience of Anhwei Province in the digging of a canal network, had touched off the four adjacent provinces of the North China Plain. Shantung, Hopei, Honan and Kiangsu had all begun building canal systems like Anhwei's. Honan was digging canals in forty areas. Serious talk had begun of joining canals of five provinces with the Yellow River, the Huai, the Grand Canal and the Yangtze, making an interlacing waterway of rivers and canals to regulate water and give transportation to the entire North China Plain.

Meanwhile on the great arid cattle-breeding lands of Inner Mongolia, which run from northwest of Peking to the Soviet border, where herdsmen have roamed for thousands of years, more nomads were entering the communes than had ever joined the farming co-operatives. They were developing ore-deposits, coal-mines, leather tanneries, brick and tile kilns, iron works and carpentry. . . . Settlements were growing up around schools, stores, clinics, libraries and community dining-halls. Ice-roads were made by clearing snow from frozen rivers: traffic on these was faster than summer traffic. For a hundred and fifty miles along the Liao River, tractors pulled five or ten sleighs behind them, taking cattle products to the cities, and bringing back to the former nomads the city goods.

Szechuan, China's most populous province, with 62,000,000 people in the warm southwest, reported that its four thousand com-

munes now owned 400,000 industrial enterprises, most of them up since September. . . . And over in Chinghai on the edge of Tibet, the nomads of the Tangla Mountains, roving fourteen sixteen thousand feet above sea level, formed a commune, and organized their first settlement around their first school. The school with eighty-one children of Tibetan nationality, opened with songs and dances to honor the new commune. The big achievement they chose to wire to Peking was that "all of the children came in new clothes." Herdsmen, who in the past were lucky if they got a new patch per year on old clothing, had chosen to celebrate their new future by giving all the children new clothes.

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On New Year's Day the papers were full of the 1958 achievements. It was truly a great and glorious year. Changes of such magnitude had rarely happened in world history in a single year.

The major event of the day in Peking was that the Congress of Outstanding Units, with nearly six thousand delegates from the leading communes of China, was drawing to its final session to sum up 1958 and launch the new year. For more than a week they had been meeting, first in a big assembly and then in smaller groups, discussing paragraph by paragraph the Party resolution on communes and applying it to their local problems in every corner of China.

When they first assembled on Christmas Day I had predicted that Mao Tse-tung, who for two months had been absent from Peking touring the rural areas and holding conferences, would "have to return" for these farmers. But when I went to the final session on New Year's Day, I had forgotten my prediction; I went to see the farmers without thought of Chairman Mao. In the new stadium, designed for economy and compactness, sat some six thousand of China's best farmers, mostly men and mostly young, but with a fair sprinkling of older men and of women. Most, but not all, wore new suits of blue cotton and all wore scarlet badges of the congress. They all had printed copies of the program. I looked at mine; there were seven items. I wondered how long it would take.

They began at four sharp with the National Anthem, then a brief chairman's report, then the "Ten Proposals for Agriculture in 1959." Each proposal was separately voted twice, in an unusual routine. The chairman asked: "Any dissent or amendment?" A pause followed by shouts of: "No!" Then the chairman asked: "Who are for it?" All arms shot high in air with clenched fists. Each proposal was thus twice approved, first by refusal to dissent or amend, then by affirmative fists.

Telegrams of greetings to Chairman Mao and the Central Committee were next approved, and to the "Fighters of the Fukien front," reminding us all that even as they organized the land for farming, there was war on the coast towards Taiwan and the American Seventh Fleet. The next item was listed as "Certificates and Badges" and my eyes turned to the great heaps of certificates that were stacked in front of the chairman's rostrum. They were certificates of merit, thousands of them, to be presented to several thousand leading communes, engraved in colors and gold and signed by Chou En-lai for the State Council, to be hung in commune offices as a challenge to their neighbors and themselves. . . . To save time, they were in bundles to be distributed by provinces, not by individual units.

Before presentation began, a stir came in the tribune and Li Teh-chuan, the woman Minister of Health who was acting chairman, said: "We have all hoped that Chairman Mao and the Party leaders might be with us. They are here." As simply as that, Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, Liu Shao-chi, Chou En-lai and others came through the rear door to the tribune and everyone rose, applauding.

The leaders did not stop in the tribune: they began to circle the stadium at the middle level, on the wide circular aisle from which the gallery stairs open. Only then did I notice that there was no division between tribune and audience: they were all on one circular aisle. The leaders went slowly, exchanging brief greetings by glance, by a few words, by a motion of hand. The entire hall followed their passage, with hands applauding, eyes seeking and bodies swaying towards Mao. When the leaders had come full circle to the tribune again, they sat down and the program went on. The certificates

and badges were given out, the secretary of the congress made the final summing-up. Mao and the Party leaders listened as part of the audience. None of them spoke a word.

For a time I kept waiting a bit restlessly for Mao to make a speech, to sum up, or at least to say some words of greeting. This did not occur. Finally I understood that silence was a stronger message, that silence said: "We Party leaders did our job when we passed the resolution. The present job is yours. For this we are just the audience. We are glad to be with you here."

At five o'clock it was over. That final session with its seven printed items and with the entrance of the Party leaders added, had been finished in just one hour. A few of the nearer delegates surged towards Mao for a final glance or handshake. The rest went swiftly out appropriate doors. They had launched the year's campaign for rural China and had received without words the blessing of their leaders. They were going home to carry the campaign through.

By the time I reached the door many autobuses had already left and others were leaving. The New Year had begun.

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### THE EARTH BECOMES A RUG

WU KENG

*Our village ends just where  
The next begins; this slope  
Joins with the next, the little streams  
Merge with the big canals,  
Until all earth becomes  
A woven rug of green,  
Criss-crossed with streams like threads  
Of silver, and all closely interwoven,  
Not easily to be torn.*

## PART II

### THE THREE HARD YEARS

(1959-62)

*“NOT easily to be torn.”*

*These words of the peasant poet Wu Keng concluded the first edition of “The Rise of the Chinese People’s Communes” (spring 1959) now republished as Part I of this volume. In quoting them, I had no idea how soon the young social form in which they expressed so much confidence would meet a supreme test.*

*In 1959-62 China’s agriculture was wracked by three years of natural disasters unprecedented in the century, which brought nationwide grain shortage. In 1960, the hardest year, Khrushchov smote China’s industries by the sudden withdrawal of all Soviet experts and the breaking of hundreds of contracts for machinery, parts and whole enterprises. The failure to deliver urgently needed parts for tractors and big dams added to the difficulties of agriculture.*

*The Chinese people and their government fought against the effects of these disasters by a three-pronged action.*

*The hundred million Chinese who live in cities rationed themselves and worked hard to produce part of their own food.*

*The half billion people who live in the rural communes fought the natural disasters directly by irrigation, drainage, better tillage, and replanting of ruined harvests. Saving themselves, they also saved the country. Some of their procedures were modified by the struggle but basically the commune organization emerged stronger than before, with greater maturity through experience in mutual help.*

*Industry, science and government concentrated on building an independent, self-reliant economy with “agriculture as foundation and industry as leading factor.” All non-essential construction and industry was cut back while industrial plants turned to help agriculture with tools for cultivation, pumps for irrigation and drainage, fertilizers to enrich the soil. They also devised and began to manufacture a wide range of modern industrial equipment for which China formerly depended on foreign lands.*

*By the end of the three hard years the volume of food and consumer goods had increased. Part II describes the struggle of the Chinese people, in cities and especially in communes, for the survival, restoration and advance of their country's economy and particularly its agriculture. Each chapter is dated with the period it describes.*

## 1. FIRST TEST\*

*Autumn 1959*

The story told in my "Rise of the Chinese People's Communes" ended in December 1958. But headlines in the world's press in the following months seemed to challenge all I wrote. Worried friends asked for comment. To them I replied: "Be at ease! Not a single commune has collapsed since it was set up! Of what other economic institution elsewhere, under similar strain, could one say as much?"

There have been ups and downs, many calamities of weather and one egregious blunder of statistics, but all these events were part of the coming of age of the child whose birth is described in this book. Nor is the grown child very different in characteristics from those given a year ago in its birth announcement: the Peitaiho Resolution of late August 1958. That seemingly almost casual statement of a new social and economic form appearing describes quite accurately the form now accepted as a base for all of China's life.

In rural life, the people's communes are today, in autumn of 1959, a base far more sure and solid than they were in their storming rise a year ago. They have been tested by all the floods, droughts and pests that the Dragon King could hurl against them and have snatched victories incredible to ancient peasant China. They have been tested also by their own mistakes, excesses and insufficiencies; they have checked these and gone ahead. Their form and function, now polished and given sharper definition, remains basically the form and function which I described last year.

All China's life today, not only in the farming areas, takes the communes as a base for plans in industry and government. This

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\*This chapter appeared as part of the New York edition of "The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes," published early in 1960.

morning the head of a great Industrial Exhibition, at a press conference on China's industrial growth in the past decade — output of industry today is almost twelve times that of 1949 — gave as a basic cause of recent accelerated growth "the great superiority of the communes for industrial development." Similarly my friend Dr. M. Hai-teh listing victories against diseases once endemic in China adds, as a matter of course: "The communes naturally make everything easier." He substantiated this by telling me how they facilitate mass health education and, by spreading information among their thousands of members about the signs of many ailments, lead to prompt reporting, prevention and treatment.

Last week I visited the Miyun (Dense Clouds) Water Control Project, a few hours north of Peking and the biggest such project just now in North China — north of the Yellow River dams. Two rivers that for centuries ran riot, spreading floods and erosion over many counties between Peking and the sea, are guided and held in a joint reservoir by seventeen dams, and serve already as irrigation canals instead of as carriers of floods; by next year they will give water and power to Peking. Originally planned as a five-year task of the late 1960's, the project is being done as a two-year job far ahead of schedule and at one half the budgeted cost by the labor of 200,000 people, of whom 140,000 have now gone home to get in the autumn crop in their communes.

"Of course it could never have been done without the communes," the director told me. It is the comment one hears everywhere. In this case some interesting detail was added. "At the start it was volunteer work by communes wanting to protect their own lands from flood; they even brought their own food, tools and carts. But since March the government pays everyone a basic wage. We still classify the work as 'volunteer' in the sense of honoring it, for the basic wage only gives the actual worker enough for his own food and incidental needs while his commune still looks after his family in the village and lists him for a share in the crop for the work done here. The government felt that the communes, in their first enthusiasm, took burdens beyond their strength."

This remark typifies some changes of the past year. What began as a great outpouring of enthusiasm, without counting the cost, has been steadily reduced to accounting and a fair division of labor. That farmers who benefit by flood control should contribute to it is proper; it is not proper that they should do it all for a dam that gives water and power to Peking. The distribution of burdens comes about, not by haggling and not even by collective bargaining, as under capitalism, but by campaigns, popular initiative and wide volunteering of which the government wisely refuses to accept too much.

Misconceptions abroad seem to derive from two sources. Some reporting, both innocent and not so innocent, has equated the people's communes in China with the communes which the USSR tried and rejected thirty years ago. Even a number of Communists abroad have been confused. In addition to this, the admission in August 1959 that the crop estimates for 1958, released in December, had overstated the grain by more than a hundred million tons, created a storm of ridicule for Chinese statistics. The subsequent definition of regulations in the communes were hailed by the American press as proof that "the communes have been abandoned and reverted to the smaller co-operatives."

No person who has carefully read my reporting of the rise of the communes is likely to be confused by these attacks. I have already made it clear that the Chinese communes are not at all the same form as that which collapsed in the USSR. They differ in size, in function, in form of organization, in method of distribution, in relation to state power.

What gave the American press the weapon of ridicule was the revelation, in Chou En-lai's report to the National Congress August 28, 1959, that the crop figures for grain and cotton in 1958, given in December as 375 million tons and 3.35 million tons respectively, were now estimated by statisticians at 250 million and 2.1 million. How can such a blunder be explained?

The explanation is fairly simple to anyone who travelled through China's farms last autumn and pestered the Ministry of Agriculture for figures. The peasants had never seen so big a crop; they had

no scales, containers, barns or elevators to handle it. They made an honest guess, in an atmosphere of boom; the county and provincial authorities passed these estimates along. I happen to know from my own interviews that the figures reaching Chou En-lai in September 1958, set the grain crop as "around 400 million tons" while in early December the Ministry of Agriculture was struggling with figures from the provinces that totalled some 445 million tons. This was so impossible that the Ministry arbitrarily cut it down to 375 million "to balance the provincial exaggeration." They did not cut it enough.

One should add that until China has standardized containers, scales and elevators, all crop figures will be honest but approximate guesses; that part of the excess figure was really produced but not gathered since over-enthused farmers left the harvest to make incredible amounts of amateur iron and steel; and lastly, that the farmers believed their own guesses enough to stake their future food on them, handed over to the government the "surplus" for which they had no storage, and then sometimes found themselves reduced to a sweet potato diet until the next crops came in. It was the peasants' first attempt to estimate crops in a new dimension, and the inaccuracies led, fortunately, not to famine but to state aid, and to a keen appreciation among peasants of the importance of correct statistics.

Improved accounting, resulting from the months of "check-up," had in turn been seized upon in the West as showing that the communes have fallen apart into the smaller co-operatives. This is not the case. What has happened was implicit in the Party resolution of December 1958 and further defined by the Central Committee meeting in Chengchow in February 1959. Three-level ownership was instituted with accounting at all three levels: the production team, the production brigade and the commune. The team, the small unit based on the ancient village, usually from twenty to one hundred households, was the basic unit for labor organization. The "brigade," which combined many teams, and roughly corresponded to the "higher form of co-operative," was a "middle unit" charged with administrative duties and in practice at the time became the "a-

counting unit,"\* which made it the manager of property and distribution of income. None of these teams and brigades were isolated; they were combined in the commune, the highest unit which made joint plans through its general meeting of representatives and its general commune office and organized joint enterprises on the savings of a jointly contributed accumulation fund.

The principles of wages according to work done, of voluntary choice in the use of public facilities such as dining-rooms and nurseries, and of strict accounting, are constant; they have been stressed in all Party resolutions and editorials from the beginning. In practice details vary from commune to commune and even from year to year in the same commune. They are determined by the membership in the general meetings, usually held twice a year after spring and autumn harvests.

In 1959 two changes of practice may be noted in the handling of grain. When public dining-rooms were first set up, everyone's grain was taken to the dining-room where the individuals could eat it or take it home as they wished. Later grain was given to the individual worker who could take it to the dining-room if he chose. This strengthened the principle of "payment for work" and "voluntary choice in use of facilities," and helped eliminate considerable waste. A similar change took place in regard to "free food." Popular at first, it was soon seen to lead to much waste; there were even competitions to see who would eat the most. It quickly stopped; in many communes it never began. It was replaced by a welfare fund to ensure that nobody should starve.

Thus the basic principles of the commune remained and were strengthened by the experiences of the year. To the principles of payment by work, free choice in use of facilities and strict accounting, there had been added by the peasants' own demand: "free supply to prevent starvation." All these principles were steadily more carefully defined.

Two events of 1959 must be noted: the testing of the communes by great natural disasters and the new combination of rural com-

\* Later the "team" became the "accounting unit" in most communes for reasons given in Part III.



munes with metropolitan cities which was defined by a conference held in Shanghai in June. Both events showed not only the communes' strength for survival, but their potential for growth.

China was tried by floods, drought and pests this past summer as it has not been for decades. In some places disaster struck as early as autumn of 1958. There were areas where no good rain fell from before the sowing of winter wheat until the following June when the crop was reaped. This grain had to be watered from other sources; where this could be done, the crop was the highest they had ever had. This drought was only the first skirmish. In summer of 1959 torrential rains and typhoons struck some areas while the longest drought known in decades afflicted others.

Nearly one hundred million acres, one-third of China's cultivated land was attacked either by heavy floods or serious drought. Summer rains in the Peking area broke all the railway lines around the capital, washing villages into the sea near Peitaiho. Rainfall of twenty inches in twenty-four to forty-eight hours was not uncommon. Typhoons more than once swept the Chekiang coast and brushed the edge of Shanghai. Canton fought the highest waters of the century and was partly inundated. Meantime the central wheat area of Honan suffered a drought of sixty-nine days, the longest in decades.

That victories were gained over these disasters was due to the new form of organization expressed in the communes. A few examples will show how.

In South Honan a county called Chang Ke contains a commune of 80,000 people. The area suffered drought in 1941, 1957 and again in the past summer of 1959. The commune compiled comparative facts from these three years.

The year 1942, known in America as a year of war with Japan, is known in China as the year when Chiang Kai-shek's troops ruthlessly looted the drought-stricken peasants in Honan. The area now comprised in the commune in Chang Ke had forty days drought in 1942. All edible weeds and leaves from trees were eaten; the roads were strewn with bodies of sick and fallen as 11,000 people tried to flee. Of those unable to flee, 4,196 died of starvation, 1,008 households sold daughters or sons, and — worse than individual death to a

Chinese — 521 households died out entirely, not even leaving a name. This was the result of drought in an area afflicted by war and by Chiang's troops.

In 1957 the drought lasted 42 days, two days longer than in 1942. The area by this time had farming co-operatives, and had done some water conservation. The co-operatives were small, averaging two hundred households; their funds and equipment were scanty. They mobilized 16,000 people to fight the drought and watered 833 acres per day. All their land was watered once. This did not beat the drought; they had a crop but it was poor. People ate some substitutes that winter, but nobody died of hunger. They felt they had managed rather well.

In 1959 the drought lasted 69 days, 70 per cent longer than in the previous droughts. No rain fell from June 12 to August 20; the air was so dry and hot that any plant that lacked watering began to curl and turn yellow in five days. The level of the wells sank six feet; many small ponds and streams dried up. This time there was a commune. It mobilized 4,000 draft animals and 43,000 people for the job of watering; 16,000 of them were women formerly kept at home by household work but now released by nurseries and public kitchens. The commune was able to water three thousand acres a day. All their 21,666 acres of autumn crops were watered four times and in some cases five times. Some two thousand acres of early corn had a yield 61 per cent above that of 1958, till then the all-time record. The later grains — wheat, millet, kaoliang and late maize — were estimated at twenty to thirty per cent above the previous record. It is not surprising that the members swear by their commune organization and hope that before the next drought they will have mechanized irrigation with pumps.

The fights against flood were even more spectacular. Floods were especially bad in the area around Canton where three mighty rivers, the East, the West and the North meet to form the Pearl River. Torrential rains of ten to twenty inches within one to three days poured into the upper basins of all three rivers. The East River crested at 1.48 meters higher than ever recorded, and overran its dykes. Crests hitherto unknown appeared on the North and West

rivers; these crests met above Canton and rushed through that city into the Pearl River Delta to meet not only the East River in flood but the highest spring tides from the sea on June 23rd.

The floods which followed affected two million people, destroyed 200,000 buildings, inundated over 770,000 acres of rice, and 180,000 acres of peanuts and industrial crops and washed out a section of the Canton-Hongkong Railway, stopping traffic for 16 days. Casualties were: 187 killed, 204 injured, 29 missing. Natural disasters of far less extent in the past have left whole counties to linger in famine. In 1959 the Canton municipality and the surrounding rural communes fought the rising flood around the clock, guided by radio reports of advancing crests and exact condition of dykes. Dyke levels were raised a meter or more for a length of 360 miles; when the water-soaked dykes softened, breaches were quickly repaired. Canton was saved from inundation; so was most of the Delta.

Villages in the flood's direct path were evacuated by army boats and planes to the hills where members of their own communes or neighbor communes sheltered and fed them. Relief from central and provincial government was sent in. Even the flooded-out peasants worked on dykes to save other areas or waded into water to pull out cart-loads of drowned rice that might be eaten. Flooded areas were quickly drained and replanted with the slogan: "Beat the summer flood in the autumn harvest." Nobody expected Kwangtung Province to make a good record that year in crops but neither did anyone expect to starve. Temporary housing was rapidly put up, and materials for permanent rebuilding were pledged by the province as a free gift to the injured areas after the autumn harvest. Meantime Canton municipality, in a gallant gesture, sent 180 tons of rice to relieve the flood victims in Hongkong.

These are two examples of the way natural calamities are fought in China, with the communes as shock troops and the provincial and central government sending aid.

## 2. WE GET IN THE WHEAT FOR PEKING

*Autumn 1959*

The first organized relation between the metropolitan cities and the rural communes was through contracts with suburban communes to supply the cities' needs. An important new step was taken in July 1959 when a Congress on City Planning, held in Shanghai, adopted the policy that cities should annex surrounding counties to enable them to plan better the sources of their food. Greater Shanghai took in ten counties, Peking six. The counties and their communes were quite willing to be annexed for they thus came on the municipal budget and could count on loans, electricity, machinery and volunteer workers at harvest. The cities thus moved towards self-sufficiency in food, especially in vegetables, fruit, dairy products, poultry, fish and partially in grain.

I had my first contact with the volunteering of city workers to help in the harvest in June 1959. I wrote this account of it under the rather presumptuous title: "We Get In the Wheat for Peking." Candor compels the admission that my part in the harvesting consisted of trips to interview top personnel of communes and to snapshot girl reapers, in which I seemed to add to the general gaiety but not to the general speed. At my age and as a "foreign guest" they wouldn't have let me volunteer; I should have been strictly in the way.

My only positive contribution was indirect. I let Feng-feng volunteer. Chao Feng-feng is my secretary and interpreter, lent to me by the Peace Committee; without my permission she could not have gone. She is a neat young woman with a new curly permanent; you wouldn't pick her to harvest wheat. She has, moreover, two small children, of kindergarten age. But Feng-feng keeps in condi-

tion by daily calisthenics and a half-day weekly of physical labor, which means weeding in the yard; she also has a full-time kindergarten where she can leave the kids.

She came to me June 9th with the news that a call for harvest help had come to the meeting of the Peace Committee staff the previous evening and she had volunteered. Would I let her go? I asked whether another young woman could substitute for her and was less than happy when I learned that the other young women were going to the Northeast with foreign guests. Later Feng-feng told me she had been refused for the harvest; it was felt I needed her. I asked if she really wanted to go and she said she did. So I told the Peace Committee I could do quite well without her. It was, at the moment, a minor lie but it turned out true because people from the Peace Committee came over from time to time to help.

I made a condition. "Feng-feng," I said, "you will do a harvest story. You will keep notes on everything you do. Begin with how you volunteer, how you get to the harvest, where you sleep and eat, and the details of your daily work." So Feng-feng went to the harvest and came back in a week. Her story was more interesting than I expected.

On the evening of June 8, said Feng-feng, the message came to the Peace Committee staff at its weekly meeting. Winter wheat was ripening fast in the Peking area; considerable rain and even hail was predicted. The crop must be got in fast between showers, before the fields turned to a sea of mud. The farms had a labor shortage; they wanted 120,000 volunteers for three, six or ten days.

The Peace Committee has a staff around fifty but many were out of town on trips. Of the twenty that came to the meeting, nearly all volunteered by handing in their names. Next day they were reviewed by the section in which they worked, and many were not accepted. One woman was refused because she had a nursing baby; others because their work was needed. A total of seven went from the Peace Committee to help get in the grain.

They left at one on the afternoon of the tenth. They went to an assembling point in Peking and took a bus at three o'clock that carried a group of thirty-eight. By four o'clock they drew up with

other buses at one of the production brigades of Evergreen Commune, which assigned them to production teams. Soon after five Feng-feng was walking half an hour down the road to Ming Village, one of the many teams in Evergreen Commune. Thirty-eight volunteers went with her, each taking a bowl, chopsticks and spoon, while change of clothing and rolls of bedding were carried alongside in a cart.

"We were shown places to stay in Ming Village, and our group divided them out. Seventeen men in the group got the day nursery, but they could only use it at night after the children went home. This was a bit hard on them for they had no place for noon-time rest. Five of us women got a room in a peasant's family where we slept on a *kang*."

Before dark they were all settled and at seven they had supper in the community dining-room. This was still unfinished but it had a big central table and many pieces of logs for stools. The newcomers sat on the logs and held their bowls to eat. "It was very good steamed rice," said Feng-feng, "with two side-dishes, cucumbers and pickled cabbage. The meals in general were very good, with home grown rice and vegetables fresh from the garden. Different food every day, rice or steamed bread or millet or corn bread and different vegetables. Once a good rice porridge with red peas."

Next morning, June 11, they rose at five o'clock, went at 5.30 to the fields, worked till the seven o'clock breakfast, then rested till eight and returned to work till noon. The noon rest lasted with lunch from twelve to two, after which they worked until seven. Once in the morning and once or twice in the afternoon there were half-hour rest periods in the field.

"We ached at the back of the waist from stooping and at the knees from squatting," Feng-feng said. "The local workers took the same rest we did."

The first morning's work for the women was transplanting sweet potatoes; for the men it was digging out cabbage roots. The wheat would not be ripe for several days, but there was much to do. The reason for the labor shortage was not only the wheat and the threatened rain but the fact that the fifty strongest young men of Ming

Village, which had only 180 workers in all, had volunteered in the winter to help dig the Miyun (Dense Clouds) Reservoir, a mighty job serving the entire Peking area. These fifty strongest workers had not yet returned. But Ming Village knew that if they helped with the big dam for Peking, the city would also help them with volunteer labor. The immediate need that morning was the transplanting of sweet potatoes into a four-acre irrigated field from which carrots had just been reaped.

Feng-feng learned that even planting sweet potatoes has its own technique. "The field was already plowed and harrowed and shaped into ridges, with small gullies for water to run. The water came from a new reservoir in the Western Hills at Jade Fountain. A man from Ming Village was up there and turned on the water according to orders each day. There was also a man in the field who let the water from the main channel into all the little gullies in turn. The water had not come when we got there before breakfast, so our work was to pull up all weeds that had grown since the harrowing and to go along the rows and dig holes nine inches apart for the seedlings.

"When we went back after breakfast the water was coming into the field. So now our job was to go down each row where the water was coming in, throw it from the channels into the holes we had made, and put a sweet potato seedling in each hole. These were brought to us in carts. We must not put earth into the hole on top of the water, for the water film would keep the earth away from the seedling and it would not grow. After an hour, when the hole was dry but not very dry, we pushed earth around each seedling. This must be done when the hole is still a little damp but not sticky, and before the sun dries it hard."

The work of the men volunteers that morning was to pull up the heavy cabbage roots in a field where the cabbage had been harvested but the ground had to be cleared for new plants. The longer the roots were left in the earth, the more fertilizer they consumed. The sooner the roots were piled up in heaps to rot, the more fertilizer they would produce. The roots were heavy and wet; it was a job

for men. The men came in to breakfast all muddy and wet to the knees.

After lunch a heavy rain came on and everyone sat around in the dining-room talking, reading, playing cards. But about four o'clock, the sun came out and they worked again on the sweet potatoes till seven. After supper they washed up, cleaned their clothes and went to bed. "There was no electricity yet in the village and you can't do much with kerosene in a small lamp for a crowd. We went to sleep right away."

Everyone went to the cabbage field on the morning of the 12th and dragged into neat piles the roots which the men had pulled. After breakfast they went to thin the sorghum field. Here they met a big detachment of students from the People's University which is located close to Evergreen Commune. Its students work there regularly and have classes about their work. People had been advocating "close planting" but nobody yet knew how close was good. The students thinned the sorghum and made observations. "This sorghum was much too closely planted; we pulled up more stalks than we left. They told us to leave one good stalk in every foot. With all this help a lot of sorghum was done between breakfast and lunch. Then the women returned to the sweet potatoes and the men went to weed the leeks."

