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### Publication Date

2008

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Crossing the Rural-Urban Divide in Twentieth-Century China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Jeremy Brown

Committee in charge:

Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair  
Professor Paul G. Pickowicz, Co-Chair  
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Professor Richard Madsen  
Professor Nayan Shah

2008

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University of California, San Diego

2008

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
Abbreviations .....	vi
List of Maps.....	viii
List of Tables.....	ix
Note on Sources.....	x
Acknowledgments .....	xiii
Vita .....	xvii
Abstract.....	xviii
1. City and Countryside in Chinese History: An Introduction .....	1
2. Lines Drawn, Lines Crossed: Rural and Urban in 1950s Tianjin.....	42
3. Tianjin's Great Leap: Urban Survival, Rural Starvation.....	89
4. Drastic Measures: The Great Downsizing of 1961-1963 .....	120
5. Uninvited Guests: The Four Cleanups and Urban Youth in Tianjin's Hinterland.....	165
6. Unfit for the City: The Deportation of Political Outcasts during the Cultural Revolution.....	215
7. Neither Urban nor Rural: In-Between Spaces in the 1960s and 1970s .....	265
8. Staging Xiaojinzhuan: The Urban Occupation of a Model Village, 1974-1978 .....	313
9. Conclusion .....	360
Map 1 .....	366

Map 2.....	367
Map 3.....	368
Map 4.....	369
Bibliography.....	370

## ABBREVIATIONS

- APA Author's personal archive
- GJG:1 Gao Jianguo 高建国. "Xiaojinzhuang de chenfu" 小靳庄的沉浮 [The rise and fall of Xiaojinzhuang]. Pt. 1. *Sanyue feng* 15 (February 1986): 3-17.
- GJG:2 Gao Jianguo 高建国. "Xiaojinzhuang de chenfu" 小靳庄的沉浮 [The rise and fall of Xiaojinzhuang]. Pt. 2. *Sanyue feng* 16 (March 1986): 6-20.
- HDA Hexi District Archive (Tianjin)
- HPA Hebei Provincial Archive (Shijiazhuang)
- HZDSJ Tianjin shi nongcun hezuo zhi fazhan shi bianji bangongshi 天津市农村合作制发展史编辑办公室, ed. *Tianjin shi nongcun hezuo zhi dashiji: 1949-1987* 天津市农村合作制大事记 [Chronology of the Tianjin village cooperative system, 1949-1987]. Tianjin: Tianjin shi nongye hezuo zhi fazhan shi bianji bangongshi, 1988.
- NBCK *Neibu cankao* 内部参考 [Internal reference]
- NCS Tianjin gongnong lianmeng nongmuchang shizhi bangongshi 天津工农联盟农牧场史志办公室. *Gongnong lianmeng nongchang shi* 工农联盟农场史 [History of the worker-peasant alliance farm]. Tianjin, 1992.
- MWG *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* 建国以来毛泽东文稿 [Mao Zedong's manuscripts since the founding of the People's Republic of China]. 13 vols. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987-1998.
- RMRB *Renmin ribao* 人民日报 [People's Daily]
- TJJG Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui 中共天津市委党史资料征集委员会, Tianjin shi dang'anguan 天津市档案馆, eds. *Tianjin jieguan shilu* 天津接管史录 [History of the takeover of Tianjin]. 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonggong dang shi chubanshe, 1991, 1994.
- TJRB *Tianjin ribao* 天津日报 [Tianjin Daily]
- TJWB *Tianjin wanbao* 天津晚报 [Tianjin Evening News]

- TMA Tianjin Municipal Archive
- WDGW Song Yongyi 宋永毅, ed. *Zhongguo wenhua da geming wenku* 中国文化大革命文库 [Chinese Cultural Revolution database]. Hong Kong: Xianggang Zhongwen daxue Zhongguo yanjiu fuwu zhongxin, 2002. CD-ROM.
- ZGSX Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao dangshi jiaoyan er shi 中共中央党校党史教研二室. *Zhongguo gongchandang shehuizhuyi shiqi wenxian ziliao xuanbian* 中国共产党社会主义时期文献资料选编 [Selected documentary materials from the Chinese Communist Party's socialist period]. N.p., 1987.
- ZYWX Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室, ed. *Jianguo yilai zhongyao wenxian xuanbian* 建国以来重要文献选编 [Selected important documents since the founding of the People's Republic of China]. 20 vols. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1992-1998.



## LIST OF MAPS

Map 1. Tianjin, circa 1915, indicating foreign concessions.....	366
Map 2. Tianjin municipality, 1960 .....	367
Map 3. Tianjin's western suburbs, including the Worker-Peasant Alliance State Farm. ....	368
Map 4. Part of Hebei province, including Gengle and Shexian, 1976 .....	369

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Population Moving in and out of Tianjin's Urban Districts, 1951-1957 .....	81
Table 2. Population Moving in and out of Tianjin's Urban Districts, 1956-1963 .....	92
Table 3. Temporary Population in Tianjin, 1956-1960 .....	92
Table 4. People Deported from Tianjin During the Cultural Revolution.....	225
Table 5. Outcomes for 78 deportees from Tianjin, through 1972 .....	238
Table 6. Production and Profit at the Tianjin Ironworks.....	301
Table 7. Population Moving in and out of Tianjin's Urban Districts, 1961-1978 .....	363

## NOTE ON SOURCES

I was shuffling through a thin pile of red guard leaflets at Tianjin's famed antique market during my first research trip to the city when a man sidled up to me and asked, "Are you interested in Cultural Revolution materials? I have much more at home than what you will find here. Come with me, my house is just around the corner." My decision to follow the man opened up a world of unique sources at least as rich as anything I was allowed to view in the archives.

Over the past ten years, government offices and factories have moved to better facilities, discarding tons of historical files in the process. Many were pulped, but others made their way to the marketplace by way of paper recyclers and book dealers. I frequented Tianjin's used book markets weekly and befriended dealers who specialized in documents, letters, and diaries from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. I gave them my phone number, described my research interests (I said wanted to see anything related to city people going to villages and village people going to cities during the Mao Zedong period), and asked the peddlers to contact me when they had a particularly interesting new gunny sack of papers.

The documents and letters I collected in Tianjin greatly enriched my dissertation and make up the primary source base for Chapter 6, on the Cultural Revolution. Citing such sources is not as straightforward as providing a file number for archival documents or publication information for openly published sources. In the footnotes, I have denoted these unique sources with the abbreviation "APA"

(Author's Personal Archive), and have provided as much information as possible regarding authorship and dates.

I conducted more than one hundred oral history interviews. Some were brief exchanges, others became extended friendships and included multiple meetings over many hours. My conversations in village homes, taxi cabs, and fancy city restaurants supplemented and complicated the written sources I found. People's memories of moving between city and countryside during the Mao era were often at odds with official and non-official documents. Thankfully, many people were glad to share their stories and experiences with me—they were waiting for someone to ask. Some complained that their children did not care about the past or did not believe what they had been through. Except for public figures who were openly identified in newspapers during the Mao period, all names have been changed.

I used personal networks to find interview subjects; no official minders were present. I explained that I was seeking city people who had spent time in villages or villagers who had spent time in cities between 1949 and 1978. My strategy was to allow interviewees to narrate their experiences with minimal interruptions. At the end of each interview, I asked the interviewee if he or she could introduce me to someone else who might be of help.

Halfway through my research year in Tianjin, I noticed that my rural interviews were almost all with men. It was inappropriate for me to be alone with rural women in village homes, and when I asked women questions about their experiences, their usual response was to defer to the man of the house. To counter this

gender imbalance, I hired a female research assistant originally from a rural county to carry out and transcribe twelve interviews with village women who had lived through the Mao era.

Although not every interview made its way into the footnotes of the dissertation, as a whole the conversations helped to frame my conclusions, and reminded me to stay focused on the lives of people whose experiences shaped rural-urban difference in the Tianjin region.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to the many people in and around Tianjin who welcomed me into their homes and shared their stories and writings with me. Without their help and generosity, it would have been impossible to pursue this project.

I came to the University of California, San Diego, in order to work with Joseph Esherick and Paul Pickowicz. I am grateful for their constant encouragement and support, which began more than a year before I even applied for admission, when I entered San Diego on foot from Mexico and found my way to a lunch meeting at the Faculty Club. Esherick and Pickowicz have been my best critics, research guides, teachers, and coaches. I could not have asked for better mentors. I am also grateful for guidance and support from dissertation committee members Takashi Fujitani, Richard Madsen, and Nayan Shah, all of whom pushed me to ask big questions and consider the broader implications of the project.

I have benefited greatly from my fellow graduate students at UCSD. A walk on the beach with Sigrid Schmalzer and Elena Songster clinched my decision to come to San Diego; since then they have been fantastic friends and colleagues. I was also fortunate to have learned from senior students including Liu Lu, Cecily McCaffrey, Charles Musgrove, and Doug Stiffler. My work and thinking owes much to classmates Christian Hess, Matthew Johnson, Ellen Huang, Jiansui He, Dahpon Ho, Liyan Qin, Xiaowei Zheng, Elya Zhang, Miriam Gross, Brent Haas, and Jeremy Murray, who all shared sources, commented on drafts, and became friends.

In Tianjin, Zhang Limin and Liu Haiyan provided a wonderful home base at the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of History. Their advice, introductions, and unsurpassed knowledge of the city and its history were indispensable to my research. I also appreciated the generosity of Song Meiyun, Wang Zhaoxiang, Ren Yunlan, and the entire history community at TASS. I learned a tremendous amount about Tianjin's past from senior scholars Wang Hui and Hu Guangming. At Nankai University, Jiang Pei was instrumental in sharing sources and pointing me in new directions—Chapters 7 and 8 came about thanks to his suggestions. Thanks especially to Zheng Wei for helping me with connections and sources at Nankai. Graduate students Huang Bo, Flower Zhao, and Liu Bingxian provided essential research assistance at key moments. Zhang Xiaoyan's flawless transcription helped me to read illegible documents and understand difficult dialects.

I cannot name the many people who provided introductions and helped to navigate difficulties in Baodi, Shexian, and the Tianjin suburbs. Their help was vital and I thank them here. In Shijiazhuang, Li Huimin, Zhang Xuejun, and Cui Pengfei were great hosts. I would also like to thank archivists and librarians at the Hebei Provincial Archive, Tianjin Municipal Archive, Hexi District Archive, Tianjin Municipal Library, the National Library in Beijing, and the Universities Service Centre at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

At conference panels, seminars, individual meetings, and over the internet, many scholars commented on my work and offered helpful advice. I thank Thomas Bernstein, Carolyn Brown, Sherman Cochran, Chen Donglin, Gao Wangling, Linda

Grove, Stephen MacKinnon, Ethan Michelson, Elizabeth Perry, Ruth Rogaski, Brett Sheehan, Vivienne Shue, Steve Smith, Dorothy Solinger, Yang Su, Andrew Walder, Frederic Wakeman, Suzanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Yunxiang Yan, Catherine Vance Yeh, Wen-hsin Yeh, Yin Hongbiao, Yoshizawa Seiichiro, Geir Sigurðsson, and David Zweig.

Three senior mentors deserve special mention: Chen Jian, Perry Link, and Michael Schoenhals have been incredibly generous with sources, advice, and support for my job search. Schoenhals's introduction to non-archival, entrepreneurial research methods was an early inspiration, and I have been fortunate to benefit from his constant encouragement ever since. I have also benefited from collaboration and conversations with young scholars at the forefront of writing a new history of the PRC, especially Daniel Leese, Kimberly Ens-Manning, and Felix Wemheuer.

I am forever grateful to Robert Eisinger, Susan Glosser, Mark Halperin, Chiu-Mi Lai, and Todd Little-Siebold. Between 1995 and 1999 at Lewis & Clark College, they challenged my assumptions, pushed me toward China, taught me how to write and ask critical questions, and inspired me to pursue an academic career.

I thank the institutions and individuals who provided financial support for this project. Research was supported by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award and a Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Field Research Fellowship with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Writing was supported by a Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, as well as a UCSD Center for the Humanities Award. Thanks also to



Zella Brown for backing my first trip to Xiaojinzhuang and to an anonymous donor whose support to the UCSD Chinese history program provided writing funds during my final year in San Diego. Laura Benson provided the most support of all. I am grateful to her and to Henry Brown for their daily reminders of what's really important.

Material from Chapter 2, in part, appeared in Jeremy Brown, "The Village in the City: Rural Migrants in 1950s Tianjin," *Chungguksa yongu* [The Journal of Chinese Historical Researches, Taegu, Korea] 40 (February 2006): 383-428.

Material from Chapter 5, in part, appeared in Jeremy Brown, "Burning the Grassroots: Chen Boda and the Four Cleanups in Suburban Tianjin," *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Spring 2008.

Material from Chapter 8, in part, appeared in Jeremy Brown, "Staging Xiaojinzhuang: The City in the Countryside, 1974-1976," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew Walder (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 153-84.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Crossing the Rural-Urban Divide in Twentieth-Century China

by

Jeremy Brown

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, San Diego, 2008

Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair  
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This is a study of the historical process by which an individual's identity as a rural or urban person became one of the most important sites of social difference in twentieth-century China. I focus on interaction between city and countryside to understand how the gap between the two realms grew, especially during the first three decades of the People's Republic of China (1949-1979). Attempts to cross the rural-urban divide reified difference. During the Mao Zedong era, the more city people

attacked the rural-urban gap, the more alienated China's cities and countryside became from one another, and the more rigid urban and rural identities became.

I downgrade institutional explanations including the household registration (*hukou*) system in favor of social and cultural ones. In spite of restricted mobility, people continued to travel between city and countryside in massive numbers during the socialist period. Through rural-urban interaction, difference was negotiated on personal, familial, and professional levels. The *hukou* system was not a central factor in these moments of everyday contact. More important were language, appearance, labor, family, food, sex, and the historical legacies of the early twentieth century, when cities came to symbolize modernity and villages were equated with backwardness.

Previously untapped archival sources and oral history interviews allow for fresh perspectives on the Communist takeover of cities in 1949, the First Five-Year Plan, the Great Leap famine, the Four Cleanups movement, the sent-down youth program, and the Cultural Revolution. The leap and its aftermath poisoned the relationship between city and countryside. The leap's legacy helps to explain the Four Cleanups and Cultural Revolution, which further alienated villages from cities. Overall, the conclusions of the dissertation fall in between and add complexity to earlier views of the People's Republic as either a model of pro-rural development or as a starkly divided land of apartheid and oppression. Stories of everyday interactions in villages and neighborhoods, combined with new knowledge of how local officials made decisions, show a society that was more diverse, complicated, and above all,

more human than the simple institutional division into urban and rural spheres would suggest.

## 1. City and Countryside in Chinese History: An Introduction

This dissertation is as an attempt to understand the historical roots of contemporary China's thorniest social problem: the gap between city and countryside. Although I did not know it at the time, the seeds for this project were planted in 2001 when I was studying Chinese at Tsinghua University in Beijing. I wanted to understand why my Chinese friends, who had been born and raised in cities and had never set foot in the villages where most of China's population lives, disparaged the rural migrants who peddled fruit and fixed bicycles on campus. One spring day I boarded the first northbound bus leaving campus and took it to the end of the line in Huilongguan, a new suburban high-rise development built on the site of a razed village. In the empty concrete square next to a faux European clock tower, I spoke with an elderly man whose home had been destroyed. He took me to a neighboring village—also slated for destruction—whose dirt lanes, mud and brick huts, and lively public activities were a marked contrast to the still unoccupied skyscrapers next door. Such contrasts are common on the outskirts of large Chinese cities, and it is all too easy to over-romanticize the loss of village homes (some villagers welcome the chance to move into more comfortable dwellings). But I was vexed by the sight and wanted to learn more about how the twenty-first century phenomenon of uncompensated land grabs and exploited migrant labor had come to pass.

It is tempting to see today's gap in living standards between Chinese cities and villages as a predictable byproduct of the global modernization process. The Asian,

African, Latin American, European, and American experiences suggest that along with modernization comes a growing rural-urban divide, with villages getting left behind or emptied out, and villagers gradually becoming part of an urban underclass. This process has certainly taken place in China. But in the Chinese case, it is puzzling that during the first three decades of the People's Republic of China (1949-1979), an individual's identity as an urban or rural person became the main source of difference in Chinese society (never isolated, of course, from other types of difference, including gender and class). Given China's predominantly agrarian society, the peasant-based revolution led by Mao Zedong, and the Chinese Communist Party's stated goal of shrinking and eventually eliminating the gap between cities and villages through encouraging rural industry, transferring urban youth to villages, training barefoot doctors, and expanding education opportunities for villagers, we might have expected a different result. In fact, scholarship that predated the opening of the People's Republic to foreign researchers in the late 1970s seemed to confirm that China was unique—that it had found a path to development that avoided the pitfalls of capitalist urbanization while also sidestepping the exploitation of peasants that characterized industrialization in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin.<sup>1</sup>

After Mao's death in 1976, fieldwork in villages and oral history interviews revealed a dramatically different picture. China's socialist development looked more like the Soviet model than scholars had previously thought. In fact, the limits and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Rhodes Murphey, *The Fading of the Maoist Vision: City and Country in China's Development* (New York: Methuen, 1980).

burdens placed on Chinese peasants seemed even harsher than in the Soviet experience. Scholars turned to institutional and structural causes to explain how the purportedly pro-rural Mao era ended up disadvantaging peasants so severely.<sup>2</sup> The most significant factor appeared to be the two-tiered household registration (*hukou*) system and its accompanying grain rationing regime, which classified every individual in China according to rural or urban residence.<sup>3</sup> Household registration was institutionalized in the early 1960s after the starvations and massive population dislocations of the Great Leap famine, and it guaranteed food rations, housing, health care, and education to urban residents. Rural people were expected to be self-reliant and were officially restricted from moving to cities. This system was justified by the socialist planned economy's emphasis on heavy industry concentrated in cities. Mao may have periodically questioned the anti-rural nature of China's Stalinist development model—most notably when launching the leap in 1958 and at the outset of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1968)—but because he never wavered from its

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<sup>2</sup> Important contributions include Martin King Whyte and William L. Parish, *Urban Life in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); R. J. R. Kirkby, *Urbanization in China: Town and Country in a Developing Economy, 1949-2000 A.D.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Andrew G. Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack M. Potter, *China's Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially Chapter 15, 296-312.

<sup>3</sup> Tiejun Cheng, "Dialectics of Control—the Household Registration (*Hukou*) System in Contemporary China" (PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991); Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, "The Origins and Consequences of China's Hukou System," *China Quarterly*, no. 139 (September 1994): 644-68; Fei-Ling Wang, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China's Hukou System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).



institutional underpinnings (the *hukou* system and grain rationing), rural and urban people remained unequal.

The tension between the structural inequalities of China's socialist industrialization and the regime's stated goal of eliminating the rural-urban gap was never resolved during the Mao era. Theorists and propagandists tried and failed to solve the contradiction by emphasizing the advanced character of the urban proletariat and reminding peasants that they were junior partners in the "worker-peasant alliance." Theorists also explained the importance of timing and Marxist historical stages: temporary inequalities were unavoidable and necessary evils along the path to a communist society.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately for peasants, Mao's attempts to speed up and skip stages caused disaster (during the Great Leap Forward, for example), while measured pro-urban development led rural people to correctly suspect that they would die before villages caught up to cities. In this respect, China's socialist development model was not entirely unlike capitalist modernization projects that prescribed proper stages and discarded supposedly backward people and practices.<sup>5</sup>

My dissertation builds on an important body of scholarship but also attempts to revise it in several ways. While most previous works study cities or villages exclusively, I focus on the interface between the two realms in order to understand

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Brown, "Justifying Inequality: The Worker-Peasant Alliance in Mao's China" (paper presented at the Mobilization, Performance, and the Production of Legitimacy in Mao's China Workshop, Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, April 7, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1960]).

how the gap worsened under Mao. Such an approach suggests that attempts to cross the rural-urban divide reified difference. The more city people attacked the rural-urban gap, the more alienated China's cities and countryside became from one another, and the more rigid urban and rural identities became. Efforts to address inequality between cities and villages actually ended up confirming the power differential between the two realms and exacerbated rural-urban tensions.

While I acknowledge the significance of the *hukou* and grain rationing regimes in contributing to rural-urban difference, I downgrade institutional explanations in favor of social and cultural ones. My research shows that in spite of restricted mobility, people continued to travel between city and countryside in massive numbers during the socialist period. Such movement—sometimes hidden and illicit,<sup>6</sup> sometimes state-sanctioned—led to exchanges and interactions in which difference was negotiated on personal, familial, and professional levels. The *hukou* system was not a central factor in these moments of everyday contact. More important were language, physical appearance, work and labor, family, food, sex, and the historical legacies of the early twentieth century, when cities came to symbolize modernity and villages were equated with backwardness. History mattered more than the *hukou* as rural-urban difference was culturally reproduced in the new political environment of the Mao era.

Viewing the history of the People's Republic through the lens of rural-urban

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<sup>6</sup> On the substantial unsanctioned migration of the Mao period, see Diana Lary, "Hidden Migrations: Movements of Shandong People, 1949-1978," *Chinese Environment and Development* 7, no. 1-2 (1996): 56-72.

interaction allows for fresh perspectives on such important events as the Communist takeover of cities in 1949, the First Five-Year Plan, the Great Leap famine, the Four Cleanups movement, the sent-down youth program, and the Cultural Revolution. I argue that the disastrous leap and its aftermath poisoned the relationship between city and countryside during the Mao era. The legacy of the leap is the key to understanding the Four Cleanups and Cultural Revolution, which further alienated villages from cities. Overall, the picture that emerges from my research falls in between—and adds complexity to—earlier views of the People’s Republic as a model of pro-rural development or as a starkly divided land of apartheid and oppression. Administrative categories—even as they shaped life choices and opportunities—did not mesh with lived reality. When official designations and intrusive political movements were imposed on a complex human landscape, individuals and families had to sort out the mess. Labels and campaigns pushed people into choices and situations that they might not have confronted otherwise. But people pushed back. In the often tense relationship between state and society, “society” had more agency and power than previously imagined.

My conclusions arise not just from differences in interpretation, but also from a revolution in sources. Access to newly available archival documents, letters, diaries, memoirs, manuscripts, and interview subjects forced me to embrace complexity and abandon any attempt to stuff the history of the People’s Republic into a neat theoretical box or a single scholarly framework. Stories of everyday interactions in villages and neighborhoods, combined with new knowledge of how local officials

made difficult decisions and managed limited resources, show a society that was more diverse, complicated, and above all, more human than the simple institutional division into urban and rural spheres would suggest. Conducting research in China still presents enormous challenges and access remains limited compared to what scholars of the Soviet Union enjoyed during the early 1990s. Nonetheless, I see my research as a first step toward a new history of the People's Republic inspired by the pioneering advances in Soviet history by such historians as Sheila Fitzpatrick and Stephen Kotkin.<sup>7</sup>

Excellent previous histories of the People's Republic have tended to focus on elite court politics dominated by Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong only occasionally appears in the pages that follow. Mao's views, whims, and policy judgments were often extremely important in launching key moments of rural-urban contact, including the Great Leap Forward, the Four Cleanups, and the sent-down youth movement. But the approaches of local leaders, including such top Tianjin officials as Huang Jing, Wan Xiaotang, and Xie Xuegong, were often more relevant to the lives of the people who lived in and around Tianjin. More important than the Chairman himself in the Tianjin region were lieutenants who enjoyed proximity to Mao and who acted in his name,

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); and Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926-1936* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

including ghostwriter and theorist Chen Boda and Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. Chen and Jiang's forays from their Beijing offices to the Tianjin countryside would have disastrous consequences for rural-urban relations, consequences that the Chairman may have never intended.

Of course, the history of rural-urban difference in China did not begin in 1949. Place-based identities and perceptions of city and village life that predated the revolution shaped both Communist policies and everyday interactions in the People's Republic. This chapter examines long-term historical processes that remained relevant as they continued to unfold after 1949. I explain the significance of my case study centered on the Tianjin region, and question whether the idea of a "rural-urban continuum" is a useful concept for understanding Chinese cities and villages in the late imperial period. I then address the qualitative shift in rural-urban relations that occurred during the Republican period (1911-1949), analyze the cultural dimensions of rural-urban difference, and discuss the Communist approach to city and countryside.

### Tianjin and its Hinterland

When Communist soldiers and officials occupied Tianjin in January 1949, they assumed control over what had become the most important urban center and port in north China during the late Qing and Republican periods. Tianjin is best known for its unique status as a "hypercolony" (Ruth Rogaski's term), a treaty port home to as many

as eight foreign concessions in the early 1900s.<sup>8</sup> Even before 1860, when a combined British-French force occupied Tianjin, the city was a vital regional center with a distinct urban identity. Much as Linda Cooke Johnson exploded the myth that Shanghai was a “sleepy fishing town” before it became a cosmopolitan treaty port,<sup>9</sup> Kwan Man Bun has shown Tianjin’s importance as an urban center before 1860. The walled military garrison of Tianjin wei was established in 1404, and the settlement quickly developed beyond its military function. Kwan recognizes that as gateway to the capital, Tianjin was sometimes overshadowed by Beijing. But he argues, “Serving a hinterland much larger than its administrative boundary, Tianjin did not exist for Beijing alone.”<sup>10</sup> The city was north China’s economic center and trade hub, was a key stop on the Grand Canal, and by 1842 it had a population equivalent to Edinburgh and Marseilles.<sup>11</sup>

Tianjin had its own autonomous urban culture before the nineteenth century. As Kwan writes, the lyrics of popular opera in Tianjin had “a hedonistic, commercial, and urban bias.”<sup>12</sup> Daily life differed inside and outside the city walls. Inside, trade

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Linda Cooke Johnson, “Shanghai: An Emerging Jiangnan Port, 1683-1840,” in *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, ed. Linda Cooke Johnson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 151-81.

<sup>10</sup> Kwan Man Bun, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin: State-Making and Civil Society in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Rogaski, 54.

<sup>12</sup> Kwan, 85.

and commerce dominated. Aside from small vegetable gardens and the transfer of night-soil to the suburbs, agriculture was not a part of Tianjin life.<sup>13</sup> While according to Luo Shuwei “there was an extremely obvious boundary between city and village” (the city wall, a clear urban marker of the pre-modern period), Tianjin was still linked to its rural hinterland through tax collection, migration, and trade in vegetables and seafood.<sup>14</sup> An extensive network of rivers facilitated movement and marketing between Tianjin and the rest of north China.

Tianjin would only grow in importance after becoming a treaty port in 1860. Rhodes Murphey’s polemical characterization of treaty ports as “a fly on an elephant” and of Tianjin’s trade as “a drop in the bucket of the economy of North China” notwithstanding,<sup>15</sup> trade between Tianjin and its much-expanded hinterland grew significantly during the first decade of the twentieth century as new rail lines connected the city to the rest of China.<sup>16</sup> Just as important as Tianjin’s economic

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<sup>13</sup> Kwan, 21; Rogaski, 209.

<sup>14</sup> Luo Shuwei 罗澍伟, ed., *Jindai Tianjin chengshi shi* 近代天津城市史 [Modern urban history of Tianjin] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993), 104-7; quote from 104.

<sup>15</sup> Rhoads Murphey, “The Treaty Ports and China’s Modernization,” in *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, ed. Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 39, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Luo, 446; Tenshin chīki shi kenkyū kai 天津地域史研究会, ed., *Tenshin shi – Saisei suru toshi no toporojī* 天津史—再生する都市のトポロジー [Tianjin history: Topology of a reborn city] (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 1999), 61. On the economic transformation of Tianjin’s hinterland, see Linda Grove, *A Chinese Economic Revolution: Rural Entrepreneurship in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

reach was its cultural impact during the treaty-port era. Tianjin—not Shanghai—was the symbol of modern urbanity for all of north China, a magnet for migrants seeking work in factories or workshops, and the site of educational opportunities for youth from all over China. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Tianjin’s distinctive *Wei pai* culture, featuring *Pingju* and *Hebei bangzi* opera, as well as its own popular brand of *xiangsheng*, rivaled Beijing and Shanghai’s cultural offerings.<sup>17</sup>

Given that Tianjin had as many as nine governing bodies (eight foreign concessions plus a Chinese administration) managing urban space during the modern period, it is not surprising that fragmentation and diversity characterized the city. Gail Hershatter’s evocative walking tour of Republican Tianjin remains the best description of its urban environment, which seemed like “not one city but many towns sprawled north to south: the neat government district to the northeast, the northern ironworking and textile area, the old city, the amusement quarters of Sanbuguan, the foreign concessions along the Hai River, and the new industrial quarters.”<sup>18</sup> Under the guidance of Yuan Shikai, the new government district (Hebei xinqu) arose as a modern center across the river from old Chinese city in 1902. The city walls were dismantled and replaced by streetcar lines after an international coalition force (known

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<sup>17</sup> Tenshin chīki shi kenkyū kai, 79. On Tianjin’s status as a center of the *xiangsheng* world, see Perry Link, “The Crocodile Bird: *Xiangsheng* in the Early 1950s,” in *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*, ed. Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 210, 216.

<sup>18</sup> Gail Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 24.



in Chinese as the Eight Nation United Army, *Baguo lianjun*) occupied Tianjin in response to the Boxer Uprising in 1900. After this, the city's administrative center of gravity shifted northeast toward Hebei xinqu and southeast toward the foreign concessions. The old Chinese city, once home to the government yamen and a center of traditional commerce, became one of many marginal urban neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup>

Tianjin's marginal districts housed the hundreds of thousands of rural migrants who moved to the city during the Republican period. By 1947 there were more outsiders than natives in the city: out of approximately 1,700,000 residents, 688,661 people listed their native place as Tianjin, while 805,995 were from Hebei and 143,909 from Shandong.<sup>20</sup> Many migrants sought jobs in Tianjin's small workshops and large factories. At one machine works, only four of the ninety-eight apprentices who started work between 1925 and 1933 were Tianjin natives; 97 percent were from Hebei province, while 3 percent hailed from Shandong.<sup>21</sup>

Many others entered the city in search of relief from the flat riverine region's regular floods, which destroyed harvests every few years.<sup>22</sup> Flood, famine, and war

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<sup>19</sup> Liu Haiyan 刘海岩, *Kongjian yu shehui: jindai Tianjin chengshi de yanbian* 空间与社会：近代天津城市的演变 [Space and society: The evolution of modern Tianjin] (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 2003), 87-94.

<sup>20</sup> Tianjin shi dang'anguan 天津市档案馆, ed., *Jindai yilai Tianjin chengshihua jincheng shilu* 近代以来天津城市化进程实录 [Record of the process of urbanization in modern Tianjin] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2005), 710.

<sup>21</sup> Hershatter, 98.

<sup>22</sup> During the devastating floods of 1917, Tianjin was designated the relief center for the north China region. Liu Haiyan, 105, 107. See also Tianjin shi dang'anguan 天津市档案馆, ed., *Tianjin diqu zhongda ziran zaihai shilu* 天津地区重大自然灾害实录

refugees were a major source of Tianjin's Republican-era population growth. Those who had family members already living in Tianjin moved in with their relatives, while people without connections stayed in small guesthouses or built nest-like shacks called *wopu* on the outskirts of the city. Their ranks swelled each winter as nearby farmers who had run short on food entered the city. These winter sojourners also lived in homemade lean-tos. During the day they did odd jobs, collected junk, begged on the streets, and took advantage of two guaranteed daily meals at "porridge yards" (*zhouchang*). The free meals were provided by both government and private charities, and organizations like the Red Cross even assisted migrants in building "nests" out of wood, dried reeds, and mud. The neighborhoods on the margins of Tianjin eventually became permanent additions to the city.<sup>23</sup>

Just because the residents of Tianjin's shantytowns were desperately poor rural migrants does not mean that their presence in and around the city was somehow not urban or not modern. Gail Hershatter's study of Tianjin workers during the first half of the twentieth century shows that migrants maintained rural networks and folk customs, returning to their native places for holidays and staying in touch with village relatives. But as Hershatter contends, Republican Tianjin should not be considered "merely an overgrown urban village":

Neighborhoods threw people from different rural districts together.  
Markets and amusement places gave male workers a new set of

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[Record of major natural disasters in the Tianjin region] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Liu Haiyan, 233, 343.

gathering places. Workers became dependent on markets, vulnerable to currency fluctuations, and beholden to pawnshops in ways that differed from rural patterns. Working-class culture in Tianjin drew upon rural resources and began to transform them in the urban environment.<sup>24</sup>

This was no simple re-creation of village life in an urban setting. Central to Tianjin's modernity was its diverse mix of people, from foreigners and Chinese warlords in the concessions to recent rural migrants in outlying shantytowns. The visible presence of migrants in and around the city helped to accentuate Tianjin residents' sense of a distinctive urban identity.

### The Rural-Urban Continuum: A Persistent Myth

In a short essay published in 1970, historian Frederick W. Mote first articulated his hypothesis of a “continuum from city to suburbs to open countryside” in traditional China.<sup>25</sup> The notion of a Chinese rural-urban continuum, usually contrasted with a purportedly sharper gulf between the two realms in European history, gained traction in 1977 with the publication of *The City in Late Imperial China*, an influential volume edited by anthropologist G. William Skinner and including a chapter by Mote.<sup>26</sup> Since then, the staying power of Mote's hypothesis has been remarkable. Books published in the late 1990s and early 2000s directly echo

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<sup>24</sup> Hershatter, 207.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick W. Mote, “The City in Traditional Chinese Civilization,” in *Traditional China*, ed. James T. C. Liu and Wei-ming Tu (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 42-49.

<sup>26</sup> G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1977).

Mote's formulation in sound-bite form, stating that "a cultural continuum of country and city was discernible in traditional China,"<sup>27</sup> or that "there was no sharp contrast or gap between city and country, particularly in the social and cultural realms."<sup>28</sup> In their introduction to *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*, David Faure and Tao Tao Liu assert, "We think that the rural-urban distinction was external to traditional Chinese thought, and is even now, only partially integrated into Chinese society."<sup>29</sup>

That the idea of indistinguishable urban and rural realms in late imperial China has become "conventional wisdom" in contemporary scholarship, as Joseph W. Esherick notes,<sup>30</sup> is especially surprising for two reasons. First, a cursory read of Mote's essays reveals them to be impressionistic thought pieces unsupported by substantial historical data. Second, serious scholarly contributions based on hard empirical evidence by such historians as Mark Elvin, Linda Cooke Johnson, and William Rowe have convincingly shown the formation of autonomous urban identities

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<sup>27</sup> Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature & Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>29</sup> David Faure and Tao Tao Liu, "Introduction," in *Town and Country in China: Identity and Perception*, ed. David Faure and Tao Tao Liu (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, "Modernity and Nation in the Chinese City," in *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 11.

in the late imperial period.<sup>31</sup> Why, then, has the idea of a continuum persisted? A basic misunderstanding of the scope and nature of Mote's hypothesis and especially of how it fits into Skinner's complex notion of spatial hierarchy is a contributing factor. More important is the striking change in relations between urban and rural China in the early twentieth century, which tempted scholars to reify a modern "gap" and a traditional "continuum." Both before and after 1900, the reality of rural-urban relations was complex and fit somewhere in between the poles of a dichotomy and a continuum. The entire debate would gain precision if historians took heed of Henrietta Harrison's point that the gap and continuum were "cultural paradigms rather than social history: they explain how people have seen the spaces they live in rather than providing an objective differentiation of those spaces."<sup>32</sup>

Mote's 1977 piece in *The City in Late Imperial China* repeats his language about the shared elements of daily life in urban and rural China. He discusses the transformation of Nanjing between 1350 and 1400, when the city became capital of

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), 260; Mark Elvin, "Market Towns and Waterways: The County of Shang-hai from 1480 to 1910," in Skinner, *The City in Late Imperial China*, 459-61; Johnson, "Shanghai: An Emerging Jiangnan Port, 1683-1840," in Johnson, *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, 151-81; William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 8-9; William T. Rowe, "Introduction: City and Region in the Lower Yangzi," in Johnson, *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Henrietta Harrison, "Village Identity in Rural North China: A Sense of Place in the Diary of Liu Dapeng" in Faure and Liu, *Town and Country in China*, 86.

the newly founded Ming dynasty.<sup>33</sup> Here, Mote's celebration of Japanese scholar Katō Shigeshi [Shigeru]'s work on urban development and identity during the Song dynasty, along with Mote's own depiction of Ming Nanjing as an entertainment center where "a pleasure-loving elite came to be identified with the city," contradict his earlier claims of a rural-urban continuum.<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to square Mote's data on Nanjing's development as a distinctive urban center home to quintessentially urban activities with his broad claims about rural-urban sameness. This contradiction lends support to Virgil K. Y. Ho's recent critique. Ho writes of the traditional period, "It might be true that there was still no well-articulated, anti-rural system of thought in the minds of urbanites, but that probably could not prevent or stop urban dwellers, whose lifestyle and socio-cultural milieu were so shaped by a distinct mode of culture, from being aware of their distinctive urban, and materially superior, identity."<sup>35</sup>

Flawed as it was, Mote's rural-urban continuum hypothesis became so influential because it appeared alongside Skinner's seminal work on space-based hierarchy in Chinese society. Skinner's adoption of the phrase seemed to signal his endorsement of Mote's claims. But upon closer examination, Skinner and Mote mean different things by "continuum." While Mote emphasizes similarities and posits a lack

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<sup>33</sup> Mote also spoke about the rural-urban continuum in a 1972 lecture at Rice University, published as F. W. Mote, "A Millennium of Chinese Urban History: Form, Time, and Space Concepts in Soochow," *Rice University Studies* 59, no. 4 (Fall 1973): 35-65.

<sup>34</sup> F. W. Mote, "The Transformation of Nanking, 1350-1400," in Skinner, *The City in Late Imperial China*, 151.

<sup>35</sup> Virgil K. Y. Ho, *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11.

of distinct urban or rural cultures, Skinner outlines nuanced gradations based on geographical distance, marketing activity, and administrative functions. In other words, Skinner does not see an absence of difference between city and countryside, he sees a complex web that includes markers of economic, political, and cultural divergence. In his introduction to part two of *The City in Late Imperial China*, Skinner, noting that two other contributors to the volume (Watt and Fechtwang) argue in favor of the existence of pro-urban bias in late imperial China, suggests that pro-urban bias and Mote's alleged pro-rural bias may well have existed simultaneously. Skinner then corrects several of Mote's claims about sameness between town and country in China: cities and towns were distinguished by the presence of merchants; such architectural landmarks as bell towers and drum towers were markers of urban space; and consumption patterns in cities and villages differed significantly.<sup>36</sup> Thus, after borrowing Mote's continuum language and giving it a different spin from what Mote intended, Skinner dismantles Mote's central claims. This was hardly a solid foundation for an idea that would become "conventional wisdom" in the field.

### The Modern Era: Difference Reconfigured

Whatever scholars conclude about rural-urban relations in the late imperial period, all observers agree that a qualitative shift occurred with the forcible opening of treaty ports by Western imperialist powers: a group of five ports following the first

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<sup>36</sup> G. William Skinner, "Introduction: Urban and Rural in Chinese Society," in Skinner, *The City in Late Imperial China*, 267-69.

Opium War in 1842, and many more after 1860. While it has become de rigueur to disparage the “impact of the West” school of historical scholarship typified by the work of John King Fairbank and his students, it is impossible to deny the transformative effects of the Western occupation of Chinese urban space. Foreigners brought with them a modernist agenda of road building, telegraph and telephone networks, electric lights, parks, water and sewage infrastructure, railways and tram lines, new administrative institutions, and new forms of industry and finance. These changes, initiated during the latter half of the nineteenth century, gained steam after the 1911 revolution, when the transformation of urban space extended beyond coastal treaty ports to far-flung interior cities.<sup>37</sup>

Modernization within cities profoundly affected the relationship between city and countryside during the late Qing and early Republic. In essence, only when cities became modern was it possible to view villages and the people who lived in them as “backward.” As cities changed, a political and economic crisis in rural China that had been building since the eighteenth century made it even more plausible to envision a dichotomy between modernizing cities and stagnating villages.<sup>38</sup> The exodus of rural

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<sup>37</sup> The chapters in Esherick, *Remaking the Chinese City*, illustrate this multi-dimensional process of transformation.

<sup>38</sup> On stagnating agricultural outputs and the tenuous fortunes of family farmers since the eighteenth century, see Philip C. C. Huang, *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), and Philip C. C. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350-1988* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990). Huang’s conclusions and figures, especially his notion of economic involution, have come under attack by such scholars as Kenneth Pomeranz, who has argued that the Yangzi Delta was on par with England on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great*



elites to cities (both pulled by the greater opportunities there and pushed by unrest in the countryside) contributed to the crisis in villages, causing a leadership vacuum and leading to the emergence of predatory middlemen who squeezed already impoverished villagers beyond the breaking point.<sup>39</sup> It was not only elites who moved from villages to cities during the first half of the twentieth century. Although China remained a predominantly rural country, millions of people from villages sought better lives in rapidly growing cities. As Hanchao Lu writes, “cities came to be seen as better places than small towns and villages” because of new urban opportunities and rural deterioration.<sup>40</sup> Lu notes that during the Republican period, “The economic opportunities, convenience of daily life, and richness of cultural and social life in the city, all granted incomparable and irresistible advantages to the city over the countryside.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, while the modern rural-urban divide was constructed by a discourse of modernity versus backwardness, it was also grounded in economic and cultural realities.

The more people crossed the sharpening divide between rural and urban China,

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*Divergence: Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). The dispute between Huang and Pomeranz may never be resolved, but it seems clear that by the turn of the twentieth century, if not earlier, crisis and not prosperity characterized the Chinese countryside.

<sup>39</sup> See Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), and Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> Lu, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Lu, 7-8.

the more aware they became of rural-urban difference. Writing of Guangzhou during the Republican period, Virgil Ho suggests that increased migration to the city may have “reinforced the urban identity, as much as the pride, of the urban Cantonese.” Seeing the often desperate situation of new arrivals in the city made urban dwellers more cognizant of their superior position. The visible presence of poor migrants begging or peddling on city streets signaled that rural-urban difference not only existed between cities and villages, it was present within cities. The divide was everywhere. At the same time that the gap between city and countryside was widening in terms of income, consumption habits, and patterns of work and leisure, contact between the two realms was also at an all-time high.

By the early twentieth century, city people knew how to identify a peasant, and they thought about peasants and ruralness in perplexed and ambiguous terms.<sup>42</sup> According to anthropologist Myron Cohen, urban intellectual elites “invented” the Chinese peasantry as a cultural category in the early twentieth century. A vast, undifferentiated mass of backward rural residents was seen as one of the primary obstacles on China’s path to modernization.<sup>43</sup> While there were diverse views on how

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<sup>42</sup> Some academic writers refuse to translate *nongmin* as “peasant” because the word can be pejorative. I follow Sigrid Schmalzer in using “peasant” precisely because the word had pejorative connotations during the modern period. To obscure this fact by using equally problematic words like “farmer” would mean sacrificing historicist authenticity. Sigrid Schmalzer, “The People’s Peking Man: Popular Paleoanthropology in Twentieth-Century China” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2004), xiii.

<sup>43</sup> Myron Cohen, “Cultural and Political Inventions in Modern China: The Case of the Chinese ‘Peasant,’” *Daedalus* 122, no. 2 (1993): 151-70. See also Yi-tsi Mei

to handle the peasant “problem,” the urban elite consensus was that peasants were poor and were indeed a problem, even if they may have been noble, honest, and pure. Susan Mann has identified three paradigms through which urbanites viewed the countryside in the 1920s and 1930s: a “nativist” celebration of rural roots stemming from ambivalence toward urban modernization, a “reconstructionist” approach aiming to revive the countryside through active tutelage, and a “positivist” view urging faster and better urban growth as a solution.<sup>44</sup> More recently, historian Xiaorong Han has divided Republican-era images of the peasant into four categories, including ignorant, innocent, poor, and powerful.<sup>45</sup> The common thread uniting these views was an us-versus-them distancing. Intellectuals who had themselves been born and raised in rural settings contributed to the early twentieth-century divide between city and countryside by depicting peasants as “others.”

Even writings that played up the negative aspects of modern urban life (such as alienation, decadence, and perversion) or that celebrated rural innocence were at base pro-urban and were often condescending toward the countryside. In his analysis of popular early twentieth-century urban fiction, Perry Link argues that “popular fiction’s frequent suggestion that life was better in the countryside was false, and readers knew

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Feuerwerker, *Ideology, Power, Text: Self-Representation and the Peasant “Other” in Modern Chinese Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Susan Mann, “Urbanization and Historical Change in China,” *Modern China* 10, no. 1 (1984): 94.

<sup>45</sup> Xiaorong Han, *Chinese Discourses on the Peasant, 1900-1949* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

it.”<sup>46</sup> Link explains that such writing “served not to reject urban living but to make it tolerable. Ironically, perhaps, the anti-urban release offered in fiction may actually be viewed as functionally supportive of the new urban mode of living.”<sup>47</sup> The benefits of city living usually went without saying—why else would people continue to live in the city rather than moving back to villages? Link’s point remains an important corrective to the assumption that ostensibly pro-rural fiction reflected the persistence of “rural values” among migrants living in cities.<sup>48</sup>

The evidence does not support labeling migrants in Republican-era cities as “not modern” or “traditional,” nor does it support the claim that migrants simply recreated village society in slums on the margins of China’s rapidly growing cities. Such assertions detract from Hanchao Lu’s otherwise excellent work on the lives of poor and middle-class residents of Shanghai; Frank Dikötter rightly criticizes Lu for “airbrushing” the modern “out of history.”<sup>49</sup> Although poor residents of Shanghai could not afford all of the modern benefits of city life, their daily habits, living conditions, work schedules, and consumption patterns were all altered by an urban setting with distinct housing arrangements and new social geographies. Writing of migrant life in early twentieth-century Moscow, David Hoffman finds that “Peasant

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<sup>46</sup> Perry Link, *Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies: Popular Fiction in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 227.

<sup>47</sup> Link, 229.

<sup>48</sup> Yingjin Zhang sees the persistence of rural values in literature from Republican Beijing. Zhang, 86-87, 90.

<sup>49</sup> Lu, 13; Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3.

culture did not remain static in an urban setting.”<sup>50</sup> This was as true for Chinese cities as it was for Russian ones. Even if Shanghai residents still celebrated traditional Chinese holidays and sometimes used sedan chairs and wheelbarrows for transport, such behavior did not make them “not modern,” as Lu contends, nor did it make them timelessly rural. The dynamic interpenetration of old and new, Chinese and Western, and rural and urban, was itself a hallmark of modernity.<sup>51</sup>

We have seen that a major shift in rural-urban relations resulted from the modernization of Chinese cities in the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. This shift was reflected in popular and elite notions about modern cities and backward peasants, and it also played out in everyday interactions in village lanes, city alleyways, and on the roads and rivers connecting town to country. Movement from village to city contributed to the construction of the rural-urban divide in popular imagination and heightened a sense of fundamental difference, in turn affecting how people treated one another when they came in contact. Cultural markers of difference took center stage during these interactions.

### Cultural Dimensions of the Rural-Urban Divide

In and around Tianjin, I asked residents how they could determine the rural or urban identity of someone they were meeting for the first time. Although our

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<sup>50</sup> David L. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 182.

<sup>51</sup> Madeleine Yue Dong makes this point elegantly in her *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

conversations took place in 2004 and 2005 and were colored by contemporary concerns, my interviewees' answers point toward the longer-term cultural components of modern rural-urban difference. Before and after 1949, people saw others' clothing and skin-color and coded them as rural or urban. The same place-based encoding applied to everyday practices, including eating and hygiene.

People in the Tianjin region told me that they were able to tell whether someone was rural or urban without hearing them speak a word. Even in a first encounter on the street or at the market, clothing, bearing, and skin color were clear indications of place-based identity and helped people mentally categorize others. One Tianjin man visited his ancestral village for the first time as a young boy in the 1970s. He said that the main difference he noticed between city people and peasants was that peasants "looked old" because they worked outside all day long.<sup>52</sup>

Other city people said that they could tell someone was rural because of his or her darker skin. City people who spent a lot of time outside felt stigmatized as rural by their urban peers. A Tianjin-born teenager who was sent to work at the Worker-Peasant Alliance state farm on the outskirts of the city in 1963 was annoyed by the constant comments of his family during his weekend visits home: "you are tanned black," they kept saying.<sup>53</sup>

Clothing was another important marker of rural difference. Respondents described urban clothing as fashionable, new, and made from tailored fabrics. Village

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<sup>52</sup> Interviewee 33.

<sup>53</sup> Interviewee 57.

attire was dirty, tattered, and made of homespun cotton. According to my interviewees, even new city clothes were not enough to cover up someone's rural identity. Four people, all village-born, said that rural people carried themselves differently no matter what they wore. A Baodi woman who first went to the city in the late 1950s said, "even if a village person has good clothes," he or she "cannot wear it well, it will not look clean."<sup>54</sup> Another Baodi man who spent many years in and around Tianjin agreed, saying, "Even if a peasant puts on city clothes and goes to the city, you can tell that he's a peasant from his bearing."<sup>55</sup> A rural bearing (*fengdu*) was hesitant and dazed, he explained, not confident and spirited like that of urban people. When villagers went to the city or came in contact with urban people, they became acutely aware of their inferior status. For the first time, their clothes seemed dirty and threadbare. One villager who first went to Tianjin in 1949 seeking work remembered: "I felt I was an idiot and that I knew nothing."<sup>56</sup>

Ideas about difference went beyond appearances. People linked distinct notions of food and cleanliness to the urban sphere or the rural sphere. How food was obtained and prepared loomed large in respondents' ideas about rural-urban difference. For many in the Tianjin region, the difference between village and city came down to coarse grain (*culiang*) versus fine grain (*xiliang*), or cheap cornmeal versus expensive processed wheat flour. Villagers wanted to make sure I understood

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<sup>54</sup> Interviewee 86.

<sup>55</sup> Interviewee 18.

<sup>56</sup> Interviewee 43.

that although noodles and dumplings made out of wheat flour are relatively common in north Chinese villages nowadays, they were rare luxuries forty years ago. My hosts in villages made a point of feeding me fried cornmeal cakes or steamed corn buns so that I could get a taste of what rural life was like during the Mao period.

An association between dirt, filth, and villages persisted throughout the twentieth century. One man from Gengle, a remote mountain village in Hebei province described in Chapter 7, was convinced that city people looked down on peasants because “villages have bad hygiene, they smell bad.” For this reason, he said, it was “natural” that outsiders would scorn peasants. Rural people who went to the city felt self-conscious about their dirtiness. They associated hygiene with urbanity, and saw dirtiness as a sign of inadequacy. One rural woman who was in Tianjin in the early 1960s remarked that the city seemed exceptionally clean and that everyone emphasized hygiene there. She felt that constant remarks about hygiene might be targeted at her, and told people in the city, “Do not dislike us because we are dirty. If it were not for us, what would you eat?” She explained in an interview, “Actually they did not look down on me. Because I was young at the time, my clothes were clean and quite nice. They all said that I did not seem like a village person.”<sup>57</sup> She was cleaner than the city residents had expected, she said.

Top Communist leaders, including Mao, were certainly aware of cultural distinctions between city and countryside. Mao even tried to invert value judgments about cleanliness, famously arguing that peasants’ stinking, manure-covered feet were

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<sup>57</sup> Interviewee 86.



cleaner than those of any bourgeois intellectual.<sup>58</sup> But the Communists' ideological and political approach to the rural-urban divide was no simple celebration of plain living and rural virtue. It was rife with tension between pro-rural rhetoric and a Marxist, developmentalist suspicion of peasant backwardness.

### The Chinese Communist Approach to City and Countryside

According to Article One of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the state is "led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants." This phrasing has appeared in every draft of the constitution since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, including the current version adopted in 1982.<sup>59</sup> In 2005, sitting on the *kang* of a village home an hour's drive outside of Tianjin, I asked a sixty-five-year-old man what he thought the term "worker-peasant alliance" (*gongnong lianmeng*) meant. He said, "You can yell that slogan all you want, but workers and peasants will never be at the same level. What alliance?" (*lian shenme meng*) In response to the same question, a seventy-five-year-old woman in a nearby village said, "I don't know what the worker-peasant alliance is. All I know is

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<sup>58</sup> From the "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," May 2, 1942, in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛泽东选集 [Selected works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 3:851.

<sup>59</sup> For the English text of the 1954, 1975, and 1978 constitutions, see Mark Selden, ed., *The People's Republic of China: A Documentary History of Revolutionary Change* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979). The same phrase appeared in Article One of the 1949 common program. For the current version of the constitution, including recent amendments, see <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>.

that it's good to be a worker and no good to be a peasant." When I quizzed a sixty-eight-year-old village man about the meaning of the phrase, he said, "In my opinion, it is a good thing. One cannot do without the other." Workers provide tools for peasants, he explained, and peasants give workers grain.<sup>60</sup>

China's party theorists and propagandists who borrowed the idea of a worker-peasant alliance from the Soviet Union would have been dismayed by the first two responses and only partially relieved by the last one. The alliance indeed meant that workers and peasants working together was a good thing. But the sixty-eight-year-old man had missed—or chosen to ignore—the most important part of the formula, which was that only workers, not peasants, could lead the alliance. The core of the theory—that urban workers were more advanced and therefore had to lead rural people—dovetailed with ideas about modern cities and backward villages that had taken shape during the Republican period. It also reflected the modernizing developmentalist agenda shared by the Nationalists and Communists before and after 1949.

Benjamin Schwartz has detailed the intellectual contortions meant "to conceal by every device possible the actual severance of the Chinese party from its proletarian base" after 1928. With its membership and military might drawn primarily from the peasantry and with few links to China's small urban working class, the party still cast itself as the vanguard of the proletariat.<sup>61</sup> Peasants might have played an important

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<sup>60</sup> Interviewee 18, interviewee 94, interviewee 24.

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin Isadore Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 192-93.

role, but only the party—as the self-proclaimed representative of the working class—could lead the way. More recently, Xiaorong Han has argued that because “intellectuals had always controlled the Communist Party,” the concept of a worker-peasant alliance covered up what was really an “intellectual-peasant alliance” before 1949.<sup>62</sup> Many intellectuals who attempted to organize rural people, including Peng Pai, Mao Zedong, and Shen Dingyi, were originally from rural areas themselves.<sup>63</sup> But even so, Han argues, they “shared a fundamental assumption” that “peasants were too ignorant and weak to control their own fate, and it was the intellectuals’ responsibility to save them by leading them, or through teaching and research.”<sup>64</sup>

Mao Zedong’s pre-1949 comments on the peasantry were mixed, meaning that the real Mao came down somewhere in between the cartoon-like poles of the peasant-loathing thug depicted in Jung Chang and Holliday’s *Mao: The Unknown Story* and the rural hero of party propaganda.<sup>65</sup> Because China’s population was predominantly agricultural, Mao wrote, the party should never distance itself from the peasants, and it needed to look out for their interests.<sup>66</sup> But it could not allow them to lead the

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<sup>62</sup> Han, 148.

<sup>63</sup> Fernando Galbiati, *P’eng P’ai and the Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); R. Keith Schoppa, *Blood Road: The Mystery of Shen Dingyi in Revolutionary China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> Han, 164.

<sup>65</sup> Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> *Mao Zedong wenji* 毛泽东文集 [Collected writings of Mao Zedong], vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996), 59. Cited in Wu Li 武力 and Zheng Yougui 郑有贵, eds., *Jiejue “san nong” wenti zhi lu — Zhongguo gongchandang “san nong”*

revolution. As early as 1929, Mao blamed a host of “ideological problems” within the party on peasant consciousness, including absolute egalitarianism, excessive democracy, and individualism.<sup>67</sup> Mao may have praised peasants’ filthy feet, but he also noted that China’s farmers were trapped in “ignorant and backward” lives.<sup>68</sup> Daniel Kelliher has pointed out the tensions built into Mao and the party’s assessment of peasants’ “dual nature:” they had revolutionary impulses, but as private property holders, were more inclined toward capitalism than socialism. The revolution could not succeed without their support, but peasants could only be “junior partners” in the worker-peasant alliance led by the party.<sup>69</sup> This notion can be traced back to Karl Marx’s comparison of the French peasantry to a “sack of potatoes,” incapable of revolutionary action on their own.<sup>70</sup>

Although the worker-peasant alliance framework disadvantaged peasants in theory, once the Communist revolution moved to the countryside, conditions were so varied and complex that it is implausible to speak of fixed divides between workers

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*sixiang zhengce shi* 解决“三农”问题之路 — 中国共产党“三农”思想政策史 [The path of solving the problem of agriculture, villages, and farmers — a history of the Chinese Communist Party’s ideology and policy on agriculture, villages, and farmers] (Beijing: Zhongguo jingji chubanshe, 2004), 153.

<sup>67</sup> *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 1:85-86.

<sup>68</sup> The reference to peasants’ ignorant and backward lives under the “small-peasant economy” is from *Mao Zedong wenji*, vol. 3, 183-84, cited in Wu and Zheng, 151.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Kelliher, “Chinese Communist Political Theory and the Rediscovery of the Peasantry,” *Modern China* 20, no. 4 (1994): 390, 393.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1984), 124.

and peasants or party and masses. As Joseph W. Esherick and Elizabeth J. Perry make clear in their recent review of scholarship on the rural revolution before 1949, events proceeded in strikingly different ways depending on timing, the social ecology of a given region, and external pressures.<sup>71</sup> The first Hailufeng Soviet in Guangdong was a world apart from Mao's early revolutionary bases in Jinggangshan and southern Jiangxi.<sup>72</sup> And the geography, social makeup, and relatively short life-spans of these southern bases in the late 1920s and early 1930s could not have been more different from the Yan'an base area after the Long March, when the Communists had the time and breathing room to implement lasting economic reforms and build a powerful military movement fueled by peasant recruits.<sup>73</sup> Yet as Pauline Keating has found, even in this legendary base there was no single "Yan'an Way." Communist success in the Yan'an region differed so significantly depending on population density, migration patterns, and landlord-tenant relations that Keating sees two revolutions—one effective, the other less so—rather than a unitary process.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph W. Esherick and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Editors' Introduction," in *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area*, by Stephen C. Averill (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), xvii-xxxi.

<sup>72</sup> On Hailufeng, see Roy Hofheinz, *The Broken Wave: The Chinese Communist Peasant Movement, 1922-1928* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Robert Marks, *Rural Revolution in South China: Peasants and the Making of History in Haifeng County, 1570-1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); and Galbiati.

<sup>73</sup> Mark Selden, *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>74</sup> Pauline B. Keating, *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

When we consider the Communist movement as a diverse mix of processes and experiences, it becomes clear that the intellectual-peasant divide identified by Xiaorong Han was sometimes salient and sometimes irrelevant. As Apter and Saich have observed, at their headquarters in Yan'an top officials enjoyed differing grades of food, uniforms, availability of horses, and access to women for sex.<sup>75</sup> In addition, quotidian interactions between peasants and urban intellectuals who traveled to the base area during the war against Japan were often characterized by mutual incomprehension or nervousness. Peasant soldiers reported that they feared seeming “ridiculous, uncouth, or stupid” when meeting intellectuals, and that it was impossible to become intimate with urban-educated elites. As one red army peasant remembered, “What equality? Those intellectual women would never sleep with us!”<sup>76</sup>

In Yan'an, the personal behavior of top Communist leaders, as well as awkwardness between city-based intellectuals and peasants, presaged trends that would become even more pronounced after 1949. Yet such tensions were immaterial in outlying counties of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region. As Esherick shows in his work on Gulin county, in such rural areas it was impossible to distinguish “party” from “peasant” because the local party structure was made up of rural cadres who were “deeply enmeshed in a variety of local networks from which they could never be

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<sup>75</sup> David Ernest Apter and Tony Saich, *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 151.

<sup>76</sup> Apter and Saich, 166, 135.

completely separated.”<sup>77</sup> Tensions and inequalities were certainly present at the county and village levels, but were based more on age, gender, and lineage than the intellectual-peasant distinction found at party center in Yan’an. This should not be surprising. Throughout the Communist movement, localities were never a mirror image of party center, but rather negotiated and adapted to fit local conditions.<sup>78</sup>

The Communist revolution was won in part thanks to committed cadres and soldiers from Gulin county and other rural areas. Having contributed and sacrificed so much, they saw the party’s shift in focus toward an urban-centered strategy in April 1945 as either a betrayal or a chance for rewards and promotion. The increased focus on urban issues following the takeover of cities in north and northeast China was troubling to some cadres and peasants who felt left out. In May 1947, the North China Bureau reported that after Japan’s surrender, “comrades entered cities and forgot about villages, or lost interest in villages, peasants, and agricultural production.”<sup>79</sup>

In December 1948, on the eve of the takeover of Tianjin and Beijing (then called Beiping), the North China Bureau reported that peasants’ biggest “thought problem” was “negative feelings toward cities and workers.” Rural people

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<sup>77</sup> Joseph W. Esherick, “Deconstructing the Construction of the Party-State: Gulin County in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region.” *China Quarterly*, no. 140 (1994): 1078.

<sup>78</sup> Esherick, “Deconstructing,” 1078. See also David S. G. Goodman, *Social and Political Change in Revolutionary China: The Taihang Base Area in the War of Resistance to Japan, 1937-1945* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>79</sup> *Huabei jiefang qu caizheng jingji shi ziliao xuanbian* 华北解放区财政经济史资料选编 [Selected materials on the financial and economic history of North China liberated areas] (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1996), 1:281.

complained that workers “enjoyed special privileges” and “lived better than peasants.” Peasants’ “current level of awareness” (*nongmin xianyou de juewu chengdu*) made this problem intractable, the report argued. The only way out was to educate villagers, thereby “consolidating the worker-peasant alliance.”<sup>80</sup> Mao Zedong agreed. In “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship,” Mao affirmed the worker-peasant alliance and proclaimed, “The serious problem is the education of the peasantry.”<sup>81</sup> The tension between educating what top leaders still viewed as a politically flawed peasantry and rewarding rural residents for their vital contributions to the revolution would continue to dominate rural-urban relations after the Communists took over such large cities as Tianjin.

### The Rural-Urban Divide in the Socialist Period

In the seven chapters that follow, I zoom in on intense moments of rural-urban contact during the socialist period. Before and after 1949, episodes of heightened interaction between cities and villages were also times when difference took shape. While patterns of migration from villages to Tianjin during the early 1950s centered on work and family and differed little from movement during the Republican era, other types of exchange were new. Chapter 2 describes what happened when the rural officials and soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army met Tianjin residents for the first time in 1949. Initial anxieties were replaced by bemusement and good-natured

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<sup>80</sup> *Huabei jiefang qu caizheng jingji shi ziliao xuanbian*, 1:416-17.

<sup>81</sup> *Mao Zedong xuanji*, 4:1477.



interactions. But at the same time, tension arose among rural cadres and underground party members from city backgrounds when urban expertise was privileged over rural revolutionary experience. Rural and urban identities took shape well before the imposition of the *hukou* system in 1958. Over the course of the 1950s, efforts to restrict migration and remove people from Tianjin who were not contributing to socialist construction paralleled policies that nationalized private industry, collectivized the countryside, and exploited rural resources. But in the 1950s, initial attempts to draw lines between the urban and rural realms were not effective in stamping out contact between city and countryside. People mostly chose to stay put or move back and forth because of work or family considerations, not because the government told them to.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the Great Leap famine and its aftermath in the Tianjin region. With its large-scale communes, inflated bumper harvests and collective cafeterias, the leap is commonly understood as a rural event, but its push for rapid industrialization encouraged many farmers to leave villages in search of better-paid urban or suburban jobs. This outflow of rural labor contributed to the spread of famine conditions in Tianjin's hinterland, examined in Chapter 3. Newly available archival evidence reveals that local leaders in Tianjin knew about the extent of the disaster in the countryside. Their response was to work energetically to shield city residents from food shortages while rural people starved. Tragically, the lines sketched in pencil between city and village during the early 1950s had been traced over with black ink.

The official response to the disaster was an unprecedented urban-to-rural population transfer called “downsizing” (*jingjian*),<sup>82</sup> which is the subject of Chapter 4. Workers who had arrived in Tianjin after 1958 were laid off, given severance funds, and told to return to their home villages. The downsizing movement triggered high-stakes interactions between urban officials and migrants, some of whom fiercely resisted the prospect of losing the benefits of city residency. But the movement also had the unintended consequence of jumpstarting rural industry, as returned workers drew upon their technical expertise and city connections to lay the groundwork for what would later become successful town and village enterprises (TVEs).

Returned workers were a more benign presence in north Chinese villages than two groups of urban visitors who spent time in villages in the mid-1960s: the first major wave of sent-down youth, and urban work teams conducting the Four Cleanups movement. Chapter 5 explores the intrusive and unwelcome presence of these urbanites. Both groups went to villages as a result of problems that had emerged in the aftermath of the famine. Four Cleanups work teams attacked problems stemming from relaxed agricultural and market policies intended to help villages recover from the leap. The sent-down youth of 1964 were dispatched to villages to relieve post-leap employment pressures in Tianjin. Urbanites clashed, sometimes violently, with villagers who were understandably suspicious of outsiders coming from a city that had

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<sup>82</sup> Most dictionaries define *jingjian* as “cut” or “reduce.” I use “downsize” and “downsizing” because the euphemistic flavor of the English term, which began to be used in the 1980s to sugarcoat reports of corporate layoffs, applies quite well to the Chinese usage of the early 1960s.

turned its back on them during the famine. As a result, rural-urban tensions worsened.

The famine was also a crucial element in the forced removal of political exiles from Tianjin during the first three years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-68). More than forty thousand Tianjin residents—many of whom had never set foot in villages—were forced into exile in their rural ancestral villages. In Chapter 6 I examine these “deportations” (*qiansong*). As an official policy governed by a sophisticated bureaucracy and supported by state funds, deportation shows a side of the Cultural Revolution quite different from the stock view of youthful red guards running wild. This was not chaos, it was state-sanctioned oppression. Justified by the need to protect vital coastal industry during the heightened security environment of the Cultural Revolution, deportation often targeted people who had stolen food or sold items on the black market during the early 1960s. During the Cultural Revolution, such transgressions represented “capitalist” behavior that had to be punished. Only eight years after the heady days of the leap promised to eliminate the gap between cities and villages, the countryside had effectively become a jail for urban outcasts who were poorly prepared for farm work and who strained village food supplies.

Thus far I have been using the terms “urban” and “rural” as if they were easily definable separate realms. Of course, urban and rural are relative concepts: to a farmer from a settlement of one hundred families, a county market town might seem urban, but to a Tianjin resident the same small town with its agricultural goods for sale alongside dirt lanes would look unmistakably rural. Using population density or the prevalence of agricultural or industrial activity to distinguish between urban and rural

space is also unhelpful—the Chinese countryside is densely populated and home to small-scale industries, while many city homes maintained truck gardens or raised chickens.

The *hukou* system and grain rationing regime established in the 1950s required a clear-cut resolution to this problem in order to determine who was eligible for urban benefits and who was responsible for selling grain to the state. In a November 1955 directive titled, “Criteria for the Demarcation Between Urban and Rural Areas,” the State Council mandated that all space had to fit into three categories: cities and towns (*chengzhen qu*); “urban residential enclaves” (*chengzhen jumin qu*, meaning state-run compounds like oil fields and research institutes outside of cities), and villages. County level and higher governmental seats and settlements with more than 20,000 residents were considered urban, as were “Localities with a permanent residential population of 2,000 or more of whom more than 50 per cent were non-agricultural producers.”<sup>83</sup>

This regulation seemed clear but was extremely problematic. Dividing Chinese society into two distinctive spatial spheres ignored complexity and caused resentment among people who could see officially urban space outside their windows but who were denied the benefits of urban residency. In Chapter 7, I analyze two category-busting spaces during the Cultural Revolution: a state-run farm on the outskirts of Tianjin where workers tilled the fields but held non-agricultural *hukou*, and the Tianjin Ironworks, an enclave administered by Tianjin officials but situated

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<sup>83</sup> Cheng and Selden, 659.

hundreds of miles away from Tianjin next to a remote mountain village in the far southwest corner of Hebei province.

The two cases suggest that in spite of administrative labels, space in China during the Mao period remained relational and contested. For peasants living next to the state farm or the ironworks, the proximity of administratively urban space offered opportunities for paid work (an avenue for upward mobility at the farm) or to steal valuable industrial materials (a regular trigger of conflict and recriminations at the ironworks). But for people born and raised in Tianjin proper, an assignment to the farm or ironworks was seen as a demotion, or even as punishment. Tense encounters at the state farm and ironworks also indicate that the cultural aspects of rural-urban difference were sometimes more important than administrative distinctions.

In Chapter 8, I conclude with the case of Xiaojinzhuang, a village north of Tianjin that was occupied by urban officials in June 1974. The officials transformed the village into a cultural theme park. Under the sponsorship of Jiang Qing and Tianjin authorities, Xiaojinzhuang became a rural model and tourist attraction famous nationwide for singing and poetry writing. While some villagers took advantage of their hometown's sudden prominence, many residents had to endure living in a false utopia invented by urban politicians who displayed a profound disrespect for rural residents. While publicly extolling the achievements and virtues of poor peasants, city-based officials treated villagers as inferiors and denied them political power.

The ugly end of the Xiaojinzhuang model was the logical result of the entire process of rural-urban differentiation under Mao. It is no surprise that the structural

apparatus of Stalinist industrialization, including the *hukou* and rationing systems, privileged cities over villages. But the many moments of contact between city and countryside during the Mao era—often explicitly intended to ameliorate the inequities associated with prioritizing heavy industry—did just as much to reinforce and deepen rural-urban difference.

## 2. Lines Drawn, Lines Crossed: Rural and Urban in 1950s Tianjin

My first sight of the *Pa Lu Chuin* [Eighth Route Army] was not reassuring. Dogtrotting single file, down the sidewalk on the other side of our street, the square, squat, fur hatted soldiers had a wild and savage look, and those amazing hats gave an Attila, the Hun touch to the scene. They were huge and long-haired with earpieces and tails flying in the wind. ... I saw that they wore padded uniforms and padded overcoats and their legs were wrapped beyond any semblance of legs. What with the big flopping hats on their heads, the machine guns on their backs, and the pistols, knives, hand grenades, shovels and pots and pans hanging around their middles, it's no wonder they appeared short and squat! And when I saw their faces the Hunnish horde changed before my eyes into a crowd of jolly, red-cheeked Chinese boys, laughing, scuffling and kicking at each other like schoolboys on a lark. Any fears I might have had of a fierce, ruthless, conquering army evaporated.<sup>1</sup>

—Grace D. Liu, Tianjin, April 22, 1949

In late 1948 and 1949, residents of Tianjin awaited their impending “liberation” with uncertainty and trepidation. Similar to Grace Liu, many people’s fears were allayed when the Communist takeover of Tianjin proceeded without massive disorder. The relatively disciplined soldiers and cadres who entered Tianjin in January 1949 were a welcome contrast to previous occupiers. This was no accident. In order to avoid embarrassment and conflict, Tianjin’s new Communist leaders had taken pains to instruct rural cadres in urban manners and ways. The immediate takeover of Tianjin was an intense moment of rural-urban contact, both between Communist cadres and city residents and between cadres from diverse backgrounds. This chapter outlines the process by which the party defined boundaries between city

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<sup>1</sup> Grace D. Liu, “Behind US-Made ‘Bamboo Curtain’: New Tientsin as Seen by an American,” *China Digest* 6, no. 5 (June 14, 1949): 5-6.

and countryside in 1950s Tianjin. Far from embracing its rural revolutionary past, in 1949 the party criticized rural characteristics and work methods and preferred people with urban expertise over what it called “purely village-born cadres.” While the urban environment could be dangerous and debasing, as we will see in a prominent corruption case from 1951 and 1952, throughout the 1950s party doctrine still mandated that cities would lead villages. A tension between the party’s reliance on urban expertise and its concern about the corrupting influences of the city characterized the first decade of Communist rule in Tianjin.

Within the party, cadres from urban backgrounds were privileged over battle-hardened officials from village backgrounds. In addition, well before the imposition of the *hukou* system in 1958, urban and rural became salient categories in the party’s interactions with residents of Tianjin and its hinterland. Urban space became exclusive space, and not just anyone was eligible to live and work in Tianjin. The project of determining who was an acceptable urban resident evolved during the 1950s. Generally the most marginalized rural migrants—people fleeing famine who lacked close family ties or fixed employment in Tianjin—were the easiest to identify (by their clothing and accents) and deport during “return-to-village” movements in 1955 and 1957. But it was impossible for Tianjin authorities to fully regulate movement from city to countryside. Even as categories were fixed and lines drawn, the imperatives of survival, work, and family drove people to cross lines and defy categorization.

### Takeover



The youthful People's Liberation Army soldiers who occupied Tianjin on January 15, 1949 were the first representatives of the Communist regime that city residents encountered, but they were not the ones running the show. A team of around 7,500 cadres followed on the heels of the army, and like the young soldiers, they were under strict orders to make a good impression. Tianjin was the largest city that the Communists had occupied. How they carried out the takeover would be a key test of the party's shift from a rural to an urban policy. On the eve of the occupation, thousands of cadres assembled in Shengfang, a county town west of Tianjin already under Communist control. There, Tianjin's new mayor Huang Jing—scion of a prominent Nationalist family and Jiang Qing's former paramour—exhorted his underlings to leave their rural habits behind. "When you enter the city, you absolutely cannot find any old corner and urinate and defecate like you would in the village," Huang said in a speech in December 1948.<sup>2</sup> Other cadres from urban backgrounds gave lessons on how to operate flush toilets, with mixed results—after the takeover, some new cadres squatted precariously with their feet on the toilet seat.<sup>3</sup>

Mayor Huang Jing and his colleague Huang Kecheng, who was Tianjin's party secretary and chairman of military affairs in the months following the takeover, explained which rural attributes could be brought into the city and which were best left

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<sup>2</sup> Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei dangshi yanjiu shi 中共天津市委党史研究室, ed., *Chengshi de jieguan yu shehui gaizao (Tianjin juan)* 城市的接管与社会改造 (天津卷) [Urban takeover and social reform (Tianjin volume)] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1998), 558.

<sup>3</sup> TJJG, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1994), 351.

behind. They warned that imperialists and the bourgeoisie would try to seduce Tianjin's new rulers. The best way to fight against temptation was to "maintain the fine village tradition of hard work and plain living," Huang Kecheng told cadres in Shengfang. In the short term, this meant that "no one is allowed to change clothes or to seize property."<sup>4</sup>

This admonition against looting referred to another problem that troubled top Communist leaders—"agrarian socialism" (*nongye shehuizhuyi*). In a speech in Shengfang on December 30, 1948, Huang Jing elaborated on the dangers of bringing agrarian socialism into the cities. The term, Huang explained, referred to the "erroneous tendency" in land reform between October 1947 and April 1948 of advocating equal distribution of property. The manifestations of peasant egalitarianism in the city, including workers and clerks seizing factories and shops from capitalists, would damage production and hurt the revolution, Huang Jing said. "The goal of the entire revolution is to liberate productive forces and improve people's lives, it is not just handing things out for the sake of giving them away," Huang said.<sup>5</sup> In practice, this would mean that national capitalists (meaning businesspeople relatively unsullied by ties to imperialist powers or the departing Nationalists) could keep their property, and that worker salaries would be kept steady.

The phrase "agrarian socialism" came from Chairman Mao. In response to takeover personnel pillaging and encouraging poor city residents to loot after the

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<sup>4</sup> TJJG, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1991), 59.

<sup>5</sup> TJJG, vol. 1, 61-62.

occupation of Shijiazhuang, Handan, Jiaozuo, Yuncheng, and other north Chinese cities in late 1947 and early 1948, Mao wrote that destroying urban industry was “a type of agrarian socialism that is reactionary, backward, regressive, and which must be firmly opposed.”<sup>6</sup> Duly admonished to bring the wholesome parts of their rural background along but to lose their “backward” habits, Communist soldiers and cadres were on their best behavior as they marched into Tianjin. Early in the morning of January 16, a group of more than two hundred poor city residents began looting a mansion in the city’s former British concession, but Communist authorities arrived and stopped the melee. Later in the day, a smaller group of poor city people attempted to rob foreigners and rich Chinese residents in the same area. They were also stopped, and no further looting incidents were reported.<sup>7</sup>

A show of force was all that was needed to stop the looters, but in other interactions with city residents, rural cadres had trouble making themselves understood. Before entering Tianjin, Huang Jing told the cadres assembled in Shengfang to be polite in their dealings with city residents and to replace the friendly village salutations of “*lao xiang*” (fellow villager) or “*da niang*” (auntie) with the more formal “*nin hao*” (hello). To neglect such niceties would mean a loss of face, Huang said.<sup>8</sup> But even when cadres altered their vocabulary, their strong village

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<sup>6</sup> Bo Yibo 薄一波, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu* 若干重大决策与事件的回顾 [Reflections on certain major decisions and events] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993), 1:6-7.

<sup>7</sup> TJJG, vol. 2, 83.

<sup>8</sup> TJJG, vol. 2, 207-8.

accents caused misunderstandings. When two cadres went to a Tianjin neighborhood shortly after the takeover and asked residents for help in finding someone, the city people could not understand the men's rural patois. Aiming to please, the neighborhood residents assumed that the new arrivals were like previous occupying forces and led them to the nearest brothel.<sup>9</sup>

These occupiers were different. Following old conventions, Tianjin's cinemas and theaters gave the new government blocks of free tickets. Normally the tickets went unused, but when a famous Peking opera performer was in town, party secretary Huang Kecheng took his colleagues to the show. Midway through the act, the performers used some "dubious and vulgar language," a common occurrence onstage before 1949.<sup>10</sup> But when Huang Kecheng heard the dirty words, he stood up and marched out of the theater, followed first by his bodyguards and then by everyone from his office, leaving the hall nearly empty. Huang was sending a message that the new regime did not approve of the degenerate pleasures of the city. But for the time being, theaters were allowed to stay open and Communist cadres and soldiers enjoyed the entertainment, even if some of Tianjin's top leaders frowned on the content. In April 1949, an American resident of Tianjin bumped into a group of soldiers at a screening of *It Happened in Brooklyn*, starring Frank Sinatra and Jimmy Durante:

Two rows of *Pa Lu* soldiers sat in front of us and enjoyed Jimmie Durante enormously; and we were enormously amused at the little *Pa Lu* who couldn't make up his mind whether to put his bayonet back on

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<sup>9</sup> TJJG, vol. 2, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Perry Link, "The Crocodile Bird: Xiangsheng in the Early 1950s," 211-12.

his rifle during intermission or not. He finally decided to put it back on in case some emergency should arise. The great decision made, he relaxed and had a good time gaping at the “big city” audience.<sup>11</sup>

### Tense Encounters

In early 1949, public interactions between representatives of the new regime and Tianjin residents were mostly good-natured, albeit sometimes tinged with disapproval or incomprehension. However, relations among Tianjin cadres from different backgrounds were often more contentious. Officials from villages who had served the revolution in the countryside clashed with young urban cadres and other underground party members from Tianjin. Both of these groups had trouble getting along with the many bureaucrats who had worked for the Nationalists but who stayed on after the Communist occupation of the city. In interactions between rural cadres (*rucheng* or *jinshi renyuán*), underground party members (*dixia dangyuan*), and retained bureaucrats (*liuyong renyuán*), many rural officials, although numerically superior, were first embarrassed and then shunted aside as urban work progressed in Tianjin. This process calls into question Hong Yung Lee’s contention that top leaders’ “rural orientation” and “Mao’s peasant mentality” characterized Chinese politics during the Mao era.<sup>12</sup> It also differs from James Z. Gao’s portrayal of the Communist takeover of Hangzhou, which apparently saw a reorientation toward villages in mid-1949, and where a purported “opportunism...rooted in the Chinese peasantry” dictated

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<sup>11</sup> Grace D. Liu, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1, 74, 388, 392.

the actions of rural cadres throughout the early 1950s (I suspect that Hangzhou's turn toward the countryside was fleeting, and I would argue that opportunism is a human trait not unique to Chinese peasants).<sup>13</sup>

In May 1949, there were 7,113 party members working in Tianjin. Of these, 5,389 had followed the army into the city, 1,564 were from the underground party, and 160 had joined the party after takeover.<sup>14</sup> The largest group was mostly from villages, but also included some students who had left cities in order to attend the party-run North China University. In his book on the takeover of Tianjin, Kenneth Lieberthal focuses on a divide between top party leader Liu Shaoqi's organization model of politics and Chairman Mao Zedong's mobilization model rather than emphasizing differences within the cadre ranks.<sup>15</sup> But similar to the rift identified by Ezra Vogel in Guangzhou, tensions arose between the minority of urban insiders and the majority of rural outsiders in Tianjin's new government.<sup>16</sup>

#### Poor coordination between rural takeover cadres and underground party

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<sup>13</sup> James Zheng Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949-1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 250.

<sup>14</sup> *Chengshi de jieguan yu shehui gaizao (Tianjin juan)*, 581.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980). Interestingly, in an earlier article Lieberthal concludes that Mao and Liu agreed on the need to control workers and cooperate with capitalists, in contrast to basic-level cadres who wanted more confrontation. Currently available sources suggest that Lieberthal was correct about Mao and Liu's agreement, but overlooked differences between basic-level cadres from rural or urban backgrounds. See Lieberthal, "Mao Versus Liu? Policy Towards Industry and Commerce, 1946-49," *China Quarterly*, no. 47 (1971): 519-20.