That afternoon was made memorable by the finding of a good singer among the volunteers. "The peasants learned that a woman in our group could sing very well and they asked her to sing in the rest period. At first she just sang by herself but then she began to teach others. After this we often had singing in the rest periods."

The women still worked in the sweet potatoes on the morning of the 13th but the men went to prepare the threshing floor for the wheat was nearly ready to reap. It was a large, flat, bare area, perhaps three hundred feet square. The men sprinkled it with water and rolled it and let it dry so that it would be hard for the threshing.

"On the 14th everyone went at once to reap wheat. We heard there might be heavy rain and even hail and we must reap fast. We cut it with sickles near the roots and stacked it in sheaves, and a man with strong hands bound the sheaves. Some people made big

sheaves and some made small ones and some bound their own, but mostly we let the men tie them. A cart came along and took sheaves to the threshing floor. But we did not thresh that day because there was no time and no sun. We piled the sheaves up and covered the piles with mats.

"Cutting with sickles is very slow. The wheat is thick and the sickles quickly grow dull. We sharpen them often but they get dull again soon. But we had special help with the reaping. About seven in the morning we saw two hundred students coming from Peking University, from its special 'quick term middle school.' This is a special school for workers and peasants who got their primary education late. They are older than most middle school students and have more experience in work. They went to another part of the wheat field and we did not know at once how they were working. They did not use sickles. They jerked the wheat right out by the roots with their hands and tied it at once into sheaves. This is quicker than with sickles but takes much strength. Because of the two hundred students, all wheat that was ripe was reaped and stacked on that single day!"

On the morning of the 15th the men went to the threshing floor to cut the sheaves for threshing and the women weeded leeks. The morning brought another kind of helper, some fifty or sixty children from the primary school.

"Ming Village has its own primary school," said Feng-feng, "and the children came to help in two groups of twenty or thirty in each one group from nine to twelve years old, the other from thirteen to fifteen. They came with flags and singing. They went to the wheat field where we had reaped the previous day and picked up all the stray heads in baskets and brought these gleanings to dump on the threshing floor, leaving the field clean for the next plowing."

Everything on the 15th was done under imminent threat of rain or hail, a threat that didn't come off. "It was very dark at lunch time, so we took no noon rest. After lunch we all rushed at once to the threshing floor, both women and men. . . . All morning the men had been cutting the sheaves in half, with heads at one end and roots at the other. These were not clean halves, for much straw

remained with the heads and some heads remained with the roots. But we had to save as many heads as possible in case of rain. We also had to save the grain already milled on the threshing floor where all morning the horses had been dragging a heavy roller around.

"We women worked very fast to clean the straw from the threshing ground while the peasants put the milled grain in sacks and took it away. We piled the grain with the heads and put mats over it, and then piled the grain with the roots and put mats over that too. Then we went back to the wheat field where sheaves were still standing — it was only three minutes walk away — and carried sheaves to the threshing floor in our arms. It was very funny to see how differently people carry sheaves. I can carry two big sheaves or three small ones at one time. Some of the men tried to carry a lot of sheaves on poles but this didn't always work. We cleaned up all the sheaves from the field and got them piled by the threshing floor, and our arms were all scratched by the sharp points of the wheat."

That day was memorable because during the afternoon rest period they found that one of the volunteers could tell good stories — a funny tale from the Ming Dynasty and then a revolutionary tale. After this they had stories as well as singing at the rest periods.

On the morning of the 16th the volunteers picked peas. This went very fast. "The peas are in rows and the roots are not tight, and you walk between two rows and pull one row with your right hand and one with your left and drop them on the ground to be taken by the carts. We thirty-six volunteers cleaned up five acres of peas in one morning and went back in the afternoon to the threshing floor."

At lunch on the 17th word came from the Peace Committee that Feng-feng should return to Peking; she was needed there. "The wheat was nearly all reaped," she said, "and all the volunteers were leaving anyway in three days. That afternoon as we came away we saw the piles of fertilizer already heaped on the former wheat field ready to be plowed into the soil for the next crop. It was mostly mud mixed with straw and manure."

Feng-feng returned in the morning, and we went the same afternoon to see the reaping in another commune where 8,000 acres of wheat were being harvested with the aid of 8,000 volunteers. Here also

half of the reaping was done with sickles and the other half with bare hands. I learned on the way from a man from the Peking municipal administration that four-fifths of the area's wheat was already reaped and the city had supplied the 120,000 volunteers for three to ten days for whom the farms had asked. This did not count the students who went in those large and effective groups for single days.

I talked with a Canadian friend who had visited the reaping. We agreed that the Chinese are still far behind in machines and equipment, but are equal to anyone anywhere in organizing human labor in effective dove-tailing of all varieties of help, from that of husky students who can pull up grain by hand to that of children who glean the heads into baskets.

"They get more fun from it than our farmers do," he added almost with envy. "With school kids coming with flags and student yanking up wheat by the acre, and the singing of songs and telling of stories in rest periods. They'll get their mechanization. But they'll never be as lonely as our farmers on their highly mechanized farms."

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*Volunteer labor by city people on farms was to become a permanent practice not only for the help to the farms but for the socialist education of city youth. Shirley Wood, an American now teaching in Kaifeng in Honan Province, wrote me in 1964: "Last year, after several years of drought, East Honan suffered heavy rains that destroyed both spring and autumn crops. Worst of all, new planting was prevented by the scarcity of draught animals and the fact that tractors bogged down in the deep mud of the roads.*

*"Colleges and schools from the 9th to the 12th grade hiked out to the country and for a week pulled plows, harrows, seeders, saving a large area from misery. The young people lived and ate with the villagers, took their share of household chores. My son Limin, seventeen years old, came back speaking of 'my brigade*

*leader' and 'my family.' I have been on several of these labor stints with students and seen with them the grand struggle against nature, the crying need for farm modernization, the glorious fun of collective labor and the deep fraternity that springs up between them and the peasants."*

### 3. THIRD YEAR OF SCARCITY

*March 1961*

The nationwide natural disasters continued for three years. In 1959 a hundred million acres, one-third of China's crop-land suffered from drought or flood, in 1960 a combination of drought typhoons, floods and pests struck 150,000,000 acres more than half of the crop-lands and "seriously affected" fifty to sixty million acres some areas having no crop at all. Nor were the difficulties over drought still continued through the winter of 1960-61 in the northern wheat-lands, only slightly relieved by two snowfalls prior to March

American friends wrote to ask about "China's famine." The Chinese Communist Party's statement on January 20, 1961 that the agricultural plan for 1960 was not fulfilled, and that "the nation must concentrate on strengthening the agricultural front," had been followed by news from Canada and Australia that Peking was buying grain by the million tons and by reports of sensation-seeking foreigners of "bread-lines in Peking." This led in the United States to questions in President Kennedy's press conferences about "aid to China," and to advertisements in the U.S. press by committees which, in hardly felicitous terms, urged benevolent Americans to "find their opportunity in China's need."

China was hungry; of this there was no doubt. We were late to learn that the winter of 1960-61 was the toughest time, and that March was probably one of the worst months. At that time I made a six weeks' trip through the south and talked to people both plain and official, in dining-rooms and fields. Everywhere the winter was admittedly a hard one but the difficulties were being handled by confident people whose will was expressed by peasants in Shantung

one of the worst hit areas: "Living men should not be panicked by dead disasters. It is for the living to bend nature to their will."

Nobody used the word "famine"; no people were fleeing their homes; no corpses lay by the roadside, no bloated children wailed for food at railway stations as they did in the pre-liberation past. Friends like Rewi Alley and Dr. George Hatem (Ma Hai-teh) with decades of experience in China, told me that in "the old society," such natural calamities would have meant famine with at least ten million dead. But now people were saying: "Nobody must die of hunger," and even: "Nobody must be hungry enough to interfere with normal life and work." This was aspiration rather than guarantee, for hospitals in many places were struggling with increased cases of nutritional deficiencies and were curing them by extra amounts of food. On the whole, however, the Chinese slogans were carried out.

Everywhere the mood was one of normalcy, modified by special attention to agriculture and to food-saving. Steel production and coal production went on; in 1960 China reported 18.45 million tons of steel, as compared with 5.35 million in 1957, a tripling in three years. Basic educational and cultural activities flourished; song and dance troupes from Cuba and Vietnam made successful tours in the provinces. The commitments to export food to Cuba, Albania, Guinea, Ceylon were not even questioned and if any foreigner questioned them, the Chinese said:

"These are small friendly nations whose need is greater than ours. We are proud to be able to help. The grain Cuba needs for her independence is not even enough for one breakfast in China; the grain Guinea wants is not even a bite in our breakfast. The sugar we got from Cuba gave us more candy for our New Year's Festival than we ever had in history."

"China is too big a country for anyone else to save. China must save herself," they told me. The size of China, in area and population, set the nature of the problem. No import of grain from abroad could be decisive. A million tons of wheat from Canada was only three pounds per capita for China, a scant three days of food. These shipments of grain to the coastal cities might, however, relieve

the pressure of their needs on the farms and the transport of the agricultural interior. And if, meantime, the Chinese people themselves could each save a pound of grain per month — not a heavy task — this made four million tons a year, delivered right on the spot.

Some changes in exports contributed to help the situation. For years China had exported considerable amounts of foodstuffs to the countries of the socialist bloc; in 1961 she conferred with them about "postponement." By agreement China kept a large part of her soybean crop which is more potent than grain in cases of malnutrition. A considerable part of the canned foods and sweet biscuits that normally went abroad were distributed to China's cities. They provided those "Peking queues" which some foreigners miscall "bread-lines." Nobody that I knew stood in line for the staples, rice and wheat; these were available at once on coupons. But canned peaches, pineapples, apple jam and sugared biscuits came suddenly into the market and queues formed in a rush.

One was at first surprised, in view of the size of the disasters, to hear of no great government relief drives. Then one realized that the grain shortages were distributed through nearly all provinces and that sources of grain also existed nearly everywhere. The great drives through the communes for irrigation had brought irrigation to a large part of the crop-lands, though this irrigation might not be sufficient in a long drought. Each commune, county and province therefore, tried to supply any shortage by normal purchase from the nearest supply, on normal loans from the state bank. The central government helped the country with scientific data and weather reports and assisted those provinces that declared their need. In Chekiang Province, for instance, they told me: "We can handle our own shortages if we do not have to furnish grain to Shanghai. Thus the purchase of grain for Shanghai in Canada at once relieved the strain on several provinces on the lower Yangtze.

This method of handling the shortages was intended to bring China through the difficulties with a strengthened economy, a healthy population and with self-reliant local government administrations. When I recalled what the massive American Relief Administration had done in the Soviet Union in the Volga famine of

1921 to destroy all local self-reliance, I felt China was lucky not to have any "American aid." Meantime the Chinese population, already better educated than most people in questions of nutrition, received a post-graduate course.

I take two examples. The island of Hainan, at the south tip of Kwangtung Province, is tropical, with crops every month in the year. It suffers in spring from drought and in autumn from typhoons. Against the drought they are steadily building irrigation; against the typhoons they have a skeleton organization of "Typhoon Fighters," which can expand at need.

In 1960 four typhoons brushed the island "one of which landed its center right on us," the Party Secretary told me. This was a big one, grade 11+ on a maximum scale of 12. It swept the east coast then cut across the center of the island. It damaged 13 reservoirs and eight bridges, blew down 2,600 electric power poles and 1,658 houses and half a million banana and papaya trees. It also flattened three-fourths of the rice crop of six counties just when it was ripening — the very worst time. Two cloudbursts followed, dropping six inches of water and in one place 14 inches.

"In past years there would have been many casualties," said the secretary. "We have 100,000 fishermen at sea. In 1949 a typhoon destroyed 300 ships and drowned 600 men. Today we have weather forecasts, and the communes all over the island have phones. We mobilized by phone nearly a million typhoon-fighters. We got the fishing fleet all in, mostly by radio, though the navy had to send out planes to find one group of ships. Before the storm struck we reaped all rice that was more than eighty per cent ripe; such rice can be eaten though the grains are not as big as they might be later. We laid all arbor crops on the ground and opened drains from all the rice fields. When the typhoon struck, the strongest men went to rescue people and animals and mend breaches in dykes. As it passed, the others came out to hasten the draining of fields and raise the flattened rice erect. We saved a lot of it, but we lost between 250 and 350 million catties of grain.

"We rushed millet and sweet potato seed to the peasants, to get a quick ripening crop at once. For the rest of the island, which



normally raises tropical crops and catches fish and gets most of its grain from Kwangtung Province, we bought 85,000,000 catties (42,500 metric tons) of rice. Government relief? Some of it was but mostly it was just an extra purchase. Hainan is rich."

All Kwangtung Province is rich, though in pre-liberation days it imported food. In 1960, Kwangtung not only fed the typhoon victims on Hainan Island and other typhoon victims near Swatow, and flood victims from the rivers near Canton, but also kept on sending food to Hongkong.

In central Honan Province of North China, Paisha Commune had 300 days of drought. Paisha had irrigation, but the three streams and the ponds that supplied it dried up. In a single summer month the commune dug 600 wells and bought pumps. Then the water level sank in the wells. So Paisha drove a wide canal some distance to the Yellow River and put up a big electric pumping station and a hundred small pumps and water-wheels. Paisha got an 80 per cent grain crop; this was enough to supply all its 105 dining-rooms till the next grain harvest but it had no extra grain above its own needs. The grain that Paisha might have sent to the cities was bought in Canada instead.

Meantime the mighty Yellow River, which one recalls as a terrible surging flood, was so exhausted by the drought plus all the local irrigation, that its lower course in Shantung Province had practically no water flow for a month. Other provinces suffered similarly. In Szechuan, regarded as a constant granary for other provinces, the Chialing River, main tributary of the Yangtze at Chungking, similarly went dry for a month.

In situations of "real distress" which means conditions worse than those in Hainan or Paisha, the province and the central government acted, and not in a niggardly way. A commune of 145,000 people near Shenyang (Mukden) was wrecked by a typhoon in August 1960 which destroyed more than 5,000 houses and inundated 85 per cent of the fields. Shenyang municipality and Liaoning Province at once sent two million yuan of relief in food, clothing, seed and tools. The commune drained its fields, got a normal winter sowing into

the ground and rebuilt 5,500 houses. Four months later, few signs of the typhoon were left.

These are samples of local situations from which grew, by the autumn of 1960, a nationwide unified struggle to strengthen agriculture and meantime to economize on food. In this the state, the scientists, the population all took part. The task of the state was to speed mechanization of agriculture with special priorities for tractors, pumps and other equipment for the farms. The task of the scientists and the population was to develop new ways of raising food and meantime to save food.

Some specific measures were taken which Western critics as usual took as proof that the communes had failed. For three winters tens of millions of peasants had flocked to great irrigation drives and had added some tens of millions of acres to the country's irrigated lands. The work was seasonal but, as we saw in the previous chapter in the account of the fifty strongest men from Ming Village who went to help dig the Dense Clouds Dam, the men often did not return when expected and the spring plowing and sowing had to be done by the women or the weaker men.

In the winter of 1960-61 the irrigation drive was called off; the strong labor power remained on the farms for relatively light work. This had a triple benefit. It allowed men who had worked hard through three winters to rest. It ensured strong labor power for the spring sowing and also for the winter tasks of grading and digging to round out the irrigation canals and deliver water more efficiently to the fields. Lastly, it saved food, for workers on heavy irrigation construction had to be given an extra pound of grain per day. Men on lighter work needed less. This is a technique well known to the Chinese peasants who have long been aware that both men and beasts need extra grain for extra work. Nobody intends to return to the old days when peasants slept most of the winter to save eating. But where food was short, winter labor could drop to six hours a day or even to four hours, and the grain demand would be less. Even the city children in the schools knew this, as was shown by the cutting down on heavy sports to save food.

Another measure was taken as a result of the checking done in autumn of 1960 by organizers and inspectors who went from county offices and from industries to help "rationalize" the communes' use of labor power. By spring of 1961 they found twenty million men and women working in offices and small industries below county level who could with benefit be returned to labor in the fields. Nobody who had visited communes was surprised at this, for in many of the small industries men did not work full time, but waited around for tools and raw materials. Rationalization was overdue: too many small industries had been started by enthusiasm without due reference to local conditions. The grain shortage provided the pressure for rationalization.

"These hard years," a Chinese friend said to me, "will be perhaps more fruitful than even the Big Leap of 1958. These are the years in which we weed out every inefficient practice. When the weather again favors us, watch and see."

\* \* \*

At the end of 1961 it was clear that China faced another hard winter, but it would not be as hard as the previous one. It was the third year of natural disasters and crop losses, but there was more to eat. The carefully planned measures by government, the steady work of the communes, the methodical savings by the population were taking effect. It was also clear that the days of the great famines, when millions of people died or sold their children as they sought to flee to regions of bread, were over for good. The Chinese were fighting scarcity by staying at home and organizing their resources, with help from the state.

Every area had a different story. Sinkiang and Yunnan in the far northwest and southwest had had no serious crop difficulties. They had grain surplus but the transport difficulties were such that it was easier for China to import from Canada than from Yunnan or Sinkiang.

It was a pleasant footnote to record that the crops in Tibet had grown better every year since the crushing of the serf-owner rebellion in 1959 had led to the land reform. The Panchen Erdeni

came down from Lhasa to Peking for the National Day celebration on October 1st, and reported the third good harvest since the freeing of the serfs. Many areas above 13,000 feet elevation had reaped in autumn of 1961 the first barley harvest they ever saw. One experimental area in the Himalayas at 14,800 feet elevation, higher than Mt. Blanc or Mt. Whitney, had produced 18 bushels of barley per acre on 170 acres of reclaimed mountain land.

The Northeast, which abroad is called Manchuria, had a good autumn harvest of sorghum and soy beans. Sorghum was the diet of North China peasants for generations before they aspired to the better but more capricious wheat. Many northern areas had a good "second crop" of sorghum, beans or sweet potatoes in 1961 after the drought had killed the spring crop of winter wheat.

The Peking area had such surplus of sweet potatoes that they made it compulsory for every citizen to take two pounds of his monthly grain ration in sweet potatoes, at the rate of ten pounds for two pounds of grain. Nobody complained; for variety and nutrition, it was a good exchange. It was also good for the grain reserves for grain is easily stored while sweet potatoes cannot last the winter without special handling. Peking had so many sweet potatoes that they were cooked, kept hot in special hampers, and sold in the streets without ration cards. They were served buttered, in slices like toast, at a friend's house with afternoon tea.

China's struggle against natural calamities of weather began to be seen in contrast not only with China's own past but with what was happening in neighboring countries of Asia. Whether or not the cause be sun-spots, chaotically evil weather has been afflicting much of the earth. Even Canada and the United States are not immune, for Canada and North Dakota had disaster areas from drought in the same season in which Galveston, Texas was struck by a record hurricane and flood. These countries, however, have mechanized agriculture and great surpluses on which to rely. Such surpluses Asia has never attained.

All southern Asia, from Japan around to India, was afflicted in this year of 1961 with natural calamities. In India "unprecedented rains" in Bihar state inundated 650 villages, destroyed 150,000 houses,

drowned 20,000 cattle and nearly a thousand people in early October. Saigon reported that the flooding Mekong inundated more than 1,500 square miles of the South Vietnam rice bowl and drowned more than a hundred people. In Thailand floods widely inundated the northern, northwestern and central provinces. Both Burma and Cambodia had the worst floods in decades, despite some fairly effective government measures. Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh was saved by the work of thousands of civil servants in raising the dykes but smaller cities and 30 per cent of the rice fields went under water.

Drought was the curse that afflicted the areas south of Burma and Cambodia. Malaya reported the worst dry spell since 1860 while Indonesia claimed the worst drought in its history.

All these calamities were connected. The same dry heat that parched Indonesia and North China was melting with undue haste the snows of the Himalayas, and sending their waters rushing down the Mekong and Irrawaddy to make floods in Burma, Cambodia and South Vietnam and down the Yangtze's tributaries to flood half Szechuan while the other half was bone dry from the drought.

The natural calamities were similar but in different countries they were differently met. Most of South and Southeast Asia call on the United States of America for hand-outs and get American surplus grain in quantities either as loans or gifts. But for the "gifts" they sell their souls. The "gifts" bring American supervision into the very heart of the recipient country, controlling the local handling of welfare and eventually the national currency. Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia renounced America aid, because he said it was destroying Cambodia's independence and debauching her merchants; few rulers have his courage. India's steadily growing dependence on American grain is well known, and so is India's drift into the service of imperialism. South Korea and South Vietnam were once famous rice-bowls; they were short of rice in 1961. They have not prospered under American control.

China, it is well known, gets no American hand-outs. Nor does she get any Soviet aid in food; on the contrary she supplies certain foods to the USSR, mainly meat and soy beans in payment for past debts and for machines. The aid she formerly got in technical help

in industry has been paid for. Except for a small balance payable in 1965 to the USSR and a Canadian commercial credit that delivers grain a trifle ahead of the payment, China pays in cash.

China today stands like a rock in Asia, independent and self-reliant. This is because every locality in China is self-reliant and every citizen in China is proud of saving grain. If an area is demolished by typhoon, it gets state assistance as a "disaster area" does in any advanced nation. Otherwise every area fights to conquer its own hard conditions and then to help its neighbors.

A prominent Asian economist told a Chinese economist of my acquaintance that informed opinion in Asia gained more respect for China for the way she handled the years of scarcity than even from the spectacular achievements of the "big leap." He also told why. "You had three years of disasters and crop losses but you never begged for a dollar. What other nation can do that? And now you advance again on your own power."

Without the communes the results that so impressed him could never have been achieved. The hard years helped iron out the imbalances and excesses that developed in the great forward drive. Thus were the communes disciplined and stream-lined by the hard years.

\* \* \*

*"By the way, I think it was a more remarkable achievement than any 'Great Leap' to have come through this period of severe shortage without inflation."*

Joan Robinson, eminent British economist in *The Listener* (British weekly) January 30, 1964.

#### 4. THE CITIES RAISE FOOD

*October 1962*

In asking how much food people get to eat in China, we consider two categories. The city people, well over a hundred million, get grain and other rationed foods from state supply and supplement it in ways we shall see below. The rural population, well over half a billion, raise their own food, deliver part to the state in taxes or by sale, and in severe disaster get state relief. We take up the cities in this chapter.

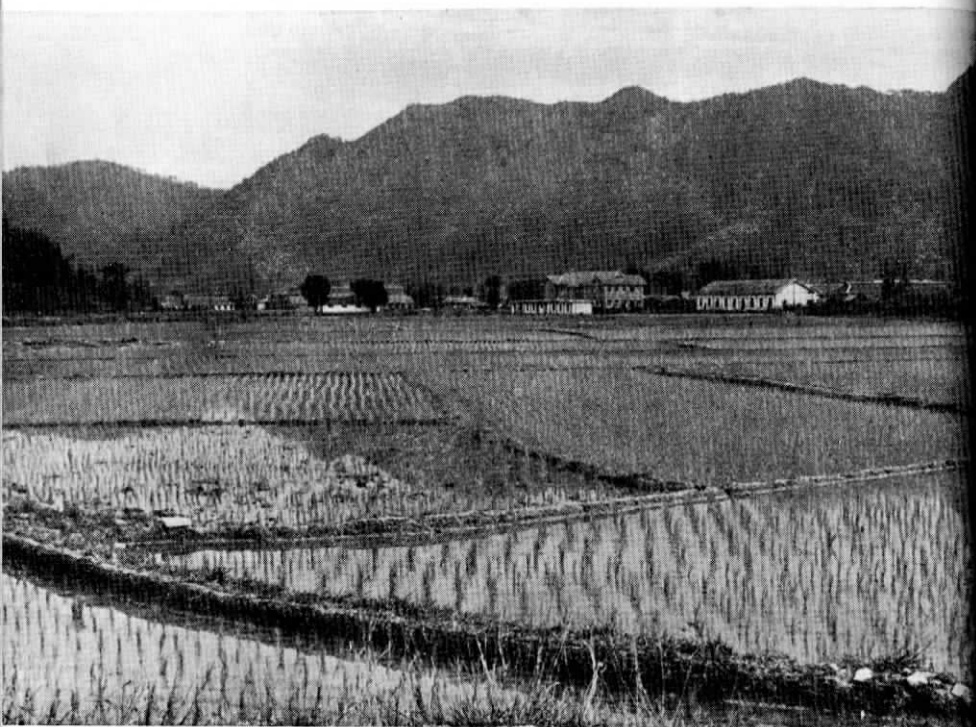
Cities by definition include all populated places of 2,000 or more, of whom half do not engage in agriculture; they thus include mining, industrial and county towns. Rations in cities have been in force since 1955, and are regarded not as limitation but as guarantee at low prices of commodities essential to life. Foods may also be bought "outside the ration" in the rural market, so-called "free market" where communes and individual peasants sell direct to consumers, but these prices vary and in times of scarcity tend to be high.

The grain ration puts a floor of security under the city population, guaranteeing basic subsistence at low cost. The grain ration of my secretary and her husband, both office workers, is a trifle less than a pound a day for the woman and more than a pound for the man. This total of 60 pounds a month, their main staple, costs (translated into U.S. money) from \$2.50 to \$3.00 a month for the two of them, depending on whether they choose to buy the coarser grains or the finer, such as wheat flour and rice. The price of grain is fixed, any losses being absorbed by the state.

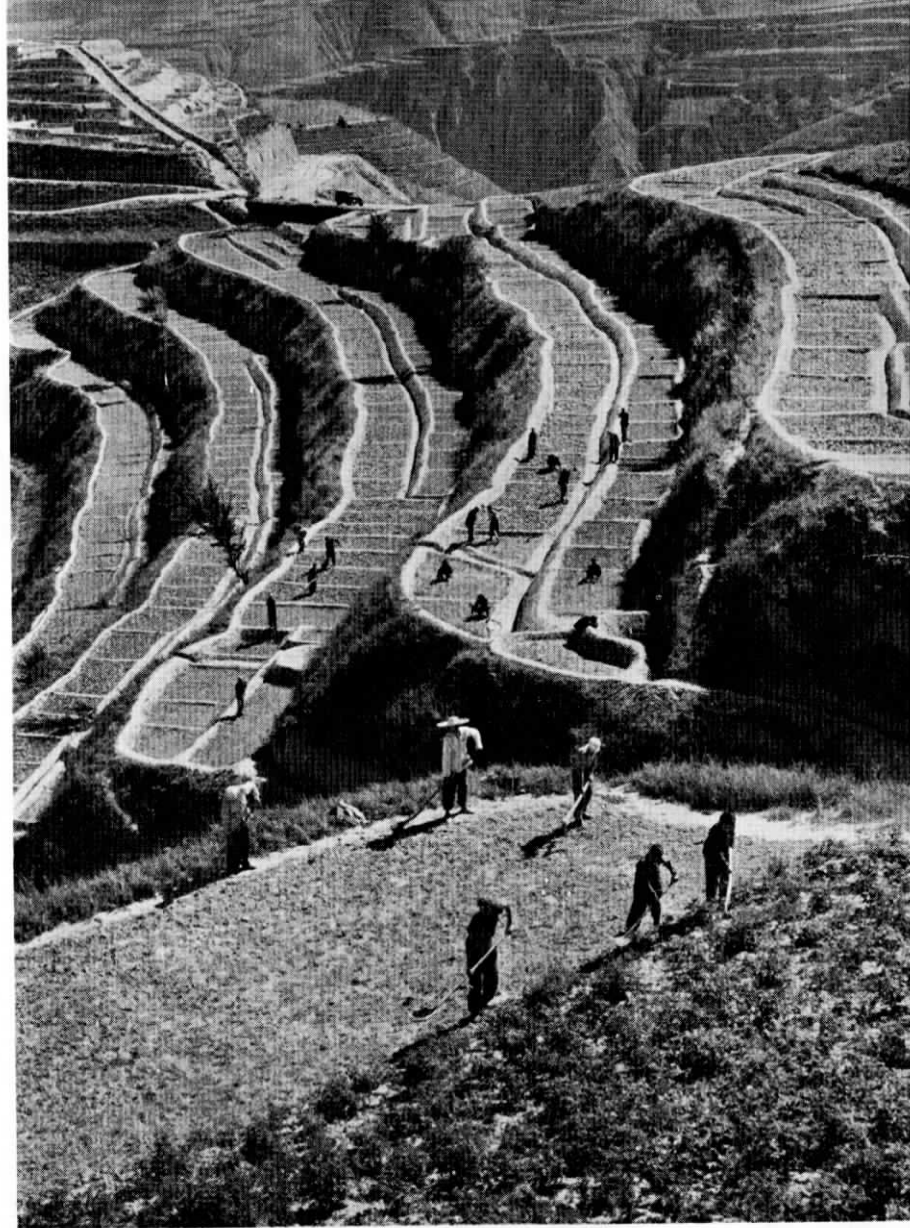
This fixed low cost of the grain needed for survival is very important to two young people whose joint salary comes to only \$80



"Three pumps deliver water faster than 240 men could do," explains the commune chairman to the author May 28, 1962



Kiangsi paddy fields need careful, infinite labor

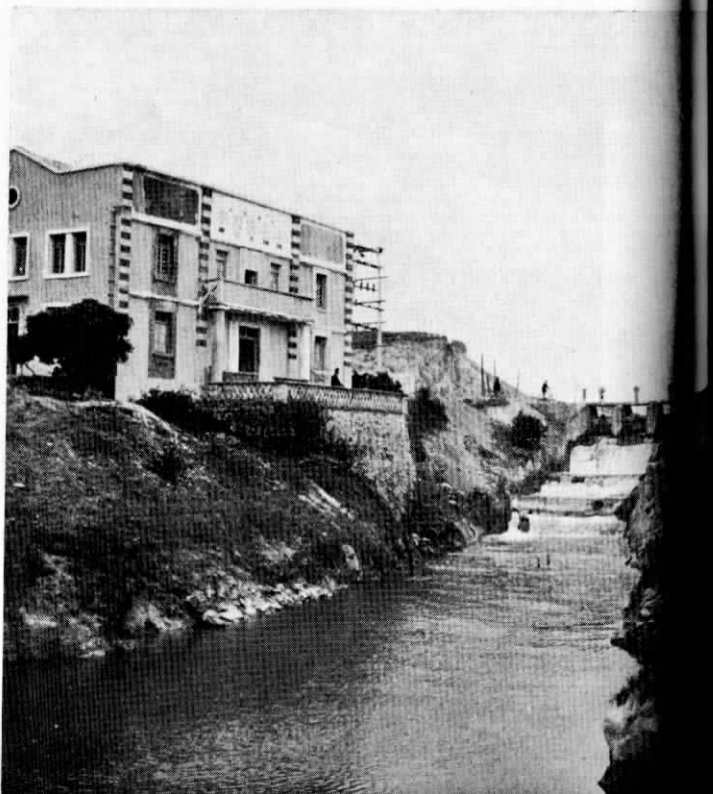


Kansu communes gain land by terracing hills



Irrigation canal dug by Huatung Commune, Kwangtung Province

A power station  
built on the canal

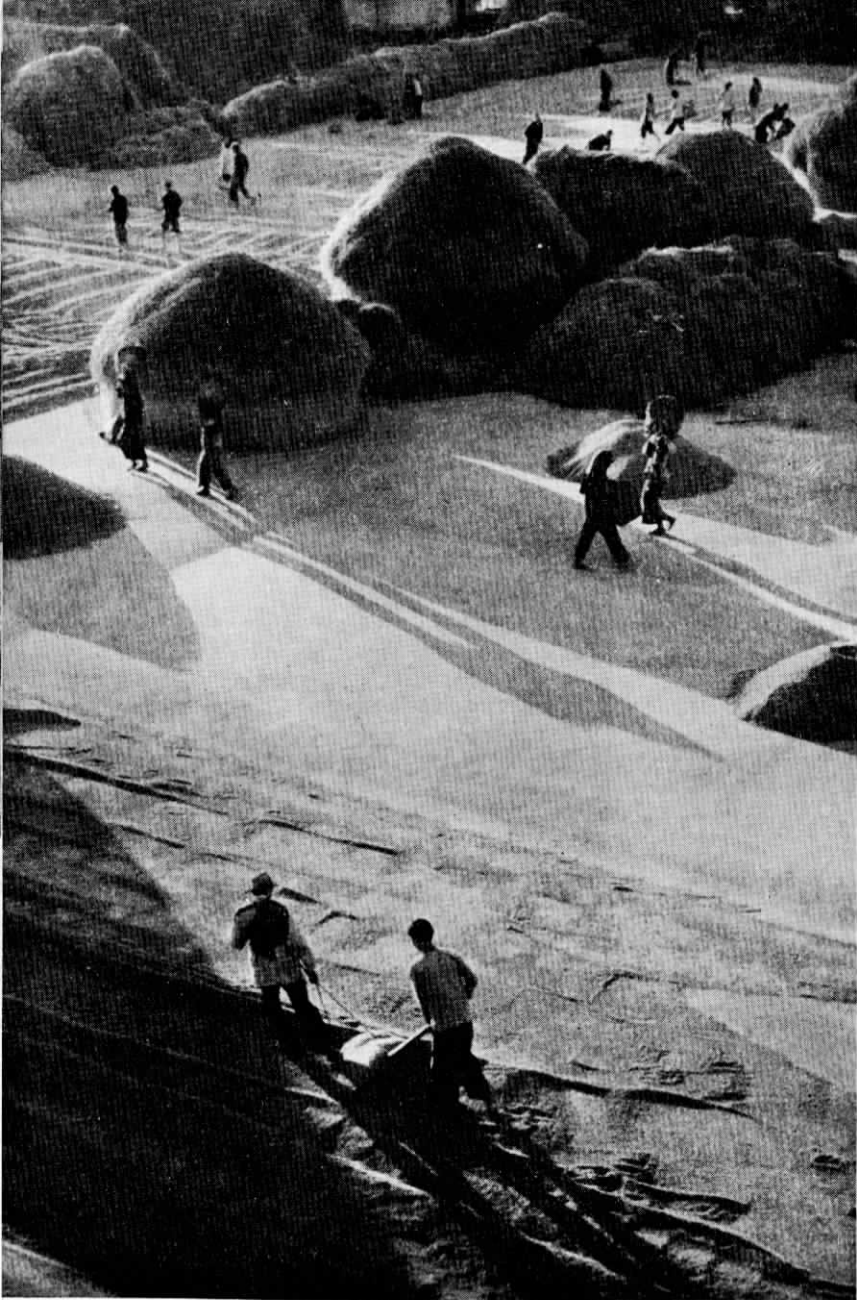


Evergreen Commune  
increases income by  
bumper crops of grapes

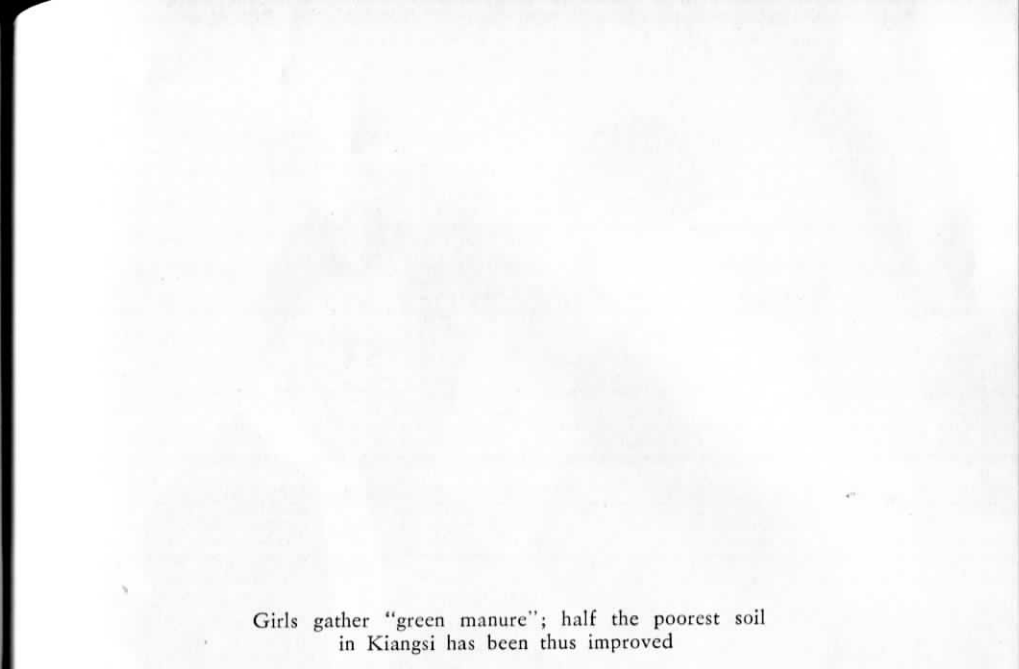


Members of Academy of Agricultural Sci-  
ences discuss crops with skilled rice grower





Sunning rice harvest in Kwangtung Province



Girls gather "green manure"; half the poorest soil in Kiangsi has been thus improved





Interviewing Sanshan Commune members, Hangchow, as we visit their brigades and pumping stations by motor boat

a month. Since their housing is also low in cost, being only \$1.20 for one and a half rooms, including electricity and gas, they are able to work without worry, secure in both shelter and enough grain to survive. In times of general scarcity they may run into hardship, since the supplementary foods in the "free market" may sky-rocket, but they do not fear for actual subsistence because of the state-supplied grain.

The grain ration does not vary much from city to city. There are slight variations from climate, because in warmer areas people need less grain than in the colder north. In smaller towns the grain may be somewhat reduced, because these towns have yards and gardens where people can grow food. In the beach resort of Peitaiho, for instance, I found that the office workers and resort staff got about three pounds less of grain per month than people in Peking; they made up for it by growing corn, soy beans and sweet potatoes on all the waste land above the beach, where they harvested potatoes by the hundred-pound sacks.

If rations between big cities like Peking and Shanghai do not much vary, they vary greatly between individuals. Each person's ration is fixed individually by age, sex, size, kind of work and climate of residence. The system was worked out under medical commissions and Chinese are proud of the fairness and fitness to individual needs. Any citizen who finds his grain ration inadequate can get it raised by a doctor's orders.

I shall not take up the entire ration system, of oil, cotton goods, meat, fish, sugar; it is too elaborate to cover here. I note only that milk goes by priority to babies, pregnant and nursing mothers and hospitals, and some delicate foods are reserved for the aged. My elderly friends get cooking oil made from maize, which is said to be more digestible than other cooking oil. I shall note here only the grain ration, which varies from somewhat less than a pound (uncooked weight) per day for a housewife or office worker to more than two pounds for a miner, longshoreman or acrobat.

The grain ration has been in force for years and is very flexible. Each family has its small ration book, with list of names, rations and residence. Children's names are entered at birth and their rations



rise automatically on their birthdays until in adolescence they get more grain than goes to a sedentary adult. The monthly tickets for grain and other rationed commodities arrive at the place of work or residence several days before the month to which they apply, but you can draw the grain a few days ahead. They are redeemable at the local store where the supply is guaranteed; you can buy for a day or the whole month as you wish. My secretary says that the only time she ever finds a queue is at the end of the month when people cashing their surplus tickets run into other people wanting to buy in advance.

The tickets accommodate themselves to their owners as easily as a personal check. Tickets on the local store can be exchanged for coupons usable during travel in another city; the notices are cleared like a bank check so that the new city may have the proper supply. When my secretary volunteers for a week's physical labor on the farm, she draws extra tickets, depending on what kind of work she undertakes. When she enrolls her two children in the full time kindergarten, their rations go to the kindergarten, but, since they come home weekends, they bring tickets home each month, and on holidays they usually appear with a bonus of an extra pound of sugar and another pound of cookies, since children have a much bigger sugar ration than adults. This enables the mother to give the children tasty food at home, which is good for family morale.

Probably no people in the West except laboratory experts in nutrition or Hollywood dietitians are so aware of the daily relation of grain to human energy as are today's Chinese. So when in 1960 the grain shortage became an emergency, everyone knew what was meant when they were asked to "regulate their grain to save waste." There was no edict or police order; word was passed through places of work and street committees and people discussed it in groups. Each person stated what he or she could save in grain each month without injury to health. Cuts were expected between one and two pounds per month per person, and anyone could calculate that such a saving would give the country a total of a million tons of grain right on the spot without the cost of buying it abroad. If any people refused to cut, they got no publicity, and their faces

and that of their organizations was thus saved. One heard, however, of people who cut too much—usually patriotic adolescents—and whose cut was "restored" by parents, physicians or the working group.

My secretary, for instance, cut her ration from 28 catties per month (32.8 lbs) to 26.5 catties (29.15 lbs); she told me the only change it made was that she became more careful not to leave any waste on her plate. A sixteen-year-old high school boy bragged that he cut from 42.9 lbs per month to 39.6 and that he did not get hungry because "we cut out sports."

"I like the sports' circle but if you have sports you need extra food or else you hurt your health."

I asked what the school would do for its sports' records and he replied: "We MAKE those guys eat plenty; we aren't so hard up as to lose our records. But ordinary folks like me can keep our health on walks and setting-up exercises and save grain." After a few weeks' patriotic sacrifice his ration was "restored" by the general order that children and adolescents should not be cut.

The city rations for the three scarcity years were thus planned to keep people with strict economy in normal health and normal work. On the whole, this succeeded. People everywhere suffered hardship and deprivation but this was not so much from the scanty grain ration—as noted above, it is more than a Westerner eats—but because the natural disasters affected also the supply of all supplementary foods and the price of these foods in the "free market", like eggs and vegetables and poultry—shot up in price or became unavailable.

The worst time was the winter of 1960-61 and this was especially bad in cities located in areas of disasters, among which were Tientsin and Kaifeng, where the surrounding areas suffered from long drought. Several people that I know in those cities lost as much as thirty pounds in weight and some even went to hospital for nutritional deficiencies, and were treated by the physician's order for special foods. That these troubles were generally attributed to lack of supplementary foods rather than to the grain ration, was shown by two friends from Tientsin, who visited me in late 1961

and told of the hardships of the previous winter which, they assured me, would not recur.

They based their optimism on the fact that "We're getting yellow beans now on the ration." It was only a pound of soy beans a month, in various forms such as bean curd, but it made a difference. There had been none in Tientsin the previous winter. Cases of malnutrition always lessened when spring vegetables came in.

Meantime the cities made their own fight for supplementary foods. It first appeared in a series of fads. Many friends grew "chlorella" in their homes in that hard winter; this is a green stuff like pond slime but is protein. One friend, a man whose name is known in international trade, joked in my study about his wife's habit of filling every dish in the house with "that green mess".

"It's what you'll eat when you travel to the moon," she retorted, and I understand space medicine confirms her.

In a public dining-room in Foshan, a city near Canton, the able woman manager told me she gave each of her patrons five to ten grams of "artificial meat essence" each day. This was a kind of yeast; everyone who studies nutrition knows that brewer's yeast is protein. This woman grew the yeast herself on the second floor above the dining-room; she collected the vegetable refuse like cabbage roots and leaves, added the grease from the pots and pans, boiled it and thus got a culture on which the yeast grew. The customers liked the "meaty taste" it gave to soups and vegetable mixtures; they felt better fed than usual.

Foshan raised its grain supply in another way. Having done its duty to the nation by cutting its grain demand by four per cent, Foshan analyzed consumption and found that grain was used for paste, in making paper lanterns, one of the city's century old handicrafts. Foshan workers sought other sources for paste and developed a glue from grass. The grain thus saved was added to the city food ration.

These picturesque additions were small compared to the drive that began in spring to plant vegetables in every bit of available soil in or near the cities. Vegetables appeared in every alley-corner and along street curbs; these places were not very productive

because of hazards from vehicles and trappings. Backyards were better. The Peace Committee grew a variety of vegetables: maize, soy, cabbage, in its compound. The Foreign Languages Press plowed up the basket-ball field in the recreation space in its housing area, and planted it to vegetables.

Every city organization also grew food in larger areas outside the city. The Peace Committee, in co-operation with other organizations, has a farm two hours away by bus, on land reclaimed in 1958, and now planted to fruit trees, vegetables and fodder for pigs and chickens. The farm is managed by resident workers but much of the work is done by volunteers from the city who give a week in spring and again in autumn. From this every employee of the Peace Committee draws some vegetables, fruit, eggs and about a pound a month of pork; they take it in the public dining-room or at home as they choose.

Personally owned chickens and rabbits appeared all over Peking. As I write there are more than 50 hens laying eggs in various parts of the Peace Committee's compound; they are good layers, for any hens that failed to give 200 eggs in the year went into the pot for some festival. One visitor who comes to my house keeps eight hens on his roof, and chops their food each evening after work. Another friend, a member of the National Congress, keeps five hens and gets an average three eggs daily for the family. He estimates that Peking has two million hens as personal property in city yards. People in other cities do the same. Shanghai people joke about keeping chickens on fire-escapes and balconies because their buildings are high; Peking residents retort that their chickens have intelligence enough to climb to the fourth floor for food if it isn't brought to them on time. Personal chickens thus become a theme of jokes in conversation. One should perhaps not quote the slander that other cities heap on Canton, when they say the Cantonese are so crowded that "they have to keep their chickens under the bed."

Feed for these chickens comes from the family garbage enriched by a bit of the extra grain ration. For as vegetables increased, people automatically ate less grain. The diet became better balanced. The grain ration, which they had set at a bare minimum, produced

surplus, and this was fed to hens and produced eggs. My secretary had no luck with hens and turned to rabbits which do not eat grain. This autumn with some surprise she found herself possessing thirty-three pounds grain surplus, in rice and wheat flour in her kitchen. She gave half to the public dining-room which gave her lunch tickets in return.

As the city population for three years developed supplementary foods of many kinds — vegetables, eggs, chickens, even pigs — the suburban communes began to overtake them, by a change that began in 1958-59. A conference on city planning, held by the major cities, decided that large cities should annex adjoining counties in order to plan their own food supply. Greater Peking today covers six counties, while Greater Shanghai covers ten. The cities help the suburban communes with electric power and sundry improvements, especially pumping systems for irrigation; the suburban communes thus increase the supply of vegetables and other food products, more profitable than raising grain.

Shanghai, as the biggest metropolis, is the prize example of how a city can raise food. Formerly a crowded center of seven and a half million people, mostly packed into slums, it launched its new city plan in 1958. This called for decentralization, to relieve the crowded center by a ring of "satellite cities" from eight to fifteen miles out, each devoted to a separate industry while the open land inside the ring is given to recreation, health and the growing of food. The clearing of the slums and the growth of the new industrial cities is an important story with which we cannot here deal. We consider here the growth of the city's agriculture.

Shanghai today has reduced its downtown area to 6.3 million people, while the outer ring contains 4.2 million, making ten million and a half, of whom more than three million work in agriculture. These agricultural workers feed themselves entirely and also supply the city with a part of its grain needs. But the special contribution from the suburbs consists of the vegetables; these have grown more than fivefold in four years, from 270,000 tons in 1957 to 1,390,000 tons in 1961. In spring of 1962 when I last visited Shanghai, the vegetables were still increasing. More than a hundred

regional markets were flooded with thirty-five kinds of vegetables, fresh and cheap. There was spinach, celery, onions at 2 cents a pound, cabbage of different kinds at 3 cents. These vegetables came at the rate of almost two pounds per person a day.

The fish supply of Shanghai was taken in hand in 1959 by the establishment of the Shanghai Water Products Corporation, a municipal organization that owns its own docks, ships and cold storage warehouses. It works in co-operation with the fishermen of the Choushan Islands, a big archipelago off the coast near Shanghai, where fisher families in the past lived in hunger and uncertainty, without weather reports, a prey to storms at sea and gangsters on shore. Today Shanghai scout ships hunt the fish runs and give the news by radio to the fisher co-operatives. And when the fishing boats are loaded, if the run continues, the fishermen do not have to leave for a trip to Shanghai, but can unload direct into deep freeze on steamers of the Shanghai Water Products, where they are paid in cash, and can bank in a branch bank maintained on the steamer and buy city goods at a store on the steamer, without leaving the fishing grounds.

By these and other means Greater Shanghai has raised its fish supply from 34,000 tons in 1957 to 146,000 in 1961, nearly a pound per week per capita for the built-up urban area. "Even as late as 1954," the vice-mayor told me, "most workers in Shanghai had only a bit of salt fish or a piece of cabbage to flavor their rice; now they have a choice of vegetables and many kinds of fish."

The growth of the food supply is similar in other cities. In Peking, as I write in late October 1962, 3,000 tons of vegetables a day pour in from the suburban communes, a pound and a half per capita for the four million residents of urban Peking. A hundred thousand tons are being stored for the winter, and the suburban communes will also be growing vegetables in twenty times as many hothouses as there were in 1949.

Two weeks ago I went to see what had happened to Evergreen Commune, the first commune I ever saw in China, in 1958 four years ago this week. Its manager said that every year of the four has had bad weather, drought every spring and drought or excessive

rains every fall. But the 7,200 families of the commune have almost doubled their gross income from 7,390,000 yuan in 1957 to more than 13,000,000 in 1961. They did it by extra irrigation and extra pumps that changed their main crop from grain to vegetables.

Yesterday I walked along Peking's main downtown shopping street and saw ten places selling fruit in two short blocks, two of them regular food stores and eight emergency side-walk stands to handle the fruit surplus that came this autumn from the millions of trees the citizens planted in 1958-59. This extra dividend from the "big leap" began with peaches in August and ends in late October with persimmons, selling at six cents a pound. On October 1 every family in Peking was offered a chance to buy two big birds for the holiday, either chickens or ducks. These come from the suburban communes plus a bonus of pork from the amateur suburban farms.

The same has happened in all of China's cities. The city people themselves, on the hard base of rationed grain, created supplementary foods by individual and group efforts, until their efforts are buried now by the flood from the suburban communes. Out of the "big leap" and out of the scarcity years they gained the most varied diet they have ever known.

My secretary is eating her last six rabbits by giving dinners to relatives and friends. She says she will not keep them through another winter now that she can easily buy chicken or duck.

Out at the Foreign Languages Press they have cleared off the vegetables and rolled the ground hard again for basket-ball.

\* \* \*

*By the latter half of 1963 the "free market" prices of such foods as eggs and meat had dropped to the low rationed prices and rationing thus "abolished itself" for one item after another. By the winter of 1963-64 milk was not only off-ration but in such abundant supply that its sale — at about 10 cents a pint — was being energetically pushed among previous non-consumers. Chocolate and other milk-content foods were also being sold everywhere at greatly slashed prices. This was the result of the large-scale planned increase and improvement of dairy herds and promotion of tropical crops (cocoa, etc.) during the shortage years.*

## 5. DISASTERS YIELD TO POLICIES

October 1962

The big news is that a good crop has been reaped on the North China Plain which, after earlier good crop reports from the south means that, at long last, GRAIN is in fair supply in all areas of China. Honan and Shantung were the last bad spots; now these have come across. Their June crop of winter wheat was poor for drought continued into the fourth spring. Summer rains brought good autumn crops of maize, sorghum, millet and sweet potatoes. Similar good news comes from other parts of the country.

The bonus of good 1962 weather in Honan is only the crown that is added to the steady advance of two years under the policy of "aid agriculture". The early rice in Kwangtung came in good for the second year despite torrential rains that twice broke the railway lines around Canton. The area around Peking has suffered the driest summer and early autumn for forty years, yet still the vegetables and fruit pour in to flood the city's markets. These are not favors of weather but victories of the electric-driven pumping systems that today give China's ever-widening irrigation network 1,600,000 horse-power — twenty times as much as in 1957 — and these in turn are only one item in the work that industry is doing to build agriculture into a sure foundation for China's next industrial advance.

Ironically, it is just at this moment that a French correspondent returns from a visit to Hongkong and tells how all the newsmen there grabbed him for "China news," and wanted just one thing: "When are they going to collapse?" Averill Harriman had told a Congressional Committee (AP, Sept. 10, 1962): "In 1959 China was going ahead so fast that I was gravely concerned. Since then China's food production failed and the communes collapsed."

Whether the newshounds got it from Harriman or vice versa, they were awaiting the moment to enter, in the wake of American relief or some other form of occupation, to cover the demise of China. They will have to wait.

People living in China learn of the increased food by seeing the supplies increase and the prices drop in the "free markets" where peasants sell surplus; by letters from friends in many provinces; by seeing friends who last year were losing weight or even going to hospital for nutritional deficiencies and who now are well-fed and chipper; by trips, such as I have made, to eight provinces, and seeing crops for miles from car windows; and by steady additions to the ration, which began a year ago when soy beans were added and have now culminated in the two big ducks or chickens offered to every Peking family outside the ration, for a feast on National Day, October first. This is the concrete evidence that convinces the people.

The state of the country has now been officially reported for National Day by Chou En-lai, the *People's Daily* and the Communiqué of the Central Committee of the Party. These announce that the crop of 1962 is "somewhat higher than that of 1961, which in turn was higher than 1960," that "the most difficult period is over," and "the rural areas present a joyous and lively picture," but that "many difficulties remain," and for next year and perhaps many years the policy must still be "to readjust industry to the technical transformation of agriculture," to develop the national economy "with agriculture as foundation and industry as leading factor," and "continue to improve management, variety and quality of goods."

This sound but restrained program may not seem very thrilling for people who in 1958 dreamed that crops would keep "leaping" by huge percentages per year, with industry rising even faster. When Chou En-lai then adds that "the serious natural disasters for three consecutive years . . . and the mistakes in our own work have caused us difficulties," one wonders what "mistakes" he means.

Are the communes now considered a "mistake"? Clearly not, for they are listed, along with the "great leap forward" and the "more,

faster, better and cheaper" criteria of China's general line of socialist construction as the "three red banners" which still guide the nation's advance. Most people even say: "The communes saved the country," for which there is considerable proof.

If I should pick the big mistake from which grew many others, I would take those grain statistics of 1958 which had to be changed the next year. I know how those figures came for I was travelling to farms and also demanding facts from the Ministries. The 1958 crop was truly terrific and nobody ever knew how big. Peasants who had formerly measured by buckets with an eye to taxes were guessing in a new dimension without scales or measures, with no danger of increased taxation and with desire to make a record.

At the same time they were organizing communes, "putting all China on ball-bearings" in three summer months by hand-hammering bearings out of iron and even making them from porcelain or acorns. They were going sixty million strong to make steel, and then seventy million strong to build reservoirs. In one great day Honan Province "shot a sputnik," which means that they worked from midnight to midnight and in those twenty-four hours claimed to have poured as much pig iron as is made in the U.S.A. in a normal day. In the midst of all this they "estimated" that harvest and then went off and left part of it in the fields. The statistical office in Peking couldn't believe the figures so they cut them according to their best judgment. Later the higher authorities had to cut them again.