<sup>16</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

members led to problems of mistrust and mistaken identity, which disappointed urban agents who felt that their sacrifices under Nationalist repression had not been properly recognized.<sup>17</sup> When takeover officials arrived at the Dongya Wheat Flour Company, they accosted underground party members who were guarding a warehouse, yelling, “you had better not be pretending!” and “what the hell are you up to?!” Similar scenes unfolded at banks and textile factories, where recently arrived cadres overheard rumors that “underground backbones” were actually “hidden traitors.” These problems prompted the municipal party leadership to complain: “There is not enough trust in the underground party members. Being suspicious for no good reason has poured cold water on the moods of the enthusiastic underground comrades, and has damaged takeover work.”<sup>18</sup> Although underground party members were let down by their treatment in January 1949, a few months later they would be rewarded for their urban expertise.

So would the “retained personnel” kept on in work units, who also clashed with rural newcomers in Tianjin. Liu Fuji, General Manager and Chief Engineer of the Tianjin Water Works in the 1940s, was a Cornell graduate who had worked in New York City. He stayed on after ten Communist cadres took over his office. Liu’s wife Grace wrote that the cadres were “green young country fellows without any experience in dealing with a large city’s established organizations, and ignorant not

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<sup>17</sup> On the student movement and underground party organization in Tianjin before 1949, see Joseph K. S. Yick, *Making Urban Revolution in China: The CCP-GMD Struggle for Beijing-Tianjin, 1945-1949* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> TJJG, vol. 1, 124.

only of the city but in a large measure, of the rest of the world. Situations arise that they cannot handle and they create unnecessary complications.” One day, the top new Communist cadre at the water works questioned Liu’s work. Liu exploded in rage, pounded a table, and yelled at the rural official for his temerity. Liu then went home and told his wife, “They can shoot me, hang me or cut off my head but no so and so farmer is going to call me a liar!” The next day, nobody was shot or decapitated. To the contrary, the Communist representative was deferential and apologetic. “‘You know,’ said the young man, ‘we are just *tou bau tze* (country jacks). You must be patient and teach us so we can study and learn.’” Liu’s wife wrote, “From that time he has been treated with the greatest respect by the comrades.”<sup>19</sup>

Liu Fuji was named a model worker for three years in a row beginning in 1951, and continued to work at the water works until his death in 1955.<sup>20</sup> But it is unlikely that his clash with rural officials was resolved as neatly as his wife’s rosy account suggests. Although Liu appeared to win the argument, his questioner’s deference—executed with a dignity lacking in Liu’s temper tantrum—was not entirely heartfelt. And rather than automatically giving Liu free reign over the water works, rural officials felt empowered to challenge a Cornell-trained engineer and to assert their authority.

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<sup>19</sup> Grace D. Liu, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> Eleanor McCallie Cooper and William Liu, *Grace: An American Woman in China, 1934-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2002), 220.



Relations between takeover cadres and retained staff remained tense in urban work units. As Grace Liu's anecdote suggests, workplace battles were often recounted at home, and were then replayed in neighborhood squabbles long after 1949. In 1955, the Tianjin Civil Affairs Bureau (Minzheng ju) reported that at a shared dormitory for bank cadres and their families in Tianjin's former British concession, family members of rural cadres who had entered the city in 1949 formed a faction that clashed with relatives of retained urban employees. "The two groups are always opposed and look down on one another," the report noted. "Disunity among these family members leads to disunity among cadres themselves."<sup>21</sup> Beginning in spring 1949, a policy turn favoring urban expertise contributed to takeover cadres' feelings of resentment. This shift coincided with Liu Shaoqi's important visit to Tianjin. The visit and its aftermath meant that the new regime in Tianjin would have an urban orientation, not a rural one.

#### "Quality over Quantity"

Kenneth Lieberthal writes that Liu Shaoqi's speeches in Tianjin in April and May 1949 "shaped the contours of the Communists' penetration of Tientsin society during the years that followed."<sup>22</sup> Lieberthal is correct that Liu's emphasis on economic development, cooperative labor-capital relations, and centralized city

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<sup>21</sup> *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 天津市政周报 [Tianjin municipal government weekly] 127 (January 24, 1955), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 50.

government would have profound implications for Tianjin's residents, especially for newly arrived village cadres, who began to be shunted aside in favor of more technically adept officials. This trend actually began in March 1949, before Liu arrived.

A March report by the military commission governing Tianjin stated bluntly, "The quantity of cadres who entered the city far surpasses their quality." The solution was to "emphasize quality over quantity. Transfer in more politically reliable, richly experienced, old workers and staff who have worked in base areas; transfer fewer purely village-born cadres."<sup>23</sup> Only two months after the Communists occupied Tianjin, cadres' overwhelmingly rural backgrounds had become a liability and an embarrassment for the new regime. In May, Huang Kecheng repeated the quality over quantity formulation in a report to party center, stating that "peasant cadres" who had only worked in rural areas were "generally not suitable for city work." When cadres did not understand policy or lacked professional knowledge, Huang continued, they were "useless" (*qi bu liao zuoyong*) and "made fools out of themselves" (*naochu xiaohua*). This was particularly galling when "many cadres did not understand people's account books and English-language ledgers, causing retained staff to look down on us and say we have no talent," Huang wrote. In contrast, Huang praised underground party members as being better at urban work than village cadres, and called for more underground agents to be promoted.<sup>24</sup> In Tianjin, far from being

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<sup>23</sup> TJJG, vol. 1, 109.

<sup>24</sup> TJJG, vol. 1, 101-2.

wedded to a “rural orientation,” party leaders found ruralness embarrassing. Liu Shaoqi’s presence in Tianjin deepened the party’s privileging of urban expertise.

Scholarly works and memoirs have highlighted Liu Shaoqi’s remarks about the need for capitalists to continue exploiting workers in the short term for the sake of fighting unemployment and promoting production.<sup>25</sup> This was indeed a central element of Liu’s visit to Tianjin, but was blown out of proportion during Cultural Revolution-era attacks on Liu, coloring later accounts and obscuring Liu’s important comments on rural-urban relations. After a week of tours and meetings in mid-April, Liu critiqued village work style, discussed peasant burdens, and outlined his vision of rural-urban difference in series of speeches to businesspeople, workers, and cadres.

In a talk with the Tianjin party committee on April 18, Liu told leaders that they should restructure city government by having the central municipal government assume tasks that local districts had been handling. Neighborhood organizations were in charge of too many things, Liu said, which wasted time and resources and was an example of “village work style.” “The city is concentrated, so work should also be concentrated,” Liu said.<sup>26</sup> Liu was chiding Tianjin’s leaders for failing to recognize fundamental differences between urban and rural administration.

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<sup>25</sup> Lieberthal, “Mao Versus Liu?” and *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*; Gao, 76-77; Bo Yibo, 1:49-50.

<sup>26</sup> Tianjin shi dang’anguan 天津市档案馆, ed., *Jiefang chuqi Tianjin chengshi jingji hongguan guanli* 解放初期天津城市经济宏观管理 [Tianjin city macroeconomic management in the initial stage after liberation] (Tianjin: Tianjin shi dang’an chubanshe, 1995), 51-52.

In his talks with capitalists and workers, Liu emphasized another type of difference, this time between city people and peasants. Speaking with capitalists on May 2, Liu referred to the tough plight of peasants in order to convince the businessmen to contribute their fair share to the revolution. Liu admitted the validity of peasant complaints that grain taxes, military service, labor conscription, and various fees imposed a heavy burden. He noted that capitalists shouldered a lighter burden than peasants, and asked them to sacrifice a bit more.<sup>27</sup> Liu had used a similar strategy on April 28, when he told workers that if their wages were raised too high, prices would increase for everyone, hurting peasants the most. “When peasants come to the city to buy things like towels, socks, and shoes, items are very expensive and they will be unhappy,” Liu said. “The peasants will raise the ‘reasonable burden’ problem, so increasing wages is also connected with the peasants.”<sup>28</sup>

It was convenient for Liu Shaoqi to invoke peasant hardships when he was asking urban workers to forego immediate economic benefits. But only a few days later, Liu backtracked. He said that while workers should recognize peasants’ heavy burden, actually peasants were the main beneficiaries of the revolution because they had received property during land reform, while “basically, workers did not get anything.” Therefore, Liu argued, “peasants cannot keep up with workers, and asking to be the same is wrong and unreasonable.”<sup>29</sup> Not only were workers and peasants

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<sup>27</sup> *Jiefang chuqi Tianjin chengshi jingji hongguan guanli*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Jiefang chuqi Tianjin chengshi jingji hongguan guanli*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> *Jiefang chuqi Tianjin chengshi jingji hongguan guanli*, 114.

different, Liu was saying, but the former deserved to be rewarded for their contributions to urban modernization. It made sense, then, that cities and workers would lead the countryside until some indefinite point in the future. Liu said:

Not only does today's Tianjin lead villages, it has always led villages. In the past it was this way, and in the socialism of the future it will also be this way. It will be like this until we change villages to make them look like cities, eliminate the gap between city and countryside, and electrify and mechanize everything. At that point, cities and villages will be about the same.<sup>30</sup>

Liu's message was multifaceted but clear. Village methods were ill-suited to the city, peasants had made some sacrifices but had been compensated in land reform and should not be too demanding, and cities, not villages, would lead the way forward to socialism. Tianjin leaders took Liu's critique to heart. In response to Liu's speeches, the city party committee issued an apologetic report blaming rural cadres and peasant shortcomings for most of the problems that had arisen since January. "Because of our many years of working in villages, we are not familiar with cities," the June 1949 document explained. "We unconsciously brought a village work style to the city." Cadres from peasant background were responsible for a litany of errors and foibles, from being afraid to meet with capitalists and workers to announcing the start of meetings by banging loudly on gongs. Even worse, the report continued, many rural cadres thought that the party's new policy of cities leading villages was

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<sup>30</sup> *Jiefang chuqi Tianjin chengshi jingji hongguan guanli*, 100.

“unreasonable.” In response, some requested to be transferred back to villages, and a few even ran off on their own.<sup>31</sup>

### The Liu Qingshan-Zhang Zishan Corruption Case

Of course, many cadres originally from villages stayed in Tianjin well beyond 1949 and served in positions of power. But the events of spring 1949 put them on notice that the party was pursuing an urban-oriented strategy and that embarrassing mistakes and “backward, regressive” rural work methods were unacceptable. While the problems that arose in Tianjin in early 1949 were attributed to cadres’ purportedly rural characteristics, the new urban environment was also dangerous. In the party’s reckoning, cities were advanced and modern, but, as home to imperialists and capitalists, were also potentially corrupting. Mao’s March 1949 warning that some leading cadres might succumb to the “sugar-coated bullets of the bourgeoisie” is well known.<sup>32</sup> On the eve of the takeover of Beijing, Mao told Premier Zhou Enlai, “We won’t be another Li Zicheng,” referring to the peasant rebel who overthrew the Ming Dynasty in 1644 but whose undisciplined forces lost control of the capital in only a month.<sup>33</sup>

According to Bo Yibo, top party secretary of the North China Bureau in the early 1950s, the execution of Tianjin prefectural leaders Liu Qingshan and Zhang

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<sup>31</sup> *Chengshi de jieguan yu shehui gaizao (Tianjin juan)*, 121-22.

<sup>32</sup> Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> Gao, 38.

Zishan in February 1952 was a second message from Mao that the party could not allow urban temptations to turn it into Li Zicheng.<sup>34</sup> Liu and Zhang were the highest ranking Communist officials to be executed since 1949, and their case was presented as an example of how the city corrupted previously upright revolutionaries.

To a certain extent, all top party leaders enjoyed perks and privileges after the takeover. In Tianjin, leaders' residences and offices were (and still are) in lavish colonial compounds and mansions confiscated from the previous regime and from foreign property holders in 1949. City leaders traveled in chauffeured cars, and a hierarchical ranking system determined the quality and amount of food they ate. What set Liu and Zhang apart was their ostentation, their entrepreneurial zeal for profit-making, and their inability to get along with each other and keep secrets. Most important, the two had the bad luck of being discovered just as the Three Antis (*san fan*) anti-corruption drive was getting underway in 1951.<sup>35</sup>

Liu Qingshan was from a village in Boye county in central Hebei, and he started working as a hired laborer there at a young age. In 1931, when he was fourteen, another laborer introduced him into the Communist Party, and Liu then joined the Worker-Peasant Red Army. Liu barely escaped death after a failed uprising against Nationalist authorities in Gaoyang and Li counties. In response to the uprising, Nationalist soldiers had decapitated nineteen red army fighters and were about to cut

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<sup>34</sup> Bo Yibo, 1:152.

<sup>35</sup> On the Three Antis, see Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 142-79. Lieberthal does not mention the Liu Qingshan-Zhang Zishan case.

off Liu Qingshan's head when their leader noticed how young the boy was and let him go. After this, Liu returned to his village and later made his way to Yan'an, where he rejoined the Communists.

Unlike Liu Qingshan, who was uneducated, Zhang Zishan left his Hebei village and excelled at the Shenxian county school. After 1931, Zhang became a leading agitator against Japanese aggression. He joined the Communist Party in 1933. In 1934, a turncoat revealed Zhang's name to Nationalist authorities and he was imprisoned in Tianjin, but he refused to bend under torture and eventually escaped. By the time they were appointed to top prefectural positions in 1949, Zhang and Liu had proven their revolutionary mettle.<sup>36</sup>

Officially, Liu Qingshan and Zhang Zishan were not supposed to have much to do with urban Tianjin. Respectively party secretary and commissioner of Tianjin prefecture, which was established in the small town of Yangliuqing in August 1949, the two men were responsible for eleven rural counties and three townships in the Tianjin region. Although their offices were headquartered in Yangliuqing's famous Shi Family Courtyard, the two men spent much of their time in Tianjin, only fifteen kilometers to the east. During the early 1950s, government and party work units were urged to carry out "office production" (*jiguan shengchan*) as a way to supplement tight official budgets. After 1949, Liu and Zhang threw themselves into profit-making and investing, setting up a prefectural "Office Production Management Department"

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<sup>36</sup> Zhou Licheng 周利成 and Li Keyi 李可意, "Liu Qingshan, Zhang Zishan tanwu an jishi" 刘青山、张子善贪污案纪实 [Record of the Liu Qingshan, Zhang Zishan corruption case], pt. 1, *Tianjin shi zhi* 2 (April 2001): 37.



in Tianjin with interests in factories and construction companies. In order to supervise these business projects and also to “recuperate” from an undefined illness, Liu Qingshan took up residence in a mansion on exclusive Machang Road in Tianjin’s former British concession.<sup>37</sup>

The bulk of Liu and Zhang’s crimes involved embezzling and misappropriating state funds and bank loans, most of which were then invested in office production projects. Liu Qingshan reportedly told a county party secretary, “now that it is peacetime, we do not have to be so stingy. If office production is done well, all expenses can be taken care of.”<sup>38</sup> But Liu and Zhang did office production too well, enlisting the help of Tianjin businesspeople who had shady pasts, sending agents on purchasing trips to the northeast and to Hankou, and giving gifts of watches, pens, and cash to keep colleagues happy and quiet. By mid-1951, though, the two men’s relations had worsened. Zhang complained to Hebei provincial authorities about Liu’s wasteful behavior and undemocratic leadership. Liu was transferred to Shijiazhuang, where he became a vice party secretary, while Zhang was promoted to top party secretary of Tianjin prefecture. On his way out of Tianjin, Liu Qingshan told a confidant, “Shijiazhuang is an okay place, but it is a real loss of face for Zhang Zishan to get rid of me like this. There is a future in Tianjin work, I kind of hate to leave.”

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<sup>37</sup> Zhou and Li, pt. 3, *Tianjin shi zhi* 4 (August 2001): 38-40.

<sup>38</sup> Zhou and Li, pt. 3, 38.

It looked like Zhang's maneuvering had been successful, but he was unable to keep his mouth shut during a drinking session, and one of his subordinates learned of Liu and Zhang's business dealings with Tianjin capitalists. Correctly sensing an opportunity for a quick promotion, the subordinate reported his suspicions of corruption to Hebei provincial authorities, who, after a brief initial investigation, recommended to Bo Yibo that the two men be arrested. Mao Zedong quickly approved of this decision, writing that the case was a warning that the party should deal harshly with cadres "corrupted by the bourgeoisie."<sup>39</sup> Zhang and Liu were both imprisoned in the Hebei provincial capital of Baoding. On February 10, 1952, their death penalty verdict was read there at a huge public rally, and was also broadcast live in Tianjin.<sup>40</sup> Immediately after the rally, the two were driven to an athletic field on the outskirts of Baoding and shot through the heart. Apparently Mao had ordered that because of the two men's previous contributions to the revolution, they should be shot in the heart, not the head.<sup>41</sup>

Even after Liu and Zhang were arrested in late 1951, officials in and around Tianjin disagreed on how to characterize the men's misconduct. A special investigation team was formed in Tianjin, because most of Liu and Zhang's problems had arisen there. At an all-night meeting, team members from Tianjin and Hebei

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<sup>39</sup> MWG, vol. 2 (1987), 528.

<sup>40</sup> Zhou and Li, pt. 2, *Tianjin shi zhi* 3 (June 2001): 37-38; Zhou and Li, pt. 5, *Tianjin shi zhi* 6 (December 2001): 41.

<sup>41</sup> Sun Hongquan 孙鸿泉, "Liu Qingshan yi an buyi" 刘青山一案补遗 [Addendum on the case of Liu Qingshan], *Wenshi chungiu* 3 (2000): 7.

debated how to deal with Liu and Zhang. One faction argued that the two men's expropriation of funds for office production arose from "the bad habit from guerrilla warfare of acting on one's own." This was a variation of the critiques lodged against rural cadres who had been unable to adapt to city work in 1949. While this group acknowledged the seriousness of Liu and Zhang's mistakes, it emphasized their revolutionary valor and lobbied for lenient treatment. The second faction played up the urban nature of Liu and Zhang's misdeeds, focusing on their ties with shady Tianjin profiteers and their appropriation of grain meant for rural flooding victims and public works laborers. For this group, it mattered most that Liu and Zhang had made illicit business deals with urban capitalists and siphoned resources from suffering peasants. By morning, the viewpoint stressing the urban character of their crimes had won the day, and the investigation group's final report, in line with the escalating Three Antis anti-corruption campaign, recommended severe punishment.<sup>42</sup>

Even after Mao had signed off on Liu and Zhang's execution in early 1952, high officials pleaded for clemency. Tianjin mayor Huang Jing, who had worked alongside the men in the Central Hebei party committee during the war against Japan, asked Bo Yibo to approach Mao and tell him that the men should not be shot, but should instead be given a chance to reform themselves. Bo was reluctant to argue against a decision that already seemed final, but Huang Jing persisted and Bo finally went to Mao. Mao responded that precisely because Liu and Zhang were so high

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<sup>42</sup> Hao Shengde 郝生德, "Tianjin neimao xitong 'sanfan yundong' pianduan jishi" 天津内贸系统“三反运动”片断纪实 [Partial report of the Three Antis movement in the Tianjin domestic trade system], *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuanji* 62 (June 1994): 45-46.

ranking, they had to be killed. Only by killing them could the party save thousands of other cadres from making similar mistakes, and comrade Huang Jing ought to understand this logic, Mao said.<sup>43</sup>

Official portrayals of Liu and Zhang made it clear that the decadent urban environment—and not the two men’s rural upbringing—was ultimately responsible for leading them astray. *People’s Daily*, acting directly on Mao’s orders, issued the first public reports on the case on December 30, 1951.<sup>44</sup> A front-page story concluded that “after leadership moved from villages to cities, [Liu and Zhang] could not withstand the sneak attack of bourgeois ideology.” Public works laborers on projects from which Liu and Zhang had profited reportedly complained, “they got rich, sat in nice cars, and watched plays while we suffered hardship.”<sup>45</sup> Internal propaganda outlines targeting Hebei peasants adopted a similar nurture-over-nature line, dwelling on Liu’s opium smoking and whoring, castigating Zhang’s profligacy, and concluding:

After they entered the city, their capacity for clear thinking was torn asunder by the world of sensuality. They became arrogant and thought that they had made contributions to the revolution and could enjoy comforts. Seeking pleasure, they became good friends with the bourgeoisie and learned their evil tricks of boasting and toadying.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bo Yibo, 1:152. Half a year later, Huang was transferred out of Tianjin and assigned to a ministerial post in Beijing; Donald W. Klein and Anne B. Clark, *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism, 1921-1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1:392.

<sup>44</sup> Bo Yibo, 1:150.

<sup>45</sup> RMRB, December 30, 1951, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Chun Hua 春化, “Yonghu Zhonggong Hebei shengwei guanyu kaichu da tanwu fan Liu Qingshan, Zhang Zishan dangji de jueyi” 拥护中共河北省委关于开除大贪污犯刘青山、张子善党籍的决议 [Support the Hebei party committee’s decision to expel

After hearing about Liu and Zhang's metamorphosis, peasants were quoted calling for the two to be hauled out and shot in public, and peasant representatives, including some from Baodi county, were bused in to make aggrieved denunciations at rallies.<sup>47</sup>

In early 1949, rural backgrounds had been liabilities for many cadres charged with administering Tianjin. When Liu Shaoqi visited the city in April 1949, rural traits and work methods were easy targets for a party emphasizing expertise and stability in the city. But in 1951 and 1952, the urban environment itself became a liability and was excoriated in the context of the Liu-Zhang case and the Three Antis campaign. What had changed? Villages and cities and the people who inhabited them had both positive and negative attributes in the official lexicon. Villagers were hard-working and honest, but uneducated and prone to rashness. Cities were advanced and modern, but as home to the bourgeoisie, were polluting dens of iniquity. Cities and villages also required different approaches to governance. Rural work was ad hoc, decentralized, and open to local rules and solutions. Urban management was centralized, rule-based, and required complex but uniform structures of decision-making and control. During the turn toward cities in 1949, rural work styles seemed

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big embezzlers Liu Qingshan and Zhang Zishan from the party], *Nongcun xuanchuanyuan* (Baoding) 3 (February 5, 1952): 7-8.

<sup>47</sup> Luo Xianming 罗先明, "Kaiguo fanfu diyi an quanjing xiezhen—chujue Liu Qingshan, Zhang Zishan gaoceng juece zhuiji" 开国反腐第一案全景写真——处决刘青山、张子善高层决策追记 [Full description of the first anti-corruption case since the founding of the state—a record of top-level policy decisions on executing Liu Qingshan and Zhang Zizhan], *Yanhuang chunqiu* 4 (1994): 17; RMRB, February 13, 1952, 2.

inappropriate, while the anti-corruption campaign of 1952 demanded an attack on city life. Yet even though it was evident that cities still needed to be transformed and cleaned up in 1952, the notion that cities and urban industry should lead villages and agriculture had been drilled home in 1949 and remained consistent throughout the 1950s.

### Drawing Lines

We have seen that Communist leaders acknowledged urban-rural difference as they moved into Tianjin in 1949, and that aspects of officials' job performance and behavior were encoded rural or urban during the early 1950s. Thus, even before the gradual construction of the household registration and mobility control system that many scholarly observers blame for the growth of the urban-rural gap in the People's Republic, lines had been drawn defining the two spheres. Throughout the 1950s, such lines affected migrants in Tianjin, including people fleeing famine conditions, seeking factory jobs, and reuniting with family members. Urban and rural categories also affected poor city dwellers, some of whom were considered unsuitable for urban residency because they were not contributing to industrial development. As sociologist Eddy U has shown in his study of the registration of "intellectuals" (*zhishifenzi*) in early 1950s Shanghai, official efforts to reorder cities created and shaped new social categories that hardly resembled pre-1949 realities.<sup>48</sup> A similar

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<sup>48</sup> Eddy U, "The Making of *Zhishifenzi*: The Critical Impact of the Registration of Unemployed Intellectuals in the Early PRC," *China Quarterly*, no. 173 (2003): 100-121.

project in the 1950s labeled people as urban or rural, but lived reality in and around Tianjin was far too complex to be confined within such overarching categories. So many people defied and resisted categorization that efforts to limit the urban population in the 1950s were only partially effective.

One group that the new regime deemed unacceptable for residence in Tianjin were refugees who had fled rural hardship. Refugees (*nanmin*), disaster victims (*zaimin*), vagrants (*youmin*), and peasants (*nongmin*) had sought relief in Tianjin for hundreds of years, and despite Communist efforts to stop them, they continued to appear in the city during the 1950s. As soon as the Communists took over Tianjin they were confronted with crowds of refugees in dire straits. The crumbling Nationalist army had destroyed tens of thousands of homes on the outskirts of the city in order to construct a defense perimeter, leaving more than one hundred thousand residents homeless. By all accounts, the city's new rulers responded admirably, providing relief grain to the homeless and helping to rebuild the dwellings.<sup>49</sup> By March 1949, tens of thousands of rural refugees, Nationalist soldiers, and landlords and students from northeast China had been sent back to their home villages. The government gave the travelers funds for transportation and food for the road.<sup>50</sup> But a spring drought followed by heavy summer rains in north China led to a new influx of rural people fleeing disaster. In August 1949, the Hailuan river overflowed its banks. In Baodi county just north of Tianjin, 808 villages were flooded, 56,000 homes were

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<sup>49</sup> TJJG, vol. 1, 10; Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> RMRB, March 2, 1949, 1; Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, 32.

destroyed, and 97 percent of the fields were inundated.<sup>51</sup>

Beggars appeared on the streets of Tianjin and businessmen complained about the problem, writing letters to the editor of *Tianjin Daily* and appealing to the new government to restore social order.<sup>52</sup> City hall continued the imperial and Nationalist governments' practice of opening porridge stations, which provided refugees with two daily meals. In January 1950 there were four such stations in Tianjin. One was designated for refugees from counties in Tianjin prefecture, another was open to people from the Cangxian area; the other two served urban street beggars and people from other areas.<sup>53</sup>

City officials also got in touch with the leaders of nearby counties, who dissuaded rural residents from coming to the city and encouraged them to permanently relocate in the more sparsely populated Northeast.<sup>54</sup> Officials set quotas: two thousand Baodi residents and five thousand from low-lying Ninghe county were slated to migrate to the northeast. Flood victims were understandably reluctant to leave the Tianjin region for faraway, unfamiliar places. One woman from the outskirts of Tianjin went to a porridge station and yelled, "these cadres had better not deport us to

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<sup>51</sup> *Tianjin diqu zhongda ziran zaihai shilu*, 498.

<sup>52</sup> TMA, X70-4C, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Tianjin shi renmin zhengfu yanjiu shi 天津市人民政府研究室, ed., *Minzheng shehui shizheng ziliao* 民政社会市政资料 [Municipal government materials on civil affairs and society] ([Tianjin]: 1950), 47.

<sup>54</sup> TMA, X63-28C, 39.



the Northeast!”<sup>55</sup> In September 1949, Zhang Zishan ordered local counties to smash the “conservative provincialism” that was keeping the refugees from moving away from the Tianjin area. “Explain that all peasants in China are one family,” Zhang urged.<sup>56</sup>

Not only did the city government urge short-term refugees in Tianjin to return to their villages or to migrate in 1949 and 1950, authorities also tried to remove longstanding city residents who were deemed unproductive. In a September 1949 speech, Mayor Huang Jing proclaimed, “in order to transform the consumer city into a productive one, we must disperse the population.”<sup>57</sup> By April 1950, almost 1,500 Tianjin residents had moved to the Chabei area (along the border of today’s Hebei province and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region). A third of them were peddlers, more than a quarter were unemployed factory workers, and some were rickshaw pullers.<sup>58</sup> Such small numbers of people were a drop in the bucket of Tianjin’s unemployment problem, and many supposedly “parasitic” (*jisheng*) city residents resisted efforts to make them leave. Rumors spread through city neighborhoods about poor quality land, man-eating wolves, and fierce Mongolians in Chabei.

Yet when a group of more than ten peasants from Shandong province heard

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<sup>55</sup> *Minzheng shehui shizheng ziliao*, 47.

<sup>56</sup> TMA, X63-20C.

<sup>57</sup> *Chengshi de jieguan yu shehui gaizao (Tianjin juan)*, 135. Huang’s phrase recalled a *Tianjin Daily* commentary, republished in *People’s Daily* on March 17, 1949.

<sup>58</sup> Guo Fengqi 郭凤岐, ed., *Tianjin tong zhi: minzheng zhi* 天津通志: 民政志 [Tianjin gazetteer: Civil affairs gazetteer] (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue yuan, 2001), 176.

about the migration program, they jumped on a train to Tianjin and tried to sign up to go to Chabei. According to the Tianjin Civil Affairs Bureau, this was not permitted. Migrants were not supposed to travel to Tianjin for the purpose of getting a free ride to a new home.<sup>59</sup> Tianjin's programs to deport refugees and disperse non-productive people were costly upfront, with the government covering deportees' transportation costs, several months of food, and accommodations in the receiving village. The hope was that getting rid of burdensome residents who did not fit the needs of urban industrial development would eventually make up for such initial outlays. But throughout the early 1950s, enterprising people took advantage of government migration and deportation programs to get free tickets and stipends. If the government was going to label them unfit for urban residence, these entrepreneurs would work the system as much as they could.

A group of seven peasants from Huanghua county south of Tianjin traveled to the city in 1953 in search of work. When they failed to find jobs, they approached the Civil Affairs Bureau and asked to be deported back to Huanghua. Hoping to get transportation and food stipends, they pretended that they had no money, but a search of their pockets revealed enough cash to get home, so they were sent away empty-handed. Other migrants repeatedly requested to be deported, received free train tickets, and scalped them for a profit at the main Tianjin station.<sup>60</sup> Such people, some of

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<sup>59</sup> Tianjin minzheng ju 天津民政局, "Dui yimin gongzuo jiancha baogao" 对移民工作检查报告 [Investigation report on migration work], *Tianjin shizheng yiye* 42 (May 13, 1950): 7.

<sup>60</sup> TMA, X65-309Y, 9, 12.

whom actually earned a living by traveling back and forth between large cities in north China at government expense, posed a headache to urban authorities. In 1953, Tianjin's Civil Affairs Bureau complained to central authorities that Shenyang, Beijing, and Tangshan were dumping vagrants in Tianjin instead of sending them home to villages. Over the course of three weeks in November 1953, 305 people were deported from Shenyang to Tianjin, only 9 of whom were actually from Tianjin and therefore eligible for state-sponsored repatriation. The rest were people from villages and other cities who were looking for work. At the end of 1953, Tianjin civil affairs officials asked the municipal government to remove deportation work from their portfolio because it was too much trouble. The request was denied.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to creative freeloaders, rural economic problems stymied city officials charged with limiting the urban population. In documents penned by city officials, "disaster victim," "refugee," and "peasant" were often used interchangeably. Officials assumed that all disaster victims were peasants. Many more such people arrived in Tianjin beginning in 1954. Bad weather and dissatisfaction with changes in the rural economy drove them there. Massive summer flooding in Hebei province was exacerbated by a 3.5 billion kilogram increase in mandatory state grain purchases compared with the previous year.<sup>62</sup> More than thirty thousand refugees from the Tianjin and Cangzhou districts brought their family members to Tianjin. Most relied on city relatives to get by; others built shacks or lived in old abandoned military

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<sup>61</sup> TMA, X65-309Y, 26.

<sup>62</sup> Wu and Zheng, 407.

blockhouses.<sup>63</sup>

The flood refugees were not the only rural people arriving in Tianjin in 1954. According to an internal labor bureau report from April 1955, between January 1954 through the end of February 1955, around 120,000 people from villages flowed into the city. More than seven thousand had found jobs in Tianjin, which, the report noted, “encouraged even more farmers to flow blindly into the city.” Even less acceptable were those who had not found proper work but still insisted on staying in the city, resorting to selling their belongings, collecting junk, begging, thieving, or even turning to prostitution.<sup>64</sup> In the context of Tianjin’s nationalization of private industry and the organization of vendors and peddlers into collectives in 1955 and 1956, such activities were particularly discouraged. Between 1955 and early 1958, the Tianjin government made halting attempts to count, classify, and remove impoverished migrants who lacked city relatives and who were not contributing to urban socialist construction. In essence, this project forced cadres to identify acceptable and unacceptable city residents, a complicated and problematic task.

On May 3, 1955, the Tianjin municipal government sent a notice to all urban districts on “mobilizing vagrant begging disaster victims to return to their villages and produce” (*dongyuan liulang qigai de zaimin huixiang shengchan*):

Since February, vagrant disaster victims begging on the street have gradually increased. These people often ask for food at people’s homes or on the streets. Some use the excuse of selling ash paper (*huizhi*) or

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<sup>63</sup> *Tianjin tong zhi: minzheng zhi*, 176.

<sup>64</sup> TMA, X53-1002C, 4.

firewood to enter residences and when no one is home they steal things. Some push their bawling children down the street on small carts, causing many people to gather and stare, which has a bad influence.

Neighborhood offices were to work with local police stations to investigate people who came to Tianjin to beg. Beggars and those with “improper income” were to be mobilized to return home and, if necessary, provided with travel funds. If an individual declined to return home voluntarily, he or she could be detained and the mobilization effort could continue in a detention center.<sup>65</sup>

Later in May, police officers and civil affairs cadres in the Wandezhuang area surveyed 1,699 “disaster victims” (864 women and 385 men mostly from nearby rural counties).<sup>66</sup> Officials classified as refugees many more people than those who had fled immediate peril. Almost anyone with a rural background who scraped together a marginal living in the city was counted, including people who came seasonally or even those who had lived in the city for more than ten years. Most of the outsiders (1,321) stayed with family or friends. Ms. Liu, a fifty-one-year-old woman from Wuqing county, moved in with her daughter and son-in-law Zhang Shiqing, who worked as an inspector at the Tianjin Streetcar Company. Liu’s daughter said that thanks to Zhang’s monthly salary of 50 yuan, it was not a problem to feed one more mouth in

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<sup>65</sup> TMA, X53-1002C, 2. This circular was republished several weeks later, but the reference to vagrant beggars was removed from the title. See “Shi renmin weiyuanhui tongzhi ge qu dongyuan liuru chengshi de zaimin huanxiang shengchan” 市人民委员会通知各区动员流入城市的灾民还乡生产 [The municipal people’s committee informs each district to mobilize disaster victims who have flowed into the city to return to villages and produce], *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 144 (May 23, 1955): 5.

<sup>66</sup> The following paragraphs on the civil affairs survey are from TMA, X53-1003C, 23-28.

the city. It would have been more of a burden to send money back to Wuqing, she said. Although Liu was counted in the survey, the city did not ask her to return to her village. City residents were implored to discourage their family members from coming to Tianjin, but the Civil Affairs Bureau instructed cadres not to “directly mobilize” refugees living with city relatives.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the 1950s, government recognition of family ties assisted villagers who hoped to become long-term city residents.

The report on Wandezhuang noted that people labeled as “disaster victims” were making and saving money. Officials counted 118 peddlers who lived in small inns or stayed with fellow villagers. Twenty-three-year-old Feng Laofu carted peanuts to Tianjin from his village in March 1955 and roasted them at a street stand, earning around 1.5 yuan a day. An additional 194 of those surveyed had found temporary or long-term work, some through the Wandezhuang labor market, others through small factory proprietors or family connections. Another group of people who said they regularly came to the city during the slack agricultural season were counted as disaster victims, including fifty-five who collected and resold junk. Xing Qiulu, a forty-seven-year-old man from Cangxian, lived in a small communal dwelling and saved around 0.3 yuan every day from junk recycling, enough to send 5 yuan home to his family shortly before city officials interviewed him.

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<sup>67</sup> In December 1955, a city order continued the practice of not removing wives, children, and parents who had come to stay with relatives in Tianjin. Nannies from villages were also allowed to stay. *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 172 (December 5, 1955): 2.

Only eleven of the outsiders counted in Wandezhuang admitted to begging. All of them lived in inns, and four were labeled “professional beggars” (*zhiye qigai*). It is not clear how these long-term residents of Tianjin qualified as “disaster victims,” but the police officers and civil affairs cadres counted them anyway. Liu Zhanyuan, a thirty-six-year-old from neighboring Jinghai county, had lived in a Tianjin inn since 1945. He went out early each morning to an area of workers’ dormitories, where he would “tell the masses that he had been hit by disaster and could not survive. If the masses do not give him money he pretends that he is dying.” Liu earned up to 3 yuan by the end of each workday, when he took a bus back to his inn. He told his interviewers that he wanted to become a peddler but did not have the capital to get started.

At the end of their report, officials analyzed why people had come to the city. They concluded that because Tianjin’s “urban people” and the “masses” from nearby counties had strong family ties, villagers came because of food shortages but also to pay family visits. Others came seasonally to peddle or do odd jobs.<sup>68</sup> The problem, the report claimed, was that after coming to Tianjin, rural people found work and became dissatisfied with agricultural production. Their presence “adds to the labor force and definitely affects the employment of unemployed workers, market management, the grain and oil supply, and social order.”

Local authorities were aware that the flow of rural people into Tianjin was not

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<sup>68</sup> Liu Haiyan has shown that this was a longstanding practice during the Qing and Republican periods. Liu Haiyan, 264.

limited to immediate “disaster victims,” yet the distinction between all farmers and refugees was unclear. Generally the “disaster victim” label was applied to the most marginal population in the city. Certainly some villagers initially left their homes because of flooding and food shortages. As people came and found ways to get by, more were encouraged to follow. City officials were determined to limit this flow. In the mid-1950s, they focused primarily on those without firm family or work ties.

In July 1955 the municipal government established a “Population Office” staffed by cadres transferred from the public security, civil affairs, labor, and commerce bureaus, the women’s league and youth league, and the party-run union. The new office opened its doors at a time of tightening controls on rural-urban movement nationwide. These changes coincided with a national push to collectivize the countryside, an organizational move that facilitated the urban exploitation of rural resources. The state also set prices for agricultural commodities at artificially low levels. The price difference between cheap farm goods and expensive industrial products was meant to fuel urban development, but it made farming unprofitable and gave peasants another reason to leave the countryside.<sup>69</sup> In 1955, party center attempted to limit migration by making it more difficult for individuals to obtain migration permits, and also strengthened a grain rationing regime that differentiated

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Ash, “Squeezing the Peasants: Grain Extraction, Food Consumption and Rural Living Standards in Mao’s China,” *China Quarterly*, no. 188 (2006): 959-98; Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 60.



between city and village residents.<sup>70</sup>

In Tianjin, each city district set up population offices, while neighborhood offices formed work teams responsible for propaganda and mobilization work. Between July 1955 and March 1956, 128,200 people left the city and returned to villages. The Tianjin government declared that the project had successfully “increased the power of agricultural production, and also decreased the nonproductive population and appropriately laid the base for a socialist city.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, urban employment pressures had been eased by this transfer of labor power to the countryside at the height of the collectivization campaign.

#### Assault Mobilization

Success was fleeting. After mid-1956, city population offices were disbanded and cadres returned to their original work units. Forcing migrants to leave the city was a difficult and unwelcome task for city cadres, who only sprung into action when prodded by directives from above. At this point, deporting migrants was episodic and not part of the daily portfolio of urban officials. But rural people, many of whom continued to be categorized as disaster victims, still came to Tianjin. Another wave of damaging floods and hailstorms assailed the countryside surrounding Tianjin in summer 1956. To the north, Baodi, Anci (now part of Langfang municipality), and Wuqing counties were hit hard; in Cangxian to the south, flooding was even worse

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<sup>70</sup> Cheng and Selden, 656, 658.

<sup>71</sup> TMA, X53-1002C, 82-83.

than in 1954.<sup>72</sup> Refugees built six hundred new shacks in Tianjin during the second half of 1956, and by spring 1957 city officials estimated that the number of peasants in the city had doubled since December 1956.<sup>73</sup> In 1956 and 1957, more than 205,000 rural people had moved into Tianjin.<sup>74</sup> This wave was likely fueled by problems with rural collectivization.

In April 1957, vice mayor Wan Xiaotang established another temporary organization to remove the new arrivals. As in 1955, city officials attempted to make the task easier by focusing on the most vulnerable populations: people staying with distant relatives or friends were targeted, while people living with close relatives were not. Those who had found temporary work could finish out their contracts. But people living out in the open, either in homemade sheds or on the floors of waiting rooms in the city's train stations, were sitting ducks. This is what city officials discovered when they carried out "assault mobilization" (*tuji dongyuan*) roundups at Tianjin's train stations and street corners. But it was impossible to completely stop people who wanted to enter the city. How could authorities be entirely certain who was a "peasant" or "disaster victim" and who was in the city legitimately? Some

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<sup>72</sup> Wang Wei 王玮 and Zhao Jihua 赵继华, eds., *Wuqing xian zhi* 武清县志 [Wuqing county gazetteer] (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue yuan, 1991), 41; TMA, X53-751Y, 112.