The trouble with this was not that China "lost face" by confused statistics. I never found that Chinese care more than Americans what foreigners think. The real trouble was that the Chinese believed their figures and acted on them for a year, at all levels. Communes sold grain lavishly to the state and some later found they hadn't kept enough to eat. The state in turn, at county, provincial and central levels, was convinced that the "big leap" and the communes were such "Big Magic" that fewer peasants could henceforth produce more grain. So every province, county and even commune happily built industry, feeling that grain and raw materials would easily come.

This was what more than tripled steel production in three years from 5.35 million in 1957 to 18.45 million in 1960. In 1958 and 1959 the first two years of the Second Five-Year Plan, the "big leap" raised gross industrial output by 115 percent, though the Plan had only called for a rise of 100 per cent in five years, by 1962. To achieve this, tens of millions of peasants poured from the farms into the cities to work in new industries or study in new technical schools which were rapidly and lavishly built. Then in that same year of 1960 in which steel soared to 18.45 million tons, the worst natural disasters of the century struck the farms. And it became clear that agriculture could not feed this expanded city population with either grain for its workers or raw materials for its machines.

Even without the weather disasters, some readjustment was due. With every province and almost every county building steel mills and even communes making synthetic rubber from sweet potatoes, control was urgent from a central Plan. This control was already beginning. On March 30, 1960, Li Fu-chun, head of the State Planning Commission, reporting to the National People's Congress on the plan for 1960, noted that the output of industry was already three years ahead of schedule and stressed the need of "simultaneous development of agriculture" as the "foundation" of the economy. He did not, as some might have expected, propose new quantitative targets for industry or propose to begin a Third Five-Year Plan but urged that industry "turn attention to putting agriculture on a modern base". One year of many natural disasters, 1959, had already shown the need of thus strengthening agriculture, but the worst disasters had not yet struck. Had the weather turned friendly, the adjustment of industry to agriculture would have come with comparative ease.

Some Western critics think China exaggerated or even "fabricated" the natural disasters. On the contrary, China began by belittling them and stressing the power of man to overcome them, as shown by some communes that "conquered" a flood or fought a 300-day drought with success. Such victories occurred. Reservoirs and irrigation systems dug by communes in the "big leap" did save communities from famine. But reservoirs last only as long as the

sources and when drought followed drought, the great Yellow River sank so low that for eight months in 1960 children waded across it. It was seen that the entire Yellow River system has not enough water for all the farms in its basin in a dry spell of several years. New sources must be found either underground by pumping systems or by syphoning water from the Yangtze to the north, a task beyond China's present strength but already studied for the future.

The year 1960 was the worst year. Yung Lung-kwei of the Economics Research Institute told me that in that year 60 per cent of all the cultivated land of China was hit by "disasters, either drought, flood, hurricane, high winds or pests," and 40 per cent had been "seriously affected." In that year, he said, "natural disasters hit every province and region of China except Tibet and Sinkiang."

The London *Times*, Dec. 30, 1960, described the natural disasters as "worse possibly than China has experienced for a century" and added that the "succession of rainless days" on the northern plain was "longer than that which led to China's last major famine in Honan in 1943 when . . . an estimated two million died." Rewi Alley, who has watched China for thirty-five years as an engineer engaged in welfare, tells me that the blows dealt by nature in 1959-61 are rather to be compared with the years of 1926-29 when drought in six northwest provinces brought an estimated twenty million deaths.

This time, the strength of the nation was mobilized against the blows of nature. The worst food shortage was from autumn of 1960 to spring of 1961. Some of the organized activities with which the city population and the rural communes met the emergency have already been discussed. Meantime, the Central Committee of the Party on January 14-18, 1962 turned attention to the paramount permanent need for increased and steady output of grain. Vice-Premier Po I-po, on behalf of industry, noted that the tremendous leap in industrial production in three years had "won time" and that the two remaining years of the Second Five-Year Plan should be devoted not to raising quantitative output in industry but to the "technical transformation of agriculture" and the "expansion of light industry to meet the people's daily needs."

With this new emphasis, many cherished plans for industry and for educational and cultural growth were temporarily sacrificed or as they choose to put it, "adjusted" to the fight for food and the needs of the farms. The lives of people and the lives of communities were cherished. The nationwide slogan became:

"NO ONE SHALL STARVE!"

There were great hardships in many areas, but no wholesale casualties occurred such as had followed much smaller disasters in China's past decades. For there was no pulverizing of communities, no scattering of starving people, to beg and die along the roads. All communities, even when hungry, stood, fought and were given aid. So all community life, whether in cities or rural communes, has come from these disasters stronger than before.

What is meant by the phrase: "Agriculture is the foundation and industry the leading factor" that now defines China's basic policy in building her socialist economy?

Does it deny or evade the importance of heavy industry, or is it a temporary retreat?

Neither of these; it affirms a relation between agriculture and industry that is paramount for the present, though its application varies with conditions from year to year.

For years past and to come, industry, especially heavy industry is the "leading factor," which transforms China's ancient society and backward agriculture into the socialist society and eventually the communist society that China seeks. Industry, whether it produces tractors, pumps or nuclear power, determines the forms of change. Yet agriculture is always the foundation which industry remoulds but on which industry is built. If the foundation be shaky, industry cannot be built.

This has always been recognized in China. In the first year after the Liberation in 1949 the major investment was in irrigation for agriculture; then, when crops seemed sufficient, China turned to build heavy industry in her First and Second Five-Year Plans and in 1958-60 industry "leaped ahead."

But when disasters struck, it was found that all the irrigation done for agriculture was not enough, and the farms could not feed

the industries. So most capital construction was halted except for the needs of agriculture, and most industrial production was either "cut back" or "adjusted" to agriculture's needs. And millions of peasants who had come to the cities for jobs or education were told: "Your jobs and schools are closing. You had better go back home and grow grain."

This was not a popular move. Retrenchment never is. But neither did it deserve the emotional adjectives given by a writer in the *Nation* of August 11, 1962 who bewailed the cruelty of "tearing men from their homes and sending them to the ends of the land." Nobody was compelled to go, except as the ending of a job compels. Nobody was urged to leave unless he had a home in the village to go back to, and often his home was only a few miles away from his city job. If he agreed to go back, he was given aid with transport for household goods and family, and also "grain tickets" which entitled him to six months' grain on his city ration from state supplies, that he might not be a burden on his village until he began to produce.

Meantime, industry and technical education, cut back in quantity, are expected to gain in quality in several ways. The words used are "readjust, consolidate, fill out and raise standards" and each of these terms is much discussed in every enterprise. They must "adjust" to the needs of the country and especially of agriculture; they must "consolidate" scattered and isolated and weak branches of industry. They must "fill out" the gaps, and they must raise quality.\*

All kinds of goods for agriculture have been increasing. I have already noted the tremendous increase in electric-driven pumps for irrigation and drainage. Four new plants are going up to make tractors. Bicycles are produced now at more than a million a year, and many are made of the especially strong kind that peasants prefer, because they use them to pull loads. Prices on all such things are going down.

\* For a fuller discussion of the whole picture, see my 1963 interview with Vice-Premier Po I-po on pp. 209-15.

A second marked change is the growth in variety and quality. Conferences of scientists and technicians and engineers of all kinds occur often; recently there were four in one month in Peking. They are devoted to improving technique, to building the "know-how" in industrial plants and processes, so that these can expand fast when agriculture gives the grain and the raw materials.

So while total steel output may be less, China now produces between 9,000 and 10,000 kinds of rolled steel; while some coal mines may have closed, those to which hydraulic mining can be adapted are going over to this most modern method. Not all needed power plants can yet be built, but China already has designed and built power-plants with complete units of several hundred thousand kilowatts. Thus, even in disasters and cutbacks, the nation presses ahead in technological advance both in industry and farming, towards the day when a sure foundation in agriculture will provide the base for another great advance.

Governor Shao of Kiangsi, a wise, weather-beaten old revolutionary who made the Long March in 1934-35 and whom I last met in 1946 in Tsitsihar in Manchuria during the War of Liberation said to me, as we looked down on the many fine constructions in his capital, Nanchang, from the roof of the fine ten-storey hotel "Man's will, not Heaven, decides," was a fine slogan in 1958. We still believe it. But until we create much more mechanization 'Heaven' has still a word to say about our crops."

The governor had done quite a bit in Kiangsi to make "man's will" prevail. The province had won fame by reclaiming red low yielding soil through years of plowing into it "green manure" and had already improved half the poor soil of the province. He had also pioneered in the building of special farms to reclaim entire hill areas, an idea which may point the way to much land reclamation in China's under-populated hills. But in June 1961 he was caught by a flood that broke right before his eyes when three swollen rivers tore through an ancient city wall and poured their water over seven counties at the very moment when the governor arrived to "investigate." He had taken a helicopter to direct the closing of the breach by thousands of soldiers, students and peasants, and

had rallied the city hotels to send bread by the 5,000 loaves to drop from helicopters to flood victims; he communicated with the flooded communes by the county telephone exchange operating from a boat, so that much of the crop was saved and the rest replanted.

Governor Shao knew that many old walls remain in China that will break under pressure, and that not all rivers are yet tamed. He also knew the forces that will conquer. The "big leap" that began in 1958 transformed China. Not only because it nearly tripled in three years the output of industry and more than tripled the output of steel. Its greatest achievement was that it awoke to life a new type of peasant, conscious of his power to bend nature to his will. The process proved more complex than at first he thought. But nobody who lived through that "big leap" forgets it. And everyone you ask will say: "The greatest thing we learned was the power that lies in the Chinese people. We also learned the need of clearer plans."

A Chinese friend said to me, "These hard years are the years in which we weed out every inefficient practice. They will ultimately be as fruitful as even the Big Leap of 1958."

\* \* \*

*I asked another friend why the "big leap" is still listed as one of the "three red banners." Is it in memory of that historic "leap" of 1958-60, or in prophecy of the "big leap" yet to come? He looked at me in some surprise.*

*"Neither," he said, "and yet both. The 'big leap' is a process and we are in it still. It is a way of advancing by great drives of the people. After each drive there may be pauses for adjustment and filling in, but we think that, taken over ten, twenty or thirty years, China's progress will certainly be considered a 'big leap,' perhaps the biggest leap the world has known."*



## 6. THE COMMUNES SAVE THE COUNTRY

October 1960

"The communes collapsed," said the Western press of the 1959-60 crop shortages. "The communes saved the country," say most Chinese.

These organizations, if efficiently managed, are a mechanism of flexibility and power both for the daily tasks of farming and for the wider community needs. Different communes, of course, vary widely in efficiency and also in "luck" with weather. During the three scarcity years of 1959-61 they were brutally tested by drought, flood, hurricanes and pests with varying results. Good communes triumphed with amazing victories; even the poor communes kept communities together by serving as distributing centers for state relief. They thus prevented the worst feature of all past famines, the break-up of communities into starving floods of refugees. This time the people stayed where they were and fought back. And the communes emerged with organization streamlined, and with some modifications in practice, which we shall note.

The more than half a billion people engaged in agriculture in China do not get "rations" from state supply. They raise their own food, turn over some 8.3 per cent of their main crop to the state in taxes,\* sell to the state any surplus at fixed prices and consume the rest. In weather disasters, they first try to meet these by their own efforts or by the help of adjacent communes or the county in several ingenious ways. In severe disaster they get state relief.

\* Taxes are fixed to encourage production. The best communes I had visited by 1962 were giving less than 8 per cent of their gross product in taxes, because their crops increased but their taxes did not. By 1964, taxes in communes visited in Kwangtung were only 5% of gross income, because income, had again grown.

The first help the communes gave in the disasters was by the water conservation work they did in the two winters before the disasters struck, when some 75 million people turned out to dig irrigation canals, build reservoirs, strengthen dykes in a tremendous drive for water control greater than China had ever seen before. All over the country these new constructions resisted the first shock of drought or flood.

In Hopei Province, for example, the weather is normally too dry in winter and spring and too wet in midsummer and early fall. In 588 years of recorded weather, Hopei had 309 serious floods and 409 serious droughts, an average of more than one disaster a year. Yet its main river system, the Haiho, never had a reservoir before the Liberation in 1949. Between then and 1957, just before the communes were organized, two big reservoirs were built. During the next four years, with the communes, Hopei built 39 big reservoirs and thousands of smaller ones. These protected over three million acres from drought, waterlogging and flood in the bad years.

This is typical of what happened everywhere. On Oct. 30, 1960, the *Peking Review* reported during the worst period: "More than half the country's cultivated area has been hit by drought, pests, flood or hurricane." But it added: "The persistent efforts of the peasants, strengthened by the communes, confined the damage to one-third of the affected area, and even there, managed to wrest something from nature."

Tales of the way the communes fought drought or flood are endless. White Sands Commune sprang into fame in 1960 for its heroic fight against drought. Located in Honan in an abandoned bed of the Yellow River, half of its cultivated land is marshy, the other half sandy, making it vulnerable both to drought and flood. It was struck by 300 days of drought beginning in autumn of 1959. The winter wheat was sown in dry soil, got little snow or rain and, despite some irrigation, gave a crop 25 per cent below normal. As summer advanced the drought grew worse. Streams and ponds dried up, and the second autumn crop was in peril.

White Sands mobilized to dig 600 wells, bought water-wheels and irrigated. But the water level sank in the wells and the crops

again began to wither. Then White Sands built a syphon station on the Yellow River, installed big pumps, and dug a long irrigation canal. This irrigated 700 acres which gave a crop 80 per cent of normal. By various "side-occupations," handicraft and small industries, the members' total income was brought up higher than the year before.

White Sands compared this record with what happened in its area in 1942 when a three-month drought entirely ruined the crops, and when 1,188 people died of hunger while 1,533 families went along the roads to beg and sell their children for food. In 1960 they worked excessively hard for a meager return in crops, but, due to the commune, they survived.

In provinces south of the Yangtze the most usual disaster is a flood. I have visited many communes which fought floods and hurricanes with success. I have mentioned elsewhere the typhoon that struck Hainan Island in 1959 and the great East River flood of the same year. I shall here take an example from Kiangsi Province, the place where Governor Shao air-battled the flood brought on by three swollen rivers. The onrushing waters raged over seven counties. Sun Commune was one of the first in their path. I heard its story later from this commune's Party Secretary Li.

"We had a thousand men patrolling our four kilometers of dyke but the break came in the town above us. Suddenly we were at sea. People were rushing to trees and housetops or struggling in water, and houses were drifting away. Our people got rescued by boats or helicopters and camped on the railroad embankment. Our members began to work.

"We first sent people to help repair the breach in the county town above us, where the governor was directing 1,500 soldiers and 500 students in work as well as volunteers from nearby communes. When the breach was closed, we turned to our own fields. These were all inundated; in some the water ran off naturally and in others we dug drainage. Some fields were under water only a day and others ten days. As soon as a field was drained we cleaned the rice plants and raised them erect. More than half the rice was saved, and gave a 90 per cent crop. The rest was ruined and we

planted again at once. We did twelve replantings that year, not an acre of ours was without its crop."

Secretary Li said that help was received from nearby communes and counties. Four counties loaned five tractors. Adjacent communes loaned 1,500 baskets to carry dirt and supplied 55,000 pounds of seed and rice-sprouts for replanting. The province sent 1,500,000 pounds of grain, 600,000 feet of cotton cloth, 100 corduroy suits and quantities of timber, brick and bamboo for rebuilding the twenty-two destroyed houses. They also sent 53,000 yuan (\$21,000) cash relief.

"Was the help all free?" I asked. "No," said Li. "The helicopters to save lives and the steamed bread they dropped and the medical relief and the cash relief were gifts. But we paid for the grain, cotton goods and building materials from the commune's accumulation fund. We got it at 'equivalent exchange,' i.e. at cost. We also got the seed and rice-sprouts at 'equivalent exchange.'"

This introduces one of the methods of mutual aid by communes. Peasants caught by disaster do not expect relief for nothing. They know that other communes are also poor, and the government is not rich either. Everyone caught by a drought or a flood suffers. But he does not suffer the extra penalties of landlord profiteering in grain and exorbitant interest. Prices of necessities are fixed; grain changes hands between communes, and between the state and the communes, at a rate that is the same in both directions. They also exchange labor in the same way.

I found other examples of "equivalent exchange" in Chekiang Province, and also the form of help called "production for relief."

Fuyang Commune, two hours by road from Hangchow on a river bank, had four disasters in 1961: a flood in May, a 67-day drought in midsummer followed by rice-borers, and the worst hurricane in 68 years in autumn accompanied by flood. Despite all this, the commune got a crop 35 per cent higher than the members got in 1957, the highest year before the commune was organized.

Old Chen, the commune manager, told me: "The chief reason was that in the spring of 1961 we got the high tension lines and electric pumps." Other members told me that the credit went not

only to the pumps but to the way Old Chen "managed." He was a shrewd, kindly, experienced peasant and clearly popular.

Fuyang, I learned, is so far north that a double planting of rice is only possible by very fast work under good conditions. The early rice must be reaped and the late rice planted in the same ground in two to three weeks. Plenty of water and fertilizer must be given to the second planting. If there is drought at the time, you cannot plant the second rice. Fuyang had 67 days of midsummer drought, and while the new electric pumps made it possible for some brigades to do the second planting, the commune had not had funds or priorities enough to supply all brigades with electric pumps. Old Chen had had to "manage," as a commune chief should.

"Three-in-One Brigade," so named because it combines three villages, had depended on gravity irrigation but the drought dropped the water level and the irrigation ceased. The brigade figured that they could only raise enough water from the river with the old-style water-wheels to plant 33 acres; they must leave 200 acres without the second crop of rice. Old Chen took up their difficulty with the commune management, and got three pumps for them, one on loan from the commune's tea plantation and two on purchase. The commune secured priorities on the plea of "production for relief," and the brigade put up half the cost while the other half came from the commune's accumulation fund, to be repaid by the brigade next year. The three pumps shot water from the river into the irrigation system "faster than 240 men could have moved it," said Chen. The extra crop came to 160 tons of rice, much more than enough to pay the entire cost of the pumps.

Not even Old Chen could get all the pumps the commune wanted in a single year. Three other brigades that needed water were supplied by more laborious methods, through "equivalent exchange." Eight stronger brigades sent 207 workers for seven or eight days, a total of 1,400 work-days, to help the three weaker brigades. They also sent 67 draught animals with water-wheels, plows, five Diesel pumps and three electric pumps. The recipient brigades paid all costs of the operation, the transport, the fodder for animals, the oil and electricity for the pumps. They undertook to pay for the 1,400

work-days by giving an equal number of work-days to jobs the eight brigades want done.

Such is the self-respecting mutual aid between communes, known as "equivalent exchange." This is the first defense against disasters.

Disasters too great to be met by "production for relief" and "equivalent exchange," are helped by "state relief." This comes from the province, though a province, in need, can make arrangements with the central government for aid. The authorities in Chekiang Province told me that despite grave disasters in 1960 and 1961, Chekiang could handle all its own problems because the Central Government relieved it from the task of supplying grain to Shanghai.

Kwangtung, which is a strong province, gave over \$40,000,000 in disaster relief in 1959-61, in addition to the local help between communes and counties. It not only supplied this state relief against three years of heavy floods and hurricanes which each year inundated more than two million acres, but also supplied Hongkong with 200,000 pigs and 10,000 tons of fish a year, and between 200,000 and 300,000 pounds a day of fresh vegetables. Kwangtung is large; even when two million acres are inundated, with navy and airforce called out to save the people, other areas in Kwangtung still produce two and three crops a year. The province does not fall behind.

The province's secretary for agriculture told me that about 30 per cent of its communes had steadily improved from year to year, either untouched by calamities or with strength to meet them; that fifty per cent had "held their own" with ups and downs, but able to meet one bad year by the next good one, while 20 per cent "lost ground" and "needed help." I have no general figures for China but Chekiang Province estimated 35% good, 50% average, and 15% poor brigades.

A commune or a brigade does not "collapse" any more than does a township in the West. The county or province sends inspectors, analyzes the trouble, prosecutes corruption if discovered — and China is less than fifteen years from the feudal period so corruption is

sometimes a cause — helps the people change any inefficient methods and also gives actual relief. Such “state relief” is not like the “rations” given in cities, designed to keep people fit for normal work throughout the year. It is emergency, supplementary relief to enable people to organize their own local resources and survive till the next crop. The amount varies with local conditions and the resources of the province; in cases I have known it ranged from half the normal full ration to three quarters. Even in “total disasters” there remain always some local resources on which the people can call.\*

The most serious calamity of which I have personal knowledge, from the standpoint of food shortage, was a flood following a hurricane in Liaoning Province, which carried away the houses and 80 per cent of the crops in a fairly large area. The housekeeper of a Peking friend came from this area, and went home to it for her vacation the following summer, in some worry lest her relatives might have starved. She found them all alive and in fair health though the winter had been one of hardship. The province sent “relief” to the amount of three-fifths of a pound of grain per person per day, which is hardly more than half a normal adult ration. The province also sent building materials for houses, supplies of clothing, and in spring extra grain for seed.

With this supplementary aid, the commune had been able to organize groups of fishermen who added considerable fish from Pohai Bay to the diet; its members also had the meager twenty percent of their own harvest. They set up workshops to make what they called “carbohydrate cake,” which seems to have been a ground mixture of corn-stalks, sorghum stalks, leaves and tender bark with edible roots and some grain added. It may have actually added nourishment beyond the grain content, but its main function seemed

\* These supplementary relief rations issued by the state were commonly misrepresented by Western writers as if they were the whole ration for all Chinese. The 1,350 calories daily which the *New York Times* so persistently reported would of course not be a ration on which people could long survive. But as an extra allowance to local resources, it helped greatly during shortages between crops.

to be to keep the stomach full and still the hunger pangs. The people slept as much as possible, rising once a day for a full meal to do house and farmyard chores, and thus kept in fair condition on little food.

This is a routine known to all peasants in China. It is the way they survived crop shortages for centuries. They do not even call it “famine,” but only “the gap between the brown and the green,” i.e. the period from the brown harvest to the green vegetables of spring. The state relief and the commune organization helped them through it with more resources than they had in the past.

Such gaps will occur for some time in China. Just now, at the end of 1962, the areas needing relief are few and small and the relief itself begins to approach the amount of a full ration. The aim is that no great difference shall exist between the living standard of city and country. But since the rural areas grow their own food, no precise equality exists or is sought. Today the most efficient communes — or the luckier ones — eat considerably more than the city ration; the less efficient ones, that need relief, eat less. But all fought the natural disasters and their own inefficiencies and pulled through.

The three years’ struggle tightened the commune organization by eliminating waste, correcting mistakes and increasing both local initiative and collective strength.

“Free food” disappeared; it was never recommended by any Party resolution; it had flashed across the country as a peasant ideal which the peasants dropped because it led to waste; it is in part replaced by commune welfare funds; able-bodied people pay for foodstuffs, but anyone who has no family support and is too young, old or ill to work is taken care of, while households with too few workers get supplements. This is cradle-to-grave social insurance such as the peasants never enjoyed in any past age.

Public dining-rooms largely disappeared, but not entirely. They survive in schools, kindergartens, workshops and at times for field groups; they also survive wherever there is a management efficient enough to compete with the economies of the home. Many people

like them, and organize them on a smaller scale. But most of them were too wasteful in food, fuel and labor for the hard years.

"Private plots" for the individual family existed in the co-operatives and were often discarded in the early days of the communes, sometimes by peasant initiative and sometimes by pressure of local leaders. The 1958 Party resolutions had warned against abolishing them prematurely, and there was never an official decree against them. They were "reaffirmed" by favorable mention in *Red Flag* in summer of 1961, an action that indicated they were already widespread but controversial, needing some authoritative comment. In China, they are limited to 5% of the collective area, far less than is given to private plots in the USSR. Private plots supply individual tastes; one person wants garlic, another tobacco, another some maize to feed chickens. They are untaxed and their produce does not show in statistics.

The most important change in the communes is that which makes the "production team" rather than the "brigade" the "accounting unit." If this sounds formal, we note that the "accounting unit" makes the farm plan, manages the labor and divides the harvest, and is practically the owner of the land and draught animals. What is happening is a transfer to the smaller unit, a team of one or two score families, of the responsibilities of ownership and distribution of crop. This is not by edict or resolution, but by favorable mention by an editorial in *Red Flag* in November 1960, and again in the New Year's editorial of the *People's Daily* January 1, 1962. The change is neither compulsory or universal. In practice most of the communes I have thus far visited still keep the brigades as "accounting units"; this is decided by the commune's general meeting.\*

The manager of Evergreen Commune in Peking suburbs told me: "We prefer the larger unit because we have tractors, electric pumping systems and many hothouses. Our ownership and operation is best handled in the larger unit. But nine-tenths of China's farming is still by manual labor and draught animals; such peasants want

\* In Chapter 3 of Part III, on "Teams and Brigades" the merits of the "team" as accounting unit appear.

to decide their plans and divide their crop right in their villages. As mechanization advances, they also will think in terms of the larger 'brigade'."

These changes are in practice, not in substance. They are part of the constant adjustment of local initiative to wider organized strength. When I asked the Evergreen manager which unit—the team, the brigade or the commune, had the right to "give orders" for an irrigation canal, he looked at me quizzically as if suspecting some provocation.

Then he laughed: "Give orders? To a Chinese peasant? That's something you don't do if you hope to succeed. Whichever unit needs the irrigation makes a plan and explains it to the peasants. If the plan is reasonable they get volunteers. If you don't get volunteers, you know the plan isn't reasonable. Peasants are shrewd in matters of livelihood."

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If the communes "saved the country" through three years of disasters, it was because they first organized the peasants for irrigation and flood control, because in the hardest trials, the better communes were a light to their neighbors, and even the poor communes, as distributing centers of state relief, prevented the dispersal of communities which is always the worst aspect of a real famine.

So communities survived, learned from mistakes, and came from the years of scarcity stronger, more confident than before.

If the greatest thing they learned from the "big leap" of 1958 was "the power that lies in the Chinese people," then they took from the scarcity years the technique for using this power, through local initiatives connected through mutual aid and state aid in a network that reaches the ends of the land.

\* \* \*

*By the summer of 1963, food was no problem and China's friends were growing lyrical. Thus a correspondent from Cuba wrote me from a tour of the country: "Collective economy has passed the test; the communes are stronger than ever. God bless this people for letting me see all these marvels."*

*Even the skeptics give tribute. And a none-too-friendly diplomat who two years ago had thought the farm situation "catastrophic," gave the judgment. "China may well be the first socialist country really to solve the problem of agriculture."*

*The Chinese themselves were modest. They made no claim to "bumper crops" and released few statistics. They said that each year now was better than the last, that "a sound base has been built for an independent modern industry." They added: "We are still a poor and technically backward country; the modernization of our agriculture has only begun and will take decades."*

*But nobody could miss the confidence and sense of well-being that grew across the land.*

### PART III

## COMMUNES SIX YEARS AFTER (1964)

AS 1963 ended, most of the Western press still wrote off the Chinese communes but the theme had changed. The declaration by John Foster Dulles in 1958 that the communes "degraded the human individual" and "imposed mass slavery" had long been replaced by the claim that the communes were abolished because they were responsible for the crop failures of the three hard years. When communes still appeared in the news, the Western view became that these were "communes in name only" and "greatly modified." When the great increase in fruit, vegetables, pigs and poultry at the end of 1963 could no longer be hidden, these were attributed to the "individual plots."

The Soviet press, led off by allusions in the Open Letter of the CPSU July 14, 1963 to people "eating watery soup out of a common bowl," and by Nikita Khrushchov's sneer at "five people wearing a pair of trousers" joined the chorus that the communes had failed and called them "a departure from Marxism-Leninism," and "in essence reactionary." The theme of a famine-stricken China was still heard in 1964 though by then it was Soviet agriculture that was clearly in crisis while China was supplying meat to the USSR by the tens of thousands of tons.

When I went south in January 1964 for a vacation on Hainan Island I stopped in Canton on the way down and again in March on the way back for another look at communes in Kwangtung. I wanted a rounded story of these six years. I chose this province because it is in any case impossible to cover all of China, while to pick communes at random in different parts of the country seemed to me less likely to give a balanced picture than to concentrate on a single province with which I am more familiar than with any other, having visited its communes over a period of nearly six years. Besides, the first provincial Party secretary, Tao Chu, whom I had met and expected again to interview, had just written a five year report on the communes in that province, giving an excellent background.

I chose Kwangtung also because it has a special interest for foreign readers. This is the province that for more than a century supplied most of the overseas migration of Chinese. Despite its subtropical climate that permits two annual crops from the same hard-worked soil, the province could not feed itself under the conditions of the "old society" but exported a steady stream of "contract labor," practically slaves, to the plantations and mines of the South Seas. Before Liberation it imported half a million tons of grain annually; after Liberation it became self-supporting in grain and then produced surplus. After the communes were organized, Kwangtung had fought through three hard years of drought, floods, typhoons and emerged with victory.

Kwangtung had therefore a dramatic and a typical story. I wanted to get this in terms of the province and of some of its regions and communes, and also to see what changes had occurred in the relation of its teams and brigades. As far as possible, I wanted a rounded drama of these six years.

## 1. PROFILE OF A PROVINCE

Kwangtung is a large province with 41,000,000 people who have 52 million *mou* (8.7 million acres) of cultivated land. Some areas are sparsely settled; the hilly northern areas and the tropical Hainan Island in the south have land reserves for which they lack water. The central areas, especially the Pearl River Delta around Canton, are crowded and closely cultivated. Even here, however, cultivation can be expanded by water conservation and fertilizer, making double-cropping possible on some lands which have only a single crop if they depend on rains.

Administratively the province has 110 counties, which in turn contain 1,500 communes, equivalent to townships. These being too many to handle conveniently from a single provincial center, they are combined into six "regions," plus the special administrative area of Hainan Island and the municipality of Canton, which includes three counties. The counties are old and stable units. The regions, being designed to handle special problems, sometimes change.

Such, for instance, is the East River Region, created in June 1963 for the special purpose of taming the entire East River system whose floods have been for centuries a major problem for the province and especially for the people who live along its banks. Two events in this region reached the press of the world in recent years: the great East River flood of 1959, which was the greatest recorded in Kwangtung's history, and the 1964 contract with Hongkong to supply that city's water shortage by reversing the flow of one of the East River tributaries and pumping fifteen billion gallons of water annually upstream and over the hills into Hongkong.

I visited this region in January 1964 by misadventure; a black fog at Canton forced an airplane landing at Hweiyang, the regional capital, and I took advantage of this to interview the regional



chairman Comrade Kuo. Said Kuo: "This is a disaster area almost every year under natural conditions. If we lack rain for a month, one-fifth of our five million *mou* of rice land shrivels; if it rains hard, our lowlands are flooded. In a 'normal year' one-fifth of our region suffers drought and one-tenth suffers flood."

A fight against these difficulties began after Liberation and the communes, organized in 1958, brought a "boom in water-control construction" so that the area now has reservoirs, large and small, with a total capacity of 1,300,000,000 cu. meters which can irrigate two million *mou*, a sizable achievement for local peasant enterprise. By 1962 rural electrification began on a large scale, providing pumps and irrigation and drainage. It thus becomes possible to plan the water control for the entire area. For this, the East River Region was created; by 1968 the region plans to spend from \$120 to \$170 per acre of its cultivated lands for permanent water control. This is a big investment in any country. How can a "disaster area" like East River afford so much?

Kuo gave the answer: "Only about 30 per cent of this cost is in cash and materials, paid by the province. Seventy per cent is in labor, invested by the local communes by work done in slack time."

The economics behind this seemed even more impressive than the investment. It was the key to the great advance in water conservation I found in many other parts of Kwangtung.

Among other areas let us note the Pearl River Delta which includes sections of several regions. I used to think of the Delta as a small watery place somewhere downriver from Canton. The two young engineers who came to my hotel in Canton in 1962 and draped big maps over my desk to explain the "Delta Electric Network" saw it as a much larger area, containing twenty-one counties and four municipalities in addition to metropolitan Canton. It has a population of eight million, nearly one-fifth of the province, and crop-lands of fifteen million *mou*, almost one-third of the cultivated land of the province and some of the highest yielding, but subject through the centuries to flood.

The Delta is formed by the joining of three great rivers, the North, the West and the East, which meet near Canton in a welter

of waters which then finds its way through eight major mouths and many more small ones to the sea. The entire area known as the Pearl River Delta runs some ninety miles north to south by two hundred miles east to west and has since 1958 a single plan for rural electrification, known as the Delta Electric Network. Several such networks were launched in 1958 in China of which the Yangtze Delta is the biggest, but the Pearl River Network is the largest under a single province.

The three "crop zones" in the Delta, as explained by the engineers, are typical of Kwangtung Province as a whole. Of the Delta's fifteen million *mou*, four million are bottom lands subject to waterlogging and floods, eight million are hill-slopes subject to drought, and three million are rolling lands between the hills and bottomlands which in the past have been irrigated by wells. The problem is therefore to control the floods on the lowlands by dykes and drainage, to water the hill-slopes by reservoirs and ponds in the hills, and to lighten the labor in the middle zone by gravity irrigation and by electric pumps.

The Delta Network delivers state-owned power to organized groups of farmers. The provincial engineers survey the area and run the high tension lines from provincially owned power plants. The communes do the needed excavation, help run the lines, erect the local buildings, install the pumps and hook on. I saw the Delta Network at different stages in successive years in each of which it provided electric power to ever-widening areas. On my last visit in March 1964, it was in its fifth and final stage, and expected by the end of 1964 to be delivering 250,000 kilowatts to a system of rural electrification covering seventeen counties. The power was especially used for irrigation and drainage systems but also for small industries and electric lighting in peasant homes. A wider plan was already being prepared to extend rural electrification to thirty counties, delivering 400,000 kilowatts of power by 1970.

In the chapter "Third Year of Scarcity" in Part II I have already described some problems and achievements of Hainan Island. One other region of Kwangtung Province is worth a glance before we consider the province as a whole. Westward from the Delta the

Leichow Peninsula juts into the sea; it contains three counties and the municipality and port of Chankiang. Here I visited in 1963 the famous Youth Canal, a trip made memorable by one remark of its chief engineer.

Despite its nearness to the sea and an annual rainfall of 1,400 mm Leichow Peninsula is prone to drought; the rains come at the wrong season and run off the hills into the sea and the land has a high evaporation rate. Only one of its rivers, the Chiuchow, lasts throughout the year. The area was formerly arid and poverty-stricken. After Liberation the peasant co-operatives dug many small reservoirs but a drought in 1955 proved them inadequate. A big reservoir was proposed but the province, lacking funds, postponed it till a later plan. Thereupon the local peasants in their communes decided to build it themselves if the province would give help.

A rush of volunteers launched the construction in 1958 and by June 1959 the sources of the Chiuchow River had been converted into a great lake in the hills impounding over a billion cubic meters of water and delivering annually 1.7 billion into a main canal 172 kilometers long and wide enough for navigation by small vessels. By the time of my visit in 1963 the Youth Canal had begun to irrigate half a million acres.

The engineer told me that the cost to the province was about fifty million yuan (\$20,000,000). I remarked that I had previously visited a somewhat larger but comparable construction that cost four times as much. Then the engineer made the memorable comment. Fifty million, he said, was only what it cost the province for engineers' surveys, machinery and materials.

"Besides this the communes donated sixty million days of labor to the main reservoir and main canal not counting what they did on the small branch canals on their own lands."

Those words illumined the secret of the vast and rapid improvements made with the communes' aid. To the regional engineer, it was a "donation," since it cut the budgeted cost. To the peasants it was an investment in their own and their children's future. For all time to come their irrigation water would be cheaper. The other irrigation project, which had to charge amortization on a higher cost

expected an annual water fee of 50 fen per *mou* (\$1.20 per acre). The Youth Canal had fixed its water fee, to cover annual costs, at 15 to 25 fen per *mou* (40 to 60 cents per acre). The difference was due to the communes' investment in labor. They built it themselves and its water will never cost them more than a river on their own land.

Something of this idea is expressed in the name the peasants give to the Youth Canal, where it crosses their valley on pillars by aqueduct against the sky. "Our river in heaven," they say.

\* \* \*

The problem of agriculture in Kwangtung, as seen in different forms in different regions, is flood in the lowlands and drought in the uplands often suffered at the same time in the same area, on a base of sandy soil, worn out by the use of centuries. These factors made Kwangtung a grain-deficit province under the conditions of the "old society," though its climate, ranging from subtropical to tropical, permits two or more crops a year. After Liberation, land reform and mutual aid in agriculture, the province became self-sufficient in grain in 1952. It then began to produce surplus. After the communes were organized in 1958, great drives were everywhere launched for water control.

The province had its share of the natural disasters that struck all China in 1959-61. In each of those three years it suffered from floods that inundated over 12,000,000 *mou* (2,000,000 acres) and destroyed over 200,000 "houses."\* The East River flood of 1959 has been described in my chapter "First Test" in Part II of this book. Floods in 1960 and 1961 were even larger in total area affected but were not considered as serious because the East River flood of 1959 was more concentrated and hence harder to fight. In

\* Kwangtung's three bad years of flood, as given by Secretary Chang of Province in early 1962:

1959. East River flood 12,500,000 *mou* inundated, 7,130,000 seriously, 370,000 houses destroyed.

1960. Floods less concentrated but inundation greater 13,600,000 *mou* inundated, 9,070,000 seriously, 210,000 houses destroyed.

1961. 19,100,000 *mou* inundated, 10,800,000 seriously, 230,000 houses destroyed.

1959 is regarded as the worst year because sudden and concentrated, 1961 as next worst because many typhoons and largest inundated area.

these three years Kwangtung spent 113,000,000 yuan (\$45,000,000) on state relief to disaster areas, in addition to the local relief done by counties and communes. The total crop fell below the harvests of 1957 and 1958.

Despite this, as Chang Keng-sheng, one of the provincial Party secretaries, told me, when I talked with him in 1962, Kwangtung Province fed itself and exported food. It is a strong province, he explained, in which disasters in one area may be balanced by good crops in another. He estimated that some 30 per cent of the communes had steadily advanced, with crops larger year after year, either because they were not affected by natural disasters or were strong enough to meet them. Half of the communes had remained steady balancing one bad crop by a later good one. Twenty per cent had been affected by the disasters and had lost ground. Thus the province had continued as a whole to be self-sufficient in grain. It returned to a "normal crop" in 1962.

In late 1962 the worst drought of the century began in Kwangtung Province and continued into the harvests of 1963. This was a greater test of Kwangtung's strength than the floods had been for the drought affected the whole province. It lasted from one hundred days in some places to as high as 270 days in others. But the communes that faced it had matured and corrected earlier weaknesses and completed the water-control work begun in 1958.

These communes launched an epic struggle against the drought of 1962-63 and won. They changed the worst drought year of the century into what the peasants called "the miracle year."

The story of that epic fight was given me by First Secretary Tao Chu with local details supplied by Secretary Chang. They were entitled to claim that the victory was won "because the big advantages of the people's communes were brought into full play."

The drought began in October 1962 and lasted seven to eight months and in some place nine months. Total rainfall from November 1962 to May 1963 was 209 mm, compared with a normal rainfall at that period of 652 mm, and an evaporation rate of 961 mm. It was the longest drought in the century. There had been big droughts recorded in 1902, 1933, 1943 and 1955 but these had been broken by

rain in May when the normal rainy season begins. In 1963 the rain held off till mid-June or early July; June was the most serious time. Many streams and small rivers dried up; in some counties 90 per cent of the streams dried. Water in reservoirs sank to one-tenth of normal. It was feared that the early rice crop, which comes in late May or early June, would be more than a million tons below 1962.

Against this the Kwangtung peasants had the following new resources. 1) Irrigation systems begun in 1958, not all of which were finished at the time, had been completed so that the area of "guaranteed irrigation" had grown from the 14 million *mou* in 1957 to 24 million *mou* in 1963. 2) Rural electrification for irrigation installed by the communes since 1958 had a capacity of 246,700 horsepower plus 135,000 horsepower in diesel equipment most of which had also been installed since 1958. 3) The peasants, through the communes, had developed an organized initiative.

The fight of the peasants against the drought took place in three stages. In February and March, when the rice was sown in small beds as seedlings, all water from the reservoirs was used thriftily, carried in buckets and poured directly into the seed-beds, so that no water should be wasted. At the same time the peasants began damming parts of rivers to raise the water level for the coming time of transplanting. Some 70,000 such small dams were built, a labor in which 1,700,000 people took part. Transplanting was done in late March through April. By this time many reservoirs were dry but the temporary river-dams gave water. Since the rivers also were dropping, the peasants began digging large wells of a type known in the south, some twenty feet across by ten deep to reach moisture. As the big well dried by the dropping of the water level, they dug a smaller well inside it, pursuing the water underground. They thus dug 180,000 large wells, securing from them water to transplant rice on an additional eight million *mou*. As harvest approached in May and June, many streams and rivers were drying, so seven million peasants came out to dig large wells and all leading personnel below county level joined the field work. Thus an additional 220,000 large wells were dug and 50,000 horsepower was set up in temporary electric pumping stations.

By these extraordinary measures — more details of which we shall note when we visit the local teams in a later chapter — a crop of early rice was reaped which was only 350,000 tons less than in 1961 when it had been expected to be a million tons less. At once the slogan was raised to make this up in the second rice crop. Mid-summer rains at the time of transplanting enabled the peasants to make the second crop a bumper one, overcoming the shortage of the early rice crop, and making the total grain harvest for 1962 higher by 800,000 tons\* than the good crop of 1962. It was an all-time high, in the worst drought year of the century.

People compared it with the drought year of 1943 which was still remembered. In 1943 the drought was shorter, about 100 days in all, but three million people died of famine and many families sold their land and children and became beggars on the roads. The drought of 1943 led to inflation, to local conflicts and banditry. But in 1963, despite the drought, grain prices in the villages remained stable; the peasants have learned to appreciate the stable grain price which supports both the nation's economy and the local peasants' economy in times of need. The peasants called 1963 a "miracle year" in which five great things happened: the biggest drought, the biggest fight against drought, the biggest water-conservation work, the biggest aid from the state, and a stable grain price during drought which never had happened before in history.

Secretary Tao Chu does not deal in miracles. He deals in analysis of historic facts. He told me that the victory was possible because some early weaknesses and mistakes of the communes had been corrected by 1963, and because the big water-conservation projects, begun in 1958, some of which had not been finished at the time, had been largely completed. In the first enthusiasm of 1958-59, he said, too many reservoirs were begun and not enough of them were finished. This mistake was understood when the crops fell short in the three hard years. In 1961-63 new construction was not stressed but attention was given to rounding out the irrigation systems already

\* The figure of 550,000 tons, given earlier by Tao Chu in a published article of March 27, 1964 issue of *Peking Review*, was corrected by him from later information in March 1964.

started. Thus by spring of 1963 the reservoirs and ponds for irrigation had a total capacity of 14 billion cubic meters of water and the "guaranteed irrigation" covered 24 million *mou* against 14 million in 1957. When all the irrigation systems begun in 1958-59 are fully rounded out and put to efficient use, said Tao, the "guaranteed irrigation" will be 30 million *mou*. This "guarantee" is only for a sixty-day drought; it is not absolute. Still wider irrigation for the future remains to be done.

Another early error in commune practice was that in some places the principle of payment according to work was violated, and the crop was distributed "equally" and not according to work. This was corrected in most places by March 1959. Some communes at first deployed labor without regard to which teams would get the benefit; this practice was also "largely corrected" by spring of 1959 and entirely by spring of 1960. At present the practice is to deploy labor from the teams in proportion to the benefits they will get. If an irrigation system will give water to 500 *mou* for one team and 1,000 *mou* for another, then the second team is expected to send twice as much labor to build it. If it cannot send this labor, it owes labor to the other teams. (These details will be discussed in my chapter "Visits to Teams and Brigades.")

The chief change in practice in these years, said Secretary Tao, has been the transfer of responsibility for distribution from the production brigade (the middle unit) to the smaller unit, the production team. This "resolves a contradiction" that has been present ever since the small co-operatives combined in 1956 into the larger co-operatives "of higher type." The small unit had continuously been the basic unit for labor in farm production. But the larger unit became the managerial unit in charge of distribution. This tended to violate the principle of payment according to labor, since some teams got less than they produced while others got more. At present, the small producing unit is given full responsibility over what it produces. This measure also conduces to economy, for after the responsibility was concentrated in the small unit, it became possible to reduce by half the number of the intermediate "brigades" with a corresponding increase in their size.

"Too many cadres were getting pay without engaging in production," explained Tao. "We had to weed out the unnecessary bureaucracy." At present the commune chairman is a full-time official, paid usually by the county, since he is also the administrator of township government. The brigade leadership is paid for half-time work, and gets half of its income by taking part in farm-work while the team leadership is not paid for administration but for productive labor in the fields, from which its members may be released "on pay" for special tasks undertaken for the team.

All of these changes, according to Tao, were in the nature of stream-lining the commune organization, cutting out needless administrators and putting the leaders into productive work. New changes would undoubtedly be made as time went on. But since every such change is described abroad as a liquidation of the commune, I asked Tao Chu flatly whether any change whatever had had to be made in the original resolutions of the Central Committee that were passed in 1958 concerning communes.

"No changes had to be made in the resolutions," he replied, "but some things had to be made more specific as we gained experience." These have been changes in practice, adapting the communes to the local conditions and needs. Changes will continue to be made as conditions of production change. As agriculture becomes more mechanized, for instance, responsibility for accounting and distribution will again tend to center in the brigades and later in the communes. But this will be a gradual process which should not be hurried.

I raised with Tao a question asked by a Californian friend who spent most of his life organizing farming "communes" in America and failed. He had asked me: "How is China able to get people to put the community interest before their own individual interests? Under capitalism, our farming communities were wrecked by pressures both inside and out. Are communes under socialism immune?"

Tao replied that of course farming communes collapse under capitalism because they are in conflict with the major economic power of the system. Under socialism farming communes become possible but even under socialism their success is not automatic. It is not a question of sacrificing the individual to the community; the economy

must be such that the individual's welfare is really best gained through the community's advance. Under capitalism, this is not the case; one man's wealth is built on exploiting others. Under socialism, the individual's welfare can really be grounded in the community's welfare. But this has to be organized and then it has to be explained so that the people agree.

This is why there is so much stress today in China on socialist education. This education is done partly by comparing the present with the past. It is done by stressing the "class line." Eighty per cent of China's peasants were formerly poor, and even 90 per cent "suffered exploitation in some form." Now they get things they never had before, such as electricity for pumping and for lighting. Now people who work well are respected for their work and are sent as delegates to congresses to make public policies, while the idlers and speculators are despised. All this helps change the peasants' mentality. But none of it happens without struggle.

The poor peasants are the first support but it soon becomes possible to prove to "middle peasants" that their lives are better in the commune.

Tao told of a recent talk he had with a middle peasant who formerly owned 8 *mou* of rice paddy and 2 *mou* of lichee orchard. "Would you like to have your land back?" asked Tao.

The peasant replied: "In the old days I got 2,400 catties of rice from my eight *mou*. This year with eight people in my household we got 4,000 catties of rice from our labor. In the past the landlords and officials took most of my lichees as 'gifts' and 'contributions.' This year, besides the grain, I got from the commune 1,200 yuan in cash. I don't want my land back. I'd rather have the electricity."

This peasant's remark may not make sense in the West, where electric power developed under capitalist exploitation. But it makes sense in Asia, Africa and the newly developing countries where they are choosing: "Who shall own our electric power?" Will electric power be used in these new countries to increase the exploitation of the poor by the rich? Or will it be used to build a community life in which people will say, as the Kwangtung peasants say: "The electric wires bind our hearts together."

Tao Chu said: "You cannot have socialism without the economic base, but even with the economic base you cannot have it without socialist education."

Communes whose territory adjoins Hongkong compare their victory over the drought in 1963 with the conditions they saw across the boundary in the farming regions of Kowloon, which suffered the same long drought. Hongkong newspapers admitted that they had been able to plant early rice on only 20 per cent of the rice paddies, that the second rice crop gave less than normal yield so that the year's total crop was only 25 per cent of a normal harvest. In Hongkong's farming areas they were slaughtering pigs for lack of fodder, so that the number of pigs declined from 570,000 at the end of 1962 to 230,000 at the end of 1963. In Kwangtung, by contrast, pigs increased so markedly that the province sold to the state purchasing organs almost 50 per cent more in 1963 than in 1962 and still had 34 per cent more pigs left at the end of 1963 than the previous year.

In sugar-cane the increase was even more spectacular. The sugar crop is counted only after it has been refined. Mayor Chen Sun of Canton told me as I left from the airport in early April 1964 that the sugar returns were still coming in. "Already we know that it is well over double last year, for in 1962 we got 200,000 tons of sugar, and now we already have 450,000 tons from the 1963 crop. We must thank the drought for this," he added, explaining that the long hot days of sunlight, on plants whose roots were well watered, had increased the sugar content "beyond any we have ever known." He told me I could get the final returns later in Peking.

After I reached Peking a letter in June from an engineer in a sugar refinery exulted: "Just think of it! Our Kwangtung by her own self fulfilled the whole country's plan in sugar! Our crop was 270 per cent of the previous year!"

Such were the victories of the "miracle year" in which Kwangtung reaped its greatest crop in the greatest year of drought in the century. This was what made the peasants of Kwangtung say, as they looked across the boundary at Hongkong: "We have a better system than they."

## 2. THREE COMMUNES IN KWANGTUNG

The "Voice of America" came over my small radio one morning in early 1962\* as I watched the sun rise above the cocoanut grove of a state farm hostel on a tropical beach in Hainan. The "White House Correspondent" noted the anniversary of the Homestead Act and rejoiced that the hundred year policy of "free land to the tiller" had developed not only a continent but "a race of free men." The "Opinion Round-up" that followed bragged that America's aid to starving India seeks to develop "self-help" among peasants, preserving their "human dignity and freedom," which "those Red Chinese Communes destroy."

I smiled as I thought of three communes I had seen the previous week in Canton, and of the human dignity and high initiative of their people. I compared them, not with the hapless Indian peasants under the feudal yoke of landlord and usurer, but with the early American pioneers. The Chinese did not lose by the comparison.

This was the year when Kwangtung Province had endured three years of serious natural disasters and the crops throughout the province had been less than in 1957 or 1958. But 30 per cent of the communes had been spared the disasters or had strength to meet them and had steadily gone ahead, giving an indication of what communes under fair conditions might do. Among these successful communes were East Flower, where the main cash crop was rice, Stone Well, which specialized in vegetables, and Torrent, which raised fish. I visited these three as samples of the wide variety among Kwangtung's communes.

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\* Material in this chapter was first gathered in 1962 and brought up to date in 1964.

East Flower is the easternmost of six communes which compose Flower County. It lies over an hour's drive northwest from Canton on the Liuchi River, which forms the county's southern border. Beyond the river the land rises from bottomlands that in the past were regularly inundated, through a middle level of cultivated lands irrigated by wells, to an upper level of hill-slopes regularly parched by drought. The best lands were the middle zone, but even here the soil was thin and sandy and more than half the working hours in the past went to raising water laboriously by foot-operated water-wheels and carrying it on shoulder-pole to the fields. The saying was: "Three days of sun start the water-wheels turning; one day of rain brings flood."

The county magistrate who met me at East Flower, told me that the county register of 277,000 population contains 65,000 people living "Overseas" in 23 countries on five continents. They migrated over the long decades from hunger. In the past, he said, only about twenty per cent of the people really had enough to eat, while forty per cent were part-time hungry and the other forty per cent starved nearly all the time. Conditions improved steadily after Liberation. The first improvement was the dyking of the Liuchi, protecting the bottomlands from floods. Next, during the period of farming co-operatives, some ponds and reservoirs were built in the hills to water some of the hill-slopes.

The big change came with the communes and especially with the digging of the "New Liuchi," a county project which the communes made possible. The county furnished the engineer and technicians while the communes furnished the labor. They tapped the Liuchi River upstream and carried part of its water by a canal 75 miles long, that parallels the river at a distance of several miles but higher up so that it waters by gravity the lands between. It was all dug by hand in the Great Leap of 1958-59, crossing the lands of all six communes, each of which dug its share.

This single improvement, known as the New Liuchi, released about half the labor power formerly employed in raising water and carrying it to the crops. The labor thus released was devoted to extending the crop area, improving the tillage and adding side-occupations

such as animal husbandry and forestry for which there had formerly been no time. Crops therefore had improved from year to year; by 1962 some 95 per cent of the cultivated land had irrigation from canals. The county has six tractor stations, one for each commune; they help cultivate about one-fourth the crop-lands. No people now move away from Flower County except a few girls that get married. On the contrary, 1,500 people have returned from abroad to live again in Flower County. "We built a state farm for them," the magistrate said.

Shao Piao, Party Secretary of East Flower Commune, a young man of 29 in a white shirt and blue trousers, gave me the facts about East Flower. Population some 50,000, households 11,585, able-bodied workers just under 20,000, crop-lands 84,000 *mou* (14,000 acres). In other words, the households average not quite five members, of whom two work and the others are dependants, and there is 1.7 *mou* of crop-land for each person. (3 to 4 people per acre.) The pre-Liberation yield had been some 300 catties per *mou*, which gave an average food consumption of 22 catties per capita. This, of course, was not enough to live on. "Sixty per cent of the people had only thin rice gruel to eat about half the year. Some cut wood in the forest to buy food; some had remittances from overseas. In a bad year some were forced to sell their land and perhaps their children. More than one-tenth of the households had members overseas, who had gone because they could not survive at home."

After Liberation came land reform, mutual aid, farming co-operatives, more wells, more pools and reservoirs in the hills. "By 1957 the former yield of 300 catties per *mou* had grown to 448 catties," said Shao. "Then everyone demanded to combine the co-operatives and get big labor power to get full control of water. In 1958 we formed the East Flower Commune and made the first overall plan for the area from the Liuchi River to the northern hills."

Shao showed me a large map on the wall of the commune office, the three crop zones and their different problems, the northern hills whose sandy slopes suffered from drought, the Liuchi River on the south where the lowlands had been inundated every year. More than half the land—the best half—was the rolling land between

the lowlands and the hill-slopes where individual owners in the past had dug wells and raised water for the rice paddies.

In a great labor drive in winter of 1958-59, the newly formed East Flower Commune finished a nine-mile dyke on the Liuchi to protect the bottomlands from floods, completed 24 reservoirs, large and small, in the hills to give gravity irrigation to the slopes and also dug its share of the New Liuchi River. This was the "big project," a navigable canal 75 miles long, of which East Flower dug the fifteen miles that crossed its fields.

"We sent 6,500 workers for two months of the winter to dig it," said Shao. "We moved 1,350,000 cubic meters of earth."