<sup>73</sup> TMA, X53-684Y, 50, 12.

<sup>74</sup> "Shi renmin weiyuanhui guanyu dongyuan liuru chengshi nongmin huixiang canjia shengchan de fang'an" 市人民委员会关于动员流入城市农民回乡参加生产的方案 [Municipal people's committee's program for mobilizing farmers who flowed into the city to return to villages to participate in production], *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 281 (January 6, 1958): 2.

migrants to Tianjin exploited this confusion.

Between May 16 and May 26, 1957, the number of people living at Tianjin's three train stations increased precipitously. At the main east station there were around two thousand rural people sleeping on the floor, and there were six hundred more at the north and west stations. Around 80 percent of the disaster victims were from Wuqing county; most of them were women, elderly people, and children. Aside from a few young people who cut grass or worked odd jobs, the refugees went out early each morning to beg. Officials from Tianjin and others from Hebei province headed for Wuqing, Baodi, and Anci to demand that local governments transfer relief grain to needy areas and establish "dissuasion stations" (*quanzu zhan*) to stop potential migrants before they left their home counties. Tianjin officials also formed a work team of cadres and railway police to "assault" the train stations.<sup>75</sup>

During the last five days of May 1957, around 30 city officials placed 2,722 residents of Tianjin's railway stations on trains back to their home counties. But the total number of people lying on the floors held steady. The problem was that as soon as a train left Tianjin, another arrived with more refugees. In early June, the number of city cadres assigned to train station deportation work jumped to 60, and their strategy shifted. Instead of emptying out the waiting rooms, city cadres focused on arriving trains. They rounded up passengers as soon as they disembarked, offered food to "temporarily allay their hunger," and put them on the next train out. This method was more effective, and the number of people living at Tianjin's east station

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<sup>75</sup> TMA, X53-684Y, 26.

plummeted from 1,521 on May 31 to 691 on June 4. Prospective migrants got the message that they would not be welcomed at city train stations. Unfortunately, a work report admitted, “we discovered that during dissuasion work on the platforms, the scope of those rounded up was too broad and some masses who were not disaster victims were held and delayed for a while. Pay attention to correcting this erroneous tendency from now on.”<sup>76</sup>

How were officials to discern who was an unacceptable migrant and who was simply a legitimate traveler taking a train to Tianjin? They profiled deportation targets based on their appearance. Rural people attempting to get to Tianjin by train in June 1957 were aware of this and took advantage of it. Officials at the train station reported that some migrants had begun “playing tricks” to avoid getting rounded up. Some wore new clothes and claimed that they had come to Tianjin to see relatives. Further questioning revealed that the gussied up visitors had no family or friends in the city. Savvy rural people tried to pass as legitimate travelers. They realized that they could not look like refugees if they wanted to avoid the assault brigade on the platform. We do not know how many newly tailored rural people were able to convince the city work team let them proceed. But the migrants knew that they were being profiled based on appearance. In the 1950s, urban and rural identities were cultural categories, as they had been before 1949, as well as state-imposed labels.

In spite of awkward cases of mistaken identity, authorities were so pleased with the results of assault tactics at the train station that later in June they attempted

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<sup>76</sup> TMA, X53-684Y, 31.

the same strategy in the city at large. Quick round-ups of suspected disaster victims on Tianjin streets were also problematic. According to the summary bulletin of the weeklong “assault mobilization and detention of disaster victims sleeping on the streets and begging,” 337 people returned to villages and 106 were sent to detention centers. The problem was that some cadres “did not check people’s status carefully enough” and could not distinguish between different types of people. Some pedicab drivers, temporary workers, and legitimate residents of guest houses were rounded up and sent out of the city, “causing great unhappiness.”<sup>77</sup> In their zeal to rid the city of disaster victims, city cadres cast their nets too wide. Anyone who looked rural, was engaged in hard outdoor physical labor, or with a non-fixed residence could have been suspect, even if he or she was contributing to Tianjin’s socialist construction in an officially sanctioned manner.

Had the detainees been working inside factories, they would not have been mistaken for return-to-village targets. Industrial work was a legitimate reason to migrate from villages to Tianjin during the 1950s. Yet just as disaster victims and other farmers resisted or subverted official efforts to categorize and deport them by moving in with relatives, cheating free tickets, donning disguises, or simply refusing to leave, migrants in factories based their decisions on work and family, often ignoring (or simply unaware of) the Communist regime’s definitions of city and countryside.

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<sup>77</sup> Another category of “return to village targets” in 1957 and 1958 consisted of longtime city residents who had migrated to Qinghai province in 1955 and 1956. More than half of the over ten thousand migrants had “flowed back” to Tianjin without permission by 1957.

### Work and Family in 1950s Tianjin

During the 1950s, many rural migrants used family connections to get factory jobs, or responded to recruitment by city work units that actively sought out migrants. Between 1951 and 1957 more than 780,000 people entered Tianjin in search of work or to move in with family members, and urban enterprises recruited an additional 409,000 workers from villages.<sup>78</sup> They crossed the rural-urban divide just as state-imposed laws and categories reified the gap. Those who found jobs during this period made the gradual transition from farmer to factory worker. City authorities tried to regulate this movement, but some migrants and urban recruiters blithely circumvented state labor rules and continued to make work arrangements based on family or native place connections.

Table 1. Population Moving in and out of Tianjin's Urban Districts, 1951-1957.

	Moved In	Moved Out	Net Change
1951	235,958	175,424	60,534
1952	193,458	167,638	25,820
1953	195,692	138,445	57,247
1954	162,390	108,059	54,331
1955	126,286	215,426	-89,140
1956	221,038	161,046	59,992
1957	168,968	83,823	85,145

Source: Tianjin shi dang'anguan, *Jindai yilai Tianjin chengshihua jincheng shilu*, 715.

Immediately after the takeover of Tianjin in 1949, the new government's labor bureau attempted to register tens of thousands of unemployed workers (*shiye gongren*) who

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<sup>78</sup> Li Jingneng 李竞能, ed., *Zhongguo renkou, Tianjin fence* 中国人口, 天津分册 [China's population, Tianjin volume] (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1987), 157.

had lost jobs during the turbulence of the late 1940s. After signing up, unemployed workers received welfare stipends and waited for the labor bureau to assign them to new jobs. The question of who was eligible for registration was contentious. Not only were peasants ineligible, former factory workers who had returned to their native villages after losing city jobs were not allowed to register.<sup>79</sup> By going home and farming after factory closures, migrants had unwittingly disqualified themselves from officially sanctioned urban futures. The only peasants eligible to register for city job assignments were farmers in the immediate suburbs whose land had been appropriated for urban construction.<sup>80</sup>

Migrants accustomed to traveling between villages and Tianjin as rural harvests and urban job opportunities fluctuated were surprised when doors were shut. In December 1952, the Hebei journal *Village propagandist* published a letter to the editor about a disappointed villager named Kong Zhiqiang, who had worked in a Tianjin factory until 1951, fell ill and returned to his village to recuperate, but was not allowed to register for a job assignment when he returned to the city in 1952. The editor responded that the vestiges of imperialist, reactionary rule in cities (potent issues in Tianjin, where foreign architecture still dominated the former concessions

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<sup>79</sup> TMA, X68-84Y, 2.

<sup>80</sup> “Tianjin shi laodong jiuye weiyuanhui guanyu shiye ji qiuzhi renyuan tongyi dengji banfa gongzuo xize” 天津市劳动就业委员会关于失业及求职人员统一登记办法工作细则 [Tianjin municipal labor employment committee’s detailed work regulations on unified registration of unemployed and job-seeking personnel] *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 7 (October 27, 1952): 6.

and where the Japanese and Nationalists had ruled for twenty consecutive years before 1949) meant that urban unemployment was still a problem:

The party and government decided on the following policy: solve city problems in the city, solve village problems in the village. Blindly running to cities without planning causes more difficulty in solving the unemployment problem. Actually, this is also taking care of peasants, because when you do not find a job in the city and go back and forth in a futile effort, it is a big waste, and not as good as just finding a way to get by in the village in the first place.

But after the situation in cities improved, the editor added, jobs would be plentiful for everyone. “It is not like some people think, that there is no future for peasants going to the city,” he wrote. “Please tell returned workers in villages to not get anxious. In the future they will be invited to work in factories and mines.”<sup>81</sup>

Many villagers were unwilling to wait. They came to Tianjin anyway and ignored official job assignment regulations. Several months after Kong Zhiqiang’s story appeared in print, more than two thousand peasants and demobilized soldiers attempted to register for jobs in Tianjin but were denied. In one district of the city, half of the denied migrants remained in Tianjin and fended for themselves.<sup>82</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, even following the nationalization of industry in 1955-1956 and in spite of the gradually increasing restrictions on migration chronicled by Cheng and Selden,<sup>83</sup> some rural people landed jobs in Tianjin even before they left their

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<sup>81</sup> “Nongcun li de shengyu laodongli bu neng mangmu de xiang chengshi li pao” 农村里的剩余劳动力不能盲目的向城市里跑 [Excess labor in villages cannot blindly run toward cities], *Nongcun xuanchuan yuan* (Baoding) 23 (December 20, 1952): 25.

<sup>82</sup> TMA, X67-31Y, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Cheng and Selden, 644-68.



villages. In December 1954, cadres at a state-operated knitting and dye factory decided on their own to hire thirty-one people from a single village in the Xushui area of Hebei. A good portion of the village's leadership departed for Tianjin, including fourteen militia members, five vice-village leaders, and five production team leaders. It is likely that dye factory management had family ties to Xushui, because it was not necessary to look so far afield for new workers. When flood refugees entered Tianjin in 1955, it was easy for factories to find migrant workers. Tianjin's Daming Steel Mill, which had already been nationalized, bypassed the city labor bureau's introduction of temporary workers and went straight to small guesthouses to hire "disaster victims" at a cheaper rate. Some flood refugees were even hired on as long-term workers, including eight people who used family connections to get jobs at cotton scouring factories.<sup>84</sup>

Family ties remained the best way to get a job and establish residency in 1950s Tianjin. Wei Rongchun was a typical case. Around midday one afternoon in 1951, the seventeen-year-old boarded a small boat in Baodi county.<sup>85</sup> After a full twenty-eight hours of floating and paddling down the canals and rivers north of Tianjin, he disembarked. For the first time in his life Wei laid eyes upon what was then the largest city in north China. Dazzled and overwhelmed by Tianjin's electric lights, tall buildings, and wide roads, Wei felt thankful that he was not alone. He had made the trip with a cousin who worked at a hat workshop, and he stayed at his uncle's house in

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<sup>84</sup> TMA, X53-1002C, 27.

<sup>85</sup> Interviewee 21.

the city. Wei had originally hoped to work alongside his cousin making hats, but there were no jobs available. After a few days in the city, Wei was ready to give up and make the long journey back to his village. But his uncle happened to work at a belt factory, and he found Wei a position as an apprentice.

For his first six months on the job, Wei did not leave the confines of the belt workshop. He worked and slept in the same space, often rising as early as four in the morning and working until almost midnight. As an apprentice, he earned 100 kilograms of millet per month, half of what regular workers did, and payday only came once a year. By the mid-1950s, when urban officials began efforts to remove unwanted farmers, disaster victims, and vagrants out of the city, Wei was not a target. He had become an acceptable urban resident, a worker in a newly nationalized, consolidated, and expanded knitting and dye factory. In 1956 he joined the Communist Party, and his salary was enough to support his parents, his younger brother's schooling, and his wife back in Baodi.

Most of Wei's colleagues were originally from villages, including a couple from Raoyang county who met at the factory in 1952 and married two years later. The wife had moved in with her uncle's family in Tianjin to help with household chores before finding a job at the belt factory. The couple worked in Tianjin until retirement and still live there.<sup>86</sup> But while some newly formed families built lives in the city, other migrants returned to villages because of domestic issues, or simply because they could not handle working in Tianjin.

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<sup>86</sup> Interviewee 43, interviewee 44.

Liang Yangfu grew up in the same Baodi village as Wei Rongchun, who was four years Liang's senior. In 1955, Liang's father drove him into Tianjin on a horsecart. It was a slow, bumpy, overnight trip. Liang began what was supposed to be a three-year apprenticeship to a family friend who was an itinerant barber. The teenager hated the work, and after a year of going from house to house cutting hair, he quit and returned to his village to work the fields. He would have preferred a city factory job over agricultural work ("who wants to suffer the exhaustion [of farming]?" he asked), but he had no idea how to find one. It seemed impossible to the seventeen-year-old. As an unpaid apprentice he was completely dependent on his master barber. He was afraid to approach strangers in Tianjin. "I felt restrained and did not know what to do," Liang remembered, "I even looked down on myself."<sup>87</sup> Liang gave up on Tianjin and went home on his own, without any prompting from the various official agencies charged with limiting rural migration.

Another Baodi resident's migration decisions during the 1950s also had little to do with state regulations and categories. Right around the time of the Communist takeover of Tianjin, a village woman named Zhang went to visit her husband, who was working in the city. Her husband used his connections to get her a job at a hat workshop. Zhang liked the work, even though she had to stay in a dormitory apart from her husband. One day her husband dropped by for a visit, an event that cut short Zhang's future in Tianjin. "Some male colleagues of mine were passing by and came in and sat down," she remembered. "As soon as [my husband] saw this he got mad

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<sup>87</sup> Interviewee 24.

and thought that I had something going on with someone else. I was so upset that I didn't eat for two days, and he didn't let me work anymore, so I came back [to the village].” She lived in Baodi for the rest of her life, only returning to Tianjin temporarily when food was short in the village during the Great Leap famine.<sup>88</sup>

In January 1958 the National People's Congress adopted stricter household registration regulations which tied families to their rural or urban residence, but the rules were ignored when the leap began several months later. In addition to its well-publicized goals of rural communization and miraculous bumper harvests, the leap also called for rapid urban industrialization. The path to utopia ran through both city and countryside. The leap's emphasis on urban industry meant that Tianjin's population would continue to grow, as it had throughout the 1950s. The volume of migrants coming to Tianjin ebbed and flowed during the 1950s, and the leap ushered in another major influx. Even during relatively restrictive periods like the return-to-village movement of 1955 and the assault mobilizations of 1957, people in Tianjin managed to resist deportation and challenge categorization. It would take the tragic leap famine to further solidify boundaries between Tianjin and its hinterland. During the leap, tens of millions of people crossed the rural-urban divide. It was at this point that the pencil-drawn lines traced in this chapter were written over with dark ink. As we shall see in the following pages, the tragic injustice of the leap was that urban-based authorities allowed villagers to starve while guaranteeing the survival of city residents. The rural famine was an unintended consequence of the leap, but the steps

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<sup>88</sup> Interviewee 90.

taken to delineate rural-urban difference during the 1950s suggest that we should not be surprised by how unevenly the disaster unfolded.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Material from Chapter 2, in part, appeared in Jeremy Brown, “The Village in the City: Rural Migrants in 1950s Tianjin,” *Chungguksa yongu* [The Journal of Chinese Historical Researches, Taegu, Korea] 40 (February 2006): 383-428.

### 3. Tianjin's Great Leap: Urban Survival, Rural Starvation

In 1959, in response to food shortages in Wuqing county just northwest of Tianjin, a member of an opera troupe in the village of Zaolin composed a “clappertalk” (*kuaiban*) routine titled, “Suffering from Famine” (*Nao liang huang*). The piece was performed openly in the village. The composer charged that there were all kinds of obstacles to getting sufficient food, and that no matter how good the crops were, there was never enough to eat. In contrast, he continued, people in Beijing and Tianjin always had plenty to eat. After hearing the performance, villagers proposed organizing a caravan to Tianjin. Some peasants expressed doubt that food was more abundant in the city, and did not want to go, but the clappertalk composer, insinuating that certain families might be hoarding grain secretly, said, “whoever does not go to Tianjin must have food in their house.” Persuaded by this argument, more than one hundred eighty villagers clambered on eight large carts and embarked for Tianjin. When the villagers arrived in the city, they begged for food on the streets.<sup>1</sup> They were indeed correct in their impression that food was more plentiful in Tianjin. The Tianjin-bound caravan of desperately hungry peasants from Wuqing—most of whom correctly suspected that cities were better off than villages during the famine—reminds us that cities must be brought back into the picture if we are to fully

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<sup>1</sup> Zhonggong Hebei shengwei *Hebei siqing tongxun* bianji bu 中共河北省委《河北四清通讯》编辑部, ed., *Hebei nongcun jieji douzheng dianxing cailiao* 河北农村阶级斗争典型材料 [Representative materials on class struggle in Hebei villages], vol. 1 (February 1966), 169-70.

comprehend the leap.

Focusing on the city does not mean discounting the rural nature of the famine. But in order to understand how the famine struck China so unevenly, we cannot ignore cities. In this chapter I draw on archival materials to describe how Tianjin and its hinterland weathered the famine. The leap's call for rapid urban industrialization drew many peasants away from communes and into Tianjin factory jobs. This rural-to-urban population transfer contributed to an imbalance in the supply system that exacerbated food shortages, because there were fewer agricultural workers in the countryside and more people eating state grain in cities. Ironically, a movement that promised rural utopia resulted in one of the largest waves of out-migration from villages since the founding of the People's Republic. The uneven toll of the disaster that followed confirmed that the lines that had been drawn between urban and rural during the 1950s favored cities and the people who lived in them.

We now know without a doubt that as early as 1958, Mao Zedong and other top leaders in Beijing were aware of famine conditions caused by leap policies.<sup>2</sup> The view from Tianjin's offices and neighborhoods confirms that it is not plausible to claim that urban officials were unaware of famine in the countryside. Average Tianjin residents knew about rural starvation because they saw beggars on the streets or hosted hungry relatives in their homes. City leaders, including top party secretary Wan Xiaotang, had an even clearer picture of the problem. They received daily reports on

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas P. Bernstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Wilfulness," *China Quarterly*, no. 186 (2006): 421-45.

deaths and illnesses caused by the famine, and they traveled to villages to assess the situation firsthand. They knew how bad it was, but were more vigorous in fighting for food for urban residents than in addressing the rural famine.

Urban residents did feel the pinch. Food rations were cut and hundreds of thousands of Tianjin people were malnourished. Tensions ran high as urbanites fought over food at grain shops, and urban crime—from illicit market activity to petty theft to brazen armed robbery—escalated as people struggled to stay afloat. Overall, a perspective that takes urban-rural relations into account allows for a fuller picture of the famine years. Most important, it helps to explain why people in villages were allowed to starve in massive numbers while city residents tightened their belts but survived.

### “We Want Peasants”

By the early twentieth century, Tianjin had become north China’s financial and trade center and was home to eight foreign concessions, but after the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, the city faced uncertainty and found its role diminished. The First Five-Year Plan funneled resources to interior cities, but dictated that coastal Tianjin’s existing industrial infrastructure was to be “fully exploited but not further developed.”<sup>3</sup> Even so, economic recovery following the Communist takeover made the city a magnet for rural migrants seeking jobs. This was especially the case when

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<sup>3</sup> Dangdai Zhongguo congshu bianji bu 当代中国丛书编辑部, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo de Tianjin* 当代中国的天津 [Contemporary China’s Tianjin] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999), 1:100-101.



the leap kicked off in 1958.

One of the ironies of the Great Leap Forward was that a movement aimed at radically increasing rural production ended up draining the countryside of some of its most productive laborers. In addition to rural communization and miraculous bumper harvests, the leap also called for rapid urban industrialization. Recently promulgated household registration regulations restricting rural-to-urban migration were ignored as city factories and workshops scrambled to hire workers.<sup>4</sup> According to official counts, Tianjin's population swelled as rural people moved into the city during the leap.

Table 2. Population Moving in and out of Tianjin's Urban Districts, 1956-1963

	Moved In	Moved Out	Net Change
1956	221,038	161,046	59,992
1957	168,968	83,823	85,145
1958	136,937	102,647	34,290
1959	132,070	57,112	74,958
1960	118,186	64,859	53,327
1961	42,476	91,232	-48,759
1962	25,910	107,483	-81,573
1963	28,329	29,349	-1,020

Source: Tianjin shi dang'anguan, *Jindai yilai Tianjin chengshihua jincheng shilu*, 715.

Table 3. Temporary Population in Tianjin, 1956-1960

1956	74,000
1957	102,000
1958	232,000
1959	168,000
1960	73,000

Source: Li Jingneng, *Zhongguo renkou, Tianjin fence*, 182.

The dramatic increase in temporary residents during the leap is even more striking.

New industrial contract laborers were often given temporary *hukou* permits. The

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<sup>4</sup> For the official line on Tianjin's role during the leap, see RMRB, August 19, 1958, 7.

increase in temporary urban *hukou* holders in 1958 and 1959 was especially significant (Table 3).

Other new arrivals did not have urban *hukou* at all, because city factories were in such a rush to hire peasant labor in 1958. One Tianjin government bulletin criticized factory managers who clamored, “We want them from villages, we want peasants,” and who complained that “city people are useless” on the leap’s exhausting urban construction projects and production blitzes. The bulletin acknowledged that all city enterprises needed more labor because of the “new situation” brought about by the leap, but it ordered officials to limit hires from villages.<sup>5</sup>

The demands of urban production swept aside bureaucratic obstacles to migration and hiring. An internal report noted that 195,000 villagers from the twelve rural counties under Tianjin’s jurisdiction in 1958 had received official sanction to transfer to urban jobs—a full 6.6 percent of the total labor power in Tianjin’s hinterland. Almost as many people left their villages without permission: 127,506 in 1958, including 13.2 percent of the labor force in Cangxian county south of Tianjin. One major problem, the report continued, was that urban factories continued to recruit workers in villages without permission from city labor officials: “The peasants do not move their *hukou* or grain card, they simply leave and the work unit then writes to the commune asking it to cancel the peasant’s *hukou*.”<sup>6</sup>

What kind of work were these new employees doing? Evidence suggests that

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<sup>5</sup> *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 17 (April 28, 1958): 11-13.

<sup>6</sup> *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 14 (April 6, 1959): 9-10.

new arrivals in Tianjin in 1958 and 1959 did not quickly become regular workers in major urban industries. Rather, many rural migrants to Tianjin during the leap obtained temporary or contract positions in small workshops, generally on the outskirts of the city. They were paid less than their counterparts in larger urban factories.

Of the fifteen factories under the aegis of Tianjin's Hexi District Handicraft Industry Bureau (Shougongye ju) in 1960, nine were situated within the city, and six were on the outskirts (Hexi, south of the city center and home to the former German concession, was one of the least densely populated of Tianjin's urban districts). The well-established city enterprises included machine-equipment, printing, carpet, metals, and cooking utensil factories, and employed a total of 1,984 workers. Although the number of workers at the city factories increased significantly after the leap began in 1958, most of the new employees were from within Tianjin, not from outside villages. After 1958, the nine factories within the city limits hired 728 urban residents, but only 54 villagers. Coveted urban factory jobs were out of reach for many rural people during the leap.

While Hexi's urban enterprises were already in operation when the leap began, most of the suburban factories were established during the big industrial push of 1958. The six suburban factories included a small brewery, an agricultural machinery plant, and brick and cement factories. Of the 634 workers hired on at the district's six suburban enterprises since 1958, 304 were classified as "agricultural population," and

302 as “idle population” (*xiansan renkou*) from the suburbs.<sup>7</sup> At the brick factory, almost all of the laborers were from the suburbs, while the cement plant mainly employed people from rural Hebei and Shandong who police had detained in Tianjin because they were part of the “blindly flowing population.” But city industry needed them. Instead of being sent home as they would have been during the “return to village” blitzes of 1955 and 1957 (described in Chapter 2), Tianjin’s Public Security Bureau sent them to make cement in the suburbs in early 1959.<sup>8</sup> One man named Li had been exiled from Tianjin to Xinjiang for the crime of protecting a counterrevolutionary in 1949. In 1958, Li returned to Tianjin to visit his mother but failed to report back to his labor reform unit. Instead, he worked at odd jobs until police officers arrested him and assigned him to the cement factory.<sup>9</sup>

Cement workers like Li were not granted Tianjin *hukou* or regular positions. Their employment status remained temporary, and without official residence permits, their presence in the Tianjin area was semi-legal at best. For a time during the leap, increased production trumped the household registration system, and people moved around in search of the best deal. During the first half of 1960, when cement factory workers’ demands for better wages and urban *hukou* were met with silence, 19 of the plant’s 171 workers left to pursue better opportunities. Ten workers left to find work in the northeast, five got better paying jobs at a nearby chemical plant (1.5 yuan a day

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<sup>7</sup> HDA, 17-1-15C, 1.

<sup>8</sup> HDA, 17-1-18C, 1, 24.

<sup>9</sup> HDA, 17-1-15C, 32.

versus the 1 yuan they had been making), and four disappeared without a trace.<sup>10</sup> While rural migrants were excluded from the best city jobs during the leap, those dissatisfied with low pay and instability in marginal enterprises did have room to maneuver.

#### Famine in Tianjin's Hinterland: The View from the City

Wage-paying jobs drew people from villages to Tianjin during the leap. This drain on the agricultural labor force contributed to worsening conditions in the countryside, which in turn compelled more peasants to flee villages. The desperate situation in rural Hebei during the winters of 1959 and 1960 pushed many villagers toward the city. Their first priority was to find food. Malnourished beggars on the streets and visiting relatives who stayed for longer than usual were signals to city residents that something was horribly wrong in the countryside.

Hungry members of the Wuqing county opera troupe took advantage of their proximity to the city and had the energy and resources to make it to Tianjin. People who lived farther away had more difficulty in fleeing desperate famine conditions, but they tried anyway. Starving peasants strained China's railway system during the crisis. A classified report sent to top central leaders in June 1960 reported that during the first quarter of the year, more than 176,000 "blindly flowing peasants" had taken trains without paying for tickets. Most of the fare-jumpers were from Shandong, Hebei, and Henan, and they were heading for the northeast, northwest, or to large cities. Peasants

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<sup>10</sup> HDA, 17-1-18C, 36, 45.

also regularly looted freight trains, according to the report: “They eat anything that seems edible and steal whatever they can, and even willfully destroy and stomp on goods, urinate and defecate on things, and use high-grade women’s socks as toilet paper.”<sup>11</sup> Some of the famine victims who managed to board trains ended up in Tianjin. During the first ten days of January 1961, city authorities at the Tianjin train station detained almost three thousand passengers arriving from the northeast, Shandong, and Henan. Most had edema, a swelling condition caused by malnutrition, and many were so weak that they fainted as they stepped off the trains. Fourteen of those who fainted never woke up.<sup>12</sup>

Tianjin residents who saw sick and dying beggars on the streets or who sheltered hungry rural relatives knew about the massive disaster in the countryside. Claims of ignorance by officials like Sidney Rittenberg, an American member of the Chinese Communist Party who worked at the national Broadcast Administration in Beijing (“Because the worst devastation was in the countryside, far from our view, most of us in the city knew nothing about it”) are unconvincing and certainly did not apply to most people in Tianjin.<sup>13</sup> By mid-1959, Tianjin residents had an idea of the scale and causes of rural problems. An internal report noted that quite a few people in

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<sup>11</sup> NBCK 3077 (June 20, 1960): 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> HPA, 855-6-2232Y, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Sidney Rittenberg and Amanda Bennett, *The Man Who Stayed Behind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 248. For more on the famine denials of foreigners living in China during the early 1960s, see Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People’s Republic* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 117-20.

Tianjin were critical of key aspects of the Great Leap Forward, including communization and the massive nationwide push to forge steel. The report charged that some city dwellers “cried out about the peasants’ hardship, exaggerating the degree of grain shortage in villages. Some cadres and employees requested decreasing the urban standard of living and increasing peasants’ food and oil supplies.” This generous idea was not rewarded, but was instead written up by informers and reported as a “thought problem.” A year later, food supplies dwindled so low that decreased urban grain rations would become a necessity. According to the same report, other city residents, rather than blaming the leap agenda, accused bad village officials of causing food shortages: “the peasants do not have enough to eat because [village cadres] practice fraud and give coercive orders.”<sup>14</sup> Whether they faulted leap policies or criticized village leadership, Tianjin residents knew about the growing crisis, and they were aware of its multiple causes.

Residents who had bad class labels were asked for their opinions about the leap in study sessions. At one such meeting in December 1959 in Tianjin’s Chentangzhuang neighborhood, a “bad element” named Wang offered his explanation of the leap’s failures. “Ever since the people’s communes became totally screwed up,” Wang said, “all villagers are unenthusiastic about work, the fields are desolate, and production has been affected. Villagers have no income, all they get is a little bit of grain. Villagers in the suburbs do not work because they think that even if they

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<sup>14</sup> NBCK 2817 (July 8, 1959): 9-10.

work a lot they will only get two corn buns.”<sup>15</sup> Wang was correct about failed harvests and disillusionment with the unmet promises of the commune system. But he was overly optimistic in assuming that peasants were guaranteed at least two buns a day.

Famine in Tianjin’s hinterland was not as bad as in Anhui and Henan provinces, where entire villages were virtually wiped off the map. But for many, the difference between Tianjin and its hinterland during the famine was the difference between life and death. City residents also went hungry, fell ill, and suffered the psychological effects of food shortages, but still received regular—albeit diminished—grain rations. Rural people had no such safety net, and urban leaders considered them more expendable than city dwellers. That top policy makers rushed to save city people while villagers starved was the clearest proof of the socialist command economy’s anti-rural bias.

Tianjin’s top authorities were not necessarily callous, but they were overwhelmed with problems. Their first priority was protecting vital urban industries and the well-being of city residents, not rural counties that had only recently been dumped into their laps. Over the course of 1958, bureaucratic reshuffling presented a host of new challenges to such Tianjin leaders as first party secretary Wan Xiaotang. Early in the year, Tianjin lost its status as a special municipality and became subordinate to Hebei province, prompting a fierce battle for resources between the city and province. Tianjin became the provincial capital, and rather than answering

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<sup>15</sup> HDA, 43-2-23C, 11.



directly to party center as they had before, city leaders instead had to deal with another layer of bureaucracy. At the time, Tianjin's industrial output was almost double that of the rest of Hebei province. The provincial authorities who moved their offices to the new provincial capital in 1958 saw Tianjin as a cow that might nourish the rest of relatively destitute Hebei. Central economic planners in Beijing still allotted more resources to Tianjin than to Hebei, but because provincial authorities had the final say in how to allocate Tianjin's part of the plan, they appropriated funds and materials for other projects. Tianjin leaders complained to Premier Zhou Enlai that the slow dismembering of their cow was making it difficult to meet yearly production targets, and in January 1959, party center required Hebei number crunchers to wall off Tianjin's resources from the rest of the province's budget.<sup>16</sup>

The headache of being subordinate to the province was aggravated in late 1958 when, following the leap's "bigger is better" mantra, the rural areas under Tianjin's control drastically expanded. In 1957, Tianjin leaders were responsible only for suburban villages immediately surrounding the city. In 1958, Tianjin prefecture (which had been headquartered in Yangliuqing and was directly subordinate to Hebei, not Tianjin) merged with Cangzhou prefecture and was then completely dissolved and put under the jurisdiction of Tianjin municipality. Tianjin leaders now had to manage twelve rural "super counties" (formed in 1958 by merging thirty counties into larger entities) with a combined population of 7,832,226. The rural population under

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<sup>16</sup> Wan Xiaotang jinian wenji bianjizu 万晓塘纪念文集编辑组, ed., *Wan Xiaotang jinian wenji* 万晓塘纪念文集 [Collected writings commemorating Wan Xiaotang] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2001), 120.

Tianjin's control now dwarfed the number of people living in the city itself (3,500,690 in 1958).<sup>17</sup> In 1960, two more counties were added to Tianjin's portfolio, and the land under the city's control spanned from the Great Wall at Huangyaguan in the north to the boundary with Shandong province in the south. By the time these rural areas were transferred to Tianjin's control at the end of 1958, leap policies had already pushed them to the brink of disaster. Tianjin's leaders, who had spent the past ten years in the city, were unable to shift course in 1959. They were ill-equipped to handle the famine. They knew what was happening, but were not sure what to do about it.

As hunger worsened in rural Hebei during 1959 and 1960, Tianjin leaders received regular reports on the extent of the disaster. They also went on inspection tours of villages. Tianjin vice-mayor Niu Yong and municipal Grain Bureau director Liu Pichang traveled to counties in the Cangzhou area in mid-1959 and were shocked by what they saw. Commune cafeterias served watery gruel, vegetable stalks, and leaves. Liu turned to Niu Yong and asked, "Is this okay?" The vice-mayor shook his head and laughed nervously, but said nothing. Later, Niu directed Liu to lend wheat bran and dried yams to the afflicted areas, which the grain official did without obtaining permission from the national Grain Bureau or other Tianjin vice-mayors. The Grain Bureau reported this lapse in protocol to Zhou Enlai, who ordered Tianjin and Hebei leaders to stop lending food without prior approval.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hebei sheng minzheng ting 河北省民政厅, *Hebei sheng xingzheng quhua biangeng ziliao, 1949-1984* 河北省行政区划变更资料 [Changes in the administrative divisions of Hebei province, 1949-1984] (n.p., 1985), 80.

<sup>18</sup> Liu Pichang 刘丕昌, "Chentong de huiyi" 沉痛的回忆 [Painful memories], *Tianjin*

In addition to reminiscences by officials like Liu Pichang, archival data and other internal documents confirm that municipal and provincial leaders in Tianjin knew full well that peasants were starving. Top officials in Tianjin received detailed reports of rural looting, starvation-related illnesses, and deaths throughout 1959, 1960, and 1961. Nine times over the course of three days in late 1960, farmers looted granaries in Shengfang, directly west of Tianjin.<sup>19</sup> In December 1960, when more than two hundred peasants besieged a rice warehouse in Tianjin's south suburbs, one looter was shot and killed by a militia guard.<sup>20</sup> In other parts of Hebei, including villages in the Tianjin region, commune organizations had completely collapsed and instances of people abandoning and selling children were "occurring often."<sup>21</sup> In January 1961, Tianjin leaders learned that 217,286 people suffered from edema during the previous year in the fourteen rural counties surrounding the city. More than two thousand had died from the condition, the report noted. Also in 1960, more than 28,000 people had been poisoned from eating dirt, seeds, or other non-edible items (we do not know how many died, but during two weeks in April, almost 1,900 people suffered poisoning in Wuqing county and 21 of them perished).<sup>22</sup>

City leaders dispatched work teams to investigate the perilous situation in

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*wenshi ziliao xuanji* 79 (October 1998): 114.

<sup>19</sup> NBCK 3155 (December 28, 1960): 14-15.

<sup>20</sup> Guo Fengqi 郭凤岐, ed., *Tianjin tong zhi: gongan zhi* 天津通志: 公安志 [Tianjin gazetteer: Public security gazetteer] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2001), 43.

<sup>21</sup> NBCK 3052 (May 8, 1960): 5-7.

<sup>22</sup> HPA, 878-2-45C, 32-33. On Wuqing, see *Tianjin tong zhi: gongan zhi*, 42.

villages. In February 1961, a newly formed task force called the Tianjin Village Livelihood Office (Nongcun renmin shenghuo bangongshi) sent investigators to Shigezhuang commune in Renqiu county. The work team's summary report began: "The main problems are that most cafeterias are doing poorly and the masses' lives are awful. The situation of illnesses and deaths is extremely serious." Villagers were so exhausted that instead of drawing well water they drank standing water from fetid pits. "Deaths are increasing by the month," the report continued. In November 1960, 90 commune members had died. In December, 190 more perished; and in January 1961, 251 died. Rural cadres hoarded grain and beat or fined villagers who tried to steal it. The work team in Shigezhuang discovered more than 700 cases of people being tied up and beaten; 10 people had been beaten to death.<sup>23</sup>

Wan Xiaotang, Tianjin's top leader, read such reports and even traveled to villages himself, but he was overwhelmed by the scale of the disaster. The tragedy pained Wan, who had been born and raised in a Shandong village, but even more frustrating was his impotence in the face of calamity. Wan went to Wuqiao county in February 1960, where he saw haggard villagers crying at freshly-dug grave mounds. In October, he traveled to Cangxian. There, an ill-advised policy to plant paddy rice on dry alkaline soil had doomed the fall harvest. "Do the peasants know how to plant, or do we know how to plant?" Wan asked, referring to officials who made irrational agricultural decisions during the leap. "We cannot have this type of lunacy ever again," he said. An increasingly fatalistic Wan seemed resigned to the fact that people

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<sup>23</sup> HPA, 878-2-45C, 58, 60.

would starve to death in villages. “We cannot just suck crops out of the ground,” he said over a meager meal with Cangxian county leaders. “It looks as if things will only get worse from now on.”<sup>24</sup> In speeches to county leaders in November 1960 and April 1961, Wan told cadres that the solution was to explain the situation to the masses and to replace non-existent staples with “food substitutes” (*gua cai dai*).<sup>25</sup> But this was a last ditch measure that came too late for many villagers.

### Tianjin Gets Priority

Wan Xiaotang was defeated by the magnitude of famine in the countryside. Yet he took drastic measures to help Tianjin when hunger threatened the city. In January 1959, Tianjin leaders realized that food shortages might affect the ability of city residents to enjoy the traditional Chinese New Year dumpling meal. Wan Xiaotang sent grain director Liu Pichang to Shandong and Anhui to request assistance. Liu remembered, “We knew that these provinces also had difficulties, but if leaders [like us] showed up personally, it might help.” Shandong officials agreed to provide Tianjin with tons of such dumpling ingredients as wheat, beans, cabbage, onions, and ginger. In the Shandong provincial capital of Jinan, Liu bumped into his counterpart from Beijing, who was also there to procure dumpling supplies. Liu took a stroll through the city’s main vegetable market. The only items for sale in the Jinan market were spicy peppers and onions. Liu realized that Shandong was worse off than Tianjin

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<sup>24</sup> Wan Xiaotang jinian wenji bianjizu, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Wan Xiaotang jinian wenji bianjizu, 274-76, 288-90.

was, but he worked to ensure that Tianjin residents would enjoy their holiday dumplings.<sup>26</sup>

Tianjin leaders, all of whom lived and worked in the city themselves, did their utmost to protect urban residents. Central leaders based in Beijing also worked hard to prevent starvation in China's largest cities, even as peasants were dying in the countryside. In the summer of 1960, Liu Pichang attended a meeting convened by central finance minister Li Xiannian about how to guarantee adequate grain rations for China's three largest showcase cities: Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai. Liu remembered that at the time, a remote area in Sichuan province was the only place in China that had surplus grain that could be transferred to coastal urban centers. Liu traveled to Sichuan as Tianjin's representative and spent a month supervising the grain transfer, which required local women to carry sacks of grain down winding mountain paths.<sup>27</sup> This infusion was not enough to keep urban grain rations at pre-leap levels, however. On September 7, 1960, grain standards for all city residents were slashed nationwide.<sup>28</sup>

Even after this belt-tightening, in late 1960 Tianjin vice-mayor and finance and trade director Song Jingyi informed Wan Xiaotang that the city only had a three-day supply of grain left and that if the next scheduled food shipment failed to arrive on time, "there would be chaos." Wan sent Song to Beijing to report to central leaders

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<sup>26</sup> Liu Pichang, 115.

<sup>27</sup> Liu Pichang, 115-16.

<sup>28</sup> ZYWX, vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), 565-70.

about the imminent threat.<sup>29</sup> It was only at this point, when the food supplies of major cities like Tianjin reached crisis levels in December 1960, that central leaders arranged for foreign grain imports from Australia and Canada.<sup>30</sup> Top leaders in Beijing and Tianjin had been receiving reports about starvation in villages for well over a year, and had even personally visited famine-stricken rural areas. Yet they waited until China's largest cities were threatened to take drastic anti-famine measures.

Imports in late 1960 may have saved city residents from starvation, but food was still in short supply. In 1961, Tianjin again clashed with Hebei over scarce resources. On the eve of the central party work meeting in Lushan in August 1961, Wan Xiaotang called Tianjin's top economic planner Li Zhongyuan, who would be attending as part of the Hebei delegation. Just one month earlier, Tianjin's rural portfolio had been reduced to five nearby counties from the fourteen that had been added in 1958 and 1960. This must have come as a relief to city leaders who had been overwhelmed by rural problems during the leap. In 1961, Wan Xiaotang and Li Zhongyuan continued to prioritize the city.

Wan told Li to make sure central leaders knew that Tianjin's winter grain supply was tenuous. Wan's goal was to secure an increase in the total amount of grain allocated to Tianjin. In Lushan, Li Zhongyuan asked Hebei leaders Liu Zihou and Wu Yuannong to report Tianjin's difficulties to central leaders, but the next day, the

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<sup>29</sup> Wan Xiaotang *jinian wenji bianjizu*, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: Vol. 3: The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 23.

provincial leaders did not mention Tianjin at all. When Li asked about this omission, Hebei officials justified their decision, saying that compared with other areas, Tianjin's situation was not so bad. City leaders had seen with their own eyes that rural Hebei was much worse off than Tianjin. Even though the Hebei officials were correct, Li's job was to lobby on behalf of the city, not the countryside.

Upset, Li Zhongyuan called Wan Xiaotang and asked him to come to Lushan, but Wan demurred because Hebei leaders had left him off the list of meeting participants in the first place and his presence would have violated protocol. Wan told Li that it was up to him to inform central leaders about Tianjin's problems. Li finally got his chance during his previously scheduled address about light industry. Noticing that Premier Zhou Enlai and finance minister Li Xiannian were in the room, Li departed from his original talking points. He played up Tianjin's supply shortage and requested more beans. After the meeting, Li learned that his impromptu plea displeased Hebei officials, but he did not care because he had achieved his goal. "Party center took measures and helped to solve some of Tianjin's difficulties," Li remembered.<sup>31</sup>

Wan Xiaotang and Li Zhongyuan knew that central leaders were terrified of the prospect of urban starvation. All the Tianjin officials had to do was make an end run around Hebei provincial leaders and take their request directly to party center. Once they succeeded, Tianjin was guaranteed enough grain to make it through winter 1961. We have now seen evidence that urban leaders acted helpless when faced with

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<sup>31</sup> Wan Xiaotang jinian wenji bianjizu, 39-40.



widespread rural starvation, but they moved quickly and decisively when urban food supplies dwindled. Why the difference? Did top city officials view the lives of rural people as somehow less valuable than urbanites? The different treatment afforded to urban and rural China during the famine can be attributed to cities holding the upper hand in political turf battles over resources, as well as to a reluctance to openly admit mistakes and problems.

China's coastal cities were showcases of socialist industry. By comparison, rural areas were invisible to the outside world. With very few exceptions, foreign residents, including journalists, diplomats, teachers, and students, were barred from leaving urban areas. During the Mao era, signs reading "no foreigners allowed beyond this point" were posted on major roads leading out of Chinese cities. If the worst of the famine and accompanying "chaos" were confined to the countryside, officials could attempt to perpetuate the lie that there was no mass starvation in China, and could claim that whatever hunger existed had been caused by natural disaster. Numerous internal reports and firsthand visits by city leaders contradicted this lie. So did the deteriorating situation in cities. Hunger, malnutrition, and anxiety about grain supplies became widespread in Tianjin.

### Hunger in Tianjin

Food became much scarcer in 1959. Rationing began then. There were many discussions about who would get how much. It was decided by how much people ate as a rule. I didn't eat much then, so I had one of the lowest rations. I had about twenty-six catties a month, eight ounces of grain a day (mostly cornmeal). There were not many vegetables. We began pickling parts of the veggies we used to throw away. There

was [sic] only a few ounces of oil a month, maybe two ounces a month. Very little sugar. Coal was also scarce. Once food is scarce, everything is scarce. Each region had its own quota depending upon how much food was available. It was better for us in the big cities than in the countryside.<sup>32</sup>

—Nini Liu, Tianjin Water Works employee

As Nini Liu's remembrance suggests, people in Tianjin knew that they were better off than villagers, but that did not mean that life was easy during the famine years. Many Tianjin residents showed symptoms of edema. Pressing the flesh on coworkers' and neighbors' arms and comparing how long the depression in the skin lasted (a telltale sign of malnutrition) became a common pastime in Tianjin offices, alleyways, and schoolyards. Tianjin's leaders received weekly top-secret reports of new edema sufferers in the city. Between February 24 and 28, 1961, 4,871 new cases were reported. This contributed to a total of 673,430 cases since reporting began, meaning that more than a fifth of Tianjin's urban population was malnourished.<sup>33</sup>

Wan Xiaotang not only read reports about urban hunger, he conducted personal spot-checks. On the way home from his office one evening in 1960, Wan noticed that the lights were still on at the Public Security Bureau headquarters, where he had served as director during the 1950s. Wan stopped in and asked the staff why they were still working. He then instructed everyone to roll up their pant cuffs and to press on their bare legs. Nobody's skin bounced back—they all had edema. The next day Wan ordered the grain bureau to increase daily rations for public security cadres

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<sup>32</sup> Nini Liu was the daughter of F. C. Liu and Grace Divine Liu, a Tennessee native who lived in Tianjin for four decades. Cooper and Liu, 284.

<sup>33</sup> HPA, 878-2-45C, 57. It is unclear when the tally started.

because they were working late and needed extra meals.<sup>34</sup>

Not everyone in Tianjin was fortunate enough to benefit from Wan Xiaotang's personal intervention. After grain rations were cut in autumn 1960, families struggled to make ends meet. Wei Rongchun, still working as a factory supervisor and union official in Tianjin in late 1959 and early 1960, remembered that of the thirty cadres in his work unit, he was the only one who did not have edema. Even in normal times he did not eat much, but it also helped that he had a special deal with a waitress at the Masses' Restaurant in Tianjin. Wei went there after union meetings and became friendly with waitress number four, frequently praising her service and good attitude. She rewarded him by providing extra sesame flatcakes and soup in exchange for a bit of money under the table. This arrangement lasted for about a year, but Wei never learned her name ("it would have been improper to ask," he said). One day the waitress was gone, and Wei inquired about her. She had been promoted because of her excellent service. "Her promotion meant hardship for me," Wei said.

In survey of 161 households in a central Tianjin neighborhood conducted by the city's Policy Research Office at the end of 1960, about 60 percent had enough food to get through 27 or 28 days of the month, while 21 percent could make it through January 25, 1961, but only by watering down their meals. Seven other families were missing a week's worth of grain.<sup>35</sup> Some people quietly suffered, but

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<sup>34</sup> Wan Xiaotang *jinian wenji bianjizu*, 160.

<sup>35</sup> *Hebei jianshe* 河北建设 [Hebei construction] 521 (January 10, 1961): 28. I am grateful to Michael Schoenhals for sharing this source.

others made noise. When the Chentangzhuang neighborhood in Tianjin's Hexi district cut the rations of its 1,634 residents by a total of 5,500 kilos, people reacted furiously and fought for more grain, either by protesting or by altering and counterfeiting ration tickets. When residents heard about the reduction, they threatened to stage sit-ins at the neighborhood police station or told local officials, "You might as well just shoot me in the head."<sup>36</sup>

Some Tianjin residents were understandably perplexed when ration reductions were accompanied by propaganda about the purportedly plentiful agricultural harvest of fall 1960. Urbanites with a "capitalist" class label, who could be counted on to provide colorful complaints in classified public opinion reports, asked: "If it is a bumper crop, then why are things getting more and more scarce?" and "Since it is a bumper crop, then increase [our rations] by one or two kilos. Why do we need to economize?"<sup>37</sup> One Tianjin man assailed the euphemisms used by the regime to mask the extent of the crisis. "There is not enough grain to eat in villages and the hungry are fleeing to the northeast," he said. "In the past that was called 'fleeing a famine' (*taohuang*); now it is called 'blindly flowing' (*mangliu*), is it not the same?" Black humor was another way to handle the crisis. An engineer who was politically suspect because he had lived in Japan remarked, "In the future each year is going to get worse

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<sup>36</sup> HDA, 43-2-23C, 103.

<sup>37</sup> China's communist regime cultivated informers and journalists who would regularly report to leaders on the "mood," or "thought trends" (*sixiang dongtai*) of the masses. The Soviet Union under Stalin also relied on such internal reports to gauge public opinion. See Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*.

and worse, we will have to import vegetables, and even the air will be rationed.” He added that he wanted to go back to Japan.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout Tianjin, residents responded to food shortages by refusing to work. Some workers agreed to accept less grain only on the condition that they could follow the “five don’t do’s” (*wu bu gan*): “one, no meetings; two, no night shift; three, don’t do urgent assignments (*tuji renwu*); four, don’t do heavy work; five, don’t take part in social activities.” In October 1960, nine party members requested to withdraw from the party because they could not bring themselves to volunteer for reduced grain rations. Bi Yuanzhen at the Tianjin Number Two Cotton Spinning Plant quit the party, saying, “I eat a lot, I can’t cut [my rations].”<sup>39</sup>

Frantic rumors spread about what might come next. Some people said that the value of grain tickets had been slashed in half, or that old people and children were only allowed to eat “eight treasures noodles,” not grain. Some warned that “in three months, the great war will start.” One wit put the famine in comparative perspective, saying, “One-third of the people in the Soviet Union starved to death when they went down the socialist road.” Others were more hopeful: “America has sent two boats with rice and flour to lend to us, in twenty days life will get better.”<sup>40</sup>

Tianjin residents smuggled food between city and countryside in order to help both themselves and their rural relatives. At first, in 1958, people sent grain out of

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<sup>38</sup> NBCK 3109 (September 14, 1960): 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> NBCK 3129 (November 2, 1960): 9.

<sup>40</sup> NBCK 3129 (November 2, 1960): 9.

Tianjin. On one day in May, city officials set up twenty-six checkpoints on the roads and waterways leading out of the city and discovered 1,800 instances of people carrying grain out of Tianjin, including women strapping grain to their bellies and pretending to be pregnant, and shipments of sealed coffins full of smuggled food.<sup>41</sup> Later, when conditions worsened in the city, urban work units and individuals sought out food in relatively well-off villages. In early 1959, Tianjin factories and elementary schools sent cadres to suburban villages to buy vegetables. The Tianjin city government ordered work units to stop this practice: “Because the cabbage on the market is often delayed and of poor quality, when city residents see cadres carrying vegetables home they all ask about it. This has a negative impact.”<sup>42</sup>

City people without connections could rely only on the overstretched urban food supply network. Tensions mounted at neighborhood grain shops, where harried shop workers squabbled with hungry customers. In June 1962, when one Tianjin woman named Wang purchased dried yam chips (a common substitute food at the time), she forgot to get her ration booklet back from a female clerk named Su. When Wang returned and Su refused to give back the booklet, saying, “I have the authority, and this is the way it is going to be,” the two women began to curse and spit at each other. Other people waiting in line took Wang’s side and threatened to beat the rude clerk. The grain shop manager had to apologize and hold off the angry crowd until

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<sup>41</sup> *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 24 (June 16, 1958): 14.

<sup>42</sup> *Tianjin shizheng zhoubao* 7 (February 16, 1959): 9.

police officers arrived to defuse the situation.<sup>43</sup>

### Crime and the Black Market

Police officers had their hands full during the famine years in Tianjin. In addition to disputes caused by short nerves at neighborhood grain shops, urban theft was on the rise. Criminal behavior ranged from pilfering to armed robbery. In late 1961, nine of the twenty-six employees at a neighborhood nursery were found to be stealing food that was intended for the children. One woman took food fifty-eight times; she was finally caught when the nursery's chef discovered her stealthily pouring cooking oil into her own container. Another woman stashed twelve pieces of the children's fish in her lunch box. The nursery workers' behavior was criticized as evidence of "corrosive bourgeois ideology," and they were disciplined by their work unit.<sup>44</sup>

Police did not get involved when nursery workers stole food from children, but they took notice when a thief broke into the home of one of Tianjin's top leaders. In 1960, public security officers informed Tianjin party secretary Zhang Huaisan that they had caught a burglar stealing flour from his home. They asked Zhang how to handle the matter. The party secretary was magnanimous. "People do not have anything to eat," Zhang said. "If this thief has any other illegal behavior, then deal with him according to the law. But if this grain is the only thing you have on him,

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<sup>43</sup> HDA, 1-6-15C, 27.

<sup>44</sup> HDA, 1-6-15C, 45.

then forget it, let him take it.”<sup>45</sup> Robbers sometimes got away with much more than a few bags of grain. In March 1962, thieves jumped over the gate of an electrical machinery factory in Tianjin’s central Heping district. The intruders killed two employees who were on guard duty, cracked the factory safe, and escaped with 10,000 yuan and 1,000 ration tickets for food and other goods. They were never caught.<sup>46</sup> Later in the year, a pistol-wielding man wearing a blue coat and a worker’s hat walked into a bank on Dali Road in Tianjin’s former British concession and demanded cash. When employees put up resistance, the bank robber killed one and wounded another before fleeing the scene.<sup>47</sup>

Many people engaged in illicit behavior found small urban inns to be ideal hiding places. In 1961, public security officials inspected residents of more than three hundred inns in Hebei’s five largest cities, including Tianjin. Of the 1,200 criminals identified during the investigation, 1,059 were speculators and profiteers, most of whom had rented long-term rooms at the inns, where they conducted black market trades.<sup>48</sup> During the famine, Tianjin’s black markets swelled with goods, including food from rural areas that had weathered the famine without major losses.

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<sup>45</sup> Zhang Huaisan jinian wenji bianjizu 张淮三纪念文集编辑组, ed., *Zhang Huaisan jinian wenji* 张淮三纪念文集 [Collected writings commemorating Zhang Huaisan] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1999), 296.

<sup>46</sup> *Tianjin tong zhi: gongan zhi*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> *Tianjin tong zhi: gongan zhi*, 461.

<sup>48</sup> Zhongyang gongan bu 中央公安部, *Gongan gongzuo jianbao* 公安工作简报 [Public security work bulletin] 52 (December 11, 1961): 4.



Between January 1 and January 15, 1961, Tianjin officials counted almost eight thousand cases of black market activity at thirteen different sites within the city. Of the cases, 22 percent involved people selling things they had produced themselves, 27 percent were people who had transported items between city and countryside, and 33 percent were speculators reselling goods at a profit.<sup>49</sup> One official investigator counted more than eight hundred people selling goods at one Tianjin market on a single day in January, and estimated that two thousand people were milling about, looking at goods, and blocking traffic. “There are no goods that the black market does not have,” the report claimed.<sup>50</sup>

Municipal cadres who patrolled the streets fought a losing battle against peddlers, according to Geng Chen, who was director of Tianjin’s Finance and Trade Commission during the early 1960s. The crux of the problem was that the city’s prohibition on private trade clashed with new central policies, including the Twelve-Article Emergency Directive of November 1960 and the Sixty Articles on Agriculture of March 1961. These measures aimed to ameliorate the rural famine by encouraging family plots and allowing limited markets in villages. Cities, perhaps fearing capitalistic “chaos,” were slower to permit free trade. Peasants wondered why they were allowed to sell their own vegetables at home, but were harassed by city officials when they tried to sell cabbage in the city. On several occasions, peddlers punched and drove away Tianjin officials when the latter attempted to stamp out market

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<sup>49</sup> NBCK 3173 (February 6, 1961), 5-6.

<sup>50</sup> NBCK 3167 (January 23, 1961), 10.

activity on city streets.<sup>51</sup>

In 1962, Tianjin authorities finally decided to regulate behavior that they had failed to eradicate. Thirty-seven market sites were legalized in July 1962. By the end of the year, a quarter of all pork and half of the fruit sold in Tianjin changed hands in peddlers' markets. The Finance and Trade Commission registered more than 7,000 people as peddlers, and of these 2,322 were "workers who had been downsized" (*beijingjian de zhigong*), a full 32.1 percent of the total (most of the rest, 62.2 percent, were unemployed city residents). Top party theorist Chen Boda came to Tianjin on an inspection visit shortly after the markets were legalized. Chen, who had advocated doing away with money during the leap, toured the sites and was aghast at what looked suspiciously like capitalism. The average peddler earned 125 yuan per month, far more than the 50-70 yuan a state worker would make. Some fishmongers made as much as 700 yuan. "Where have you lured the workers' class off to?" Chen demanded to know.<sup>52</sup> Geng Chen, who accompanied Chen Boda on the tour, might have been fired for telling him the truth: "downsizing" in the aftermath of the famine had driven the workers' class to the markets. Downsizing, or the rustication of workers who had entered the city after 1958, marked the final phase of Tianjin's leap, and is the focus of Chapter 4.

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<sup>51</sup> Geng Chen 耿忱, "Liushi niandai chuqi Tianjin shi kaifang tanfan shichang de qianqian houhou" 六十年代初期天津市开放摊贩市场的前前后后 [The whole story of opening peddlers' markets in Tianjin in the early 1960s], *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuanji* 79 (October 1998): 119.

<sup>52</sup> Geng Chen, 123-25.

### Conclusion: City, Countryside, and the Leap

People experienced the leap and its aftermath in diverse ways. One of the key variables that determined how people in China weathered the disaster was whether they were in a large city like Tianjin or in a rural commune like Shigezhuang in Renqiu county, where in 1961 a Tianjin-based work team discovered horrifying starvation and violence. Certainly the famine affected rural areas unevenly, and not everywhere was as unfortunate as Shigezhuang. But generally speaking, city residents had much greater odds of surviving the leap. So did the thousands of migrants who entered cities during the industrialization frenzy of 1958 and 1959. People in Tianjin were not immune from hunger during the lean years, but municipal and central leaders—well aware of the apocalyptic scene in the countryside—went to extraordinary lengths to prevent urban starvation, even brushing off comments from Hebei provincial officials that the city was relatively well-off.

It is ironic that a movement that aimed to dramatically improve living conditions in the countryside did more to poison rural-urban relations than any other event in the history of the People's Republic. In his recent pathbreaking article on the politics of rumors in early 1960s China, historian Steve Smith suggests that peasants understood the Great Leap famine as supernatural retribution, not as a disaster caused by flawed policy.<sup>53</sup> Smith's attention to the spiritual world, previously neglected in

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<sup>53</sup> S. A. Smith, "Talking Toads and Chinless Ghosts: The Politics of 'Superstitious' Rumors in the People's Republic of China, 1961–1965," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 2 (2006): 411-12.

studies of the People's Republic, is an important contribution. However, his explanation does not give savvy peasants enough credit. Spreading ghost stories was a safer form of resistance than talking about politics. But when it came to surviving the famine, the most useful rumors must have centered on finding enough to eat. The Wuqing peasants who went to beg in Tianjin after hearing claims that there was plenty to eat in the city indicate that rural people knew where food was most likely to be found. Surely villagers, themselves experts in agricultural production, did not believe that cities were blessed with sufficient grain because urbanites were somehow better at placating the gods through rituals. The uneven toll of the famine laid bare the inequity of a political and economic system that valued and protected cities—and the people fortunate enough to live in them—more than villages. Peasants were painfully aware of this inequity.

#### 4. Drastic Measures: The Great Downsizing of 1961-1963

For Wei Rongchun, it was time to go home.<sup>1</sup> It was late 1960 in Tianjin, and the twenty-seven-year-old factory worker and union chairman had been away from his family long enough. Wei was one of more than 10 million city workers nationwide who returned to their home villages in the aftermath of the disastrous Great Leap famine. Several hundred thousand people left Tianjin for the countryside between 1961 and 1963.<sup>2</sup> But contrary to accounts that emphasize the “coercive” or “forced” nature of urban-rural migration during the Maoist period—particularly the massive rustication of the early 1960s—Wei Rongchun left Tianjin voluntarily.<sup>3</sup> He was the first in his belt-making factory to sign up to “support agriculture,” and his boss was so taken aback that he tried to talk Wei out of leaving. His boss did not want to lose an employee with Wei’s skills and know-how. “I am a party member, I should lead the way in responding to the party’s call,” Wei argued, referring to the August 10, 1960

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewee 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Dangdai Zhongguo de Tianjin*, 1:127, puts the number at 400,000, but more recent migration statistics suggest that the number was lower.

<sup>3</sup> Solinger refers to “coercive repatriation” and a “forced exodus” with “deportations” after 1960. Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden call the downsizing a “forced population transfer.” Persuading workers to return to their home villages sometimes involved coercive tactics and was obligatory for workers and family members who arrived in cities after 1958. However, using such words as “coercive” and “forced” oversimplifies the downsizing process. Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 39; Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 19.

central directive ordering the entire nation to “do agriculture and grain in a big way.”<sup>4</sup> The matter was settled. Wei’s application letter to return to his village in Baodi county, about fifty miles north of Tianjin, was approved, and his *hukou* changed from “non-agricultural” to “agricultural.”

What Wei did not tell his disappointed boss was that back in the village, his family needed him. Wei’s father had recently hurt his leg in an accident, rendering him unable to do heavy farm work or shoulder buckets of water (a crucial daily task in north Chinese villages, where wells were often a long distance from homes). Wei also failed to mention that he had only seen his wife for a few days each year since they had married in the early 1950s. It was time to think about starting a family. Almost ten years after arriving in Tianjin, Wei returned home. His time as a city worker had changed him permanently, and his return would change his village for the better.

This chapter sheds light on the human consequences of an unstudied but crucial moment in the history of the People’s Republic. Few people outside of China know much about the downsizing (*jingjian*) of the early 1960s, and aside from Tiejun Cheng’s doctoral dissertation, no works in English devote more than a few paragraphs to the event.<sup>5</sup> This is partly because the Maoist regime, embarrassed by its retreat from the grandiose goals of the Great Leap Forward, prohibited newspaper and

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<sup>4</sup> ZYWX, vol. 13, 516-26.

<sup>5</sup> Cheng, 125-33. One notable book in Chinese on the massive urban-to-rural migration is Luo Pinghan 罗平汉, *Da qianxi: 1961-1963 nian de chengzhen renkou jingjian* 大迁徙: 1961-1963 年的城镇人口精简 [Great migration: the downsizing of urban population, 1961-1963] (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 2003).

broadcast reports on downsizing. Policies specifying the numbers and types of people who were supposed to return to villages were classified state secrets and are still tightly guarded. Downsized workers were comparable to later groups of sent-down youth in scope and scale. But unlike educated youth sent to villages during the 1960s and 1970s, most downsized workers never had the opportunity to return to cities, complain about their treatment in villages, and emigrate to the West to publish fashionably nostalgic or titillating memoirs. Academic scholarship and popular culture in both China and the West have privileged the experiences of urban sent-down youth, obscuring equally important moments of rural-urban contact.

More than 20 million rural people moved to Chinese cities during the feverish industrialization drive of the Great Leap Forward. Sending these migrants back to their villages in the early 1960s was an attempt to fix the imbalance between agriculture and industry that had contributed to food shortages and starvation. Contrary to what we might expect, given the guaranteed rations and benefits received by urban residents in the planned socialist economy, for some people cities were not necessarily more desirable places to live than villages in the aftermath of the leap. As famine conditions improved, policies restricting family plots and rural commerce loosened, and urban factories closed down, returning home to villages appeared attractive to some migrants.

When urban work units and neighborhood committees received orders to reduce the urban population in 1961, millions of people in cities were faced with a vexing choice: follow party policy and return to the countryside, or fight to hold onto

the benefits of city life, including salaried work, subsidized housing and health care, better educational opportunities, infrastructure, and entertainment options. Some people like Wei Rongchun quickly volunteered to head for the countryside, even though they were not required to do so (only workers who had arrived in Tianjin after 1958 were subject to mandatory repatriation). Others took advantage of a full repertoire of protest techniques to resist rustication, including sit-ins, arguments, petitions, and suicide attempts. Such resistance was sometimes successful, especially when it was framed in terms of family obligations and duties.

The leap and its aftermath marked the most intense period of rural-urban contact since the Communists had come to power in 1949. Downsizing was a series of high-stakes interactions between city and village people—city people who were mostly ex-villagers themselves, and ex-villagers who were on the verge of becoming ex-city people. This chapter will first trace central leaders' stuttering steps toward a return-to-village program, and will then explore the variety of individual and collective responses to the policy. I conclude by assessing the impact of returned workers on their home villages.

#### Orders from the Top: Explaining the Decision to Downsize

After several years of listening to sunny reports that ignored their worsening reality, people in Tianjin, including those originally from villages, were desperate for solutions that matched the magnitude of the leap disaster. Sweeping solutions became possible after summer 1960, when top leaders met in Beidaihe and discussed



economic recovery options that would bring an end to the leap. The main challenges were to adjust agricultural organization and fix the imbalance between grain producers and grain consumers. Wang Man, head of the Hebei provincial labor bureau, understood the problem as follows: since 1958, the leap's overemphasis on industry had drawn huge numbers of peasants into the cities. This meant that salary payments far outstripped original budget plans. More money was put into circulation to pay the new workers' salaries, leading to urban inflation and a decline in city living standards. At the same time, the new workers drained grain supplies, so peasants were forced to sell more grain to the state at low prices, causing shortages in the countryside. Too many workers on the job negatively impacted productivity in factories, which led to declines in state revenues, and the depleted rural labor force was unable to increase agricultural yields.<sup>6</sup>

The beginnings of a policy that would balance agriculture and industry appeared in the August 10 "do agriculture and grain in a big way" directive. This document was the only push that workers like Wei Rongchun needed to return to their villages. The first item of the directive, which appeared on the front page of *People's Daily* on August 25, was to "squeeze out all of the labor force that can be squeezed out, and replenish the agricultural front, primarily the grain production front."<sup>7</sup> The August 10 directive and others like it in late 1960 called for a shift in the labor force,

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<sup>6</sup> Wang Man 王漫, *Liushiliu nian de huigu* 六十六年的回顾 [Recollections of sixty-six years] (Self-published memoir, n.d.), 330-31.

<sup>7</sup> ZYWX, vol. 13, 517.

but gave no sense of the scale of the proposed transfer and remained focused on the usual suspects who had been targeted for removal from large cities like Tianjin during the mid-1950s: temporary workers, people in odd jobs (*qinza renyuan*), and the “blindly flowing” population. It would take the endorsement of Mao Zedong for the movement to become specific, targeted, and massive.

Mao’s stamp of approval at the end of 1960 initiated the downsizing policy that would take shape in the coming year. Mao finally came on board in late October, directing all provinces to redirect as many industrial workers as possible to agriculture.<sup>8</sup> At a central work meeting on December 30, 1960, the chairman was much more specific and determined. “It will be one hell of a mess if the 26 million newly added people do not go back [to villages],” he said, speaking of the rural migrants who had flooded cities during the leap. “Pushing them back down is difficult, but they definitely must be pushed back down.”<sup>9</sup>

After Mao spoke, the removal of millions of rural migrants from Chinese cities was much closer to becoming reality, but those who would be affected by his order had little idea what was about to hit them. Crude “do agriculture and grain in a big way” propaganda provided few clues that the slogan was more than lip service, let alone the prologue to the rustication of millions of people. An oral propaganda outline

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<sup>8</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution: Vol. 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 324.

<sup>9</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 中共中央文献研究室, ed., *Chen Yun zhuan* 陈云传 [Biography of Chen Yun] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2005), 1238.

drawn up for cadres in Hebei province began, “The current situation is an excellent situation.” This preposterous opening would immediately signal to listeners that the party was still out of touch with reality. “Agriculture is the base of the national economy, and grain is the base of the base,” the outline continued. “Why is this? Because people need to eat every day, three meals a day. Eating two meals a day feels a bit awkward, and eating only one is just plain unbearable.”<sup>10</sup> Here, finally, was a public admission from the party that the current situation, although still “excellent,” was untenable. Yet one might expect skeptical listeners to respond, “I had zero meals today.”

The outline’s claim that agricultural labor was the most glorious kind of work did provide hope for some. Rural cadres who propagandized the outline in speeches actually disparaged industry, warming the heart of at least one peasant in Wuqing county, directly northwest of Tianjin. “Why the heck is the worker’s class ‘elder brother,’ anyway?” the man asked, referring to the longstanding practice of newspapers referring to city workers as “elder brothers” (*gongren lao da ge*) and peasants as “younger brothers” (*nongmin xiongdi*). “I have not understood this for a long time,” he continued. “Everyone’s got to eat, it is impossible to do without agriculture, it is great that agriculture is the base now!”<sup>11</sup> Overly optimistic, the man thought that “doing agriculture in a big way” meant that peasants would finally be treated on par with city workers. He had no way of knowing that the purpose of

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<sup>10</sup> HPA, 864-1-236Y, 21-23.

<sup>11</sup> NBCK 3130 (November 4, 1960): 12.

recovery was to return the economy to 1957 normalcy, not to turn the worker-peasant alliance completely upside-down.

Yet the Wuqing peasant was not alone in misinterpreting pro-agriculture propaganda. Grassroots officials giving speeches about the new policy told peasants that their lives would soon be the same as, or even better than, those of city people. Young cadres in Wuqing, Wuqiao, and Cangxian counties urged villagers who had spent time in Tianjin to speak about the bitterness of city life. One said, “In the city, workers not only get dirty and tired when they work, but they have to sleep outside in the courtyard when it is cold. When you compare the two, the city is like hell and our home is like heaven.” The purpose of this story, which accurately reflected the lives of some city laborers (especially temporary workers from villages), was to keep young villagers at home working the fields. Yet the remark was highlighted in a report to city leaders as an example of “talking irresponsibly.”<sup>12</sup> It was politically incorrect to disparage cities.

Other village cadres faced criticism for changing the phrase “reform the backward appearance of villages in three years” to “eliminate the difference between city and countryside in three years.” By the end of 1960, it was no longer acceptable to speak of eliminating the rural-urban gap. When a cadre in Wuqing county tried to dissuade village youths from going to Tianjin, telling them, “hold on for two or three more years, by then city and countryside will be the same,” he was censured for “recklessly making vows.” It was hopelessly unrealistic for him to predict that “they

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<sup>12</sup> NBCK 3130 (November 4, 1960): 12.

live in fancy foreign buildings in the city but we will live in them too, the air here will be better than in the city, and maybe city people will come running out to our village!”<sup>13</sup> This Wuqing cadre had failed to realize that the utopian dream of equal wealth for city and village had died. With the leap’s tragic failure, Mao had lost hope in rural China’s potential for revolutionary change. After 1960, the best case scenario reverted to “reforming” the countryside’s “backward appearance.”

The appearance of many villages would certainly change with an influx of returned workers, but how to pull off the transfer was still up in the air during the first half of 1961. Even though Mao had explicitly approved the idea at the end of December 1960, Roderick MacFarquhar speculates that some members of the party’s central committee were opposed to sending millions of city workers to villages all at once because of the immense difficulty of the task.<sup>14</sup> By the time the central committee met on May 31, advocates of large-scale downsizing had won out.

At the central committee’s work meeting, President Liu Shaoqi and economic czar Chen Yun argued that the only choice left was to reduce China’s “non-agricultural population.” Liu spoke frankly, saying that the party was acting like a landlord by squeezing peasants for grain. He also admitted that the party’s top leaders had assumed an urban identity, placing them in opposition to rural people. “Currently city people—that means us—are competing with peasants over rice, meat, oil, and eggs to eat,” Liu said. “Many things were completely bought up by us, and the

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<sup>13</sup> NBCK 3130 (November 4, 1960): 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> MacFarquhar, *Origins: Vol. 3*, 32.

peasants are unhappy. If it keeps up like this, a sharp conflict will arise in the worker-peasant alliance.”<sup>15</sup> Liu was not advocating an amendment of the worker-led alliance, but he did realize that the well-being of city people was threatened if the party squeezed peasants too hard.

Rural China could not support such a large non-agricultural population, Liu argued. He allowed that some workers might have difficulty understanding why they were being cut, but held that they would warm to the idea of returning to villages when they heard about official sanction of family plots and the resurgence of sideline production. “When the situation in villages gets better, it will be easy to mobilize workers to return,” Liu said.

At the same meeting, Chen Yun agreed that family plots were key in ensuring that people in both cities and villages had enough to eat. Chen addressed critics of rustication who said that returned workers would have to eat no matter where they were. He estimated that each returned worker would on average need 75 kilos less of state grain annually (thanks to harvests from private plots plus savings in grain

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<sup>15</sup> Renmin chubanshe ziliao shi 人民出版社资料室, *Pipan ziliao: Zhongguo Heluxiaofu Liu Shaoqi fangeming xiuzhengzhuyi yanlun ji* 批判资料: 中国赫鲁晓夫刘少奇反革命修正主义言论集, 1958.6-1967.7 [Materials for criticism: collection of counter-revolutionary revisionist utterances by China’s Khrushchev Liu Shaoqi, June 1958-July 1967] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe ziliao shi, 1967), 176.

The text of Liu’s speech in the above source differs from the version in ZYWX, vol. 14 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 357, where Liu’s explicit references to city people as “us” (*chengliren, ye jiu shi women*) and goods being bought up by “us” (*bei women shougou qilai*) are omitted. The latter source also changes “worker-peasant alliance” (*gongnong lianmeng*) to “between workers and peasants” (*gongnong zhi jian*). Based on central leaders’ hands-on involvement in its production, I believe the 1967 text is more accurate (see MWG, vol. 13, 422-23).

transport and processing). This meant that a return of 20 million workers would save the state 1.5 million tons of grain.<sup>16</sup>

Both Chen and Liu stressed that downsizing would be a difficult task and that problems, even protests, were sure to arise. But according to Chen, the only other option—increased requisition of villagers’ grain—was a non-starter. Villagers had already been pushed past the breaking point. The great downsizing was officially under way. At the May 31 work meeting, party leaders proposed a nine-point program specifying how to reduce the urban population.<sup>17</sup> The document, officially released by party center on June 16, ordered a reduction of more than 20 million urban people over the course of three years: 10 million in 1961, at least 8 million in 1962, and the rest in the first half of 1963. All “black people and black households” (meaning those without urban *hukou*) living in large and medium-sized cities were to be investigated.<sup>18</sup> Each province, city, and urban district set numerical targets. On June 16, the Tianjin party committee met and decided to cut the urban population by 300,000 by 1963. A year later, Tianjin’s overall target jumped to 400,000.<sup>19</sup>

City authorities now knew how many people to remove, but many confusing

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<sup>16</sup> ZYWX, vol. 14, 374. See also MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution: Vol. 3*, 32.

<sup>17</sup> *Chen Yun zhuan*, 1242.

<sup>18</sup> ZYWX, vol. 14, 412-13.

<sup>19</sup> MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution: Vol. 3*, 33. See also Zheng Zhiying 郑质英, ed., *Tianjin shi 45 nian dashiji* 天津市 45 年大事记 [Forty-five year chronology of Tianjin] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1995), 202; and Wan Xiaotang 汪小棠, *jinian wenji bianjizu*, 333.

logistical questions remained unanswered. Who was supposed to leave the cities? What about their family members? Would people who were downsized receive any compensation? Should rightists, capitalists, and other political outcasts be handled differently from other downsized workers? Similarly, villages needed guidance on how to house, feed, and assign farm work to the influx of returned workers. Over the course of 1961 and 1962, a series of directives addressed these issues.<sup>20</sup>

A June 28, 1961 circular tackled the most pressing questions. All new workers who had come from villages since January 1958 had to return home, unless they had become “production backbones” or skilled experts. Workers who had started their jobs before the end of 1957 should return to villages only if they were genuinely willing to do so. Generally, people who were originally urban residents would not be sent away. These provisions targeted rural migrants who had moved to cities in the leap’s free-for-all. Downsized workers would receive severance packages according to the time they had spent on the job, and would receive travel and food stipends for their journey home. The funds were to be paid by the workers’ original work units.<sup>21</sup>

Wei Rongchun volunteered to leave his position at the belt factory and return

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<sup>20</sup> An April 25, 1962 order from the Hebei Provincial Downsizing Small Group mandated that people labeled as counterrevolutionaries, landlords, rich peasants, and bad elements could be downsized but their severance payments were set at half the amount of regular returned workers. But on July 7, the State Council ruled that capitalist-class businesspeople should not be sent to villages during the downsizing. Hebei sheng laodong ju 河北省劳动局, ed., *Jingjian zhigong daiyu wenjian huibian (1961-1966)* 精简职工待遇文件汇编 [Collected documents on the treatment of downsized employees, 1961-1966] (n.p., 1966), 20, 83-84

<sup>21</sup> ZYWX, vol. 14, 505-7.



to his village before any of these guidelines had been issued. Because he started work in Tianjin in 1951, he would not have been targeted for mandatory downsizing, but he jumped to volunteer. When he offered to leave, there was no discussion of compensation, nor did he expect any money. He wanted to go home for family reasons and did not need financial incentives. After he had been living in the village for several months, his factory called the commune headquarters and left a message telling Wei to come to Tianjin to collect his severance payment. Wei did not want to make the trip and did not realize how much money was involved. He told the factory to send the funds. He was pleasantly surprised when he received a lump sum equivalent to thirteen months of his salary.

All downsizing plans, quotas, and policies, including severance packages like Wei's, were kept secret. Internal orders prohibited newspaper or radio reports on the program, and limited propaganda to discussions within work units.<sup>22</sup> When factories and residential committees received orders to begin cutting in mid-1961, their first task was to establish how many people in each work unit or neighborhood met the conditions for mandatory rustication. After a head count, persuasion began in small group and one-on-one meetings. Although propaganda in 1961 was more nuanced than the crude formulations of 1960, officials still struggled to explain the downsizing to targeted workers and families.

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<sup>22</sup> I came across a gag order issued by *People's Daily* and the New China News Agency on March 22, 1962, but judging by the content of newspapers in 1960 and 1961, downsizing reports had been prohibited since the beginning of the movement. HPA, 864-1-269Y, 56.

A few Tianjin factories and an urban district party office were criticized for openly using secret abbreviations, such as “begin the double-cut movement” (meaning cut population and grain rations). Propagandists were instructed to stick to such well-worn euphemisms as “support agriculture” and were prohibited from saying “cut” or “shrink,” which made people feel like they were being fired.<sup>23</sup> Whatever it was called, salaried workers knew that “supporting agriculture” meant becoming an unpaid farmer.

A propaganda outline issued by Hebei provincial authorities suggested ways to make “return to village” candidates feel better. Villagers who had come to the city during the leap, “whether they were hired according to rules and procedures or whether they came to cities on their own,” were to be thanked for their contributions to industry. They should feel grateful for the “ideological awakening” and new technical skills they had gained under the tutelage of the urban proletariat. But now the nation needed them to make even greater contributions on the agricultural front.<sup>24</sup> How would workers respond to this line of argument?

### Responses to Downsizing

Many factors came into play as people decided how to handle their new dilemma. How a factory or neighborhood committee approached return-to-village targets often colored responses: harsh or confusing orders spurred resistance, while reasoned persuasion might lead to grudging acceptance. Much more important was

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<sup>23</sup> NBCK 3252 (August 4, 1961): 9.

<sup>24</sup> HPA, 864-1-257Y, 7.

each individual's personal circumstances. For almost everyone involved, the stakes were extremely high, touching upon considerations as varied as finances, family, housing, and pride. For some, returning home meant losing a job and a major source of guaranteed income. This prospect was devastating. But for others, in the recently relaxed economic atmosphere, downsizing meant new, informal opportunities to make money through trade or sideline production. Some returned villagers were proud to use the skills and connections they had gained in the city to help with rural collective projects. But many felt ashamed at having to leave positions of genuine responsibility, and feared that fellow villagers would see them as failures.

Villagers definitely saw Wang Kaiwen as a failure. Wang, born in 1933, grew up in Tianjin.<sup>25</sup> His family was originally from Duliu, a small market town in Jinghai county directly southwest of Tianjin.<sup>26</sup> Wang began working in Tianjin's Hexi district government offices in 1951, delivering documents and handling other odd jobs. In mid-1961, Wang caught a respiratory illness and was recuperating at home in Tianjin. In July, two cadres from the Hexi personnel department visited Wang and convinced him to return to Duliu. Government offices, in addition to city factories, were under pressure to reduce non-essential staff, and while Wang was not a recent arrival to Tianjin, he was an obvious target. He fell into the category of "odd-jobs personnel," and he was sick and gullible. He wanted to please his bosses, hoped to get ahead at

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<sup>25</sup> Information about Wang is from HDA, 32-2-47C, and interviewee 15.

<sup>26</sup> Well known for its special vinegar, Duliu was larger than the average Jinghai village, but most of its residents were farmers with agricultural *hukou*.

his job, and did not consider the long-term implications of answering the party's call to support agriculture. One of the cadres told Wang that the assignment in Duliu would last for ten months. He was lying.

Wang followed directions and submitted his first application letter to return to Duliu on July 15, 1961. His letter is a revealing example of how a relatively uneducated city employee (Wang had attended two years of elementary school) distilled propaganda about rural China. In shaky handwriting, Wang wrote, "I will lead the way in rebuilding my home village...I will change the appearance of my home village along with the dear country people." Wang had absorbed propaganda about the need to reform and remake villages. Villages were also home to tough heroes steeped in "excellent revolutionary tradition," Wang wrote. Clearly differentiating himself from the rural people he was about to join, Wang pledged to learn from the "arduous, diligent, courageous, and excellent work style of the peasants." Wang praised Duliu villagers, but he certainly did not consider himself one of them.

Nor did Wang's parents want him to become a peasant. Wang's father, a worker at the Tianjin Construction Bureau, opposed his son's decision to go to Duliu. Wang was already twenty-eight and had no marriage prospects. His parents knew that if he was in the countryside with no salary and no urban *hukou*, it would be even more difficult to find a suitable partner. But the downsizing process had already been set in motion. The Hexi district government and party committee approved Wang's application on July 25 and sent his file to the Jinghai county's newly established

“Office to Shrink Non-agricultural Population and Support Agricultural Production.”<sup>27</sup>

Wang began having second thoughts. Before he was scheduled to leave, he told his superiors that he had changed his mind; he did not want to go to Duliu after all. His parents disapproved and his chronic respiratory problems were acting up, he said.