The New Liuchi, according to Shao, saves hundreds of thousands of labor days that formerly went to hauling water. It irrigates 42,000 *mou* (7,000 acres), half of the total cultivated land. It released labor for small industries. East Flower developed a small coal mine, a brick and tile kiln, a farm implement factory, a fertilizer factory and other small industries, chiefly to serve the members but they also produce surplus coal and lime for sale to Canton. All these small industries get power from a power plant built by the commune on the New Liuchi, which gives 300 kilowatts of power. The New Liuchi is wide enough for boat transportation across the fields.

Shao took me to the power plant, a handsome brick and tile building with three turbines and three generators and a fourth set for expansion. It was serving 15 commune-owned workshops making brick, tile, lime, fertilizer, pottery and farm tools and processing grain. It already provided nearly half the brigades with power for smaller workshops and light for their homes.

"With all these new improvements," said Shao, "our entire production changed."

The increased control of water first showed itself in an increased yield of rice. The plentiful water supply by gravity from the New Liuchi hastened the growing time of the early rice by 20 days. This ripened the crop before the insect pests developed and before the season of high winds. For these reasons, and also because there was more labor available for better tillage, the yield of rice steadily increased.

"In 1959," said Shao, "Kwangtung had the big East River flood but this did not affect East Flower. Our yield that year rose to 718 catties per *mou*. In 1960 we had 180 days of drought but our yield kept rising to 744 catties. In 1961 we had pests and high winds but our field still rose to 758 catties per *mou*" (over 5,000 pounds per acre).

Then labor released by the better water control went into side-occupations: livestock, timber and industry. The yield in these grew faster than in rice. Industrial output was negligible in 1957, a bare 25,000 yuan; in 1960 it was 3,410,000 yuan, 136 times as much!

How was this income divided? I asked. What part went to the members and what to the state?

There are pitfalls in accounting. Even an honest reporter may go wrong. When Shao replies that the total rice crop in 1961 was 45 million catties, and that 14.9 million catties "went to support the state," we might conclude that East Flower pays the exorbitant tax of one-third of its gross crop. We would be wrong. The grain tax was only 6.3 million catties; the rest of that grain that "went to support the state" was sold for money with which the commune members bought clothing, watches, bicycles, and radios. Do we then conclude that the tax was about one-seventh of the gross income? That is still wrong for the gross income included not only rice but other crops and also other activities than agriculture, but the total tax was paid in rice, this being the main cash crop.

So we turn to the commune's money accounts and get:

<i>Gross income</i>	10,109,252 yuan
<i>Expenditure:</i>	
Taxes	445,500
Cost of operation	3,964,963
Accumulation	1,673,539
Divided to members	4,025,250
	<hr/>
	10,109,252

It becomes apparent that the taxes are less than five per cent of the gross income and about 7 per cent of net income. This single tax, paid from the commune to the county, covered all the taxes due



to county, province and central government by all the members. The private plots and homes are not taxed. I would like to settle for that in the United States!

If one wished to go further into the division of income, we should note that, at the stage of accounting in 1962, the communes tended to lump under "costs of production" not only such things as seed, fodder, fertilizer, insecticides, replacement of small tools and amortization of larger equipment, but also many permanent improvements in housing and lands which the West would class as investment. Furthermore an unusually large sum was designated as "accumulation," and its purposes are not fully shown. It clearly included the tractors that were cultivating one-fourth of the fields, the trucks that carried crops to market, the equipment for the many small industries that furnished the members with coal and with brick and tile homes. It probably also included a welfare fund for the sick and aged and the families with many dependants. The amount left for distribution to members was not as large as the Party's general policy recommended and one was therefore to expect that in later years this would rise. It was not too bad in the first years to put a considerable amount into equipment for future growth.

Individual income averaged \$97 a year per worker, about \$185 a year per family. Put in American dollars it was small; put in rice, it was fourteen times what the pre-Liberation peasant got. Shao did not reckon it either in rice or dollars. He merely said: "Before Liberation sixty per cent of the peasants ate only thin rice gruel half the year. By 1957 we all had solid rice to eat all year. In 1958 we formed communes and now we are buying fountain pens, watches, radios, bicycles, sewing machines, which nobody in East Flower owned before."

Two years later, in early 1964, I inquired in Canton how East Flower had fared and especially how it had weathered the drought of 1963.

East Flower had gone right ahead in 1962 to a bumper crop with average yield of 822 catties per *mou*. Then the seven months drought in winter of 1962-63 struck the commune and lasted so long that the famous New Liuchi, with its 17 foot channel, was almost dry. East

Flower, with help from the county and the Canton municipality, set up twenty big electric pumping stations on the main Liuchi River, allotted over 100,000 yuan from its accumulation fund for extra pumps and water-wheels and got water from every possible source. This brought in an early rice crop that was 6.4 per cent higher than the bumper yield of 1962. The second rice crop, aided by midsummer rains, far surpassed any that East Flower had ever seen.

East Flower Commune therefore ended the year of drought with a crop yield of 974 catties per *mou*, which was an 18.5 per cent increase over the good harvest of 1962. For East Flower, as for the province, the drought year of 1963 became a "miracle year."

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Stone Well Commune was twice as prosperous as East Flower. The reasons were not entirely clear. It lay on the same Liuchi River, and had the same problems of drought and flood. It had the same pre-Liberation rice yield, of 300 catties per *mou*, and it doubled this yield, as did East Flower, in the period of farming co-operatives by much the same type of improvements. From the moment when the commune was organized in 1958, Stone Well went ahead much faster. When I visited Stone Well in early 1962, it reported a gross income of twenty million yuan for the previous year of 1961, twice the income of East Flower though it had only three-fourths as many members.

Communes, one sees, are not all alike; some do better than others. Possibly Stone Well's rapid advance was helped by its nearness to Canton; it lies in a suburb of that city, just forty minutes drive from downtown. This gave earlier access to electric power and facilitated the growth of small industries. It was also able to grow vegetables for the city market as its main cash crop instead of rice. Its vegetables are high-grade and fancy kinds, lotus root, lotus seed, water chestnuts, cucumbers and a special potato used in fine cooking; they are sold not only in Canton but through the state purchasing agency in the Hongkong market.

Some of that twenty million gross income was due to new industries; these accounted for five and a half million yuan. But agri-

cultural income alone was 14.7 million yuan against East Flower's total ten million, though Stone Well had only 14,000 agricultural workers to East Flower's 19,000. Income distributed per worker was also nearly twice that in East Flower. Quality vegetables for city markets appear to be more profitable than rice.

The director of the commune office was a handsome youth of twenty-four years named Teng, in a crisp, cream-colored jacket neatly styled, a young man in whom one became interested at once. For a youth to rise at such an age to such a responsible job indicated ability; this ability also appeared in his talk.

In answer to questions Teng told me that he had been born in this area in a poor peasant family in 1937, just in time to encounter the catastrophes of the Japanese occupation and the civil war. His father tried hard to give him an education; the nearness of the city facilitated his getting five years in a primary school. Then he had to go to work at the age of fourteen. He looked after cows for richer peasants. When the first farming co-operative was formed in 1954, Teng joined, being then 17. Thereafter he rose through the organization. Three of his brothers and sisters died before Liberation; his parents still lived and also a married sister.

"Are you married?" I asked.

"A wife and a son," he smiled, "in the old days a man of my age could not have married unless he had a rich father. My wife works in the trading office of the commune. My son will get a better education than I did."

"He will be lucky if he learns as much from school as you have from life," I commented. Teng grinned.

The area where Stone Well lies, Teng told me, was formerly a single village administration comprising fifty hamlets. Farm co-operatives formed in the hamlets after Liberation; in August 1958 these combined into a commune, for which Stone Well naturally became the center. The Liuchi River had already been dyked in this area by the co-operatives and the peasants had many wells in the rolling lands. Their first demand was not for additional irrigation but for electric power to save the heavy labor of raising water from wells by foot-operated water-wheels and carrying it to the fields by hand.

Since the province had already built a power plant not very distant on the Liuchi, Stone Well Commune spent its first money on high tension lines and 72 electric pumping stations.

The electric pumping station to which Teng took me was a small brick and tile building, from which a 25 horsepower pump raised water to irrigate 1,560 *mou* (some 260 acres). It was operated by a single man but since the land was not level, it took 24 men to distribute the water to the crops. "These 24," said Teng, "do the work that formerly took 300 men on water-wheels." The commune had 72 such pumping stations, each tailored to its location, totalling 1,450 horsepower. They had been built at a total cost of 360,000 yuan (\$144,000 U.S.).

"The dykes solved the problem of flood," explained Teng, "and the pumping stations cut the labor needed to fight drought. We still had the problem of waterlogging in heavy rains."

For this the commune built six drainage stations. These were much more costly than the pumping stations. The drainage station Teng showed me was three times as big as the pumping station had been, had five pumps instead of one, and served 15,000 *mou* (2,500 acres) where the other station served 1,550 *mou* (260 acres). One 15-mile dyke had been built to contain the water. This partly accounted for the cost, for this single drainage station cost 360,000 yuan (\$142,000) as much as the 72 irrigation pumping stations combined. "The five pumps," said Teng, "can let out 12 cubic meters per second with just two operators. It would take 12,000 men to do it by hand."

Despite the high cost of the drainage stations, the commune had set aside funds to build six more such stations in 1962. The six they already had had proved insufficient. "They can handle four inches of rain in twenty-four hours," said Teng, "but we got 12 inches in twenty-four hours, and it took several days to clear it."

"Did it damage you much?" I asked.

"It damaged all the vegetables it reached," said Teng, "but in this climate you just plant vegetables over again. We made our quota and filled our contracts, but it cost much time and labor and seed."

Stone Well was clearly a modern farm, conscious of time and labor and accounting. Its total investment in irrigation and drainage stations, counting the six new ones for which funds had been set aside, was 1,680,000 yuan (\$672,000). The electric power bill for the communes was running 8,000 yuan (\$3,200) a month in an area where there had been no electricity before Liberation. Ninety per cent of the members' homes had electric light for which they paid 23 fen (nine cents) a kilowatt hour but the main use was for the pumping and drainage stations and for small industries for which the cost was seven fen (2.8 cents) per kilowatt hour.

These industries which gave a gross income of five and a half million yuan in 1961 included the usual brick and tile factory—most communes make their own building materials—the usual fertilizer and insecticide and farm tool factories and the usual local coal mine, which seemed normal near Canton. There was also a fairly large lime production both for the commune's use and for sale to Canton. They made wooden barges 50 feet long and holding ten tons of produce to carry to the Canton market. Stone Well even made parts for its tractors.

A rather unusual factory collected rags of carpets and old clothes and made them into shoe-soles for the ordinary Chinese cloth shoes; they supplied their own needs and sold surplus to Canton. Another workshop collected shells from a kind of river shellfish and ground them into fertilizer.

Since the commune combines a collective organization with state power, and since young Teng seemed well informed, I asked how the functions of state and commune meshed. He listed relations in finance, trade, education, health and police and explained that the organ directly above Stone Well Commune was not, as usual, a county, but a suburban district of Canton.

"In finance there was both a credit co-operative owned by the commune and a branch of the state bank. The credit co-operative was like a village bank; it accepted deposits and made loans to brigades, teams and individuals. The teams and brigades kept their accumulation funds in the credit co-operative and drew them out to buy small implements or equip small workshops. The commune's own ac-

cumulation fund was kept in the state bank, for the business of the commune's central office was the sale of products to the state and the purchase of tractors and large equipment from the state.

"In trade we have our commune trading office for small trade by brigades, teams and individuals. Our large sales, like those of vegetables, are made direct to the State Vegetable Corporation which delivers them to Canton or Hongkong as it chooses. Our industrial products are partly for ourselves but any surplus is sold to the state.

"Schools are run both by the Canton municipality and by the commune. We have 20 primary schools and one middle school on the budget of the municipality. These are not enough for us, so the commune maintains twelve more primary schools and an additional middle school. In general our commune schools do not have as good buildings or teachers as those on the municipal budget. When the municipality has more money and more trained teachers, it will take over the present commune-run schools, which fill in a temporary lack.

"Our commune maintains a hospital with 18 beds; each of our 58 brigades has a clinic. The service is free but medicines have to be paid for except in needy cases. Special doctors and health inspectors come from the city, and serious operations are sent to the Canton district hospital.

"We do not have any court because we do not need one; we have a conciliation committee that mediates small complaints. If we had any serious cases these would go to the district court."

"What things are free?" I asked, "and what are paid for?"

Teng replied that a man's house was his own and he paid no rent but he had to pay for electricity. Schools and hospitals were free, but medicine and some books had to be paid for. The use of cultural buildings was free and most motion pictures were free but not all. There was no more "free grain" except for needy cases which the production team determined. Everyone wanted "free grain," said Teng and the idea was still liked, but "experience has shown that the present economic base and habits of waste do not permit it."

Public dining-rooms still existed in schools and workshops and in some places among neighbors. About 30 per cent of the members used them. They had been widely organized at first, and were

popular because they saved doing work at home, but it was found that public dining-rooms needed able-bodied labor to a greater extent than the commune or its members could afford. Home-cooking could be done by people who could not do heavy labor. This situation varied; as income grew, the public dining-rooms might again increase.

Stone Well grew part of its own rice, but bought a considerable part of it from the state. "The province feels," said Teng, "that since we are so near Canton we should grow vegetables rather than rice. If we supply our quota of vegetables — and we always have — we are allowed to buy rice at 'equivalent exchange,' i.e. at the price the state pays the rice-growing communes for it. This price is reckoned on 'paddy' which is unhusked rice. The commune may mill it or pay for the state milling."

"We take it pure white," said Teng. This meant, he admitted, a loss of 30 per cent in the milling.

"You would get more rice if you left some husk," I remarked. "It would also be more nutritious."

"We know it," said Teng. He added, courteously but firmly: "The white rice is more convenient to keep and we think it tastier. We take it as white as we can get it."

Two things were clear about Stone Well. Its members were certainly not hungry, if they deliberately cut the quantity of their rice in order to have it "tastier." They were also aware of the views of nutrition experts but they stood on their human dignity of choice.

Teng was proud of the fact that the \$672,000 for irrigation and pumping stations had all been paid by the commune itself, "except 100,000 yuan (\$40,000) that came from the state." I asked casually if this was a loan, and if so, at what interest? Teng replied that since no interest had been asked, it was probably what they called a "state investment."

"What does the state expect for its investment?" I asked. "Any profit?"

At this Teng laughed merrily and so did everyone in the commune office. Then he answered with confidence: "I don't think

the state expects money from us. What the state wants is better crops and better people."

That was the word I took from Stone Well in 1962. Two years later in spring of 1964 I again inquired in Canton about Stone Well Commune. As against the 72 irrigation stations totalling 1,450 horsepower, it had grown to 221 stations with 3,759 horsepower; the six drainage stations had grown to 13 with 2,100 horsepower. These facilities had enabled Stone Well to get a bumper crop both in vegetables and in rice in 1963, despite the seven months dry spell. Its average yield of paddy rice for 1963 was 1,124 catties per *mou*, the highest in its history. This was 38.2 per cent higher than in 1962, 58.7 per cent higher than in 1957, and nearly four times the pre-Liberation yield. The average per *mou* yield of vegetables was 6,300 catties for the year of 1963, and 90 per cent of these were of the delicate expensive vegetables. Stone Well was steadily advancing.

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Leliu, which in English means Torrent, is a fascinating commune which produces fish and silkworms in an extraordinary biological rhythm. It is probably not as far from Canton as East Flower in actual distance, but it took much longer to reach for it lies southwards in the Delta and we had to cross eleven arms of the Pearl River, eight by bridges and three by ferry, and with ferries there is often delay.

Thus I came in early 1962 to Shunteh County where the peasants have specialized for generations in producing fish and silk. Fish ponds alternate in the landscape with acres of mulberry trees. Mulberry leaves are fed to silkworms, in large carefully managed buildings. The secretions of silkworms then nourish the fish. Four kinds of fish are bred in the ponds, each living at a different level in the water and fed by excreta and leavings from the fish above.

This fish production is reckoned like a crop; it runs to 300 catties per *mou* (1,980 pounds per acre) per year. The fish are shipped daily in special boats provided with watertanks which deliver them alive to the water tanks in markets and restaurants in Canton and Hongkong. Meantime the silk cocoons mature in forty-eight to fifty days

and are delivered to the four silk mills of the county, an average of seven "crops" of silk cocoons a year.

As we went along the road in the county town, every inch seemed neatly planned for production. The landscape everywhere was partly water, confined by dykes in narrow or wide canals and long rectangular ponds. The dykes were planted to banana trees and any ledges on the dykes were planted with vegetables. The road was bordered on both sides by lettuce-like plants in neat designs like big yellow-green roses on dark brown soil. It was an exquisite combination of productivity with beauty and was matched by a charming small hostel surrounded by flowers where they gave us an excellent lunch.

Magistrate Wang told us at lunch that the county had suffered considerably from the big East River flood in 1959. While the chief disaster area was higher up in Hweiyang County on the main stream of the East River, Shunteh County is downstream where the waters of the East, North and West rivers meet and spread into the many streams of the Pearl River Delta and it is affected by any high water in the upper streams. Shunteh had five days warning from the weather station but nobody dreamed that the water would rise any higher than the dykes they had built in the great 1949 flood which till then had been the highest in history. But in 1959 the high water rose 16 inches above the main dykes so people came out by thousands to build small dykes on top of the main ones. Despite this, a considerable area was flooded.

"We had to harvest some of our rice from boats," smiled the magistrate. "Our dykes were not broken but ten days of heavy rain flooded the fields behind the dykes and the water could not drain off because of the height of the river. It was June and the rice was 80 per cent ripe. Rice can be eaten at that stage, but the yield is low because the rice is not full grown. The people waded in the water to harvest it. In some places the water was so deep that they had to go out in boats to pull the plants up. About 60 per cent of a normal crop was thus reaped. Then we worked very hard on the second crop and the year's total was only 17 per cent below the previous year."

The magistrate added that similar high water came again in 1961 and flooded a considerable area but this time the fields were quickly drained because the electric power system of the Delta network had been installed. "The network is our iron rice-bowl," he said, meaning the rice-bowl that cannot be broken.

Beyond the county town we came to Torrent Commune and learned from the commune secretary Chao that it contained 4,229 households of 16,000 people of whom some 7,500 were able-bodied workers. Its crop-lands were reckoned at 22,529 *mou*, but more than half of this was water. Chao took us to a slight rise of ground to survey his territory. Below us we saw five or six large rectangular ponds alternating with areas of low green trees. From a distance the mulberry trees seemed a solid green carpet; they were actually very low, hardly more than half the height of a man. They were kept low by cutting off the leaves to feed to silkworms.

In a large three-storey building on the hill-top we saw how the silkworms were bred. Formerly the peasants raised them in their homes and some peasants still did this but Torrent Commune had erected several large buildings whose temperature, moisture and lighting could be better controlled than in a private home. We came into a large warm dimly lit room whose walls from floor to ceiling were filled with deep shelves. From one of these shelves they brought me a sheet of thin gauze about a meter square, on which finely minced mulberry leaves were spread like thick butter. Tiny worms, a quarter inch in length, were crawling over the minced leaves. Our guide explained that young worms cannot easily eat big leaves so they are fed on minced leaves. They eat a sheet of leaves in about eight hours, leaving only the skeletons of leaves, sticky with the worms' secretions. This secretion is protein in nature and is the best nutriment for fish. When the worms have eaten all the leaves on a sheet of gauze, a new sheet with fresh leaves is brought and placed on top of the old one. The worms at once crawl through the holes of the gauze to the fresh food. The old sheet with everything on it is dropped into a pond to feed fish.

Work in the silkworm houses continues twenty-four hours a day in three eight-hour shifts. It needs continuous, careful attention. In

summer it is heavy work for big fans are swung by hand to give the worms air. The growth cycle of the silkworm is 48 to 50 days. Then the cocoons are delivered to the silk mills of the county.

The fish grow continuously in the ponds and are continuously weeded out by nets. The kind of fish varies in different localities but a general principle has been developed by centuries of fish breeding. Different species live at different water levels; by having four kinds of fish suited to different levels one can raise four times as many fish in the same pond. The top layer is usually a kind known as Chinese ide; the second a kind of bream called the "big head fish." Beneath these come silver carp and at the bottom of the pond, black carp. The fish will eat several kinds of refuse, including mulberries, sugar-cane leaves, rotten sweet potatoes, rice stalks but the silkworm secretions are their most desired and nutritious food.

Every morning the commune members in charge of fish come with nets to make the morning catch. The nets have large meshes so that only the bigger fish are caught while the small ones slip easily through. The catch is put at once into water-tanks in special boats. By afternoon the fish reach the county center where the state trading office accepts them and transfers them to larger boats for the night run to Canton or Hongkong. Early next morning the fish are swimming in water-tanks in restaurants or markets where customers select them for a meal. Torrent Commune is only one of many communes in Shunteh County that specialize thus in fish.

Torrent suffered somewhat from the East River flood in 1959. "We mobilized 5,000 people to work for three days and nights raising our dykes a meter higher," said Secretary Chao. "Other members quickly netted all fish that were big enough to sell, and shipped them away before the flood. We could never have looked after the fish and the silkworms while fighting the flood if we had not had the commune organization. This made possible division of labor. The flood didn't get over our dykes but we had about 600 *mou* of ponds (100 acres) outside the dykes and from these we lost many fish. Some we managed to transfer to other ponds but some got away in the river."

According to Secretary Chao's figures, Torrent had grown more prosperous year by year. The account for 1961 showed a gross of nearly five million yuan, as compared with just under three million in 1957. Nearly two of the five million yuan came from fish, half a million from cocoons, one-third of a million each from vegetables and sugar-cane and a million from the commune's enterprises. Torrent was more prosperous than East Flower, which grossed ten million yuan, but for three times as many members.

I noted a small item for rice, just 73,000 yuan. I asked facetiously: "Why do you grow rice at all when you grow so little of it?"

Shao took me seriously. "When we organized the communes," he said, "we took stock of all our territory to see what best use could be made of it. Some pieces of land were too wet for sugar-cane and too shallow for fish-ponds; we thought it best to plant them to rice."

It was a striking answer in a rice-growing province where most communes sought the best land for rice. Torrent gave to rice only the bits of land they couldn't use for fish.

Two years later I tried to check on Torrent when I was in Canton in early 1964. There was a commune of that name at the same location but it had two and a half times as many households. Clearly Torrent had combined with another commune; its figures would not be comparable with the past.

Something nonetheless could be gained from the report of the enlarged organization. In every item of production the yield had markedly increased in 1963 as compared with 1962. The rice yield had risen from 918 catties per *mou* in 1962 to 1,058 in 1963, making Torrent one of the "thousand-catty" communes. The fish yield had increased in the year by 13 per cent. Sugar-cane had risen 71 per cent. Torrent was still advancing year by year.

Of its present 294 teams, 241 already "had electricity." The rest will have it soon.

### 3. VISITS TO TEAMS AND BRIGADES

My visits to communes in Kwangtung in March 1964 had two objects. The earlier visits to East Flower, Stone Well and Torrent had shown some successful communes, part of that thirty per cent which steadily advanced even through the three years of natural disasters. I wanted to see some units that had been backward and had later improved and learn the cause of improvement. I also wanted to study some "teams" and "brigades" and their relation to the commune. The transfer of accounting and crop distribution to the smaller unit, the production team, had been hailed abroad as a liquidation of the commune. What actually was the present relation of the commune to these constituent parts?

We drove to the Hsinhua Commune over an hour northwest of Canton, one of the six communes of Flower County. I chose Hsinhua because Secretary Tao Chu's report had stated that 98 of its production teams had formerly been rated backward and 96 of them had now "caught up." The commune headquarters was a large white three-storey building with tan-colored tile roof, so imposing that I reminded myself that it was also the township administration, and needed considerable office room. We were received by Comrade Hsu, the commune chairman, a young man whose jacket was of an attractive shade of blue making a pleasant color scheme with his white shirt and gray trousers, and Comrade Lo, secretary of the Tungchin Brigade, dressed more soberly in gray. The peanuts they set before us with the usual serving of pale, hot tea were the largest, best roasted I had seen for some time.

Comrade Hsu was typical of cadres met at commune level. Now aged 30, a native of the area, he grew up with the revolution. At the age of 16, he was already active in the local peasants' association and led a "working group" in the land reform. At 18, he was

elected head of his village and a year later secretary of the local Party branch and head of the first mutual-aid team. When the mutual-aid teams grew into the small farming co-operatives, Hsu became chairman of the local co-operative. When the higher form of co-operatives were organized in 1955-57, he was chairman of one of these. In 1958 he helped organize the commune and became its chairman. He was clearly one of the energetic local men. His family consists of his wife, two children and his mother.

Foreign writers often speak of these local leaders with assumed sympathy as the "lower echelons" who "take the brunt of all mistaken policies." Hsu is not asking for sympathy. He knows that his task is to interpret to the local people the policies of Party and government, and also to acquaint the government with the local people's demands. Since he believes that the aim of Party and government is to lead the local people to the satisfaction of their needs, if he cannot make the right connections he considers that he really is to blame. Chairman Hsu seemed to be making good; his manner was bright and decisive and he was pleasantly in command of his facts and surroundings.

In this he was helped by Comrade Lo, though the latter sat so quietly and said so little that I wondered at first whether he was over-awed by the commune chairman and whether Hsu might be a bit domineering. But when I addressed direct questions to Lo, I learned that his reticence was due to the fact that he spoke only Cantonese and had to ask Hsu to translate some of his words. The many dialects still existing in China are clearly a barrier to full communication. Lo had the fullest data on the Tungchin Brigade.

Hsinhua Commune was formed in October 1958 by combining 64 co-operatives of the higher type. In 1964 it included 13,000 households with 50,400 individuals, organized in 51 brigades with 335 teams. They possessed 90,300 *mou* (15,080 acres) of cultivated land including 3,200 *mou* in orchard and 3,000 *mou* in fish-ponds. They had built one big reservoir and two smaller ones in 1958-59 to irrigate 36,000 *mou*; they had also dug a 46 kilometer irrigation canal from the Liuchi River. The commune's crop and income had steadily increased year by year, but some brigades and teams had been "back-

ward." Recent efforts of the commune had gone to improve these teams.

Tungchin Brigade had been one of the backward ones. With an area that suffered from drought nine years in ten, it had never in the past raised more than 300 catties per *mou* in its rice paddies. Even in 1957, the best year before the commune was formed, Tungchin had had to buy 500,000 catties of rice from the state. With the commune's help, Tungchin had tackled its water problem, levelled its arable land, improved seed strains and tillage and had in five years increased its yield by an average of 30 per cent per year so that in 1963 it became a "thousand-catty area," 1,000 catties per *mou* (6,600 lbs per acre) higher than the general average of Hsinhua Commune.

Team Number Two of Tungchin Brigade did even better than the brigade average. Its 39 households with 179 people had 230 *mou* of land of which 210 was in rice paddy. The soil was very thin and watered by hand from wells, and 60 per cent of the labor went to hauling water so there was little left for good tillage. Before Liberation they plowed with a wooden plow-share a depth of barely three inches. Men harnessed themselves to the plow for there were few buffaloes and these were thin and weak. Four-fifths of the people, said Lo, had been hungry most of the time. Many went out to beg or went abroad. Some dug wild grass for food.