The cadres in charge of mobilizing Wang to leave Tianjin told him he had “thought problems,” but decided not to push him. Because he had started working at the district government well before 1958, they could not make him leave. According to a Hexi personnel office report, one month later Wang changed his mind again. He sought out district leaders and requested to be sent to Duliu, guaranteed in writing that he was ready to go, and said that this time there would not be any more problems. But Wang’s troubles had just begun.

Wang had probably done the math after hearing about how severance packages were calculated for returnees. He figured that he could pocket a large sum of cash and hang out in the village for a while before returning to Tianjin, which was only a few hours away by bicycle. On August 27, he went to Duliu accompanied by two Hexi district cadres carrying paperwork to transfer Wang’s *hukou* to Duliu. When he deposited 450 yuan of his 508 yuan severance payment (equivalent to ten months of his salary) in the Duliu bank, the Hexi officials said, “you are not allowed to spend it irresponsibly.” On his first night in Duliu, Wang stayed at his uncle’s house. It would take him until 1990 to undo what had happened that day.

Wang’s behavior after arriving in Duliu was less than exemplary. But the main

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<sup>27</sup> This office would later change its name to the Jinghai county “Downsizing Office.”

reason for his dissatisfaction was that his superiors had deluded him. Wang was led to believe that his stay in the village would be temporary and that he would be treated as a “sent-down cadre” (*xiafang ganbu*), not as an average commune member. He thought that as an employee of a city district, he would be considered an official and would be in a position of superiority in Duliu.

Leaders of factories and offices were under considerable pressure to meet rustication quotas, and had little guidance on how to carry out the complicated work. While some work units made threats or lied in order to force non-essential employees to leave, others did not want to get rid of any workers. Downsizing was also stressful for grassroots cadres charged with convincing workers to leave Tianjin.

According to an internal report from early August 1961, some Tianjin work units failed to inform workers that returning to villages was voluntary if they had started work before 1958. Factories also took advantage of downsizing to jettison undesirable employees. They targeted old and sick workers, people with bad family backgrounds, and workers who “acted up,” skipped work, lacked technical skills, or were “not needed for production.”<sup>28</sup> It was not surprising that factories would interpret downsizing as an opportunity to increase efficiency, in effect using rural China as a dumping ground.

Young, skilled workers who had arrived in Tianjin during the leap were more highly valued than older workers who did not have to leave. Enterprises pushed hard to keep their key employees, prioritizing the economic success of the work unit over

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<sup>28</sup> NBCK 3252 (August 4, 1961): 9.

restoring the national balance between agriculture and industry. In 1962, the Tianjin Construction Materials Company was in a bind. More than 90 percent of the company's 3,470 employees were from villages. If the company carried out the national downsizing policy, it would be decimated. Some workers, similar to Wei Rongchun, heard about the chance to return home and immediately volunteered to leave Tianjin. Leaders of the company pressured the volunteers to withdraw their applications by organizing youth league "backbones" and "activists" to "mobilize" people *not* to return to villages. The factory was using classic mass movement tactics to undermine the party's latest campaign. The strategy worked; workers withdrew their application letters and unpacked their bags.<sup>29</sup> Tianjin authorities responded to the problem by ordering work units to stop obstructing their employees from voluntarily returning to villages.<sup>30</sup>

Tianjin city leaders also criticized factories that were overly vigorous or slipshod in trying to get rid of workers. Some factories simply posted lists or announced the names of those who had to return to villages at meetings without explaining the policy or its rationale. After the director of the Heping District Mechanized Embroidery Collective read out the names of twenty-five downsizing targets, he said, "If you do not have any complaints, then go to the personnel department to do the paperwork. If you have complaints, I will wait and we can talk after the meeting." One worker went to the personnel department, but the other

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<sup>29</sup> HPA, 859-2-12C, 62b.

<sup>30</sup> HPA, 859-2-13C, 118a.

twenty-four surrounded the director and pleaded with him for six hours.

When workers tapped for downsizing expressed reluctance to leave Tianjin, some factories threatened them and even locked them up. At the Beiyang Cotton Mill, six of the ten downsizing targets in one workshop had already departed, but the other four refused to leave. The workshop party secretary became impatient and put each of the four in private rooms. “Because of your unclear understanding of returning to villages,” he said, “we have brought you here to improve your thought.” Two cadres were assigned to each hesitant worker to discuss thought problems full-time. The workers were prohibited from talking to one another and could only leave the room to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water.

One of the detained workers, named Pang, had come to Tianjin in 1950 and joined the party in 1958. In 1959 he was honored as a model worker and was awarded with a vacation at the Beidaihe beach resort. But as the famine hit and anxieties rose in Tianjin, Pang suffered from stomach problems and sold goods on the black market. In his private room, cadres slapped the table, glared at Pang, and forced him to sit up straight. In his defense, Pang said that conditions in his home village were difficult and that it would be impossible to feed his wife and four children there. As tensions escalated, Pang finally said, “I would rather die here than go.” A cadre named Liu said menacingly, “even if you die you will still have to go. When are you going to die? When will you get into a coffin? I will buy a wreath for you.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> HDA, 1-6-15C, 63-64. After Pang reported this treatment to higher levels of the city bureaucracy, his bosses were criticized. Eventually, Pang was convinced to leave Tianjin.



Tianjin workers from rural backgrounds did not respond meekly to threats, lies, and struggle sessions. Workers protested loudly and organized to resist the prospect of being removed from the city. Resistance to downsizing took many forms, from grumbling and complaining to posting big-character posters, writing petitions, and stealing factory property. Some return-to-village targets went home for a few days, then immediately came back to Tianjin. Others were so despondent at the prospect of losing urban benefits that they attempted suicide. These types of problems were exactly what economic czar Chen Yun feared when he outlined the downsizing program in mid-1961.

By the end of October 1961, downsizing work wrapped up for the year. Chen Yun felt great relief when he heard reports that 10 million people had already been transferred from cities to villages. “In the beginning, when we decided to cut people from cities, I was afraid that a lot of suicide-type situations would occur and that there would be many difficulties,” Chen said.<sup>32</sup> The downsizing of 1961 had gone more smoothly than Chen had expected for several reasons. First, people who were genuinely willing to return home left quickly when the party made them a decent offer. Also, in 1961 the leap crisis was still so acute that citizens recognized the need for drastic measures. By 1962, economic conditions had improved enough that it would be difficult to convince city residents that an additional eight million people nationwide had to return to villages. Most of the “situations” that Chen Yun dreaded occurred in 1962, not 1961.

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<sup>32</sup> *Chen Yun zhuan*, 1243.

In July 1962, the Hebei provincial downsizing office reported that “suicide incidents are occurring repeatedly in several regions.” During May and June, twenty-four people had attempted suicide in seven Hebei regions because of downsizing, and eleven had died. Seven had tried to kill themselves in Tianjin.<sup>33</sup> A woman named Li came to Tianjin from her home village in 1958 to work at a hat-making factory. In March 1962, factory management convinced her to resign because of a long illness that kept her from working. When she heard that the factory was sending workers back to their villages, she was afraid that she would have to leave Tianjin. Li hanged herself on the morning of May 8. Another woman, Liu, had been hired without permission at a Tianjin health clinic. On May 4, when she was mobilized to return to her village, she agreed to leave the city, but before her departure she became despondent and overdosed on sleeping pills. She was revived at the hospital.<sup>34</sup>

Suicide was an extreme reaction to the prospect of job loss and displacement. Grumbling, complaining, or simply ignoring orders to leave Tianjin were more common types of resistance. In spite of *hukou* and ration restrictions, people voted with their feet. Twenty-four of the sixty-six people sent back to villages from Tianjin’s Number Four Coal Briquette Factory came back to Tianjin after spending a short time at home.<sup>35</sup> They were presumably able to get their jobs back or find other work. People who refused to leave Tianjin echoed a common refrain, according to

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<sup>33</sup> HPA, 859-2-12C, 38.

<sup>34</sup> HPA, 859-2-10C, 71.

<sup>35</sup> NBCK 3252 (August 4, 1961): 8-9.

informants for the regime: “The city has four good things: fixed work hours, monthly wages, set grain rations, and guaranteed supply.”<sup>36</sup> Migrants in the city may not have been inherently biased against rural life, but they were reluctant to part with the guaranteed benefits of urban residence.

Many people saw through euphemisms about “cutting” or “reducing.” They complained that cutting people (*jian ren*) was the same as being unemployed (*shiye*, a social condition the Communists had purportedly eliminated in the early 1950s). “Whether you make dumplings or buns with pork filling, the taste is the same,” residents complained. Others used official rhetoric to poke fun at the party. Grassroots cadres sarcastically debated whether the current situation could be classified as an economic crisis. “An economic crisis in capitalist countries is when so many goods are produced that they cannot be sold and they have to be thrown into the ocean or destroyed,” a city cadre said. “Right now our country does not produce much and people cannot buy what they want,” he reasoned, “so it does not count as an economic crisis.”<sup>37</sup>

Complaints and satire were a good way to blow off steam, but were not effective in getting return-to-village targets off the hook. Organizing to make demands or petitioning to higher levels was risky for people being downsized, but it occasionally worked. Some targets explicitly referred to their legal rights, arguing that “mobilizing us to return to villages and not letting us live in the city means that there

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<sup>36</sup> HPA, 859-2-11C, 73a.

<sup>37</sup> HPA, 859-2-11C, 73a-73b.

is no freedom of residence. This is a violation of the constitution.”<sup>38</sup> This claim was technically correct, for China’s 1954 constitution guaranteed freedom of movement. But petitioners would not get very far with this line of argument. When Minister of Security Luo Ruiqing explained new household registration laws in early 1958, he called freedom of residence a “guided freedom” subordinate to the needs of socialist construction.<sup>39</sup> Persistent petitioners who repeatedly made demands risked being classified as “unreasonably causing trouble” (*wuli qunao*), as we shall see in the case of Wang Kaiwen, the unmarried messenger who was duped back to Duliu. Such a label in one’s personal file meant that future petitions were likely to be ignored or denied. But the threat of petitioning could be a potent weapon for aggrieved return-to-village targets, because factory management was wary of attracting attention from higher levels about problems and unruly behavior.

In 1958, twenty-one workers’ relatives were hired as temporary loaders at the Tianjin train station freight depot. During the downsizing of 1961, they were “not successfully cut.” In May 1962, management tried again and told the loaders they were being let go. In response, they organized, demanded answers, and sought a better deal. The workers pointed out that they had only signed a one-year contract, but had been working for longer than that and earned the same salary as permanent employees. They wondered why they were being fired when a leading cadre’s wife

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<sup>38</sup> HPA, 859-2-11C, 73a.

<sup>39</sup> Zhang Qingwu, “Basic Facts on the Household Registration System in China,” *Chinese Economic Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 100.

had just landed a permanent job. Finally, the loaders demanded continued grain ration stipends and said that a severance worth one and a half months of salary was unreasonable. After talks between management and the downsized loaders reached an impasse, thirteen loaders went to the State Council in Beijing to plead the group's case.<sup>40</sup> Recognizing the reality that they would have to leave their jobs, the workers tried to gain a more favorable settlement. When that failed, they played their ultimate trump card by petitioning in the capital.

In some factories, workers were in a much stronger bargaining position than management. Leaders at a radio factory in Tianjin were so afraid that return-to-village targets would refuse to leave that they caved in to virtually every demand. When workers saw that factory management would satisfy every request, their conditions for returning to villages spiraled out of control. Soon the workers began taking whatever they wanted from the factory, including bicycles and radio components, as management watched helplessly. A worker named Hao outfitted a radio repair shop in his home village with pilfered factory machinery; the shop reportedly made monthly profits of more than 1,000 yuan (Hao's monthly salary at the radio factory was probably no more than 50 yuan).<sup>41</sup> Workers ensured that they would not be returning to villages empty-handed by taking advantage of official fears of resistance and petitions.

Even if the radio factory workers and rail freight loaders managed to make

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<sup>40</sup> HPA, 859-2-10C, 72. We do not know the result of the loaders' petition.

<sup>41</sup> HPA, 859-2-12C, 39.

downsizing a better deal, most still lost their jobs and urban *hukou*. Bargaining and petitioning were usually ineffective for workers who wanted to hold on to their city jobs, benefits, and legal residency. But there was another way. Officials looked much more favorably upon individual requests for exemption from downsizing based on family considerations.

As we have seen, Wei Rongchun volunteered to return home because of family obligations. The opposite also occurred. Migrants in Tianjin who, according to policy, were required to return to villages, received special consideration because of family problems or duties. For some individuals, deciding how to handle the downsizing of the early 1960s hinged more on fulfilling domestic obligations than on weighing urban benefits against rural difficulties. Neighborhood officials responsible for deciding who had to leave Tianjin often responded humanely to emotional appeals about family situations. People who pleaded that the difficulty of rural labor compared unfavorably with the conveniences of city life were criticized for having thought problems. But authorities considered domestic issues legitimate reasons to stay in the city. Eradicating the traditional family was not even close to becoming a reality in early 1960s Tianjin. Instead, policy on the ground attempted to protect family values. Exemptions based on special family circumstances were the main reason that Tianjin had difficulty fulfilling its final downsizing quota.

The relaxation of migration controls during the leap encouraged families and couples to reunite in the city. It was the job of neighborhood residential committees to convince family dependents to leave Tianjin. As “do agriculture in a big way”

propaganda heated up in fall 1960, propagandists anticipated that recently arrived migrants would refuse to leave Tianjin for family reasons. They preemptively—and unsuccessfully—attempted to forestall this eventuality through a barrage of propaganda celebrating return-to-village models.<sup>42</sup>

In October 1960, *Tianjin Evening News* ran a series of articles praising village wives who separated from their city husbands, a city mother-in-law who encouraged her daughter-in-law to return to her village, and a woman who made her elderly rural mother go home. Zhang Shufen came to the city in 1958 and got married to a Tianjin man. She did a bit of housework every day and enjoyed strolling around and relaxing with her husband on his days off. One day Zhang suddenly realized that if China’s “village population all acted like me and ran to the city with nothing to do, unwilling to do agricultural labor, village labor power would shrink, and agriculture and socialism would not develop.” Supported by her family and neighbors, Zhang returned to her home village. The article did not discuss the effect of this separation on Zhang’s marriage. When another Tianjin wife decided to separate from her husband to support agriculture, her husband and mother-in-law supposedly said, “only by building up the great family of 600 million [Chinese] people can our small family be harmonious.”<sup>43</sup> Zhang’s message was that the big socialist “family” trumped the

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<sup>42</sup> This was before the official downsizing policy (and the accompanying media ban) went into effect in mid-1961.

<sup>43</sup> TJWB, October 6, 1960, 2.

nuclear family.<sup>44</sup>

Reality was more complicated. In December 1960, family members who had recently left Tianjin came back to get through the winter. A twenty-one-year-old rural woman named Ji came to Tianjin and married a city worker in 1958. She went home to Renqiu county with her one-year-old baby in November 1960, but returned to Tianjin a month later. “I have a baby so I cannot work in my hometown and nobody in the village provided for me, so I came back to Tianjin,” she said. Ji’s local police station in Tianjin granted her, and at least thirty-eight other neighborhood people in similar situations, temporary *hukou* and grain rations for three months. Those who had “flowed back” (*daoliu*) from villages were to be told that returning to villages was glorious, but decisions on their cases would be postponed until spring.<sup>45</sup>

In spring 1961, the original issues that led family members to flow back to Tianjin had not disappeared. Neighborhood committees and police stations argued about how to handle rural relatives. Mrs. Wang, née Yang, a sixty-four-year-old from Fengrun county in Hebei, came to stay with her son and daughter-in-law in Tianjin in 1960.<sup>46</sup> In August she was mobilized to return home because her husband was still in Fengrun. He was sick and Wang needed to care for him, so she left. In October, Wang came back to Tianjin. Because her *hukou* registration was still rural, she was

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<sup>44</sup> The nuclear family became an ideal urban type during the Republican period. See Susan L. Glosser, *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> HDA, 43-2-23C, 112.

<sup>46</sup> HDA, 43-2-23C, 173-81.



not entitled to any grain rations in Tianjin. Food was short in the Wang household and tensions ran high. Wang and her daughter-in-law's quarrelling finally ceased when Wang was granted a temporary three-month urban *hukou*.

When his mother's *hukou* was on the verge of expiring, Wang's son, a cadre at the Tianjin Number Four Cotton Mill, took action to keep her in the city. The file on Wang's case includes three letters written in early 1961. The first was from her village in Fengrun, explaining that she was old, had stomach problems, and nobody in Fengrun could take care of her. The second, from the union office at her son's factory, ostensibly "clarified" the factory cadre's family circumstances. The union pointed out that both Wang's son and his wife worked during the day, and suggested that the elderly Wang could help look after the couple's two young children.

The final letter, written by Wang's son on February 26, 1961, stressed family obligations (children should take care of their parents; grandparents should help look after grandchildren) that would strike a chord with Tianjin neighborhood officials and police officers:

Dear leading comrades of the return-to-village office and police station:

My mother, Mrs. Wang, née Yang, is sixty-four years old and has a stomach illness. In 1960, when she was mobilized to return to her village, my wife sent her *hukou* out with her. My mother gave birth to me and six brothers. Five of us live in Tianjin, one lives in Harbin, and one is at the Great Northern Wilderness State Farm in Heilongjiang. My father lives in our home village but has no labor power and relies on us brothers to support him.

Because my mother has no labor power, if she were to return home she could not work and would be no help to agriculture. The commune and village have already confirmed this. But three of us brothers belong to working couples and each of us has two or three children at home who need supervision. I therefore request that you show consideration for my work and for my mother's illness. I request

that you investigate and allow my mother to stay in Tianjin.

After reading this letter, Chengtangzhuang neighborhood cadres and police officers disagreed about what to do with Wang. “Little Li,” the official in charge of return-to-village work, was still angry that back in July 1960, Wang’s daughter-in-law did not mention Wang’s husband in Fengrun. To Little Li, it was crucial to know that the husband was in the village, presumably able to support Wang. He wanted to send her back.

Comrades at the police station acknowledged Little Li’s opinion, but requested that the neighborhood party committee consider Wang’s extenuating circumstances: not only was she old and unhealthy, but her husband was also rather elderly, and most of her children worked in Tianjin. The police station was leaning toward allowing her to stay. On March 10, 1961, five days after Little Li and the police station issued conflicting opinions, the neighborhood party committee agreed to give Wang a permanent urban *hukou* because she was quite elderly, her commune did not want her back, and “after returning she would increase the burden on her village.” This appeared to be the final word, but on March 14, the Hexi District Public Security Bureau concurred with Little Li, overruled the neighborhood office, and ordered local officials to continue to mobilize Wang to return to her native place, because she had support in her village. We can infer that if she had been widowed, there would have been no debate and she could have stayed legally in Tianjin.

The file ends on March 14, 1961, so we do not know if this second round of mobilizing Wang to leave the city was successful. But it is clear that the local cadres

and police officers charged with handling return-to-village cases were sympathetic to family-based claims. As downsizing peaked in 1961 and 1962, hundreds of family members who had arrived in Tianjin since 1958 were granted exemptions. In August 1962, cadres from the Number Four Road residential committee in Hexi district identified 293 return-to-village targets, but immediately disqualified 97 Tianjin wives whose only rural relatives were in their *niangjia* (a married woman's parents' home). "Owing to customs and habits, generally do not mobilize a woman back to her *niangjia*," the report read. It would have been shameful for a married woman to return alone to her parents' home. Eighteen others in the neighborhood were granted exemptions because they "truly cannot get along with" or had "disharmonious" relations with rural relatives. For grassroots urban cadres, customs and family squabbles were valid reasons for return-to-village targets to remain in Tianjin. This was not what Chen Yun had in mind when he drew up downsizing regulations in the first half of 1961, but the practical, humane aspect of family-based exemptions probably helped limit the disturbances that kept Chen up at night.

Others who were not immediately disqualified as downsizing targets were often able to convince local officials to leave them alone. A twenty-nine-year-old worker named Li at the Hexi district cooking utensil factory successfully persuaded leaders that she should be allowed to stay in Tianjin because she had three children, including an infant, and was pregnant again. One of Li's colleagues also gained an exemption because her husband was sick at home and she needed to take care of him. Another woman worker at the Hexi printing press had come to Tianjin in 1958,

apparently because her acrimonious relationship with her rural mother-in-law had given her a mental disorder. According to the Hexi Daily Use Articles Company, her mental state was still abnormal and she was not required to return to her village.<sup>47</sup>

Claiming special status because of family problems or obligations was the best way to avoid being sent back to villages. But there were definite limits to what authorities considered acceptable excuses. Caring for children and sick relatives was valid; love and spousal unity were not. In mid-1962, an internal bulletin reported that Tianjin employees were rushing to get married in an attempt to sidestep the downsizing. When work units tried to dissuade couples from having quick weddings, people complained, “this is not freedom of marriage, this is not following the marriage law.”<sup>48</sup> Even if the marriages went off successfully, in many cases they would not have exempted spouses with rural backgrounds from returning to villages. Guidelines from 1961 anticipated that “doing agriculture in a big way” might cause separated spouses to consider divorce. The party’s suggestion was for couples to return to villages together, or to sacrifice togetherness for the cause of socialist construction. “Awakened youths should correctly view the question of falling in love,” the guidelines suggested.<sup>49</sup>

Back in Duliu, Wang Kaiwen began to wonder whether he would ever fall in love. Maybe his parents were right that volunteering to support agriculture would hurt

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<sup>47</sup> HDA, 17-1-15C, 21-23.

<sup>48</sup> HPA, 859-2-11C, 3.

<sup>49</sup> HPA, 864-1-257Y, 12.

his chances of finding a girlfriend. He began to mention his bachelor status in his petition letters to Tianjin officials. Still stuck in Duliu in 1964, he wrapped up two separate written pleas by noting that he was still young and had not yet married. With this in mind, he hoped that city authorities would favorably consider his request to return to Tianjin. They did not. As we have seen, for local cadres to consider exempting people from downsizing, family problems or obligations had to involve irreconcilable disputes or children, elderly, or sick relations in need of care. Wang's prolonged bachelorhood did not qualify him for special consideration. Even though he had been misled about the terms of downsizing, Wang had initially volunteered to go to Duliu and his fervent application letter was on file. Others who were allowed to stay in Tianjin had consistently requested family exemptions from the very beginning of the process.

What was so terrible about Duliu that Wang Kaiwen did whatever he could to get out? How do we explain the discrepancy between perpetually discontented Wang and happy Wei Rongchun, who used the skills and connections he gained in Tianjin to help his village throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s? To understand the diversity of ways in which returned workers changed rural China—and how villages affected returned workers—we must travel to the villages themselves.

### Downsized Workers in Villages

How a returned worker fared in rural China depended on his or her resources in and out of the village, including family and professional networks. Technical skills

and a willingness to work hard also helped them get along. Finally, returned workers' sense of self-identity—rural or urban, peasant or worker, cadre or commune member—was key in determining their success in villages. Those who clung to an urban identity or thought of themselves as superior cadres earned the resentment of villagers. People who assumed rural identities had an easier time fitting in.

Of course, much hinged on the economic conditions and social geography of each particular village. Places with serious grain shortages or jealous village officials were less welcoming, while a solid economic base and forward-thinking cadres made for an easier integration. When people like Wang Kaiwen behaved badly, refused to work, and repeatedly complained to higher levels, it was not surprising that some villages considered returnees an unwelcome burden.

Wang was allowed to relax in Duliu for two days before he was assigned to collective work. His first task was to help with the fall harvest, but he only worked for half a day and then disappeared. Members of Wang's work team searched all over for him to no avail. He eventually reappeared, and the next day he was told to watch over the crops, but he refused to go. On a third occasion, Wang worked a half day and then rode his bicycle back to Tianjin. According to an investigative report by the Hexi district personnel office from October 7, 1961, villagers often heard Wang requesting a leadership position and complaining, "I am a sent-down cadre, where do they get off assigning me work?" The report noted that Wang's behavior and requests seemed bizarre to villagers, who "mistakenly thought that his mental state was abnormal."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> HDA, 3-2-47C, 13.

In May 2005, Duliu residents still remembered Wang not by his given name, but as “Crazy Wang” (Wang *shenjing*).<sup>51</sup>

Wang had no memory of living in Duliu as a child, had no friends there, and clearly felt that he was a city person, not a peasant (he told me that China must rely on its “peasant little brothers,” clearly differentiating himself from them). Wang’s aunt became frustrated with his behavior and told him to settle down. She testified to city cadres in 1964: “Right after he arrived, I said, ‘can you do farm work? Can you handle this kind of life?’ My nephew said, ‘Fine, attack my enthusiasm.’” After Wang had run away to Tianjin several times, his aunt admonished him. “I advised him to work hard, build a base, settle down and establish himself,” but he did not listen.<sup>52</sup> After Wang’s cousin got married, there was no room for Wang at his aunt’s house anymore. He stayed in brigade housing for a short while and finally began living with his parents in Tianjin full-time, busily appealing his case and only going to Duliu twice a month to pick up grain rations. He had already spent all of his downsizing severance.

Duliu cadres did not miss Wang. The village party secretary at the time said that Wang “is not a real peasant, he is a city person” (*bu shi zhenzheng de nongmin, ta shi chengshi de ren*). “Tianjin people cannot do farm work,” he said. “The city government should take care of him.”<sup>53</sup> Wang considered himself an urbanite, and so

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<sup>51</sup> Interviewees 48, 49, 50.

<sup>52</sup> HDA, 3-2-47C, 10.

<sup>53</sup> Interviewee 48.

did villagers in Duliu. To them, Wang was a city person, and therefore the city's problem. Considering Wang's unacceptable behavior in Duliu and his jobless, *hukou*-less status as a perpetual petitioner in Tianjin, it was no surprise that Wang had no luck with love. "Wang never got married," an elderly man sitting under a tree in Duliu told me in 2005. "If you do not work and do not have much of an income, how can you get married? Even in the village it's that way. A bare stick! (*guanggun*)"<sup>54</sup>

By May 1963, Wang's petitions to various government agencies were labeled as "unreasonably causing trouble" and he was accused of trading on the black market. He kept petitioning but the response was always the same: he had volunteered to go to Duliu in the first place, his behavior had been bad, and he needed to "settle down" (*anxin*) to collective farm work. Every once in a while he managed to squeeze a stipend out of a government agency because of his health problems, but his requests to return to Tianjin continued to be rebuffed.

Wang's *hukou* was finally moved back to Tianjin in 1990, and his monthly welfare funds were transferred to Tianjin in 2002 (before that he still went to Duliu every month to collect the stipend). Wang still rides his bicycle to weekly visits to various government offices in Tianjin, and occasionally travels to Beijing to petition for a reconsideration of his case. He is demanding that his years of "agricultural work" in Duliu be figured into a monthly pension as a government worker. Peasants have never received pensions in the People's Republic, but Wang wants credit for

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<sup>54</sup> Interviewee 47. "Bare stick" means bachelor, but also "loafer" or "ruffian." The man sitting under the tree seemed to imply both meanings.



doing farm work.

There is a precedent in the reform era for former political outcasts to receive compensation for time spent in villages during the 1960s and 70s (discussed in Chapter 6), but not for downsized workers. When I met Wang, he explained his grievance:

When the government and party order you to do something, what can you do, can you oppose it? No, you must follow your orders. So I went to support the agricultural front. I made a mistake, and the party also made a mistake. It should accept this and correct the mistake, but it never has. When Deng Xiaoping took power he immediately redressed the mishandled cases of the five bad elements and rightists, and stopped the class theory system, but because I was not in that category my problem was never solved. At least call me retired, or let me do some work for the country.

Wang's case has dragged on for forty-five years. Unlike the mistreatment of class enemies during the Cultural Revolution, which was condemned by China's reform-era leadership, the downsizing of the early 1960s is still considered a legitimate and correct response to the excessively leftist leap.<sup>55</sup>

Wang's downsizing experience was unsuccessful for a number of reasons. He felt tricked into agreeing to go to Duliu, but his written application doomed his chances of returning to Tianjin. Wang considered himself a city person, not a peasant. He had no friends or strong social networks in the village. He had never done farm work in his life and did not want to start at the age of twenty-eight. Village cadres

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<sup>55</sup> For the latest official interpretations of downsizing, see Wu and Zheng, 511; and *Dang de wenxian bianji bu* 《党的文献》编辑部, ed., *Gongheguo zhongda juece he shijian shushi* 共和国重大决策和事件述实 [Stating the truth about major policy decisions in the People's Republic] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), 205.

thought he was a burden and the average villager called him crazy. While Wang's story is an extreme case, other workers who lacked solid networks, skills, or rural identities had similarly difficult experiences in villages.

Villages did not welcome returnees who ate more grain than they produced. In October 1961, Wuqing county officials said that if any more people returned to villages, they would not be getting any grain at all.<sup>56</sup> Rural authorities were unwilling to further cut villagers' meager diets in order to accommodate downsized workers. Even if villages and communes were able to provide food and housing to returned workers, the returnees often faced discrimination or snide remarks from rural residents and cadres. Common comments included: "these returned people all fell through the sieve" (meaning that they were of lower quality), "let's see if they run away again," "with more people, work points will decrease," and "the people who are coming are all mischievous and noisy, we don't want them."<sup>57</sup> Even Wei Rongchun, who said he was generally happy with his experience, remembered some village residents who gossiped that the returned workers had come back because they had failed or made mistakes in the city.

Wei did not let such talk bother him. He knew that in his case, it was not true. But a few misbehaving apples almost spoiled the bunch. Other returnees in Baodi acted more like Wang Kaiwen, squandering their severance payments (or even lending

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<sup>56</sup> HPA, 859-2-7C, 23b.

<sup>57</sup> For the first two comments, HPA, 864-1-269Y, 175; for the latter, HPA, 859-2-2C, 124b.

the cash at high interest) and trading on the black market. Returned workers were spotted in Baodi and Jiaohe counties selling steamed buns, sheep, rabbits, chickens, ducks, ceramics, glassware, cigarettes, window screens, and clothing at high prices.<sup>58</sup>

While some downsized workers got rich as peddlers, others like Wei Rongchun worked hard in their home villages. Wei's nuanced sense of identity helped him fit in. When I asked him whether he considered himself a worker or a peasant, he said, "It is difficult to say. Am I a worker who lives in a village? But I also lived in the city for a long time." Wei did not call himself a peasant. He did think of himself as a rural person who had become a worker and who was shaped by his time in Tianjin. After overcoming his initial fears and difficulties in Tianjin during the 1950s, Wei was comfortable and confident in both city and countryside. This dual identity, plus Wei's network of family and friends in the countryside, made him a successful returned worker.

Although Wei's main reason for volunteering to go back home was to fulfill his family obligations, his wife and father were not entirely happy to have him back. After Wei left the room for a moment during one of our interviews, Wei's wife, who had barely seen him since their wedding in the early 1950s, told me, "I was not willing for him to come back." The urban salary he sent back to her every month was worth more than his daily presence in their village home. Wei's father, unwilling to admit the seriousness of his leg injury, also told Wei to keep his city job because his salary was paying for his younger brother's college education in Beijing. "My dad said he

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<sup>58</sup> NBCK 3389 (June 29, 1962): 7-8.

could handle things on his own,” Wei said. But Wei knew better.

As soon as he got back home, Wei became a normal peasant, doing collective farm labor and earning work points. But thanks to the foresight of their village party secretary, Wei and other returned workers were able to contribute in other ways. During the famine, village party secretary Hu Yishun had sent his family, including his sixteen-year-old son Hu Penghua (who would later play a key role in the rise of neighboring Xiaojinzhuang as a model village, described Chapter 8), to the Miyun reservoir cafeteria, where one daughter worked and procured free food for the others. But he had also gotten a taste of the benefits rural industry could bring to his village. When the leap started, Hu was in charge of establishing a farm tool repair factory at the nearby commune headquarters. In 1958, commune headquarters in Baodi had electricity, but most villages did not. Hu was convinced that the village needed electricity in order to establish its own small workshops. In their spare time, villagers used river reeds to weave baskets for sale. The village spent the proceeds on electrification.

Electrical materials and components, including steel cables and ceramic insulators, were extremely hard to come by in the early 1960s. Hu knew that if he waited for central planners to allocate the goods, it could take years for electricity to arrive. In 1962, Hu called together Wei Rongchun, other returned workers, and a villager who had served in the army. One former coal mine worker’s assignment was to ride a three-wheeled bicycle cart to Tangshan. He used his connections at the mines to purchase enough ceramic insulators to fill his cart.

Wei Rongchun's job was to accompany the ex-soldier to a county south of Beijing, where an army buddy helped them obtain a truckload of steel cables. On the journey back to Baodi, the truck broke down in Wuqing county. The men had skipped lunch that day, and as darkness fell, they were increasingly cold and hungry. They walked to the nearest commune office. When they got to the door, the jumpy cadre on duty grabbed the pistol on his desk, on guard against strangers in the night. Wei, thinking quickly, remembered that his friend at the belt factory in Tianjin, the factory's vice-party secretary, was from a Wuqing village. "Don't be scared," Wei called out, saying that he was a friend of a certain vice-party secretary Liu. Wei's friend happened to be the gun-toting cadre's older brother, and the situation was immediately defused. Any friend of Liu's was a friend of the village official. He fed the men, found a new battery for the truck, and sent them on their way. Factory and army connections turned out to be vital in obtaining materials—and in getting them home safely.

Wei Rongchun's village was the first in the area to get electricity. Homes and lanes were illuminated at night, but more important, electricity made efficient irrigation possible and supported small village factories. In 1962, soon after electricity came, Hu and Wei worked together to establish a rice and flour processing workshop. Proceeds from the workshop could be invested in agricultural advances. Three villagers went to Tianjin to buy the processing machine. The brigade opened a cotton fluffing workshop in 1964 and a small-scale gunnysack factory in 1967. Before 1967, all gunnysacks in the area were produced by a neighboring village. They used

footlooms and could finish about twenty sacks in a day. Wei Rongchun went to Tianjin and looked up an old comrade at his factory. The men had a meal and some drinks, and Wei used village funds to purchase two Toyota-made electric looms.<sup>59</sup> The looms produced more than one hundred sacks daily.

Wei's city connections and his skills in operating textile machinery paid off for his village in the four decades after he voluntarily left his city job. He recognizes this. "You could say that after I returned to the village I made some contributions," he said. "Yes, I used the technical skills I had learned in the city, but more important, I got in touch with my friends from my time in the city." He had a few regrets about leaving Tianjin. In the city, he had more authority, earned more money, and living conditions were better. But returning home seemed like the right thing to do.

#### Conclusion: Downsizing's Unintended Consequences

Party leaders saw downsizing as the only way to right the imbalance between industry and agriculture. An implicit admission that the socialist economy had gone horribly awry, the policy was not publicized as it unfolded. To this day, its details have remained one of the regime's best-kept secrets. Mao Zedong, in a self-congratulatory mood, was amazed that the party had pulled it off in the aftermath of the famine. "We have 20 million people at our beck and call," he said. "What

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<sup>59</sup> Toyota manufactured automatic looms and other textile machinery well before it became an automobile company.

political party other than the ruling CCP could have done it?”<sup>60</sup> The party indeed deserved organizational credit for the downsizing, but Mao was patting himself on the back for calling a tow truck after smashing his car into a tree. Downsizing was not progressive or visionary. It was an attempt to patch up the crippled socialist economy, to restore grain production to pre-1958 levels so that urban industry could continue to exploit artificially cheap raw materials from rural China. The impact of skilled, connected workers on village industrialization in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was an unintended consequence of the program. Downsizing policy and propaganda never referred to the urban-rural transfer of technology as a goal. Rather, the aim was to stabilize and increase grain supplies after the terrible famine. Returned workers themselves and savvy village cadres, not party center, deserve credit for innovations in collective industry.

In addition, Mao’s claim of moving 20 million people is difficult to verify. Sources differ on the total number of people cut from cities between 1961 and 1963. On the high side, Wu Li and Zheng Yougui claim that 29.4 million workers were downsized, but because of new urban employment assignments for high school graduates and other new city hires, the net reduction in employees was 17.51 million.<sup>61</sup> Luo Pinghan, basing his numbers on a 1963 central report wrapping up downsizing work, estimates that 19.4 million people were downsized, while others put

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<sup>60</sup> MacFarquhar, *Origins of the Cultural Revolution: Vol. 2*, 335.

<sup>61</sup> Wu and Zheng, 510.

the number at 15.97 million.<sup>62</sup> Given the incentives for local cadres to meet quotas by inflating figures, I suspect that the lower number is more accurate.

Tianjin did not come close to meeting its downsizing target. As late as May 1962, Tianjin party secretary Wan Xiaotang was still exhorting city officials to downsize 220,000 employees and shrink the city population by 400,000 in the coming year. He was frustrated. Wan noted that insufficiently vigilant *hukou* control was allowing almost as many people to enter Tianjin as were cut. Population data show that 222,064 people moved out of Tianjin's urban core between 1961-63, but because of continued immigration, the net reduction was only 131,349.<sup>63</sup> The 1961-63 outflow from Tianjin to rural villages would be surpassed by the 371,904 people who left the city during the three-year period between 1968-70, when urban sent-down youths and political outcasts made up the bulk of the migrants.

Downsized workers were a more positive force in villages than these later waves of city people were (although sent-down youth did contribute to rural education in the 1960s and 1970s). At best, returnees were like Wei Rongchun, the creative and technical impetus behind each successive wave of village industrialization after 1963. Every time central policy allowed or encouraged collective enterprises, downsized workers were front and center, using their urban ties to obtain scarce supplies, to

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<sup>62</sup> Luo Pinghan, 257. For the text of the 1963 central report, see ZYWX, vol. 16, 550-55.

<sup>63</sup> Tianjin shi renkou pucha bangongshi 天津市人口普查办公室, ed., *Tianjin shi renkou tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-1983* 天津市人口统计资料汇编 [Collected materials on Tianjin population statistics, 1949-1983] (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 1986), 254. This net decrease is 30,943 higher than the one used by Li Jingneng, 89, cited in MacFarquhar, *Origins: Vol. 3*, 34.



secure outsourcing contracts from city factories, and to teach successive generations of village youths technical skills. Able to move comfortably in villages and cities, they led rural delegations to Tianjin and were the first to greet urban work teams arriving in villages.

At worst, the returnees were pests, black marketeers, a burden on rural grain supplies, and a headache for village cadres. As the various levels and generations of cadres who have had to deal with Wang Kaiwen can attest, these troublemakers also represented a formidable legacy of downsizing. Wang's case shows that the party has never come to terms with the long-term effects of the lives that it shoved off course in the early 1960s. Between the extremes of Wang and Wei, millions of returnees lived rural lives devoted to farm work and family. Sometimes regretful at having had their urban benefits, salaries, conveniences, and independence taken away, the returnees were perhaps more aware of rural-urban difference than anyone else in Mao's China.

In Chapter 5, we turn to two groups that were comparatively ignorant about the realities of rural life when they arrived in Tianjin-area villages in the mid-1960s: the first major wave of sent-down youth, and urban work teams conducting the Four Cleanups movement. Villagers who knew that the disaster of the early 1960s had urban origins were understandably suspicious of uninvited guests from the city. The urbanites came to address problems that had emerged in the aftermath of the famine, but their impact was much less benign than the downsized workers who preceded them.

5. Uninvited Guests: The Four Cleanups and Urban Youth in Tianjin's Hinterland

On an inspection visit to villages outside of Tianjin in 1960, top party theorist Chen Boda approached a group of peasants. Eager to make conversation, the editor of *Red Flag* greeted them: "Are you fishing?" The anglers responded in the affirmative, but demurred when Chen, ever alert to signs of illicit market activity, asked if they planned to sell the fish. "It seemed that they did not want to pay attention to us," Chen recalled as he recounted the story four years later.<sup>1</sup> But after Chen asked about local crops, the group warmed to him and chatted as they walked toward Tuozidi, a village of five hundred people. Chen was in Xiaozhan, a marshy area between Tianjin and the Bohai gulf.

The most well-known person from Tuozidi was Jiang Deyu, a rice specialist and national labor model who had visited the Soviet Union and met with Chairman Mao Zedong. But when the peasants brought up "labor model Jiang," Chen Boda had no idea who they were talking about. One local jumped at the opportunity to complain to a top party leader. "Aren't we supposed to emphasize class struggle now? We think that labor model Jiang is a landlord, or at least a rich peasant," Chen recalled the peasants telling him. "He has cheated our Xiaozhan."

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<sup>1</sup> Chen was speaking to staff members of *Red Flag* and the Marxism-Leninism Research Academy who were preparing to join work teams in the Four Cleanups movement. Chen Boda 陈伯达, "Xiexiang wenti" 下乡问题 [On going to villages], reproduced by Hebei shengwei siqing bangongshi, October 4, 1964, HPA, 855-19-1045C, 39-40.

Chen asked Tianjin leaders to investigate Jiang, who was quietly stripped of his honors and kicked out of the party in 1962. Chen was impressed with his seemingly successful foray into rural work. “Why was it that I went for only two hours and I learned about the matter, but many local comrades had been there for more than ten years and did not know about it? Why were the masses willing to tell me this, but not willing to tell others?” The key, Chen reckoned, was his attitude. “The masses check you out and see if they can bare their heart to you,” he said. “I am a very stupid person, and have very little experience in working with the masses, but no matter how bad you are, as long as your attitude is correct, you can quickly discover problems.”

Chen’s positive experience in suburban Tianjin led him to return to Xiaozhan in March 1964 during the Four Cleanups movement, much to the regret of many local cadres. Chen rapidly uncovered other problems during the movement, which aimed to clean up politics, economy, ideology, and organization. Chen charged that class enemies had not only hidden their true identities, they had usurped village leadership and enjoyed protection from higher-ups. His claims led to a witch-hunt that implicated thousands of villagers, killed tens of people, and tortured and imprisoned many others in Tianjin’s south suburbs. Beyond Tianjin, the “Xiaozhan experience” was promoted as a successful “power seizure” in a central document circulated nationwide in October 1964.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the full text of the report, see ZGSX, 482-518. According to Bo Yibo, the report was responsible for pushing the Four Cleanups in a more radical direction, causing the downfall of countless rural cadres across China. Bo Yibo, 2:1123-24.

Many rural people who knew that urbanites had weathered the leap famine at their expense did not welcome the intrusive Four Cleanups work teams. Just when many villages were finally recovering from the leap disaster, self-righteous city people attacked the very practices that were making rural people's lives tolerable—freer trade, keeping grain in villages rather than giving it to the state, and private family plots. In assaulting the petty corruption and political errors that had arisen during the Leap and its aftermath, the Four Cleanups movement exacerbated rural-urban tensions and ended up alienating cities from villages almost as much as the famine had.

At the same time that tens of thousands of officials, university graduates, and students from Tianjin went to the countryside on work teams to carry out the Four Cleanups, thousands of Tianjin teenagers moved to villages as “sent-down youth.” This chapter focuses on these concurrent waves of city transplants between 1963 and 1966. Unlike the downsized workers discussed in the previous chapter, many Four Cleanups work team members and sent-down youth had never spent time in villages before. The Four Cleanups were meant to root out corrupt rural cadres who had illicitly enriched themselves. Work team members were also supposed to follow the “three togethers” (live, eat, and work) and learn from poor and lower-middle peasants. Propaganda urged sent-down youth to transform “backward” (*luohou*) and “poor and blank” (*yi qiong er bai*) villages, but also to reform themselves through rural labor and class struggle.

These conflicting messages—villages as backward and corrupt but also as revolutionary crucibles worthy of humble study—jockeyed for position in the minds

of city people sent to the countryside in the mid-1960s. The gap between what work team members and sent-down youth were told to expect in villages and what they actually saw and experienced was jarring. Rural poverty, even in the relatively well-off area surrounding Tianjin, shocked and disillusioned urban people in villages. Friction escalated between peasants and the city transplants who occupied their homes. Conflict and violence were built into the Four Cleanups and encouraged by leaders like Chen Boda. In contrast, battles between urban youth and rural residents were the unintended consequence of a policy that tried to ameliorate post-leaf employment pressures in Tianjin by dumping troublemaking teenagers into villages.

We know surprisingly little about the Four Cleanups and the first substantial group of sent-down youth in 1964. We know even less about the conflict that erupted because of the urbanites' presence in villages. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals note that the Four Cleanups movement is “regarded by many historians as a dress rehearsal for the Cultural Revolution,”<sup>3</sup> yet aside from general overviews and a handful of case studies, details remain fuzzy, especially about Chen Boda's impact in Xiaozhan.<sup>4</sup>

While many more works focus on sent-down youth, few analyze the 1963-1966 period,

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<sup>3</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Overviews include Richard Baum, *Prelude to Revolution: Mao, the Party, and the Peasant Question, 1962-66* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), and Guo Dehong 郭德宏 and Lin Xiaobo 林小波, *Siqing yundong shilu* 四清运动实录 [Record of the Four Cleanups movement] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 2005). The best case study is Anita Chan, Richard Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

when lasting precedents and problems emerged.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will discuss the goals and methods of the Four Cleanups and sent-down youth programs, and will explore the contradictions between policy, propaganda, and reality. The two programs unfolded simultaneously and featured contradictory approaches to the countryside. In order to capture the confused tensions of the period, the narrative that follows jumps back and forth between the Four Cleanups and sent-down youth. In the mid-1960s, confrontations between city people and villagers included violence, hidden and open resistance, and sexual entanglements. The Four Cleanups and sent-down youth programs aimed to fix genuine problems, but they assaulted villages that had finally begun to recover after the leap disaster. After spending several months in villages during the mid-1960s, work team members and urban youths had become less sanguine about rural China. Urban policymakers' confrontational approach toward the supposedly backward, corrupt countryside was more to blame for this than were villagers themselves, who struggled to deal with their uninvited guests. Contact between cities and villages actually ended up confirming the power differential between the two realms.

### Attacking Rural Wealth

Xiaozhan, like much of the area southeast of Tianjin, used to be underwater. After the sea retreated, reedy marshland was gradually populated by migrants from

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), addresses the entire history of the transfer program.

north China. Many villages did not appear on the map until two developments during the late Qing: first, the discovery that the wetlands were perfect for paddy rice cultivation; and second, the establishment of Yuan Shikai's Beiyang military training camp.<sup>6</sup> After the army's arrival, Xiaozhan township, eighteen miles from Tianjin's city center, developed quickly, and by 1964 had a population of eleven thousand. Its proximity to urban Tianjin oriented the region's rice, vegetables, and handicrafts (primarily woven reed products) toward the city. When Chen Boda visited Xiaozhan, the region's political and economic fortunes were still closely tied to Tianjin.

The Four Cleanups in Tianjin's outskirts began with little hint of the turmoil to come. In January 1964, the Tianjin municipal government established test points in the south suburbs: one in Xiaozhan commune (headquartered in the township and in charge of surrounding villages), and another in Beizhakou commune, five kilometers northwest of Xiaozhan township. Work teams sent to the south suburbs included city and suburban cadres and recent university graduates. Their initial findings were unremarkable. The class composition of the area was complicated, owing to the motley mix of migrants who had settled its villages over the past seventy to eighty years. Land reform in 1951 had been mild, which allowed class enemies to falsely claim poor peasant status; some had wormed their way into leadership positions. But the overall achievements of the region were noteworthy, most cadres were good, and

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<sup>6</sup> Xie Yan 谢燕, "Chen Boda zuo'e zai Xiaozhan" 陈伯达作恶在小站 [Chen Boda does evil in Xiaozhan], *Tianjin shi zhi* 6 (December 2004): 15.

those who had committed mistakes should not be struggled against excessively.<sup>7</sup> At this point, it appeared that Xiaozhan's Four Cleanups would be "brief and uneventful," much like in Hebei's Raoyang county, where rural leaders used the movement to reward friends with politically valuable "poor peasant" class labels and punish rivals with damning "rich peasant" and "landlord" labels.<sup>8</sup>

The Four Cleanups, also known as the Socialist Education Movement, was Mao's response to problems that had spun out of control during and after the Great Leap famine—corrupt village cadres who wined and dined at state expense, or who underreported harvest numbers in order to reduce the amount of grain requisitioned by the state. Black market trading, profit-making rural sidelines, and private agricultural plots may have been necessary survival strategies during the three hard years, but were harbingers of revisionism (a betrayal of Marxist principles). There was also the trumped-up fear that class enemies who had avoided detection during land reform had assumed positions of power, continuing to exploit poor peasants. To Mao, these were all dangerous signs that China's countryside was experiencing a capitalist restoration. This was a dark vision of rural China, and it had to be attacked in a "war of annihilation" (*xiaomie zhan*) carried out by Four Cleanups work teams.<sup>9</sup>

Mao's trusted lieutenant Chen Boda entered the battlefield in March 1964,

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<sup>7</sup> Xie Yan, 16; Liu Jinfeng 刘晋峰, *Zhengrong suiyue: Liu Jinfeng huiyilu* 峥嵘岁月: 刘晋峰回忆录 [Extraordinary years: Liu Jinfeng's memoirs] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2000), 220.

<sup>8</sup> Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform*, 54, 61.

<sup>9</sup> ZGSX, 506.



when he returned to Xiaozhan. Chen, described by Michael Schoenhals as Mao's "senior perception management advisor,"<sup>10</sup> had scant managerial or organizational experience in the rural sphere. Chen was a city-based author and propagandist, but he had written about agriculture and knew that the chairman saw the countryside as an important ideological battleground. By expanding his political activities to Tianjin's hinterland, Chen was "working toward" what he thought Mao wanted.<sup>11</sup>

The Four Cleanups movement varied tremendously depending on where and when it was carried out. Policy debates and the shifting analyses and alliances of top central leaders pushed the cleanups through many permutations between 1963 and 1966, first focusing on economic malfeasance, then stressing class struggle.<sup>12</sup> Because the campaign proceeded in phases, certain counties completed one version of the movement, then had to go through another after policy changed. Other counties were barely affected at all. Some Four Cleanups work teams consisted of officials from the county and commune levels (this was the case in Baodi, where urban authorities were not directly involved), while others, like those in the Tianjin suburbs and certain Hebei

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Schoenhals, "The Global War On Terrorism as Meta-Narrative: An Alternative Reading of Recent Chinese History" (working paper, Lund University, 2006, <http://www.lu.se/o.o.i.s?id=12588&postid=534824>).

<sup>11</sup> MacFarquhar and Schoenhals apply British historian Ian Kershaw's idea of "working toward the *führer*" to Mao; Kershaw, *Hitler*, 2 vols. (London: Allen Lane, 1998, 2000). Mao was deliberately vague in expressing himself to his subordinates, forcing them to guess at his intentions and sometimes going beyond what Mao himself had imagined. This was a recipe for radicalism. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 48.

<sup>12</sup> See Baum, *Prelude to Revolution*, and Baum and Frederick C. Teiwes, *Ssu-Ch'ing: The Socialist Education Movement of 1962-1966* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1968).

counties, were dominated by city people. When powerful officials from urban centers like Tianjin and Beijing became involved in the rural movement, the potential for conflict was heightened.

The first sign that Xiaozhan's Four Cleanups might become eventful was the appearance of Zhou Yang, deputy director of the central propaganda department. Zhou went to the Tianjin region in late February to visit sent-down youth, but thanks to a few words from Chairman Mao, Zhou changed his itinerary. Mao, upset that writers and artists were not serving workers and peasants, ordered Zhou to spend time at the grassroots. "If he's unwilling to go, then order the army to force him to go down," Mao told Chen Boda. Ostensibly out of concern for Zhou Yang's health, Chen and Tianjin officials arranged for Zhou to stay somewhere close to the city. They settled on Xiyouying, a village of 1,100 people in Beizhakou commune.<sup>13</sup>

Zhou Yang stayed in one of the nicest houses in Xiyouying, the home of female village party secretary and labor model Zhang Fengqin and her husband. Zhou and others in his entourage did not reveal their official positions, saying they were writers hoping to "experience life."<sup>14</sup> Village life confused Zhou Yang. Some villagers told Zhou that his host, who had been featured just weeks earlier in a laudatory *Tianjin Daily* profile about her honest words and deeds, was actually no

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<sup>13</sup> Chen Xiaonong 陈晓农, comp., *Chen Boda zuihou koushu huiyi* 陈伯达最后口述回忆 [Chen Boda's final oral memoir] (Hong Kong: Yangguang huanqiu chuban Xianggang youxian gongsi, 2005), 248.

<sup>14</sup> Wang Kangzhi jinian wenji bianjizu 王亢之纪念文集编辑组, ed., *Wang Kangzhi jinian wenji* 王亢之纪念文集 [Collected writings commemorating Wang Kangzhi] (Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2001), 124.

good.<sup>15</sup> When Tianjin propaganda chief Wang Kangzhi visited Zhou to see how he was doing, Zhou said, “The more I learn about problems here, the more complicated they get. I’m like a doctor who can only inquire about a patient’s condition but cannot write a prescription.”<sup>16</sup> Enter Chen Boda, who would not hesitate to issue prescriptions. Chen’s earlier discovery of labor model Jiang Deyu’s purported corruption and bad class background, combined with his awareness of Mao’s concerns about revisionism and class struggle, encouraged him to take charge of Xiaozhan’s Four Cleanups.

On March 5, 1964, Liu Jinfeng, who had served as party secretary of Tianjin’s south suburbs since 1953, accompanied Chen Boda to Xiyouying. As their car neared the village, Chen ordered the driver to stop. Chen wanted to walk the final half kilometer to the village. He thought that entering the village in a car would distance them from the masses. After hearing a report from the Four Cleanups work team stationed in Xiyouying, Chen visited Zhang Fengqin’s house. Chen took note of the three new outbuildings in Zhang’s compound, saw hefty bags of rice stacked up inside, and fixated on something he had never noticed in villages before: double-paned glass windows. After twenty minutes, Chen had seen enough. He told Zhou Yang to move to a poor peasant’s house. Chen then reported his findings to the work team. “Zhang Fengqin does not seem like a poor peasant, her family is richer than all other villagers.

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<sup>15</sup> TJRB, February 2, 1964, 2. The article was titled, “Speak honest words, be an honest person—a record of Xiyouying brigade’s party branch secretary Zhang Fengqin.”

<sup>16</sup> Wang Kangzhi jinian wenji bianjizu, 124.

She got rich after becoming party secretary,” Chen said. “The double-paned glass exposed Zhang Fengqin. She’s a poor peasant who’s not really poor, a labor model who does not labor, she’s become a politicized figure.” Something had to be done, Chen told the work team. “You can tell with just one look that she’s the enemy. You take care of this, we can’t have mistakes here,” he ordered.<sup>17</sup> When he returned to Tianjin, he told city officials that Zhang should be removed from her leadership positions.

The work team jumped into action and assembled evidence of Zhang’s crimes, which included illegally profiting from seven village factories established during the early 1960s, lowballing harvest reports and keeping excess grain for the village, and hiding her true class identity, which was allegedly “rich peasant element” (*funong fenzi*).<sup>18</sup> This verdict came as a shock to Liu Jinfeng, who had spent years promoting Zhang Fengqin as a star female village leader. Zhang had organized Xiyouying’s first mutual aid society and cooperative in the 1950s. Now she was being attacked because her house did not conform to what Chen Boda thought a village cadre’s home should look like. Liu Jinfeng saw rural prosperity not as a crime, but as evidence of his successful stewardship of the suburbs.<sup>19</sup>

Underreporting grain yields and investing in profitable sidelines were common

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<sup>17</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 204-5; Wang Hui 王辉, “Wo suo zhidao de ‘Xiaozhan si qing’” 我所知道的“小站四清” [What I know about ‘Xiaozhan’s Four Cleanups’], *Tianjin wenshi ziliao xuanji* 102 (2004): 207.

<sup>18</sup> ZGSX, 488-89, 503.

<sup>19</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 213.

survival strategies after the Great Leap famine.<sup>20</sup> These practices were also likely to earn village leaders popular support, while cadres who insisted on handing everything over to the state faced grumbling. Ironically, a *Tianjin Daily* profile had praised “honest” Zhang Fengqin for saying, “however much we harvest, that is what we will report,” and chastised villagers who complained that Zhang’s honesty put the village at a disadvantage. But it turned out that Zhang had been dishonest, to her village’s advantage. Xiyouying had kept 3,500 kilos of extra grain for itself. The village reportedly earned 400,000 yuan in “sudden huge profits” from sideline industry during the early 1960s, and even rented a long-term room at a Tianjin hotel in order to make business deals in the city.<sup>21</sup> For leaders like Mao and Chen Boda, the post-leap recovery had gone too far.

Zhang Fengqin was not the only village leader to thrive economically after the leap. Other communities that took advantage of their proximity to Tianjin did especially well. One village in Huanghua county, directly south of Tianjin on the Bohai gulf, stationed five cadres in Tianjin to trade seafood for city-made goods. When the village leader negotiated a deal with a Tianjin shoe factory, he stayed at a top city hotel and went shopping for sandals, a jacket, an alarm clock, a raincoat, a

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<sup>20</sup> Gao Wangling 高王凌, *Renmin gongshe shiqi Zhongguo nongmin “fan xingwei” diaocha* 人民公社时期中国农民“反行为”调查 [An investigation into Chinese peasants’ “counteraction” during the commune period] (Beijing: Zhongguo dangshi chubanshe, 2006). See also Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> ZGSX, 488, 503.

handbag, and a fur-lined cap. During the Four Cleanups, these dealings were condemned.<sup>22</sup> Villagers' lives may have been improving in 1963 and 1964, but the means to this end—increased trade and the subversion of the state grain monopoly—were a painful repudiation of Mao's leap-era plan for the countryside.

Work team members followed Chen Boda's example and searched for evidence of excessive prosperity. Former members of work teams told me that their first task in villages was to look for the biggest, nicest houses. Those families would be struggle targets, and work teams were instructed to remain aloof from them. Likewise, small, run-down hovels were markers of political reliability. Candidates for membership in newly formed poor peasants' representative associations (an organization of activists meant to assist work teams and eventually replace cadres overthrown during the Four Cleanups) came from these households.<sup>23</sup> Internal documents also mentioned eyeballing villagers' homes, but warned that this might lead to errors. One work team member admitted:

I thought that whoever's home is poorest and filthiest was automatically a poor and lower-middle peasant. Wang Guiyin's home is the dirtiest and his son is a poor peasant association representative, so I thought that he could become an activist. But the masses said that his origins were unclear. I went to the police station to check his file and to my great surprise, he was a landlord who had been struggled against.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Zhonggong Hebei shengwei *Hebei siqing tongxun bianjibu* 中共河北省委《河北四清通讯》编辑部, ed., *Hebei nongcun jieji douzheng dianxing cailiao* 河北农村阶级斗争典型材料 [Representative materials on class struggle in Hebei villages], vol. 2 (April 1966), 83.

<sup>23</sup> Interviewee 9, interviewee 51.

<sup>24</sup> *Jinjiao siqing jianbao* 津郊四清简报 [Tianjin suburbs Four Cleanups bulletin] 14 (December 1, 1965): 11.

The lesson learned was that while appearances were important markers, class enemies could be hidden anywhere. Material realities often contradicted villagers' official class labels, in part because a landlord or rich peasant label could lead to discrimination and abject poverty.

According to this logic, Zhang Fengqin's home should have alerted propaganda chief Zhou Yang that his host's "poor peasant" status was spurious. But Zhou's mind was elsewhere. His original purpose in traveling to Tianjin was to mobilize the city's young people to emulate model sent-down youth, not to live in a village himself. Zhou's statements on why city teenagers should transform themselves into peasants formed the basis of a propaganda blitz in spring 1964. His message was almost the polar opposite of Chen Boda's simultaneous battle against excessive village wealth during the Four Cleanups. In order to attract urban youth to the countryside, Zhou had to avoid linking poverty to political virtue. No wonder Zhou was confused by the situation in Xiyouying.

"The First Generation of Intellectuals to Become Peasants"

Zhou Yang's stay in Xiyouying was sandwiched in between visits with sent-down youth in the Tianjin area. In February and again in early May 1964, Zhou visited nationally famous model youth Xing Yanzi and Hou Jun in Baodi county.<sup>25</sup> In the early 1960s, the two young women had chosen to become peasants instead of

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<sup>25</sup> *Baodi xian zhi*, 58; Zheng Zhiying, 246.

seeking city jobs and university educations (Xing in Tianjin, where her father was a factory official; Hou in Beijing, where her family lived). Also in February, Zhou spent a week in Jinghai county, where he dropped in on model youth Wang Peizhen.<sup>26</sup> Wang, a 1957 graduate of Tianjin's Number Seven Girls' Middle School, became famous after marrying an illiterate peasant and settling in his village in 1959.<sup>27</sup> On March 5, Zhou Yang addressed Wang, Xing, Hou, and other "advanced educated youth" who had traveled to Tianjin for the occasion. Zhou's rambling remarks fueled a propaganda drive that accompanied the city's transfer of teenagers to villages in 1964.<sup>28</sup> In April alone, 2,300 teenagers moved to Baodi villages, ostensibly for life.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jinghai xian zhi bianxiu weiyuanhui 静海县地方志编修委员会, ed., *Jinghai xian zhi* 静海县志 [Jinghai county gazetteer] (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 1995), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Liu Xiaomeng 刘小萌, et al., *Zhongguo zhi qing shidian* 中国知青事典 [Chinese educated youth encyclopedia] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1995), 716.

<sup>28</sup> A transcript of Zhou Yang's speech, including the interjections of Tianjin party secretary Wan Xiaotang, mayor Hu Zhaoheng, and Wang Peizhen, can be found in HPA, 864-2-296Y, 10-15. This document, *Zhou Yang yijiuliuwu nian san yue wu ri zai jiejian xiexiang zhishi qingnian xianjin renwu de jianghua jilu* 周扬一九六五年三月五日在接见下乡知识青年先进人物的讲话记录 [Transcript of Zhou Yang's talk upon meeting advanced educated youth down in villages on March 5, 1965] is misdated. The propaganda outline based on the talks and Zheng Zhiying's chronology confirm that Zhou spoke in March 1964, not in 1965. See Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei xuanchan bu 中共天津市委宣传部, *Guanyu dongyuan he zuzhi chengshi zhishi qingnian canjia nongcun shehuizhuyi jianshe de xuanchuan tigang* 关于动员和组织城市知识青年参加农村社会主义建设的宣传提纲 [Propaganda outline on mobilizing and organizing urban educated youth to participate in village socialist construction], March 22, 1964, TMA, X281-96Y, 1-4; and Zheng Zhiying, 244. The heading for this section comes from Hu Zhaoheng's interjection at Zhou Yang's March 5, 1964 speech.

<sup>29</sup> NBCK 3624 (May 26, 1964): 7.



By the end of the year, more than 14,000 youths had been sent from Tianjin to Hebei villages or to more distant frontier encampments.<sup>30</sup>

While Chen Boda obsessed about rampant wealth in villages, Zhou Yang worried about the “poor and blank” and “backward” condition of China’s countryside. The best way to improve villages, Zhou argued, was not through combative work teams, but by sending urban educated youth to “laborize” (*laodonghua*) themselves and to “intellectualize” (*zhishihua*) peasants. “The main target of socialist education is peasants,” Zhou said, “500 million peasants are uneducated. Who’s going to go and disseminate? We could send work teams, but where do we have that many people? It’s mainly going to rely on the power of educated youths.” Zhou saw the long-term settlement of urban youths in villages—and not outside work teams—as the most effective way to transform China’s countryside. He exhorted youths to teach villagers the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. “In this way, village culture, science, and education will be built up, and the appearance of villages will change bit by bit because of you,” Zhou said. “Transform traditions, go about it little by little. This will remold yourselves and remold villages.”<sup>31</sup>

As divergent as Zhou Yang’s approach seemed from Chen Boda’s, each man had good reason to believe that he was following Mao’s wishes. In June 1964, Mao mentioned Xiaozhan as evidence that revisionism (a betrayal of Marxist principles)

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<sup>30</sup> Zheng Zhiying, 258.

<sup>31</sup> HPA, 864-2-296Y, 13.

had already appeared in China.<sup>32</sup> Through the end of the year, Mao supported Chen's version of class struggle in Xiaozhan. Yet the Four Cleanups' "war of annihilation" was concurrent with the first systematic, large-scale transfer of urban youth to the countryside in 1964. To promote the sent-down youth program, Zhou Yang repeated verbatim Mao's comments from the 1950s about the "poor and blank" countryside, which was a "vast universe" where educated youth could "make great contributions." The gap between a happy realm for sent-down youth and the Four Cleanups' dark war against excessive rural wealth could be measured by what had transpired between 1958 and 1964. After the leap's crushing failure, China's rural population was no longer a "sheet of white paper" on which "beautiful things" could be written and painted, as Mao had once put it.<sup>33</sup> The paper had been sullied.

Why, then, was Zhou Yang promoting a pre-leap script about rural China in 1964 when the times apparently called for a "war" to punish village officials for their alleged transgressions during the famine? Practical concerns about how to handle increasing numbers of unemployed, trouble-making urban youth drove the 1964 rustication program. Behind Zhou's platitudes was a legion of idle teenagers who had few job prospects in Tianjin. Their destination was the vast universe of Baodi county.

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<sup>32</sup> Bo Yibo, 2:1116.

<sup>33</sup> On April 15, 1958, Mao wrote, "Aside from other characteristics, the most striking characteristic of China's population of 600 million is that it is poor and blank. This may seem like a bad thing, but actually it is a good thing." He then called the population a "sheet of white paper." MWG, vol. 7, 177-178. Mao's statement about the "vast universe" where young intellectuals could "make great contributions" (*da you zuo wei*) was in response to a report in December 1955. Liu Xiaomeng, et al., 5.

According to a March 30, 1964 directive from Tianjin’s municipal government, the main group targeted to go to villages were youths holding long-term urban *hukou* who “were unable to advance in school or be employed.”<sup>34</sup> While some documents referred to this group as “educated youths” (*zhishi qingnian*), others used the euphemism “society youths” (*shehui qingnian*), meaning young people unattached to schools or work units—essentially, juvenile delinquents. They had dropped out of school or failed entrance exams and could not find jobs, either because of aberrant behavior, poor grades, or bad class labels. Chinese scholars have called these youths “cast-offs” from the lower strata of urban society.<sup>35</sup>

Xue Meng quit high school in the early 1960s. In spring 1964, when he was eighteen years old, he signed up to join the movement to send urban youths to the countryside. On April 25 he left Tianjin for a Baodi village. Xue volunteered because it seemed like a revolutionary thing to do, but more important, as a high school dropout, he had little hope of finding city work. “If I would have gotten a job assignment in Tianjin, I would have stayed,” Xue admitted.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Bernstein has identified ameliorating urban unemployment as one of the central—and often unstated—goals of the sent-down youth program.<sup>37</sup> While newspapers stressed the revolutionary value of urban youth remolding themselves and transforming villages,

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<sup>34</sup> TMA, X281-96Y, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Liu Xiaomeng, et al., 14, 61.

<sup>36</sup> Interviewee 28.

<sup>37</sup> Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages*, 33.

internal documents confirmed that urban job shortages in the wake of post-leap retrenchment were also a central motivation. One oral propaganda outline was explicit: “Perhaps some parents think, ‘Tianjin is such a large industrial city, can we not solve city youths’ employment problems?’ We cannot. Industrial development depends on technical improvement and mechanization, not on building new factories and adding new employees. Because of this, the number of employees our industrial and other construction enterprises can absorb is very limited.”<sup>38</sup>

Propaganda arguing that contributing to rural development was better than sitting idle in the city targeted parents who hoped to keep their children in Tianjin. Much of the resistance to the sent-down youth program in 1964 came from family members. After model youth Wang Peizhen visited Fu Tianliang’s Tianjin middle school and told the students about her experience, Fu decided to follow in Wang’s footsteps. Fu signed up over his parents’ objections, and in late April he went to Dongjia village in Baodi along with seventeen other Tianjin youths. There he met former Tianjin worker Wei Rongchun, who was in charge of managing the urban youth. A few years later, Fu would defy his parents again by marrying a girl from the village.

While Fu’s parents disagreed with his decision to settle and marry in a village, they realized that they could not change his mind. In 1964, other Tianjin parents took more drastic measures to prevent their children from going to villages. In April, when a sixteen-year-old Tianjin girl named Wang volunteered to go to a village, her mother

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<sup>38</sup> TMA, X281-96Y, 3b.

made her a big meal of eggs and dumplings, saying, “villages are so bitter, don’t go!” The mother wanted Wang to stay at home and help with housework. When Wang was not swayed by big meals, her family tied her up while she was sleeping and hid her pants so that she could not leave the house. Wang dictated an S.O.S. note to her niece, which the younger girl then delivered to the local street committee cadres who were in charge of mobilizing jobless youth.<sup>39</sup>

In another case, a Tianjin factory official beat his son when the unemployed seventeen-year-old signed up to go to a village. The cadre said, “If you go, I’ll break your leg,” and tried to make good on this threat when his son returned from a send-off ceremony with a bouquet of flowers and a certificate approving the boy’s transfer to Baodi. The father made the teen return the certificate, and then beat him with a belt for an hour until the strap broke into three pieces. Mangled belt in hand, the boy limped off to the local Communist Youth League office and reported the abuse.<sup>40</sup>

According to one internal report, the longer parents had spent in villages, the more likely they were to obstruct their children from leaving Tianjin. For parents who had left the countryside so that their children could enjoy the benefits of urban life, the sent-down youth program seemed like downward mobility. Tianjin parents from village backgrounds had a clear understanding of the rural-urban divide’s specifics. They feared that their children could not handle farm work, that they were too young

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<sup>39</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 河西区简报 [Hexi district bulletin] 125 (May 4, 1964): 1-2, HDA, 1-6-21C.

<sup>40</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 124 (April 25, 1964): 1-2, HDA, 1-6-21C.

to be on their own, that nobody would care for them if they fell ill, that they would not earn money to support the family, and that they would permanently lose their urban *hukou*. One parent said, “I spent half my life in a village. It’s bitter and exhausting. I really don’t know about this.”<sup>41</sup>

Whether out of adolescent rebelliousness or because they were tired of waiting for a job assignment to materialize, some Tianjin youth ignored their families’ warnings about village life. The bitterness that their parents and grandparents spoke of had changed, had it not? Mao said that the countryside was a vast universe where they could make great contributions. It was galling for the teens to discover that their parents had been right.

“We felt cheated,” Xue Meng said. “The propaganda said that there were employment problems in the city so we should come to the countryside. We did, and then the people who refused to go to villages were rewarded with jobs several months later. As soon as we left, there were lots of jobs in the city.” When faced with a choice between sitting idle in the city or being revolutionary in a village, many Tianjin youths had chosen the latter option. A new wave of city hirings in mid-1964 revealed a third possibility. The news that their friends in the city were getting jobs was made worse by the realization that village life was indeed bitter. A December 1964 provincial report on problems in Baodi and other counties noted that most sent-down youth lacked sufficient grain, winter clothes, and blankets, and that adequate housing was in short supply. Urban youths including Xue Meng and Fu Tianliang received

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<sup>41</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 111 (March 21, 1964): 3, HDA, 1-6-21C.

monthly allowances and packages of extra food from their parents to supplement their meager village diets.

Propaganda had mentioned the need to transform rural poverty, but youth who had never been to villages before did not know what to expect. They were more receptive to messages about how Jixian county north of Baodi had “mountains filled with flowers and fruit, and plains full of rice and grain” (as one urban cadre had promised sent-down youth at a mobilization meeting) than to vague warnings about hardship.<sup>42</sup> One Tianjin youth complained, “You cheated us into coming by giving us red flowers and showing us movies.”<sup>43</sup>

In 1964, sent-down youth were not the only urbanites to discover that rural reality defied expectations. Members of Four Cleanups work teams, many of whom were only several years older than the sent-down youth, learned lessons about village hardship and poverty that conflicted with encomiums about fighting a war of annihilation against class enemies and corrupt rural cadres. Chen Boda exhorted city people to get close to the masses by following the three together. But the closer they got to the masses, the more skeptical some work team members became about a capitalist restoration in the countryside.

### The Three Together

After successfully taking down Zhang Fengqin in Xiyouying, Chen Boda

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<sup>42</sup> HPA, 907-7-85Y, 23.

<sup>43</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 176 (July 4, 1964), 5, HDA, 1-6-21C.

continued his search for problems in the Tianjin suburbs. In spring 1964, Chen visited several other sites in Xiaozhan. He returned to Tuozidi, where farmers had complained about labor model Jiang Deyu four years earlier. It was rainy, but Chen again insisted on walking into the village. He took off his shoes and socks, slipping and sliding through the mud. For lunch, villagers had prepared a substantial meal with several dishes, steamed buns, and rice. When Chen saw the food, he declined to partake. He refused to “eat big and drink big,” one of the main crimes village officials were accused of during the Four Cleanups. Chen said he would have a corn bun, and his village hosts rushed off to make some. When the buns were ready, Chen divided one up and passed pieces around before taking two bites and declaring the meal finished. Chen then said that even though Jiang Deyu had been cashiered in 1962, he was still in charge behind the scenes in Tuozidi. Jiang would also have to become a struggle target during the Four Cleanups, Chen said.<sup>44</sup> After Tuozidi, Chen’s next stop was Xiaozhan township, where he decided that township party secretary Zhang Yulun was actually a class enemy from a “bandit family.”

Chen thought that he had found a good formula for getting close to the masses and discovering problems in the suburbs. This was his modified version of the three togethers. Chen stayed in a colonial-style guesthouse in Tianjin’s former British concession, where he enjoyed privately screened films (including one about the life of Beethoven),<sup>45</sup> and he did not do farm work, but when he went to the countryside he

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<sup>44</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 206-7.

<sup>45</sup> “I like to watch films about bourgeois life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,



portrayed himself as down-to-earth. First, walk into villages, even if your feet get muddy. Second, be seen eating simple food. Chen had learned the latter lesson during his 1960 visit to Xiaozhan, when he insisted on eating a humble vegetable bun. In late 1964, he told a group of writers and editors preparing to join Four Cleanups work teams that his attention to appearances had paid off. “Recently I went back there and two peasants pointed at me from afar and said, ‘that old man wearing glasses came here in 1960 and ate a vegetable bun. Now he’s back.’ All I did was eat once and the common people remembered it,” Chen said with misplaced pride.<sup>46</sup>

After 1964, people in Xiaozhan would remember Chen’s accusations during the Four Cleanups more than his bun chewing. Wang Hui, director of the Tianjin municipal party committee’s general office, was instrumental in publicizing Chen’s charges. Wang spent two weeks in Xiaozhan drafting the report that was circulated nationwide about the region’s Four Cleanups. He later regretted his involvement. “This was the most important document from Tianjin that party center had circulated since liberation. It was also the document with the worst impact,” he wrote in 2004.<sup>47</sup> Even though his final report adhered to Chen Boda’s orders, outlining the massive corruption, sexual misconduct, and evil deeds of “class aliens” Zhang, Jiang, and Zhang, Wang Hui’s impression of suburban village life differed from Chen Boda’s.

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no less than I like reading old Chinese books,” Chen told Tianjin mayor Hu Zhaozheng. Quan Yanchi 权延赤, *Tianjin shizhang* 天津市长 [Tianjin mayor] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993), 83.

<sup>46</sup> Chen Boda, “Xiexiang wenti,” HPA, 855-19-1045C, 40.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Hui, 197.

This is because Wang, unlike Chen, slept, ate, and went to the bathroom in Xiyouying for an extended period of time. Wang followed the three together in a peasant home. “There was not even a basic latrine pit in the yard,” he wrote, “so going to the bathroom was very difficult.” In retrospect, Wang found it ironic that he and other work team members normally lived in nice buildings equipped with bathrooms, but were struggling against grassroots rural cadres living in mud huts. “Their small-scale farming lives were extremely far from a capitalist restoration,” he wrote.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout rural China in 1964 and 1965, members of Four Cleanups work teams had experiences that clashed with the goals of the movement. Chen Boda stressed the need to overthrow hidden class enemies and corrupt village officials who had gotten rich. But work team members from cities were far more impressed by widespread poverty than by examples of rural wealth. Mao sent his doctor to participate in the Four Cleanups in Jiangxi province, where “after sixteen years of revolution, it seemed to me that China had not progressed at all. The standard of living was terrible.”<sup>49</sup> Closer to Tianjin, in Baxian west of the city, work team members “were unclear on why after more than ten years of being liberated the poor and lower-middle peasants could still be so impoverished,” according to an internal report. The local diet consisted solely of boiled carrots, a family of five shared one dirty quilt and two bowls, and daughters were sold or married off as child brides.

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<sup>48</sup> Wang Hui, 206-7.

<sup>49</sup> Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician* (New York: Random House, 1994), 429.

Work team members thought these conditions were “incomprehensible, and did not link them to cadres’ four unclean problems.”<sup>50</sup> They followed orders to struggle against enemies and temper themselves in the revolutionary crucible of the countryside, but also privately took note of economic reality.

Testimonials about how to overcome revulsion at the dirtier aspects of village life became a popular genre in internal publications like *Hebei Four Cleanups newsletter* and *Tianjin suburbs Four Cleanups bulletin*. Work team members usually concluded articles with an obligatory sentence or two acknowledging that their own bourgeois ideology was the filthiest thing of all. But the bulk of the texts aimed for shock value and reinforced the idea of rural inferiority. One woman work team member described an elderly female villager with a putrefying open neck wound who spit rancid globs on the floor and then cooked steamed buns in a dirty face-washing basin. The young woman forced herself to take a few bites of the bun, ran outside, and vomited. On her next visit, she inhaled smelling salts before entering the home. After examining her thought, she apologized for offending her host and the two women became friendly, but the disgusting parts of the testimonial overwhelm its happy ending.<sup>51</sup> Other work team members wrote about snot-nosed village children who urinated or defecated in bed. The city visitors eventually controlled their disgust and helped to clean up the mess, but readers could be forgiven for thinking, “gross,”

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<sup>50</sup> *Hebei siqing tongxun* 河北四清通讯 [Hebei Four Cleanups newsletter], November-December 1964, HPA, D651.7 15:1.

<sup>51</sup> *Hebei siqing tongxun*, November-December 1964, HPA, D651.7 15:1.

instead of “I, too, need to reform my bourgeois ideology.”

Four Cleanups work team members from Tianjin may have been disgusted by village life, but they knew that eventually the movement would end and they would be able to return to the comforts of city jobs and schools. They were well aware that their performance in the movement could affect opportunities for career advancement. Enthusiastically following the three together was a ritual meant to impress work team colleagues and peasants alike. One thirty-year-old Tianjin woman named Yang did not mention rural filth in her personal diary about her time on a Four Cleanups work team in the Hengshui area of Hebei in 1964 and 1965, although she commented on the hardships of farm work and the “extremely obvious selfish mentality” of peasants who seemed overly concerned about grain distribution.<sup>52</sup> Yang dwelled more on her superiors and fellow work team members than on village life or the details of the Four Cleanups. She saw her tasks, including the three together, as hoops to jump through in order to enter the Communist Party and advance in her career.

In between diary entries about going to the county town for a shower and wondering when the movement would ever end, Yang complained that her efforts to follow the three together were not being recognized by her superiors. In July 1965, she was outraged at a formal review of her performance. The language used on her evaluation form especially galled Yang. “Ai! I work myself to death day and night but I didn’t even get the word ‘enthusiastic,’ instead I only got ‘hard working,’” Yang wrote. She wore an old cotton jacket to show her closeness to the peasants, but

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<sup>52</sup> Diary, APA.

nobody believed that it was really hers, “so in my evaluation I got a ‘simple lifestyle’ but no ‘arduous.’” For Yang, the three together were more about appearances than about uniting with villagers. How the Four Cleanups might affect her professional development was her paramount concern. In this, she was not alone.

Work team members in the Xiaozhan region also wanted to show their superiors that they were enthusiastic about the Four Cleanups. In Xiaozhan, Chen Boda’s involvement raised the stakes. Work team members who wanted to seem revolutionary could not afford to ignore the orders of a central leader who seemed so certain about ominous plots. While Yang worried about what others thought about her jacket, work team members in Xiaozhan competed to ferret out as many hidden class enemies as possible. Their zealousness spiraled into violence.

### Xiaozhan’s Shocks

After Chen Boda identified evil ringleaders in the Tianjin suburbs, work teams compiled materials on the three “counterrevolutionary cliques” centered around female labor model Zhang Fengqin, rice specialist Jiang Deyu, and township leader Zhang Yulun. Each clique included about eighty people, who were criticized at mass meetings. Anyone with ties to the counterrevolutionaries also came under suspicion: one official source reports that 2,711 people in the south suburbs were implicated in “mistaken cases” during the Four Cleanups.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tianjin shi Jinnan qu difang zhi bianxiu weihuanhui 天津市津南区地方志编修委员会, ed., *Jinnan qu zhi* 津南区志 [Jinnan district gazetteer] (Tianjin: Tianjin shehui kexue yuan chubanshe, 1999), 425.

Tianjin leaders helped to push the movement in a violent direction by officially endorsing Chen Boda's verdict on the cliques' three ringleaders. By the end of April, Zhang Fengqin was kicked out of the party and her husband was arrested. Jiang Deyu was detained in July; Zhang Yulun remained free until December, although his party membership and leadership positions had been taken away earlier in the year. Once the cliques had been identified and their leaders punished, family, friends, and others who had connections to the counterrevolutionaries became fair game for inhumane treatment.