Team Number Two began to advance with Liberation. The mutual-aid teams and co-operatives got iron plow-shares and were able to plow a depth of five inches; the yield, which was only 100 catties per *mou* in 1948, rose to 450 catties in 1957. When the commune was formed, Team Number Two was able to get the use of a tractor; in 1960 and 1961 the depth of its plowing increased to seven or eight inches. It also got good strains of seed from the commune's experimental farm. It sent members to visit better teams and learn better ways of tillage. By 1962 this team reached 1,050 catties per *mou*, and in 1963 it got 1,200 catties per *mou*, well above the average of the commune or the brigade as a whole, but nonetheless achieved with the commune's help.

To understand the framework within which the help was given, we glance at the structure of Hsinhua Commune which also acts as township administration. Fifty-one persons are employed full time at commune level. The chairman and a few of the top personnel draw salaries from the *hsien* (county), the next government level above the commune, but most of the other full-timers are paid from commune funds. One person is in charge of finance and others of trade, grain, civil affairs, culture, education and health; one commands the local homeguards (militia); another runs the local broadcasting station which keeps the people informed of weather forecasts and also of local, national and international news. Twenty-one manage production in various commune enterprises, factories, etc.

In Hsinhua Commune's 21 brigades there are 132 additional elected leaders, six to a brigade. These are half-time functionaries, getting half their income for managerial tasks and the other half from their labor in production. The 335 production teams, each with thirty to fifty households, have 1,004 elected leaders but their work of leadership is unpaid. Their income is derived from their labor in farm production though time spent on errands for the team counts as working time.

The production team, which is the original local village, the most stable unit in the countryside, has charge of all agricultural activities. This has been true through all stages of organization, under the small and larger co-operatives and also under the commune. The team consults with the commune on some things and with the brigade on others, but the team itself decides when to plow and plant and how to organize the work. The changes that took place when the higher level co-operatives and later the communes were formed did not affect the organization of production. It affected the distribution of crop and income. This for a time was handled by the commune, then by the brigade; now in most communes it is handled by the smaller unit, the production team.

This change took place in Hsinhua Commune in early 1961. Hsu and Lo described the process. "For two years we used the brigade as accounting unit. In January 1961 we held a long discussion in all the units and decided it was better to use the team. The reasons



given were: 1) this fits best with local history and habit; 2) it unites production with distribution; 3) it is easier to manage; 4) it fits our organization of agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry and fishing; 5) it fits our present level of labor and leadership. I asked whether the favorable mention of the team as basic unit by *Red Flag*, the Party journal, in November 1960, had influenced the decision. Hsu replied that the favorable mention had silenced those members who had thought it might be going backward to take the team as accounting unit. He added that when farming becomes more mechanized, the brigade might again be preferable as accounting unit, but in the present stage of agriculture, the team was better.

I remarked that East Flower Commune, in the same county, had still been using the brigade when I visited it in 1962. Hsu replied that Hsinhua had been the first in the county to make the change. "We made the experiment; when it worked well, the others followed. East Flower uses the team now."

Comrade Lo summed up the production of the twenty teams of the Tungchin Brigade, which contained 649 families with 2,631 individuals. Gross income for all these teams in 1963 was 480,000 yuan (\$192,000). This included all agricultural production, animal husbandry, forestry and side-occupations done by the teams but did not include individual private plots and side-occupations nor the rice-grinding mill, nursery for fruit-trees, and poultry-breeding center run by the brigade.

From this gross income 4.8 per cent went for taxes, now calculated separately for the team but in practice paid by the team through the commune office; 30 per cent went for "costs of reproduction," including not only seed and upkeep but some construction which in the West might have been considered investment; five per cent went for funds for accumulation and welfare and the remaining more than 60 per cent was distributed among the members in proportion to the work they had done. Hsu confirmed my comment that taxes had dropped considerably. He explained that these were fixed by the earlier normal production and did not rise when production rose. He also confirmed that the tax of 4.8 per cent paid by the team through the commune to the county was the only agricultural tax

due to the state, whether province or central government, and that the individual plots and homes paid no tax.

I was surprised to learn that none of the accumulation funds of the teams had been given to the commune or brigade. Earlier and elsewhere I had found that a considerable sum was thus transferred. In the Tungchin Brigade this was not the case. How then did the commune pay its bills?

From our enterprises, laughed Hsu, Hsinhua had enterprises employing 500 workers. They included: 1) an experimental farm producing selected seed and saplings; 2) a sugar refinery; 3) a workshop grinding limestone as fertilizer for the acid soil; 4) a small coal mine; 5) a farm implement factory; 6) a workshop making fire-sand for castings; 7) the digging of clay for pottery.

The launching of these enterprises had undoubtedly been facilitated by the enthusiasm of the Big Leap and by the brief period in which the commune had the handling of most of the joint funds, but the enterprises had become profitable in themselves, possibly after weeding out some less suitable attempts. The commune enterprises were run partly as a service to members and also sold products in the local market and to Canton. Their net income from 1959 to 1963 gave the commune over three million yuan (\$1,200,000). Roughly two million yuan had been spent on roads, irrigation and drainage, some had gone to pay salaries for management, and a considerable part had been used "to help the backward teams advance." If in the earlier years the teams had voted funds to build up the commune, now the commune was using funds to build the backward teams. Some of those 98 "backward teams" had caught up with and surpassed the commune average.

The average production in the commune, said Hsu, had advanced steadily. The yield in rice, which in the pre-Liberation year of 1948 had been only 180 catties per *mou* (under 20 bushels per acre), rose to 450 catties in 1957, but then sank in 1959 because of the big flood. Then it rose rapidly as the water-conservation work done by the commune in 1958-59 came into full play. In the drought year of 1963 the average yield was 998 $\frac{1}{2}$  catties per *mou*, just short of the thousand-catty target.

"This," said Hsu, "is five times the pre-Liberation yield, and more than twice the yield in 1957 before we formed the commune." The great increase, he said, was due first to the water-conservation work, which made double-cropping of rice possible on areas that formerly produced only a single crop and secondly, to the electrification, which made pumping of water easier for irrigation and drainage and thus released much labor for better tillage and for profitable side-occupations.

"We had no electricity anywhere on our territory in 1957," said Hsu. "Now 70 per cent of our teams have it; they will all have it by 1965." The chief task now, he added, is to "help the backward teams." This is done in part by direct aid, but more by organizing the spread of modern techniques and skills.

A dramatic example of this was going on at the time of my visit. Not until January 1964 did the high tension electric wires reach the headquarters of Tungchin Brigade. Word went out at once to all 20 teams of the brigade, all of which wanted electricity. The high tension wires were run by a group of thirty "electrical workers" of different levels of experience. Fifteen came from commune level, ten from different pumping stations, eight from Tungchin Brigade, one of these being from Team Number Two. Those from the brigade had no experience; they learned as they went. By the time the high tension wires reached Team Number Two, the member from this team had learned enough about electricity to remain in charge of the team's installation, adding other members of the team to help.

This rapid multiplication of skills and techniques is one of the chief tasks of the commune office and the brigade office today. Team Number Two had had in the past no experience in pig or poultry raising; the people had been too poor to own these animals. The team sent representatives to work with more advanced teams and learn the techniques. Team Number Seven had similarly sent two members to work on the commune's experimental farm and learn how to grow cotton. Thus skills spread rapidly through eager learners.

Nylon coverlets for rice-seedlings were one of the novelties in farm practice in Kwangtung's rice fields in 1964. To me, in the

past, nylon meant luxury and expense. This was even more true in China; just after the Pacific War people would come from America to Shanghai bringing a couple of suit-cases of nylon stockings and get such fantastic prices for them from rich people that they would make profit above the cost of their trip. By 1963 I saw nylon fish-nets on Hainan Island; the local fishing communes found nylon lighter, stronger and less liable to rot than hemp. In 1964 nylon blankets were used on rice-seedlings to advance the season in areas around Canton. The nylon was made in the Canton Plastic Industries.

I saw it in the fields of the Ta Li Commune near the Canton airport. Commune members were taking off the nylon coverings for the sunny day. These were big sheets of transparent plastic at least ten feet wide and three times as long. Used to protect the relatively small beds of rice-seedlings from the night chill they made it possible to plant two weeks earlier. After transplanting the rice would cover many times the area of the seedling beds. Mayor Chen Sun of Canton told me that two weeks' gain in planting produced taller plants to resist the heavy rains in May and also escaped late-developing insect pests. An early first harvest gave more time to prepare the soil for the second rice planting. The nylon coverlets had been tried in the agricultural colleges the previous year; in 1964 they were being tried on 4,000 *mou* (670 acres) scattered in different communes. Team Number Eighteen of Tungchin Brigade was one of the teams that were experimenting with it. After this testing, if the technique is found useful, it will spread fast through the commune network, as fast as the nylon coverlets can be produced.

I asked the two local leaders: "Does the commune still have power to deploy labor for large constructions as it did in 1958-59?"

"Certainly," replied Hsu, "we do it even more widely but in a different way. The commune, or even a group of communes, makes the plans and estimates what teams will benefit. These teams are asked for labor in proportion to the benefit they will receive. If the team can send the labor, then the labor is paid from the team's crop. If the team cannot send the labor, the commune seeks labor

from other teams and the benefited team owes a debt to be paid in 'equivalent exchange'."

"We can mobilize as much labor as we ever did," concluded Hsu, "but we do it with better accounting."

\* \* \*

To study more closely another production team in a former poor area, I went the following day to Tsuliao Commune northeast from Canton where the Mikan Brigade has improved a formerly backward district and where the peasants were credited with such strong "collective spirit" that they sold even their private produce to the state.

A dark-skinned youth with a shock of black hair that kept falling over his forehead met us at the commune office and drove with us straight to Team Number Three of Mikan Brigade, explaining that he was head of the commune office and could give us the main facts about the commune on the way. He was 26 years old and I learned some details of his personal history which was very similar to that of Comrade Hsu, a local boy who grew up with the revolution.

Tsuliao Commune, with 8,818 households, some ten thousand able-bodied workers and 50,896 *mou* of cultivated land differed from Hsinhua chiefly in the fact that it lies in Canton's suburban area, and hence is relatively well supplied with schools. Funds for the commune office come, not from a county, but from a Canton suburban district, which pays salaries of top personnel. Commune enterprises include a farm implement works, a transport service of four trucks, a peanut-into-oil processing unit, two grain-processing units and a sugar refinery. Gross income from these in 1963 was 180,000 yuan (\$72,000) of which the net income was 120,000 yuan (\$48,000). It is spent for the same general purposes of roads, water conservation, tree-planting, etc.; twenty per cent of the net income goes "to help the poorer teams improve their condition."

Team Number Three of Mikan Brigade had been one of these poorer teams. We found its headquarters in a small structure some ten by twelve feet in size, with stone floor, white-washed walls and a thatched, peaked roof upheld by four bare poles from wall to wall without a ceiling. Several window-spaces looked out on fields and

the dirt road by which we had come; none were glazed, glass being little used in this semi-tropical countryside. A blackboard and several posters hung on the walls, a home-made bookcase stood in a corner and a large square table occupied the center of the floor. Everyone drew up around it on narrow benches. In deference to my age and in hospitality to a foreign guest, they brought a big chair padded with blankets for me to sit in.

Two new men took over the conversation: They were Secretary Feng of the Party Committee of the Commune in a blue-gray jacket and Hsiao, Party secretary of Mikan Brigade, whose bushy black hair stood straight up. Both were barefoot, having come from field work to which they would return after I left. Feng did most of the explanation; Hsiao spoke only Cantonese. They gave me the picture of Team Number Three.

Team Number Three, one of the six teams of Mikan Brigade, is an ancient natural village named Sing Ho Li, which means "Kind Hearts Lane." It has 75 households with 305 people of whom 89 are able-bodied workers while another 39 are part-time workers. They have 434 *mou* (71 acres), of which 203 *mou* are rice paddy, the rest going to sugar-cane, vegetables, cotton and peanuts. After Liberation the village had three mutual-aid teams, which later became a single co-operative of the lower type; when the higher type of co-operative was organized in 1956, Kind Hearts Lane became one of its "production teams."

A contradiction developed in the higher co-operative, said Feng. The overall plan for cultivation was made by the higher co-operative but the actual field work was planned and done by the teams. Each had its own land, draught animals, implements and labor force. Each team made a contract with the co-operative, and fixed a target to fulfil. The contradiction was not in production but in distribution, for the large co-operative owned and divided the total crop. Some teams exceeded their target and others fell short. The large co-operative distributed according to "labor days," and counted every labor day equal to every other. In this way some teams got more than they produced and others got less. There was an attempt to rectify this by giving each team 30 per cent of its "surplus produc-

tion" above the target, but 70 per cent remained with the co-operative and was shared with everyone.

This "contradiction in distribution" was taken over into the commune when we formed it in 1958. In the commune the contradiction "even increased." At first the commune got all the crop and distributed it all, paying all salaries and giving a considerable "free supply." By the end of the first year the free supply was "corrected" and the brigade became the accounting unit in November 1959. At the end of 1960 discussion began about making the team the accounting unit.

"When the Central Committee said that the team was a good accounting unit, everyone here was pleased and decided to use the team. This cancelled the contradiction," said Feng. "Every team gets what it produces. It is more efficient and more just."

"I suppose you know," I remarked, "that people abroad say the communes have collapsed, that they have 'retreated' further back than even the large co-operatives to the small co-operatives by giving the team the power over the crop. Some even call this local initiative a step back towards capitalism."

"We know what they say abroad," replied Feng without much concern. "As we see it, we have not changed the system; we are still on the road to socialism and later to communism. But accounting by the team is better for the present. We give each worker what he produces; we should also give each team what it produces. To say that this abolishes the commune is nonsense. We are in the commune as the fish is in the sea. The fish has the initiative but without the sea he would not live. Without the commune our good harvests would be impossible. These come from the new reservoirs, irrigation systems and electric stations. A big reservoir costs eighty to a hundred thousand yuan; an electric pumping and drainage station costs thirty to fifty thousand yuan. These are done by the commune; they are beyond the power of the team and even of the brigade. The commune helps the teams advance in many other ways. It furnishes tractors for cultivation, trucks for transport; it supplies fertilizer, draught animals, selected seed and other material aid."

As judged by increase of crops and by members' income, Kind Hearts Lane was clearly making good. Its rice yield had been 597 catties per *mou* in 1958 when the commune was organized; it was 1,181 catties in 1963, the worst drought year of the century. The income per household from collective labor averaged 203 yuan (\$84) in 1957; it was 410 yuan in 1963, having doubled in five years. Neither figure counts the grain distribution, which was 34 catties per capita per month in 1957, and 50 catties in 1963. Nor does it count individual income from private plots or outside labor.

Hsiao seemed more concerned to prove the devotion of the peasants to the collective than the benefits they received. He told in detail how peasants of Mikan Brigade sold 210,000 catties of surplus grain, above and beyond the call of duty, at the fixed state price of 9.8 yuan per hundred catties though the free market price was 18 yuan; how they sold 62,000 catties of bamboo at 8 yuan per hundred to the state when the free market offered 35 yuan, and 90,000 catties of dried lichees from their orchards at 45 yuan per hundredweight to the state when the free market price was 300 yuan. They even sold vegetables from individual plots and privately owned pigs and poultry to the state purchasing agency in Canton, a total of 5,700 catties of pork and 1,100 head of poultry in 1963.

All this was meticulously listed by Hsiao who, as secretary of the Mikan Party Branch, was charged with "raising the peasants' consciousness." He was clearly a dedicated young man. I wondered whether he and his Party Branch might not be pushing the peasants of Mikan Brigade a bit harder than they really desired. If so, I had no doubt that he would be "corrected" by events. I myself could only ask by what methods the Party induced such selfless action by the peasants. Did the government give any compensating benefits?

Hsiao replied that the state gave some material returns to teams and brigades that sold to the state beyond the regular contract. Those who sold extra grain got more fertilizer; those who sold other commodities at state prices got extra coupons for cotton goods. These material gains were not large. The main influence was socialist education.

"It is not easy at first," he admitted, "for peasants to understand why it is better to sell to the state. The better-off peasants argue: 'When you sell to the state, this does not help the members get rich.'"

Socialist education, as organized by Hsiao, begins by comparing the present with the past. "Formerly if we lacked rain for three days there was drought; if we had rain for three days, there was flood. In 1957 we had a poor crop and the state helped us with 90,000 catties of grain. We have irrigation and drainage systems now by the help of the state. We control the water now by our two irrigation and drainage stations. Each of them cost 50,000 yuan, not counting the labor. Our brigade put up 10,000 yuan and the state gave 40,000. If we don't repay all this we have no 'face.' If we accept benefit and return nothing, we cannot feel right." Hsiao's arguments had been supported by many of the older peasants, especially the poorer ones.

Hsiao's best argument was probably the housing project. Tsuliao Commune planned to provide new brick and tile housing for all the commune members that needed it, as most of them did. The plan called for 12,000 house units\* by the end of 1965, to supply a membership of 8,800 households with 33,541 people. A few units had been built prior to 1963; then in 1963 work really got underway with the commune supplying an engineering staff and part of the funds while the brigade made the bricks in its kiln. Over 3,240 units were built in 1963, another 4,000 were being built in 1964 and the total 12,000 units would be completed in 1965. They were given free to commune members, beginning in order of need.

"This housing impresses the peasants more than anything we have yet done," said Feng. "Eighty-five per cent of the peasants here were poor people who never had more than a mat-shed to live in. To buy even a small bit of land for a house in former days cost at least a thousand yuan (\$400) and to build even a one-room cabin cost 720 yuan (\$288). How could a poor peasant ever hope for this? A poor peasant found a bit of wasteland and put up a few mats on poles

\* A house unit is a floor area about 15 by 24 feet, or, in terms of peasant building, a "room of 17 beams." A large family would get more than one unit.

and lived there—sometimes for generations. The commune now gives him a stable home."

They took me to the nearest housing development. I admit that I would not care to live there. There were rows of long buildings that seemed to me too close together; each had several apartments that seemed to me too small. There was no indoor plumbing; the wells and the toilet facilities were down at the end of the street and may have been one reason why the streets were short and the buildings close together. If the housewife had to carry the water in and carry out the slops, she didn't want to carry them far. The pale tan walls of double-laid brick with tile roofs and large terra-cotta colored squares on the floors were clearly better than mat-sheds whose dirt floors and thatched roofs bred vermin.

Each unit cost the commune 720 yuan (\$288), most of which went for door and window frames, wooden doors and nails. The bricks were made in the kilns of Mikan Brigade. The windows were not glazed, but the new owner would fill them with mosquito netting in summer and perhaps with translucent paper in winter, if winter was ever cold enough to require it. Two-thirds of the units already had electricity; by 1965 all would have it. Yes, this housing was a distinct advance in local livelihood. I could understand why a widow who was given a unit for herself and her son could exclaim: "Never in my life had I dreamed of such a home of my own. Now the commune gives not only food but shelter."

I discussed with Feng and Hsiao several aspects of the relations between the local peasants and the commune. Could the commune still deploy labor for constructions, such as irrigation and housing, as freely as in 1958-59. They replied in almost the same words that Chairman Hsu of Hsinhua Commune had, that the commune can deploy even larger labor forces, but they are differently mobilized so that each team furnishes labor in proportion to the benefit it receives. If it cannot furnish this labor, then other teams give it and the benefited team repays them by "equivalent exchange." I asked also whether it was generally true that the agricultural tax

had dropped from eight or ten per cent of gross income to about five per cent. They confirmed this also, saying that the tax does not rise when production rises, and this is an encouragement to production.

I probed further. Was there not hidden taxation in the sale of grain to the state at the fixed state price of 9.8 yuan per hundred catties (about \$4.00 per hundred pounds), when the free market price might at times rise much higher. Did not the peasants feel this as tax?

Both Feng and Hsiao replied — and this was confirmed by others in the province and elsewhere — that the question of a fixed price for grain had been debated by the peasants long before the communes existed. It was made clear that the fixed grain price is the economic base of the country, that this enables China to avoid inflation, to pay fixed wages to workers, and thus to produce increasing consumer goods for the peasants at stable and even declining prices. A few of the better-off peasants had opposed it, but without much support or conviction for everyone remembered the terrors of inflation under the Kuomintang and how prices had always risen in times of famine in the “old society” so that the poor folk both in country and city starved.

The people understood and approved an economy founded on a stable price for grain. This approval was strengthened when their own crop was scanty and they were supplied with state grain at the fixed price, even in years of scarcity. At present, when the cost of cotton goods, watches, fountain pens, bicycles remains stable and even gradually decreases, peasant opinion definitely supports the fixed state price for grain. This does not mean that every peasant refuses a higher price if it is offered; but public opinion is against profiteering in grain.

Still probing, I asked whether the commune's charges for services were ever felt to be too high, as an extra tax on the peasants. To this they gave quickly a negative reply, which was confirmed by the Mayor of Canton later and by many others. Prices that the communes charge for their services are fixed at public meetings, held at least twice a year, to which every team sends representatives. Peo-

ple are very willing to pay for having their grain milled and their rice husked, rather than do it at home with heavier labor. As for payment for truck transport, or electricity, or improved seed or saplings or better breed of pigs or poultry, who can estimate the worth? It is fixed in the general meeting, and the members are not only willing to pay for these services but they even want the commune to charge good prices so that there may be funds to spend on roads, irrigation and other improvements.

Feng gave me examples from other brigades of the way the commune helped the teams in difficult situations. The Hantien Brigade has six teams in a hilly area, all of them poor. In the 1963 drought they located a source of water but had no way to pump it to their field. The commune rented six pumps from Canton for them for five months, with a diesel fuel cost of 300 yuan a day, a total of 45,000 yuan (\$18,000). With this help the brigade got an early rice crop of 540,000 catties on a plot of 1,200 *mou* (200 acres) which otherwise they couldn't have sown.

Twelve teams of the Paisha Brigade were also rescued when their streams ran dry in the 1963 drought. The commune helped plan a difficult canal around a hill to the Liuchi River. It was eight feet deep and two kilometers long; it took the brigade four shifts of day and night work for a month to dig it. It needed ten levels of pumps at a cost of 60,000 yuan (\$24,000). The commune put up half and the brigade collected the other half from individual members. They transplanted on time and got an early rice crop of more than a million catties.

Since communes are good at accounting these days I did some arithmetic and said: “You paid 45,000 yuan for fuel so that the Hantien Brigade could get an extra 540,000 catties of early rice, for which the state price is about 51,000 yuan. It seems you cleared only 6,000 yuan for several months' hard labor. The Paisha Brigade got a million catties of rice worth 98,000 yuan at state prices. It cost them 60,000 for pumps plus a season's normal labor and a month full-time extra digging. It seems that Hantien and Paisha worked pretty hard for that grain.”

Secretary Feng clearly thought me lazy and faint-hearted. He preferred the way the peasants put it. "If we had depended on heaven this year, we would all have starved."

The peasants dealt not in profit and loss but in terms of survival. Their age-old wisdom told them what their socialist education confirmed that production, not purchase, is the way of survival and advance.

#### 4. "READJUSTMENT" OF INDUSTRY

We have mentioned the increasing use of pumps, tractors, electricity, chemical fertilizers and even nylon sheets in Chinese farming. All these became possible because, while the communes were remaking agriculture, China's industry was being re-oriented in close correlation with it. Under the slogan "Agriculture is the foundation and industry the leading factor," and such rather drab sounding terms as "readjustment," the Chinese were reconstructing their national economy to make industry more quickly and effectively responsive to the people's needs, especially the needs of agriculture, and to build a self-reliant economy independent of foreign aid.

This process began in 1960; it is expected to continue through 1965. In late December 1963 I went to Vice-Premier Po I-po to ask just what is meant by "readjustment."

As Chairman of the State Economic Commission, and Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Committee, his reports about once a year make the Western experts rush to analyze. But I was eager to see him because my last interview with Po I-po was seventeen years ago in the Taihang Mountains when he was political commissar for the army defending a "liberated area" about the size of Germany with a capital in a hidden hill village.

I asked him then, in 1946, a bit impatiently: "Why does everyone talk cheerfully of 'victory' when Chiang Kai-shek is taking all your county towns?" He gave me, in clear arithmetic and common sense, the precise reasons why Chiang was getting bogged down in towns and how this would enable the People's Liberation Army, based on the rural areas, soon to take the initiative. From then on I understood how the PLA strategy worked.

This time Po I-po received me in more splendor than in the Taihang Mountains. Instead of a small room on a back street in a

hidden village, he used one of the handsome audience halls of the old imperial palace, now available to vice-premiers for interviews. It was bright with the sun shining through a long wall of windows, and it had a big red Chinese rug and many comfortable chairs around a coffee table with fruits and tea. In a small adjoining dining-room we later had an excellent lunch.

I wanted just what I had wanted in that long-ago year: clear common sense about strategy, but economic this time, not military. I asked the same kind of question: "Why are you all so cheerfully 'readjusting' instead of launching a 'big advance'?"

Po I-po had the same direct manner and didn't seem much older. "Your word 'readjustment' does not quite cover all the meanings in our Chinese slogan of eight characters, roughly translated as 'readjust, consolidate, fill in, increase variety.' But 'readjust' may be the best term to cover them all. When a commander in war wins a battle, he pauses to let the troops rest, regroup and reorganize; he sums up experiences, studies the strength and weakness revealed and estimates what is needed for the next victory. Our economy moves ahead by a rhythm something like that. After every important period of action we sum up experiences and 'readjust' for the next action. The period may be long or short; this depends on many factors. But on this 'readjustment' depends the success and the speed of the next action."

In the first five-year plan, he explained, in 1953-57, China had no experience in large industry and could only copy the USSR. "The speed was not all we wished and there were other lacks. In 1958-60 we tried some ideas of our own under the name of 'Big Leap Forward.' We made some big achievements and also some errors. All this had to be digested to combine our experience with Soviet experience and find the best way. To this was added Comrade Khrushchov's action in 1960. He pulled out all the Soviet specialists and broke the contracts to deliver equipment. This forced us to create a new, independent economic base."

Po I-po described many types of readjustment: within an industry, between industries, between industry and agriculture, and for a new economic base. He gave examples of all.

In steel-making China shot up to 18 million tons in 1960, three times the 5.35 million of 1957. "But quality was not all good, and variety was lacking. It did not meet our needs. We had excess of ordinary steel; it lay around some time before we could use it. But our growing industry needed many steel alloys. We saw that eight to ten million tons of good quality in adequate varieties was more needed than 18 million tons of ordinary steel."

"Would you then say that the great steel drive of 1958 when sixty million people made steel was a mistake?"

"It was not a mistake," he replied. "It was indispensable. When you as a writer write 10,000 words and then cut it down to 5,000, this is no mistake. It enriches the result. That steel drive gave us a nation-wide steel industry faster than any other way."

He gave another example from machine-building. In the old China they repaired and assembled but could not make machines. In the first five-year plan they made a considerable number. In 1958 they launched the slogan: "Liberate Ideas"; the workers began to make inventions. In three years machine-building, lathes, etc. increased by 150 per cent. "Much faster than the first five-year plan," said Po I-po. "But we were getting too many of some machines and not enough of others. We lacked especially the very big machines, the precision machines and the machines that make agricultural equipment." This was another readjustment needed inside industry.

More serious adjustment was needed between agriculture and industry. "We drew too much manpower from the rural areas into the cities," said Po I-po. "The natural disasters showed that our city population was bigger than our farms could feed. Our industry became modern but our farms were not yet mechanized. We had to reduce our city population from the expanded 130 million down to 110 million until we could mechanize the farms." (Po I-po omitted what I knew from other sources that this was not done by administrative order but by closing down of unessential industry and giving the jobless six months grain tickets if they agreed to go back to the farms to produce food.)

Another example of the overall adjustment between farming and industry was the moving of factories to be nearer their raw materials



and/or consumers. "We grow peanuts and soy beans in many parts of the country," said Po I-po, "but the factories that processed them into edible oil were all in the coastal cities, which means extra transport both ways. We have now moved factories nearer to the source of their materials and also moved raw materials nearer to processing factories. But this must not be overdone. When local people process their own tobacco or make their own soap, they sometimes waste good tobacco in poor cigarettes or good oils and perfume in bad soap. So we must set standards and only permit local factories to have the raw materials if they turn out good quality."

Much work has been done to rationalize transport. "During the Big Leap everyone wanted everything at once, and got it wherever they could." Timber grown in Manchuria was found going south of the Yangtze while timber grown in the south was travelling north. Maps were made showing the sources of basic materials like coal, oil, steel, timber, and where they were needed.

"We did a lot of adjustment on such problems," said Po I-po, "so that timber grown in the north should not cross the Yangtze southward and vice versa."

Probably the most serious readjustment was caused by what Po I-po called "the surprise attack in 1960 by Comrade Khrushchov. This was very severe. There were over 300 large constructions and enterprises in all branches of industry and all parts of the country in which over 1,300 Soviet specialists were employed on contract to design, supply and install equipment. This all stopped within a month in midsummer of 1960. The specialists were withdrawn with their blueprints and the equipment stopped coming. To be accurate, we could still buy machines of the ordinary kind that we ourselves could make but not the key machines we needed. It was like taking out the dishes in the middle of a meal."

He gave examples. In Anshan Steel Works a new plant for cold-rolling steel sheets for auto bodies and similar uses had eleven Soviet specialists to install two groups of machines. The first group of machines was installed and was being tried out when the specialists were withdrawn. Only 20 per cent of the second group of

machines had arrived; the rest never came. The second set was quite different from the first and could not be copied from the other.

"What should we do? Our workers and technicians were angry and determined and decided we must make those machines ourselves. They sent out a call for ideas from all Chinese workers who knew steel rolling, especially in the Northeast. We had to invent from scratch. Within a year we had them operating. They may not be like the machines the Soviets would have sent, but they roll steel sheets with 90 per cent of them up to standard, while the USSR contract promised us only 80 per cent."

Three years ago everyone was waiting for a big power plant at the great Sanmen Gorge on the Yellow River; it was to feed a power grid touching three provinces. The USSR was supplying generators and turbines of 150,000 kilowatts by contract, with specialists to install them. Bigger than anything China had ever known. The first generator-turbine combination came in 1960 but the specialists never arrived and no more generator-turbines came. Slowly the Chinese learned how to make turbines and generators of that size and install them. The hardest bit was to weld together the two huge turbine blades that came separately and had to fit within 0.1 mm tolerance. They've done it now, within 0.06 tolerance. Meantime factories in three provinces had to build their own steam plants, or wait for three years.

"So now," said Po I-po, "some of the comrades think we should offer Khrushchov a medal for the spur he gave to our self-reliance! Sometimes it isn't enough to have lessons from Marx and Lenin; you may need a spur from Chiang Kai-shek or an American embargo." He noted that Chiang at first gave the Communist-led armies 400,000 KMT dollars a year in the united war against Japan but he stopped it in 1939. So the Communists had to learn to feed and arm their own soldiers; by the time Japan was beaten they had 1,100,000 soldiers instead of the three divisions Chiang paid for. Similarly the U.S. embargo spurred China to make and even to export many machines that the U.S. forbade them to buy.

"Khrushchov thought to strangle us with one clutch," said Po I-po, "but he made us do our best in these three years. The difficulties he made we have overcome by building a new, independent economic base. This is not entirely finished for we take time to adjust to the resources and needs of our land before we begin our next overall advance."

Almost as in afterthought Po I-po returned to the question I had raised. "To readjust is not to stand still," he said. "Every readjustment has been a swift but specific advance. In 1963 alone Anshan made 126 new kinds of rolled steel. Petroleum advanced 50 per cent a year until China is now practically self-sufficient both in crude and in petroleum products. Output of chemical fertilizer tripled between 1959 and 1962; insecticides grew ninefold from 1958-62. Special priority was given to equipment that would rapidly increase agricultural production; this explains how Kwangtung Province had twelve times as many electric pumps at the end of 1963 for irrigation and drainage as it had in 1957."

Po I-po's account was already being illustrated by many facts appearing in the Chinese press in 1963. Industrial production that year moved steadily upward month by month. Plans for all major items were overfulfilled; 30 per cent more tractors and 40.5 per cent more fertilizer were reaching the farms than in 1962. Quality and variety improved; costs in materials and labor were reduced. These savings were passed on to the consumer in a slow but steady reduction in prices of consumer goods.

One method of improving technique may be mentioned. Under the slogan "Catch up with Shanghai" which swept the industrial plants of the country, 22,000 skilled workers and technicians from all parts of China came to Shanghai and spent some time there in 1963 to study the techniques and methods of the foremost industries. Steel, machine-building, power equipment, chemicals, textiles and light industries all sent their quotas of workers to compare Shanghai's best techniques with their own practice and study wherein they lagged. Shanghai gave instruction unstintedly, giving the time of her best technicians and workers to train new workers from all parts

of China. The great metropolis, once the stronghold of imperialist domination, proudly became "tutor to China's working class." Exchange of knowledge is a two-way street; Shanghai not only improved her own techniques by teaching but also sent 6,000 leading personnel from seven hundred of her factories to exchange knowledge with enterprises in Peking, Tientsin, Shenyang, Canton.

By the end of 1963 China was designing and building: coal pits yielding a million tons a year; integrated iron and steel works with 1,500,000 tons capacity; power plants of 650,000 kilowatts; heavy machine-tool plants. She was 90 per cent self-sufficient in steel and 85 per cent in machine-building. China had developed trade with 110 countries.

"Meantime," concluded Po I-po, "we have been clearing off all our debts to the USSR for loans as far back as 1950. The heaviest payments were made in our hardest years. What is left will be easily cleared by 1965.\* Then we shall have no more debts to anyone."

"Few nations can claim such solvency," I commented.

Vice-Premier Po I-po concluded: "Then we shall plan our next general advance on an economic base fully adjusted to our needs and all our own."

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\* The trade-debt instalment due in 1965 was unexpectedly paid off in 1964 by the harvest surplus of 1963 which, among other exports, enabled China to supply several tens of thousands of tons of frozen and canned meat to the USSR.

## 5. SOME CLOSING COMMENTS

It seems time for some closing comments on the communes. They form the base of China's rural life today but are badly understood abroad. A Latin American friend just back from Cuba tells me that people everywhere asked about the communes, and many thought they had failed and been abandoned. When U.S. press and Khrushchov both sneer at communes, what are Cubans to believe?

So it must be said flatly:

First, the communes exist; they arose in 1958 and are now in their sixth year; with every year they have grown stronger and more adapted to their tasks.

Second, they exist in basically the same form in which they appeared which was hailed by the Communist Party's resolution in Wuhan in December 1958 as "a new social organization fresh as the morning sun above the broad horizon of East Asia." They survived three years of the worst natural disasters of the century which struck when the communes had just been organized and were still hardly stabilized and hence most vulnerable. Foreign critics try to blame the bad crops on the communes, but the Chinese know that, while some mistakes of some communes in some areas added to the difficulties, the communes basically were the force that saved the country, preventing disasters from becoming widespread famine.

Changes of course have occurred in the communes; all living forms change. What is surprising and what I only realized recently is that none of the changes make it necessary to retract a single paragraph of the first Party resolutions that described the communes in 1958. "The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes," which forms the first part of this book, was written and originally published in early 1959. To my surprise the only significant change I had to make for this edition was to put a footnote to the 1958 grain statistics,

which were long ago admitted to be wrong. The basic form and basic aims remain.

Even more, the communes not only still fulfil the description and purposes outlined in 1958 by the two historic resolutions of the Chinese Communist Party—in Peitaiho on August 29, 1958 and in Wuhan in December of the same year—but they still embody all the aspirations which the peasants at that time expressed in their wildest dreams.

The view that men by community organization can prevail over heaven was expressed in the ringing peasant slogan, "Man's will, not heaven, decides." This is still the profound faith, but is sought more clearly in terms of years of steady mechanization, more fertilizer and increased water-control. The women still seek freedom from the ancient household drudgery and find it in the fact that the commune's processing of grain relieves the farm-wife from substituting for the donkey at the old dizzy task of dragging the heavy grinding stones around and around. Other household drudgery is lessened by the increasing electrification and the better handling of water which no longer has to be carried so far on shoulder-poles. Nurseries and kindergartens maintained by the communes are also a liberation for the women. Only the public dining-rooms which in 1958 swept the rural areas have been greatly diminished, for the family kitchens were found to be needed, especially in the north where the same heat cooks and warms the home, but public meals for nurseries, kindergartens, schools, workshops and seasonally for field gangs still lighten the household burden and collective kitchens are organized on a small scale by neighbors, a tendency likely to increase.

Even the shout for "free grain" which in late 1958 swept the rural areas, expressing the faith that famine was conquered, and that now in the communes nobody would ever starve—a demand which most peasants at the time felt more essential than even their own personal wages—was never really given up. For while the actual free distribution of grain led to much waste and was soon stopped, usually within a few months, it is replaced today by a careful handling of a "welfare fund" to ensure that nobody in the "team" shall lack food.

Since each change in the commune, made by its members for improvement, has been greeted abroad as a "liquidation," I shall sum up briefly what the Chinese People's Commune was, and is, how it differs from all other forms of farm collectivization and what the changes were in the past six years.

Some attacks first describe the commune incorrectly and then attack the form they have described. Khrushchov's attacks are of this type; probably the first open criticism of China he ever expressed was his remark to Senator Humphrey in late 1958 which sneered at the commune as a form which had been tried in the Soviet Union and failed. The communes that existed in the USSR in early days were, as I myself saw them and as everyone knew them, a type of collective that held property in common with equal distribution to all; they were highly thought of theoretically but had to be dropped as "premature." Attributing this equalitarian form to China, Khrushchov then attacks it as a departure from Marxism-Leninism, etc., etc. But the Chinese Communists never advocated that equalitarian form.

People's Communes in China arose, not as an experiment in equalitarianism, but as a merger of agricultural co-operatives to create a larger unit for better control of the rural environment, and especially, but not exclusively, for water-control and irrigation. In early 1958 most of China's more than half billion peasants were in 740,000 agricultural co-operatives with an average membership of 160 families. When the year ended, they had merged into 26,000 communes, usually on the scale of a township, with an average of several thousand families. (The number of communes subsequently fell, for a brief period, to 24,000 as a result of some mergers. Still later it increased threefold by subdivision in some provinces to fit local conditions, but the commune throughout remains the form which merges all the co-operative farming in the country, and to which practically all peasants belong.)

This original merger took place in 1958 in a great drive of peasant enthusiasm based on the realization that the co-operatives were not big enough to handle irrigation projects, in which every canal was at the expense of somebody's land but that, by pooling resources

and making joint plans, they could "conquer nature" and insure that nobody in the future need starve. This was a sound hope and it has proved true.

A second feature of the communes, in addition to size, is its wider function. It assumed the handling, not only of agriculture but of local industry, commerce, education, home defense on a township scale. One of the "excesses" that occurred was that some communes, in enthusiasm, launched too many local industries, using up resources and labor wastefully in occupations not suited to their area. One commune in Honan boasted of making synthetic rubber from sweet potatoes; there were many such inventive ideas. Hence one of the natural changes was that they eventually dropped many of the small industries but expanded occupations and enterprises correlated with agriculture, such as livestock, orchards, forestry, the grinding of grain, processing of peanuts into edible oil, sugar refining, local truck transport and the making of farm implements and machinery.

The third aspect of the Chinese People's Commune, in which it differs most sharply from all other forms of farm collectivization anywhere, is that it combines government power with production. The commune is both the upper level of the combined farming co-operatives and also the lowest level of state power at township level. The peasants of the township survey the total resources of their township and have the state power to use them.

This is still the basic difference of the Chinese communes from all other forms of farm collectivization. What first recommended it locally was that improvements like local roads, reservoirs and irrigation canals could be done with authority at once by local initiative. One husky commune chairman from Manchuria told me in 1958 when I asked who paid for local roads: "Nobody pays for roads. We just make them!" He was utterly unaware of cost accounting; the peasants have learned much about it since. But basically, while roads and irrigation projects are always planned with the county and even with the province for large constructions, the smaller projects are really "just made" by the peasants whose villages they serve. The merging of commune with "state power" also gives

authority and connections with upper branches of government, in seeking priorities for electrification and pumps.

The Chinese believe that this merger at basic level will also enable an easier transition to communism when the time comes. The form of farm collectives practised in the USSR and elsewhere creates a duality in which the collectives are separate from the state. The state power may favor the collective and control it by law, but a contradiction of interests remains which will some day have to be bridged. In China, state power is inside the organization at township level. As the commune's economic strength increases, so does the share of the state within it. This, it is believed, will make possible a future transition to "ownership by the whole people" with less contradiction. Still later, the commune itself may survive as a basic cell in a communist society.

These three basic characteristics of the Chinese People's Commune were given by the first resolutions of the Communist Party in 1958; they still remain. It was also specified in those resolutions that, in the distribution of income, the basic principle should be payment for work done, and any diversion of funds for other purposes, such as an accumulation fund or "free supply," should be strictly limited. In practice this at first was not always done.

For the first demand that swept the country with enthusiasm was that everyone should be fed, that the hunger of generations should be conquered at last. This, as described at the time in the accounts that now make up the initial chapters of this book, took the form of "free grain" in public dining-rooms; in many places "free dishes" of other kinds were added and competitions arose as to the number of "free services," from tailoring to barbering and theater tickets. In some places — Kwangsi among others — competitions took place among husky young men as to who could eat the most grain.

Some people in China today tend to avoid mentioning these "excesses." But I myself agree with an old peasant in Kwangsi who said: "We just had to do it once, just once in order to break down the centuries in which every family concentrated on its own small plot." When foreign critics in malice express the hope that the Chi-

nese Communists will now "let the peasants" drift back to their ancient ways of agriculture, I think of this old man in Kwangsi.

For the Big Leap in 1958 and the communes with it broke the "old ways of farming" forever. A new type of peasant awoke to life, conscious of collective power. No peasant that I meet wants to go back. He wants to go forward; he wants various adjustments and changes. He does not want the old feudal, mediaeval village, most of whose people were illiterate. Foreign comments describe China's rural areas as "80 per cent illiterate with antediluvian tools"; this is no longer true. Most peasants under 30 read and write and take an interest in their country and the world. Illiteracy is higher in older-age groups, but the overall percentage is now very low.

While it is true that very primitive tools still remain, and the ancient shoulder-pole has not everywhere given place even to the wheelbarrow, much less to motor power, the urgent needs of irrigation and water-control are already covering much of the countryside with high-tension lines and power pumps. Mechanization of agriculture for one-fourth of earth's people is a long task, requiring much investment of cash with labor; but with the pressure of the communes behind it, this advances fast.

What then are the changes in the communes in the past six years? I must preface this by stating how changes take place. People abroad seem to think that somebody in Mao Tse-tung's office sends them out as binding decrees. Nothing of the kind. Neither the origin of the commune nor any of its changes began as a decree by the state or even as a resolution by the Communist Party. The rise of the communes was a mass movement which the Party summed up and promoted. The first Party resolution about it was issued on August 29, 1958 when 30 per cent of the peasants had already formed communes; the second resolution in Wuhan in December, with the modest title "Some Questions Concerning the People's Communes," was adopted after 99 per cent of the peasants had joined.

Most of the changes came similarly, by local actions to meet local problems, followed at intervals by a summary or analysis from the Central Committee or perhaps merely a reference in the *People's Daily*, noting that such practices had appeared and making com-

ments about them. Any summing-up by the Central Committee, any "suggestion" made with approval of the *People's Daily*, at once became a strong indication to all the Party members that this was a policy to be regarded with favor. In no case were they legally binding or passed as laws. The final word in every commune lies with its members.

Roughly one may say that in the past six years the most obvious change was the tripling of communes in number with consequent reduction in size; the most spectacular event was the brief adoption of "free grain" which in some places never occurred, in others lasted from a few months to a year; the most important change politically is the decentralization of the "accounting unit" which at first tended to be the commune as a whole, but quickly became its larger subdivision, the "production brigade," and by 1962 was in most places transferred to the smaller subdivision, the "production team."

None of these changes took place suddenly or universally. In Canton I learned with surprise that even the tripling of communes by subdivision into smaller units was not at all general throughout China, but largely confined to mountainous areas with minority nationalities where difficult communications and different languages made smaller commune-townships better. Thus in Kwangtung Province the number and size of communes had hard'y changed, but in Kwangsi, its neighbor province, there had been only 1,000 communes in 1958 and there are now nearly 10,000! The "tripling of communes" is not general but an average.

The chief change I saw in the communes in 1964 in visits near Canton was the increase in prosperity, confidence and especially in better accounting since my last visits in 1962. The change to the "team" as accounting unit concentrates responsibility for production and distribution in one place, the original natural village, the oldest, most stable unit in the countryside where everybody knows everybody else. This "team" averages 20 to 40 households, and seldom goes above 100. When the early co-operatives developed, they had their limits in this village; when the higher forms appeared, the village remained one of its "production teams" but the distribution of income was made at the higher level, which even then led to

contradictions between production and distribution that are now resolved.

This is the change that is held abroad to have "liquidated the commune," "retreating" further back even than the higher co-operatives to "local initiative" and hence, it is assumed, towards capitalism. In China it is held to have affirmed more clearly the "socialist" principle of "to each according to his work." It gives each small village full control of and responsibility for its own produce. The small team "owns" the crop, divides it, pays the taxes; these, incidentally, are much smaller now than in 1962, being only some five per cent of the basic crop. This small team has been throughout the unit that handled production; it now regains, in most communes, the right to dispose of its own crops.

The immediate result of this change was to make a clear distinction between the "better-off" teams and the "hard-up" teams. The backward villages are pin-pointed by their own accounting. This enables the backward villages to analyze the source of their troubles, and it enables the commune and brigade to come to their assistance, by helping them change their conditions and methods, and raise their income by their own efforts, instead of glossing over their backwardness by sharing the crops of better teams. Thus we saw that in Hsinhua Commune, of 98 teams that had been originally "hard-up" with a lower than average crop, 96 had advanced with the help of the commune so that by 1963 they were level with the average and some even surpassed the average. The commune form of organization is admirably adapted to give such aid, not primarily by donations, whose effect is transient, but by helping the teams to learn from each other, and increase their own skills.

Finally, just as the small team can be more readily and intimately helped by the commune than by government aid from higher levels, so the individually "hard-up" families can, at the present stage of production, be helped more effectively and with greater justice by the small village team. The villagers all know each other from long experience of working together. They are the best judges of the reasons why any particular household is in difficulties, whether this is due to illness, or a large number of dependants, or just plain

laziness. The small team, controlling the joint crop of the village, is in the best position to apply the remedy.

A striking example of this is the crop distribution in 1963 by the Yangho Team of East Flower Commune, as reported in *China Reconstructs* for June 1964 by Chang Yen, who spent some time in the village and attended discussions at several levels. Here we see clearly how the team is able to combine the basic principle of paying each worker according to his work with the equally basic principle that nobody shall be allowed to starve.

The Yangho Team has 57 families. In the past its land was subject to flood and the peasants could not count on more than a single crop. In the "old society" most of the poorer peasants were continually in debt to the landlord and money-lender. So it is not surprising that when East Flower Commune was organized in 1958, half of the families in Yangho were in debt to their co-operative. In the next five years, through the water-conservation work done by the commune and the consequent double-cropping and release of labor for side-occupations, the income of the members steadily grew. After the 1962 harvest, only six households were in debt to the team; after the 1963 harvest, only two.

In 1963 Yangho Team had an excellent crop plus additional income from side-occupations which was equal to that from the crop. After selling one-third of the grain to the state and setting aside for seed, fodder and taxes, which, as usual now in this area, were only five per cent of the gross income, Yangho, in general meeting, voted a small per cent to the Welfare Fund and another small per cent to the accumulation fund and "divided the rest among its members in proportion to the work each had done." Each member then could draw this income partly in grain and partly in cash. In grain he could draw up to the total needs of his household, as reckoned by ages, sex and general activities; the rest he drew in cash.

This strict observance of the principle of paying according to work gave a relatively large income to households whose labor power was large and whose dependants were few, but they were not entitled to draw in grain any more than the normal food consumption of their household; they took their gains in cash. At the other extreme, a

household with only one able-bodied worker and many small children or in which the bread-winner had been incapacitated by illness, might find that all the work done was not enough to care for the household properly. In that case the Welfare Fund came to its aid. The Welfare Fund exists so that nobody in the team, for whatever cause or misfortune, should lack the basic guarantees of food, clothing, shelter, education and care of health.

Yangho Team considered the plight of the "hard-up" families, first in a small conference with the needy households to learn their needs, then in a preliminary committee and finally in the general meeting of the team. Three different cases are instructive.

We first take a widow with three small children who had been "on welfare" and in debt to the co-operative for several years but who, when the second crop was counted in 1963, found that through the general rise in the value of the "work-day," she had earned enough to buy the grain for her family till the next crop, with 66 yuan in addition in cash. The team leader suggested that 66 yuan (\$26.40) might not be enough for miscellaneous expenses till the next accounting — this comes twice a year in teams with a double crop — and that the Welfare Fund might still assume part of the cost of her children's grain.

The widow refused the aid. "I have a house that costs me nothing," she said. "I have now all the rice we need. I have a private plot with vegetables and also a pig and chickens. We will get by on 66 yuan and be glad to be out of debt."

This left two families to consider as "hard-up" and needing aid. The first was that of Kao, a widower with an aged father and two children in primary school. Kao was known to everyone as a conscientious worker but so slow that his total work-points were not enough to support his household. The moment his case was mentioned, everyone agreed that the Welfare Fund should advance Kao grain for his children. Kao replied, with tears in his eyes: "The commune is our unbreakable rice-bowl."

The final problem was Mrs. Lo, whose husband worked in another county and apparently sent no money for her and the two children. Mrs. Lo was known as an idler. The team leader reported that he

had tried hard to find any kind of work that she would do properly; he had even given her work to do at home. But after the grain that she needed for herself and the children was balanced against her work, she still owed the team 66 yuan. Mrs. Lo's case aroused conflicting views; it was referred to the general meeting.

The general meeting was a huge turnout. It passed rapidly through the reports of the year's gains, which most people knew already: a rice yield of 1,306 catties per *mou*, more than double that of 1957; an average income per household of 780 yuan (\$312). Then argument grew hot over Mrs. Lo. The women especially denounced her. When an easy-going old man argued that the crop was good and "nobody would notice it if we give grain for Mrs. Lo's children," a woman retorted that "all the women would notice it if an idler gets as good treatment as a hard worker." To treat idlers like honest workers would, she said, be bad for everyone's morale. The matter was finally settled by giving Mrs. Lo a public criticism and warning her to work better in the coming year, but giving her grain for the children from the Welfare Fund since "in no case must we hurt the children."

Thus was the eternal problem of the idler in the collective handled by Yangho Team. At the present stage of production, when agriculture is still largely done by hand, it is clearly better that such problems be handled by the small unit, the local village which is long acquainted with all parties, and which can most effectively reconcile two great principles on the reconciliation of which all collective life depends: the principle that each worker shall receive according to his labor, and the principle that nobody in the collective, not even the idler, and especially not the idler's children, shall be deprived of the necessities of life.

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We have seen that the Chinese People's Communes still exist, that they continue to fulfil the basic aims for which they were called into being in 1958, that the changes which they have undergone in these six years have been for the purpose of more efficiently fulfilling those aims. In the three hard years of unusual natural disasters, the

communes saved the country: first by their constructions of water-conservation works which, even when only partly finished, resisted the first shock of drought or flood; then by the forms of mutual aid that they made possible; and in the final emergencies by acting as channels of state relief so that communities were held together and people did not scatter to beg and die along the roads. Many Chinese experts believe that without the communes, the disasters of the three hard years would have lost millions and possibly tens of millions of lives.

We have seen that the communes still have the power to mobilize labor on a large scale for public improvements and that they do it today more accurately and with better accounting than in the first enthusiasm of the Great Leap of 1958. Through their double nature, as a co-operative form that is also government at township level, the communes can even mobilize labor effectively and economically on the scale of eleven counties, as in the reconstruction plans of the East River Basin. We have also noted that in the tremendous increase of water-conservation facilities of Kwangtung Province, only 30 per cent of the cost was borne by the province, since the communes were able to mobilize the labor on the basis of each locality building for its own prosperity. Thus the annual costs of irrigation, and of all similar improvements, remains low for all time to come.

In 1958 when the enthusiasm for the Great Leap was at its height, a Chinese leader surprised me by saying: "We think the commune is a good form for us; but it will take ten years of testing to make sure."

The Chinese leaders are not hot-heads; they weigh their enthusiasms against the difficulties and the facts. Six years have gone by in which the communes have faced many hardships, made some mistakes and some adjustments and scored great successes. With each year they have become an ever-stronger section of the forces that remake the Chinese land.

More than this, they have proved able to build a collective form that cherishes and develops the initiative of the individual, and that educates and disciplines individuals to seek the collective good. Thus



they move consciously towards that distant goal which today, prosaically or combatively, is called communism, which men in many lands and many ages have sought by many names in many ways, and which Chinese in the long past foresaw as the "Great Harmony" of men with nature and with their fellow-men.

*(continued from front flap)*

overcoming the natural calamities of 1959-61. The third, "Communes in 1964", is the result of close observation of communes and their brigades and teams on the scale of one province, plus important concluding chapters dealing with the entire national economy and the role of the communes today. Rich in facts, impressions and interviews, the whole book illustrates the author's own remark in her foreword: "A nation's greatness shows itself to the world in many ways but always the foundations lie in its internal life. The people's communes are the form of China's rural life today, a base of her internal strength."

成長中  
安娜·路

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# *Letters from China*

*Anna Louise Strong*

These are the letters written by Anna Louise Strong in answer to friends seeking information about China. At first she only corresponded with a few friends using carbon copies to save time in writing. Friends passed their letters on and her correspondents increased in number so she mimeographed her letters, sending out sixty copies. Letters of inquiry about China continued to grow in number. Anna Louise then decided that the only way to deal with her voluminous correspondence was by seeking the aid of the printer, who produced a thousand copies of each letter. Information now available shows that many of these letters have been quoted in newspapers and journals in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Britain, Indonesia and Ghana. The letters have also been translated into Spanish, Portuguese and French and passed on by Latin-American and African friends.

This pamphlet is a collection of the ten letters she wrote between September 1962 and July 1963. They cover a wide range of issues which were topical during that period. The most revealing and enlightening of these letters deal with the Sino-Indian border conflict, the Cuban crisis, the Communist debate, China's conquest of difficulties and the better living standards of her people, and the author's own relations with China, especially the 17 years since she went to Yenai as a journalist. These subjects are still of as much significance as they were at the time of writing.

An experienced writer of 79, Anna Louise Strong writes in a lively, intimate and sincere style. Her penetrating enlightenment on factual matters and convincing answers to questions of vital interest to all mankind, appeal not only to the mind but also to the heart.

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