Available accounts identify work team members as the main perpetrators of beatings and torture in Xiaozhan, although villagers were also involved. According to an official source, there were twenty-nine "abnormal deaths" during Xiaozhan's Four Cleanups; one former member of a work team there told me that the dead included beating and suicide victims.<sup>54</sup> Chen Boda blithely encouraged the violence after someone told him about a beating in Xiaozhan. "The masses want to beat him, they have the revolutionary spirit," Chen said. "First, they are not beating a good person. Second, they did not beat him to death."<sup>55</sup> Violence occurred on stage at meetings and also during interrogations. At one session, Zhang Fengqin was subjected to the "swing the coal briquette" torture. One person grabbed her by the hair, another took

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<sup>54</sup> Tianjin shi nongcun hezuo zhi fazhan shi bianji bangongshi 天津市农村合作制发展史编辑办公室, ed., *Tianjin shi nongcun hezuo zhi fazhan jianshi, 1949-1987* 天津市农村合作制发展简史 [Concise history of the Tianjin village cooperative system, 1949-1987] (Tianjin: Tianjin shi nongye hezuo zhi fazhan shi bianji bangongshi, 1989), 324; interviewee 9.

<sup>55</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 230-31.

her legs, and they swung her around violently. Zhang's hair was torn from her head and two of her front teeth fell out.<sup>56</sup> She tried to hang herself at home, but two female work team members stationed in her house stopped her.<sup>57</sup>

Other rural officials in the Tianjin region heard about the carnage in Xiaozhan and were terrified. In October 1965, work team members reported that “because of Xiaozhan's shocks,” cadres were afraid of getting killed: “People say, ‘as long as I have a breath in my body after the movement is over, it will be okay.’”<sup>58</sup> Some could not take the pressure. A rash of suicides swept through villages when a new wave of work teams entered Hebei villages in autumn 1965. In October alone, thirty-six suicides in the Tangshan region were attributed to the Four Cleanups. In the province as a whole, 533 people had killed themselves during the movement, including 73 in the Tianjin region and 2 within the municipality.<sup>59</sup> Even though internal reports urged caution and deplored the deaths, leaders including Gu Yunting (Tianjin's party secretary in charge of agriculture and the suburban Four Cleanups) emphasized the necessity of harsh struggle well into early 1966. In a speech to work team political officers, Gu spoke approvingly of the treatment used against Zhang Yulun in

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<sup>56</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 231.

<sup>57</sup> ZGSX, 510; Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei bangongting 中共天津市委办公厅, “Chen Boda tongzhi jianghua jiyao” 陈伯达同志谈话纪要 [Summary of comrade Chen Boda's remarks], November 24, 1964, HPA, 855-19-1045C, 50.

<sup>58</sup> *Jinjiao siqing jianbao* 1 (October 25, 1965): 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Hebei nongcun siqing jianxun* 河北农村四清简讯 [Hebei village Four Cleanups news in brief] 40 (November 21, 1965): 1-3.

Xiaozhan, who “was struggled against so hard that his sweat soaked the ground.”<sup>60</sup>

### Sex and the Four Cleanups

Accusations about almost any perceived transgression—economic, political, or personal—led to humiliation and violent punishment. Some of the harshest criticism and treatment were reserved for alleged sexual improprieties. In the official report about the “Xiaozhan experience” circulated nationwide, both Zhang Fengqin and Zhang Yulun were singled out for having had illicit sexual relations (Zhang Fengqin with a Xiyouying vice brigade leader, Zhang Yulun with the “concubine” of a “landlord-capitalist”).<sup>61</sup> After the charges against the two village leaders were aired publicly, work team members investigated the sexual histories of lesser targets, sometimes viciously. When one female cadre in a village a mile away from Xiyouying denied charges that she had slept with her village party secretary, work team interrogators stripped her naked and forced icicles into her vagina.<sup>62</sup>

In such cases, work team members justified their criminal brutality by arguing that adultery and seduction were nefarious tools that class enemies used to corrupt upright officials. Yet members of work teams were not immune from involvement in sexual entanglements. Disciplinary guidelines drawn up for Four Cleanups work teams required that members not engage in “chaotic sexual relations” or form

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<sup>60</sup> *Hebei nongcun siqing jianxun* 98 (May 6, 1966): 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> ZGSX, 511, 490.

<sup>62</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 231.



romantic attachments with other team members or villagers.<sup>63</sup> Some people from Tianjin, released from the routines of city jobs and classrooms, had difficulty following these rules. In November 1964, Hebei governor and second party secretary Liu Zihou criticized Gu Yunting for allowing two suburban work teams to fall apart because of sexual improprieties.<sup>64</sup> Work team members were not rewarded for adding a fourth “together” to their interactions with villagers.

One team sent to Hangou in Tianjin’s north suburbs was totally out of control. Two leading officials on the work team had sex with one another in multiple peasant homes. This angered villagers. When one local man learned that his young daughter had walked in on the two in flagrante, he called them “contemptible creatures.” Two other work team members flirted or slept with village women, and a third snuck out of Hangou to pursue an adulterous affair with a woman from his work unit in Tianjin. According to an internal report, the work team’s sexual misconduct undermined its ability to clean up village problems, and was responsible for the “premature death” of the movement in Hangou.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei jiaoqu siqing gongzuo zongtuan 中共天津市委郊区四清工作总团, *Shehuizhuyi jiaoyu xuexi wenjian* 社会主义教育学习文件 [Socialist education study documents] (Tianjin, January 1966), 239.

<sup>64</sup> Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei bangongting 中共天津市委办公厅, *Zihou tongzhi zai tingqu Yunting tongzhi huibao Tianjin jiaoqu siqing yundong qingkuang he buzhi wenti shi de zhishi* 子厚同志在听取云亭同志汇报天津郊区四清运动情况和布置问题时的指示 [Comrade Zihou’s orders upon hearing Comrade Yunting’s report on the situation and problems with the Four Cleanups movement in the Tianjin suburbs] (November 13, 1964), HPA, 855-19-1111C, 42.

<sup>65</sup> *Hebei siqing tongxun* 3 (November 23, 1964): 1-2.

While the Hangou debacle was kept under wraps, another case of sexual misconduct in Tianjin's east suburbs received wider publicity. In the latter instance, the village woman involved suffered the brunt of the criticism. The two Tianjin work team members she had supposedly seduced were censured for giving in to temptation, but their weakness was presented as excusable. As the Tianjin journalist who publicized the case put it, "class enemies stealthily shot off a pink cannonball that exploded in the Four Cleanups work team, and some work team members fell wounded."<sup>66</sup> Sex could be a dangerous weapon wielded by crafty villagers.

Two versions of what happened in the east suburbs emerged.<sup>67</sup> According to the lurid account circulated in Four Cleanups newsletters and featured in an exhibition about the "fruits of the Four Cleanups" on public display at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, a young female village accountant known as the "little fox" was at fault.<sup>68</sup> Village cadres threatened by the Four Cleanups purportedly encouraged the little fox to entrap a recent university graduate from Tianjin. The graduate was in charge of documents related to the movement. After seducing him and gaining his trust, the little fox was able to access secret files and provide intelligence to her backers. But the relationship was discovered and the graduate had to cut off contact with the young woman. The next step in the plan was for the little fox to sleep with an older married

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<sup>66</sup> *Hebei nongcun jieji douzheng dianxing cailiao*, vol. 1 (February 1966), 191.

<sup>67</sup> The following paragraphs are based on *Hebei nongcun jieji douzheng dianxing cailiao*, vol. 1, 190-203 and vol. 2, 216-24. While the woman's version is discredited by the author, her accusations against the work team are included in the report.

<sup>68</sup> Interviewee 79.

man on the work team. Under the pretense of lending a literary magazine to the man, the little fox stroked his hand and they immediately fell into bed. After this coup, she was allowed to attend meetings of the work team party branch and to borrow internal documents from her new paramour, all the while passing along classified information to village cadres.

The woman disputed this narrative. She denied that there was any political motive or spying involved. The relationship with the young graduate was “sincerely falling in love,” she said. Before they were discovered, the two went on dates to Tianjin movie theaters and strolled in the city’s riverside parks. Sex with the older married work team member, a cadre in the Tianjin planning commission who had a long history of sexual misconduct, was not consensual, the woman said. She claimed that he had forcibly humiliated her. After the work team interrogated the woman and tried to get her to confess to her plot, she mailed letters to party center and personally delivered protest petitions to the Tianjin party committee and municipal government, excoriating the “bandit team” as “bullies protected by the powerful.”

The work team turned up the pressure on the little fox by organizing a “struggle corps” of village activists against her. Finally, the team’s political instructor publicly humiliated her by broadcasting its version of events at a village-wide struggle meeting. After four days of criticism, she gave up, saying, “I admit defeat, without the help of the entire village I would not have reformed myself. I will write the party a letter of repentance and will not do any more plots.” She was kicked out of the youth league; her punishment was supervised labor. The two men were disciplined for

having succumbed to seduction. The graduate had his youth league membership revoked and the old cadre was booted from the party. The “profound lesson” learned by the work team was that “we relaxed our political thought work and were cheated by the enemy’s sexual entrapment.”<sup>69</sup>

There is reason to doubt the veracity of the work team’s story. It is likely that team leaders, wanting to avoid being humiliated and criticized like their lewd comrades in Hangou, sought to deflect blame by accusing the little fox of seduction and spying. It was the word of the work team against a village woman, and when villagers sensed which way the wind was blowing at struggle meetings, they turned against her. When the university graduate was finally allowed to enter the party in the 1980s, his colleagues discussed the matter and characterized it as “falling in love.” There was no plot.

There was, however, a power imbalance between urban work teams and villagers—especially female villagers—in Tianjin’s suburbs. The little fox and other rural women in similar situations, including village party secretary Zhang Fengqin, were in the most subordinate position of all during the Four Cleanups. The little fox used all of the protest channels available to her, but was unable to successfully refute the work team’s charges. As long as work teams remained stationed in villages, people who felt wronged by the Four Cleanups could only resist in symbolic ways. One villager complained about the hypocrisy of criticizing sexual misconduct by yelling, “Lin Tie is the [Hebei] provincial party secretary and he still has a

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<sup>69</sup> *Hebei nongcun jieji douzheng dianxing cailiao*, vol. 1, 202.

concubine.” Another filled a work team’s anonymous opinion box with excrement.<sup>70</sup> The most effective strategy was to simply wait until work teams declared the movement over and decamped from villages.

Villagers confronted with burdensome sent-down youth did not have the luxury of waiting for them to leave. As “new-style peasants,” the urban youth were supposedly in the countryside for life. But villagers had more options at their disposal in handling sent-down youth than in dealing with politically powerful Four Cleanups work teams from the city. When battles broke out between peasants and relatively powerless urban youth, they were not so one-sided.

### Confrontations

When Dongjia party secretary Hu Yishun learned that his village would host urban youth in 1964, he requested only male teenagers. He saw the transfer as a useful infusion of labor power and wanted men, not women. Eighteen young men arrived in Dongjia on April 25, 1964. Impressed by downsized worker Wei Rongchun’s success in using his city connections to help bring electricity to Dongjia, Hu put Wei in charge of the newcomers. Hu figured that Wei’s experience in Tianjin would give him authority with the city kids. He was right.

Most of the youth sent to Dongjia were middle-school dropouts. About half of them had had run-ins with the law. One problem child named Zhao had been

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<sup>70</sup> *Jinjiao siqing jianbao* 78 (May 24, 1966): 4; *Hebei nongcun siqing jianxun* 35 (November 7, 1965): 2.

sentenced to three years of labor reform but escaped before being sent to the village by Tianjin street committee cadres. Once in Dongjia, Zhao refused to work and cheated money from villagers in order to buy liquor. After only a month in the village, his misbehavior was reported to top national leaders in a classified report.<sup>71</sup>

Another young tough named Yu also tested Wei Rongchun's patience. Instead of working in the fields, Yu went out by himself and caught crickets. He took them to Tianjin and sold them to city people who kept the insects as pets. Apparently poverty motivated Yu's peddling. While the other youths in Dongjia received allowances and care packages from their families, Yu got nothing. When Wei Rongchun told Yu that his cricket peddling was unacceptable and that he had to stop going to Tianjin, Yu became angry and threatened to "waste" (*fei*) Wei.

The next night, Wei called all of the urban youth to a meeting. Before leaving his house, he put a large kitchen knife in his pocket. As the meeting began, Wei showed Yu the knife. "I hear you want to waste me," Wei said. "Well, here's your chance, go ahead." He put the knife on the table in front of Yu, loosened his collar, and pointed to his neck. "But you should know that Liu Guanghan is my master and if you kill me, you'll have killed his disciple," Wei added, referring to a famous secret society boss from Tianjin.

Wei was bluffing. He did not know any underworld bosses; he had only heard about them in Tianjin. But Wei's name-dropping unnerved Yu, who started backing away. Wei grabbed the knife and started toward Yu, saying, "fine, if you won't waste

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<sup>71</sup> NBCK 3624 (May 26, 1964): 7.

me, I'll waste you!" Yu turned and ran out of the building. After this confrontation, Yu stopped catching crickets and worked quietly in the village. Wei used his urban know-how to keep unruly sent-down youth in line. But other problems were less easily solved, especially for village cadres who lacked Wei's urban street smarts.

Villagers quickly tired of the youths' antics. About half of the 2,300 Tianjin youth sent to Baodi in April were described as having resolute ideology and laboring enthusiastically. The rest were less than enthusiastic, while about seventy teens had "evil ways" and soured the experience for everyone else.<sup>72</sup> The kid who bellowed auspicious songs at rural weddings and funerals and then demanded money for his services was harmless enough, and the hapless one who nearly burned down his host's house while trying to boil an egg could be forgiven. But forming gangs and brawling had led to injuries, and the pilfering of food and money was getting out of control. Urban youths crossed the line when they urinated out of their windows, peeped at village girls using the bathroom, spread rumors that certain young women were not virgins, and taught local boys to masturbate.<sup>73</sup>

Villagers began to fight back. One sent-down youth named Wang in Jixian north of Baodi had formed a gang of toughs that picked fights with locals. When another urban youth reported on Wang, Wang's gang bloodied the tattletale's eye. After Wang punched the village party secretary, who had tried to intervene, villagers trussed Wang up. Then one of Wang's mates tried to release him. Villagers tied up

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<sup>72</sup> NBCK 3624 (May 26, 1964): 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 176 (July 4, 1964): 1-5, HDA, 1-6-21C.

the friend and marched him to the nearest police station, pausing to beat him with a rifle stock when he refused to cooperate.<sup>74</sup> For some village cadres, dealing with unruly sent-down youth was the most difficult task they had ever encountered. “I have been through countless political movements, but have never gotten a headache,” one village cadre said. “Now my head really hurts!”<sup>75</sup>

Village and county officials demanded that Tianjin street committees stop sending city “rejects” (*feipin*).<sup>76</sup> But some urban districts continued to dispatch troublemakers to the countryside, and when Baodi officials traveled to Tianjin to complain, city cadres refused to show the visitors relevant files and offered vague assurances that everything would be fine.<sup>77</sup> Everything was not fine. Villagers’ headaches would not subside until the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, when many urban youths returned to the city to join the new movement or to complain about their hard lives in the countryside. After 1966, many of the youth who had settled in Dongjia village in 1964 were never heard from again.

#### Invited Guests in Tianjin

Movement between city and countryside in the mid-1960s was not limited to urban people going to villages. In March 1965, a year after sent-down youth went to

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<sup>74</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 180 (July 14, 1964): 1, HDA, 1-6-21C.

<sup>75</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 176 (July 4, 1964): 6, HDA, 1-6-21C.

<sup>76</sup> TMA, X281-97Y, 14.

<sup>77</sup> NBCK 3624 (May 26, 1964): 8.



Baodi and Chen Boda went to Xiaozhan, more than three thousand poor and middle-lower peasant representatives from Hebei province converged on Tianjin for a ten-day meeting. The purpose of the gathering, aside from honoring model laborers, was to share experiences on agricultural work in 1964 and to discuss how to achieve a bumper harvest in 1965. Unlike the Four Cleanups members and sent-down youth stationed in Hebei villages during the same period, the peasant representatives visiting Tianjin were not ordered to remold the city. Nor were they asked to assist with urban class struggle. In 1965, city people were supposed to attack village problems, not the other way around. Even though the city was starting its own version of the Four Cleanups, no rural work teams took part in the movement. Instead, peasant representatives attended plays, ate out at restaurants, and stayed in multi-storey hotels.

Newspaper propaganda about the meeting urged Tianjin residents to “fully recognize the major significance of the worker-peasant alliance,” but reminded readers that the nation was “led by the workers’ class.” City people were also instructed to help the rural visitors if they got lost.<sup>78</sup> *Tianjin Evening News* quoted hotel staff who were impressed by peasant guests who refused to take elevators, kept their lights dim to save electricity, and helped with housekeeping. The hotel employees returned the favor by washing and patching farmers’ muddy, worn clothing.<sup>79</sup> Storekeepers likewise pledged to change their old habits of “judging people by their appearance and

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<sup>78</sup> TJWB, March 10, 1965, 1.

<sup>79</sup> TJWB, March 17, 1965, 4.

pushing dull goods on peasants” and to thoughtfully serve the visitors.<sup>80</sup>

These feel-good messages of cross-class friendship did a poor job of hiding the underlying message that peasants did not really belong in cities in 1965. Villagers did not know how to operate elevators or electric lights, their clothes were dirty, and they got lost on city streets. Farmers deserved kudos, but for what? For serving the city. Factory workers thanked peasants for providing raw materials for industry and for sacrificing their fields in order to save Tianjin during the terrible flood of 1963. One worker gushed that this was the first time that poor peasants had ever come to the city for a meeting, and that in the exploitative old society they hardly had the chance to visit a county town, let alone a big city like Tianjin. This certainly seemed like progress, but peasants’ proper place in the new society was clear. They could sacrifice and then enjoy ten days in the city at a meeting; urban people would say thanks and then come to villages to transform them.

According to an internal report about the peasant representative meeting, some city residents wondered what the big deal was. “Peasants holding a meeting has nothing to do with me,” said one person, while another asked, “Isn’t it just a meeting?” Other people thought that the meeting might be linked with the Four Cleanups, which was not mentioned in any of the propaganda about the meeting. City people’s comments about the Four Cleanups, which the report characterized as “confused thought,” included: “Because village cadres kept making false reports, this time the poor peasants have been called here to tell the truth,” and the notion that the

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<sup>80</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 214 (March 15, 1965): 3, HDA, 1-6-26C.

peasants were invited to Tianjin “because they got rid of bad village cadres.”<sup>81</sup> After ten days in Tianjin, the peasant representatives returned home and city people stopped worrying about why they might have come in the first place. But in villages, turbulence caused by the Four Cleanups did not go away.

### Fallout

In Tianjin’s south suburbs, practical problems emerged after Chen Boda and Four Cleanups work teams sacked and punished “bad” village cadres. As the fall harvest in Xiyouying came around, it became clear that the village’s income had fallen drastically since the Four Cleanups had started and that peasants would receive less grain than they had under deposed village party secretary Zhang Fengqin’s leadership. Unwilling to let his model flounder, Chen went into damage control mode. The first step was to invest funds in improving “village appearance” (*nongcun mianmao*). Chen diverted 250,000 yuan for building projects in Xiaozhan, and asked Tianjin economic planners to consider moving city factories there.<sup>82</sup> Even though village leaders’ homes were too luxurious for Chen’s tastes, apparently the area needed a makeover. It was standard practice for leaders to lavish state funds on model units. But architectural

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<sup>81</sup> *Hexi qu jianbao* 214 (March 15, 1965): 6, HDA, 1-6-26C.

<sup>82</sup> Tianjin shi nongcun hezuo zhi fazhan shi bianji bangongshi, ed., *Tianjin shi nongcun hezuo zhi dianxing shiliao xuanbian: 1949-1987* 天津市农村合作制典型史料选编 [Selected representative historical materials on the Tianjin village cooperative system, 1949-1987] (Tianjin: Tianjin shi nongye hezuo zhi fazhan shi bianji bangongshi, 1988), 132; Li Zhongyuan 李中垣, *Bashi shuwang* 八十述往 [Narrating the past at age eighty] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1998), 205.

improvements would not solve the serious threat that a drop in local incomes posed to the credibility of Chen's model.

During the Four Cleanups in Xiyouying, the work team learned that Zhang Fengqin had kept 500 mu of "black land" off the books.<sup>83</sup> Now that the land had been reported, Xiyouying was responsible for handing over more grain to the state. Also, following the Four Cleanups' attack on money making, the village's sideline income in 1964 plummeted by 44 percent.<sup>84</sup> Chen Boda was learning an important lesson about how rural leaders had managed to keep life bearable for villagers. He was frustrated that villagers supported "bad" cadres and hated "good" ones. "Bad cadres hid land and gave too much grain to the masses," he said in Tianjin in late November 1964. "With good cadres in charge, the hidden land is made public and the masses get less grain. This means that good cadres cannot continue on."<sup>85</sup> Now he understood why Zhang Fengqin enjoyed popular support. "Since the Four Cleanups movement, the burden on the masses has increased," he said. "If I were a common person in Xiyouying, I would also endorse Zhang Fengqin."<sup>86</sup>

It was unacceptable to Chen that Xiyouying owed more to the state after he

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<sup>83</sup> Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei bangongting, "Shiyi yue ershier ri wan Chen Boda tongzhi de tanhua jiyao" 十一月二十二日晚陈伯达同志的谈话纪要 [Summary of comrade Chen Boda's remarks on the evening of November 22], December 2, 1964, HPA, 855-19-1045C, 83.

<sup>84</sup> *Jinnan quzhi*, 844.

<sup>85</sup> "Chen Boda tongzhi jianghua jiyao," HPA, 855-19-1045C, 53.

<sup>86</sup> "Shiyi yue ershier ri wan Chen Boda tongzhi de tanhua jiyao," HPA, 855-19-1045C, 83.

had tried to clean up the village's problems. He ordered no requisitioning of grain from the "black land" for at least three years, and directed Tianjin officials to immediately distribute to villagers 85,000 kilos of grain that had already been collected and warehoused. When Tianjin's deputy propaganda director Fang Ji mentioned commune rules mandating that forms had to be filled out before grain could be given to villagers, cranky Chen went on a Mao-like tirade against bureaucracy:

Why is the commune so bossy? This form, that form, burn them all! They've set up this complicated system that makes it impossible for us to get involved, then they can play tricks. Their crock of a system is hairsplitting and pretentious, they use it to frighten people. Why don't you take care of this! Your Four Cleanups work team is incompetent! This affects the masses' livelihood, it affects next year's production, but you do nothing about it! The commune is stirring up trouble by doing it this way! Let the masses discuss this and distribute grain however they want.<sup>87</sup>

Fang Ji made sure that the grain was dispensed right away, and also carried out Chen's orders that finance authorities forgive outstanding debts owed by Xiyouying villagers.

Chen Boda was discovering how difficult it was to be a village leader. He bent the rules to maximize villagers' incomes, much like Zhang Fengqin had in previous years. Back in the village, a man named Wang Fengchun had benefited greatly from his rival Zhang's downfall. Wang, who had risen from vice party secretary to become Xiyouying's top leader, owed his new position to Chen Boda. But Wang was unaware that his powerful patron had been pulling strings in Tianjin to distribute more grain to Xiyouying. Wang was still giving speeches attacking Zhang Fengqin, saying that keeping more or less grain for the village was a struggle between two lines (more

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<sup>87</sup> "Chen Boda tongzhi jianghua jiyao," HPA, 855-19-1045C, 54.

grain being capitalist, less being socialist). Now that Chen Boda was acting like Zhang Fengqin had, he needed Wang to shut up. “His attitude and viewpoint are correct,” Chen said about Wang, “but in policy terms he is mistaken. Comrade Fang Ji, go back and do a bit of persuasion work on Wang Fengchun.”<sup>88</sup> Chen Boda would soon discover that Wang Fengchun was not the only person who had misread his patron’s shifting intentions.

Chen’s ability to manipulate events on the ground in the Tianjin suburbs changed along with the overall direction of the Four Cleanups. Mao’s late 1964 critique of Liu Shaoqi’s version of the movement also applied to Xiaozhan. The “twenty-three points,” circulated on January 18, 1965, stressed uniting 95 percent of cadres and called for an end to “human wave tactics,” stating, “we must not concentrate excessively large work teams within a single hsien [xian], commune, or brigade.”<sup>89</sup> Chen Boda was chastened. Xiaozhan was a prime example of human wave tactics—more than five thousand people served on work teams there. And instead of uniting 95 percent of cadres, Chen had claimed that “more than 80 percent of grassroots power” in Xiaozhan was “not in our hands.”<sup>90</sup>

After making a few conciliatory moves in January 1965, including releasing Zhang Fengqin’s husband from jail and allowing Zhang to labor under supervision at

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<sup>88</sup> “Chen Boda tongzhi jianghua jiyao,” HPA, 855-19-1045C, 53.

<sup>89</sup> Baum, 119, 122.

<sup>90</sup> Liu Jinfeng, 208.

home, Chen backed off from Xiaozhan's Four Cleanups.<sup>91</sup> The intensity of the movement diminished, and the last work teams left Xiaozhan in September 1965. This was small consolation to people classified as members of counterrevolutionary cliques, including Jiang Deyu and Zhang Yulun, who remained in jail until the 1970s.

When Tianjin cadres returned to check up on Xiaozhan in spring 1966, they found that the problems they had tried to stamp out had already reappeared. New village cadres who had taken office during the movement were stepping down and refusing to work; gambling and black market grain trades had reemerged.<sup>92</sup>

Resentment simmered among those who had been targeted during the Four Cleanups. The wife of one "unclean" village cadre cornered the inspection team and told them that they could not leave until the furniture confiscated from her family in 1964 was returned.<sup>93</sup> One former village party secretary became enraged when he ran into Four Cleanups activists at a public works project, yelling, "you fucking bastards, you relied on the influence of the movement to oppress people. Come on, let's go one-on-one, I'll get my knife and stab you."<sup>94</sup>

For a while, the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in mid-1966 and the power seizures that swept the nation in early 1967 gave hope to people in Xiaozhan

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<sup>91</sup> Chen Boda, *Chen Boda yigao: yuzhong zishu ji qita* 陈伯达遗稿: 狱中自述及其它 [Manuscripts by the late Chen Boda: accounts from prison and more] ([Hohhot]: Nei Menggu renmin chubanshe, 1999), 58; HZDSJ, 196.

<sup>92</sup> *Hebei siqing tongxun zengkan* 15 (April 20, 1966): 26; *Jinjiao siqing jianbao zengkan* 15 (May 12, 1966): 4.

<sup>93</sup> *Jinjiao siqing jianbao* 53 (March 5, 1965), 8.

<sup>94</sup> *Hebei siqing tongxun zengkan* 15 (April 20, 1966): 25.

who felt wronged by the Four Cleanups. They were spurred on by a group of more than twenty students from Beijing's Politics and Law Institute (Zhengfa xueyuan) who had come to dig up dirt on Chen Boda in December 1966. The students spoke with Zhang Fengqin and targeted her rival, Wang Fengchun. On January 22, 1967, a "rebel" group allied with the students occupied the Xiaozhan broadcast station.<sup>95</sup> Chen Boda later characterized this event as a "capitalist restoration," explaining, "cadres who were removed during the Four Cleanups came to power or were preparing to return to power. I heard that Xiaozhan was very chaotic for a while."<sup>96</sup>

Unfortunately for the rebels, they were attacking a project associated with Chen just as he was riding high as leader of the Central Cultural Revolution Group. Their cause was doomed. Those victimized during Xiaozhan's Four Cleanups would have to wait for relief until well after Chen Boda was purged in late 1970. It took until 1972 for Tianjin to send an investigation team to Xiaozhan to reassess the counterrevolutionary cliques. In March 1973, the Tianjin party committee sent a report to party center concluding that even though Zhang Fengqin and Zhang Yulun had committed serious mistakes, they were "pretty good cadres," not black gang leaders, rich peasants, bandit family members, or class aliens. Both were rehabilitated, and Zhang Yulun was released from jail. Jiang Deyu was not so fortunate. For

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<sup>95</sup> TJRB, August 18, 1970, 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Zhongyang shouyang jiejian Tianjin fu Jing daibiao jici tanhua huibian* 中央首长接见天津赴京代表团几次谈话汇编 [Collection of central leaders' remarks on several occasions to Tianjin representatives in Beijing], (Tianjin: October 1967), 10. Chen was speaking on August 18, 1967, in the Great Hall of the People.



reasons that remain unclear, the report concluded that even though Jiang did not lead a seventy-seven-person clique, he was still a counterrevolutionary and a landlord. His original verdict stood and he remained in jail. A second reinvestigation that began in 1978 finally cleared Jiang Deyu and others of any wrongdoing.<sup>97</sup>

Chen Boda was imprisoned until a year before his death in 1989, but he remained reluctant to admit that he had done anything wrong in Xiaozhan. At a mass denunciation meeting in the southern suburbs in April 1974, officials excoriated Chen (in absentia) for having supposedly boasted, “On the whole, I did a good thing for the people of Tianjin by carrying out the Four Cleanups for a year in Xiaozhan. If it were in the past, the common people of Tianjin would build a temple and erect a monument to me.”<sup>98</sup> Chen’s later comments were less celebratory, but he still defended himself. When Chen read in the newspaper about Zhang Fengqin’s rehabilitation, he had difficulty accepting that the Four Cleanups in Xiaozhan had been completely repudiated. What really disturbed Chen was that Zhang Fengqin and her husband were being compensated 4,000 yuan by the collective for the money and property that had been seized from her in 1964. “Both of them are villagers, both are ‘cadres,’ and neither worked. Where could they have gotten so much money?” Chen wondered.

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<sup>97</sup> *Jinnan quzhi*, 845-46.

<sup>98</sup> Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei pi-Lin zhengfeng bangongshi 中共天津市委批林整风办公室, “Nan jiao quwei zhaokai pipan dahui henpi Lin Biao fandang jituan zhuyao chengyuan Chen Boda de fangeming zuixing” 南郊区委召开批判大会狠批林彪反党集团主要成员陈伯达的反革命罪行 [South suburbs party committee convenes a large-scale meeting to ruthlessly criticize the counterrevolutionary crimes of Chen Boda, important member of the Lin Biao anti-party clique] *Pi-Lin pi-Kong jianbao* 批林批孔简报 67 (April 17, 1974): 3, APA.

“Just from this point, I think that the entire case was not necessarily a complete mistake.”<sup>99</sup>

Chen was being disingenuous. He knew exactly how Zhang and her husband had made their money, and in 1964 he had admitted that if he were a villager, he would have supported their rule-bending ways. By the end of 1964, Chen was breaking the rules by handing out grain that should have gone to the state. In spite of his largesse, the people of Xiaozhan can be forgiven for not building a temple or monument to honor Chen and the work teams that did his bidding. Villagers were better served by the peculations of a Zhang Fengqin than by the disruptive presence of a central leader like Chen Boda.

Intrusive policies and visitors coming from Tianjin drove a wedge between city and countryside. The Great Leap famine was a pivotal event in sharpening lines between urban and rural China. Although the Four Cleanups and the early sent-down youth movement of the mid-1960s contained contradictory messages, both addressed problems that had emerged in the aftermath of the leap, and both resulted in heightened rural-urban tensions. As we shall see in the following chapter, uninvited visitors continued to appear in Tianjin-area villages in 1966 and 1967 as the Four Cleanups wound down and the Cultural Revolution exploded. What had happened during the leap also turned out to have major implications for political outcasts from Tianjin who were exiled to villages at the outset of the Cultural Revolution. In 1964, urban people saw villages as battlegrounds where socialist China had to be saved from

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<sup>99</sup> *Chen Boda yigao*, 58; see also Chen Xiaonong, 248.

a capitalist restoration. By 1966, the countryside became a virtual jail for city people accused of capitalist crimes.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Material from Chapter 5, in part, appeared in Jeremy Brown, "Burning the Grassroots: Chen Boda and the Four Cleanups in Suburban Tianjin," *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, Spring 2008.

6. Unfit for the City: The Deportation of Political Outcasts during the Cultural Revolution

In November 1966, a thirty-six-year-old woman named Ding Yun was expelled from Tianjin, along with her husband and four sons. Officials in charge of the Cultural Revolution at the Chongqing Road food shop in the city's former British concession, where Ding worked as a clerk, signed off on her expulsion. She was deported to her native place, a village in Hebei's Wanxian.<sup>1</sup> In the report calling for Ding's removal, Ding and her family were derided as the "dregs of society" (*shehui de zhazi*). "In order to protect order in the city," they had to be relocated to a village, where they could be supervised and reformed. "To have this type of person living in a large city under the current circumstances of war preparedness (*zhanbei*) has many disadvantages and few benefits," the report explained.

What had Ding done wrong to render her unfit for urban residence? Her alleged crimes included stealing food on the job. As early as 1951, she had been caught giving cookies to her children. During the food shortages of the early 1960s, she colluded with co-workers to steal three sacks of grain. More serious was the allegation that Ding had falsely claimed "middle peasant" (*zhongnong*) class status and covered up her father's landlord past. She also reportedly had sex with two classmates and a teacher in her village before migrating to Tianjin in 1951, and after

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<sup>1</sup> Wanxian is now called Shunping county. All materials about Ding are from a file on her case from the Heping District Vegetable Foodstuffs Company (Heping qu shucai fushipin gongsi 和平区蔬菜副食品公司), deportation file 74, APA.

moving to the city she had questionable relationships with five men. Adding to the evidence against Ding was the misbehavior of her three youngest sons, who were purportedly “little hooligans” who stole food for their pet dog and cat, and who once commandeered a three-wheeled bicycle cart for a joyride across Tianjin.

During the first three years of the Cultural Revolution, Ding and her family repeatedly crossed the rural-urban divide. Their first stint back in her native village was short. After the leadership of her food shop was overthrown in January 1967, Ding returned to Tianjin, joined a rebel organization, and moved back into her house, which had been ransacked and sealed by red guards. But Ding was soon kicked out of the rebel group because of her questionable class background. Matters worsened for her in March, when party center ordered the redeportation of people who had returned to cities.<sup>2</sup> In May, a day before her deadline to leave Tianjin for the second time, Ding fled to Beijing, where she appealed to central authorities to reconsider her deportation. She stayed in Beijing as a petitioner until December 1967, when she returned to Tianjin. A faction sympathetic to Ding had gained the upper hand at her store, but by March 1968, the faction had lost and a Revolutionary Committee had been formed. She fled to her home village on her own, lying low until a Revolutionary Committee was finally established there. No longer able to escape scrutiny in the countryside, Ding showed up at her workplace for the last time in September 1968, with her three

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<sup>2</sup> *Zhong gong zhongyang zhuanfa Beijing shi gongan ju junshi guanzhi weiyuan hui san yue shiba ri bugao* 中共中央转发北京市公安局军事管制委员会三月十八日布告 [Party center circulates the Beijing Public Security Bureau’s Military Control Committee’s Bulletin of March 18], *Zhongfa* [1967] 101 (March 18, 1967), in WDGW.

sons in tow. She said that she was looking for a “way out” (*chulu*) and was willing to confess to her problems (*jiaodai wenti*).

There was no way out for Ding Yun. She was immediately detained in a dormitory room and was repeatedly beaten and kicked during struggle meetings over the course of the next nine days. In her absence over the past summer, the Heping District Revolutionary Committee had labeled her a “bad element” and officially sanctioned her redeportation. On September 26, 1968, Ding hanged herself in her makeshift cell. Her sons were found sitting in the room with her when her body was discovered. At the time, her suicide was blamed on “fear of punishment” (*weizui zisha*), an official designation that denied benefits to her dependents. In 1974, a reinvestigation ruled that she had killed herself “because she did not sufficiently understand the Cultural Revolution mass movement.” This phrase sounded insulting, but it meant an improvement in her family’s political and economic status. The last document in Ding’s file, dated September 17, 1979, completely overturned Ding’s “bad element” label and called the decision to deport her a “mistaken judgment.” This decision followed a nationwide policy shift in June 1979.<sup>3</sup>

Ding’s story is especially tragic, but it is not unique. She was one of more than forty thousand people expelled from Tianjin under official deportation policies during

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<sup>3</sup> See “Zhong gong zhongyang, Guowuyuan guanyu chuli dangqian bufen renyuan yaoqiu fuzhi fugong huicheng jiuye deng wenti de tongzhi” 中共中央、国务院关于处理当前部分人员要求复职复工回城就业等问题的通知 [Party center and State Council circular on handling the employment and other problems of certain personnel who request to return to cities and return to work], June 4, 1979, <http://www.law-lib.com/lawhtm/1949-1979/43942.htm>. I thank Michael Schoenhals for alerting me to this document.

the Cultural Revolution; 1.28 percent of the city's population.<sup>4</sup> Nationwide, hundreds of thousands of political outcasts from cities were relocated to villages.<sup>5</sup> Deportation to ancestral villages—not to be confused with administratively separate programs managing sent-down youth, May Seventh cadre schools, war preparedness relocation, and labor reform (*laogai*) camps—affected almost every urban work unit and neighborhood in China, and had a direct impact on housing and grain allocation in many villages. But the deportations of the Cultural Revolution have yet to be studied. The few mentions of deportation in English-language memoirs and scholarly articles are vague and often imply that removal to villages was an ad hoc, spontaneous red guard punishment, arbitrarily applied during the chaos of late 1966.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary,

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<sup>4</sup> The official figure is 41,571 people, including 15,688 exiles and 25,833 accompanying family members. Zheng Zhiying, 294.

<sup>5</sup> According to Wang Nianyi, 397,400 “monsters and freaks” were forced to leave China's cities before October 3, 1966; Wang Nianyi 王年一, *Da dongluan de niandai* 大动乱的年代 [A decade of great upheaval] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1988), 100. More were deported later in 1966 and again in 1968, pushing the actual number of deportees nationwide much higher than Wang's early figure, likely approaching one million. I base this estimate on numbers from Tianjin, where many outcasts were removed after October 1966, and where more than a third of deportees were expelled in 1968, not 1966.

<sup>6</sup> Yang Rae remembered taking a train with bad elements who had been “driven out of Beijing by the revolutionary masses;” Yang Rae, *Spider Eaters: A Memoir* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 133. Yue Daiyun's aunt was labeled a landlord and deported to rural Hubei from their home in Beijing; Yue Daiyun and Carolyn Wakeman, *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 176-77. Jiangsui He writes that Ma Zhongtai and his wife were “sent back” to the county seat and “brought to” their home village in Shaanxi in 1969; Jiangsui He, “The Death of a Landlord: Moral Predicament in Rural China, 1968-1969,” in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz and Andrew G. Walder (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 140.

the expulsion of political outcasts was a state-sanctioned policy, first handled by “Urban-Rural Liaison Stations” (Chengxiang lianluo zhan) in 1966, and later administrated by Deportation Offices (Qiansong bangongshi) in 1967 and Deportation Work Groups (Qiansong banshizu) under the authority of municipal and district revolutionary committees in 1968. In their recent history of the Cultural Revolution, MacFarquhar and Schoenhals mention the widespread “repatriations” of 1966 and assert that top leaders endorsed the practice, but the broad coverage of *Mao’s Last Revolution* does not allow for in-depth analysis of deportations.<sup>7</sup>

This scholarly neglect cannot be attributed to a lack of data. I have collected the files of seventy-eight deportees from Tianjin. Several, like the one about Ding Yun, are thick, detailed folders containing letters, official forms, reports, and testimonies. Most are briefer forms with a few pages of supporting documentation. All of the files but six are from the food supply systems in Tianjin’s Hongqiao and Heping districts, which means that my conclusions may not be representative of Tianjin as a whole (and that crimes involving grain and food loom especially large in my files). But the human stories of deportation, together with the policy documents and directives in my possession, shed light on the broader patterns and implications of expelling urban residents to villages during the Cultural Revolution.

This chapter will first outline how the deportation program came to be institutionalized and bureaucratized between 1966 and 1968, apparently against Mao Zedong’s wishes. I will then discuss who Tianjin’s deportees were and how they

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<sup>7</sup> MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 122-23.



responded to being sent to villages. Those targeted for deportation were not the prominent intellectuals, elites, and cadres who dominate victim-centered accounts of the Cultural Revolution such as Anne Thurston's *Enemies of the People* or Wang Youqin's *Wenge shounanzhe* [Victims of the Cultural Revolution].<sup>8</sup> Instead, the people who inhabit my files were lowly clerks and noodle-makers, among others. They were not party members. Not surprisingly, deportees fiercely resisted the prospect of losing their city jobs and residence permits for such transgressions as having an affair. Sometimes their resistance was effective, but it often backfired. Villagers also opposed what they viewed as an unwelcome influx of politically suspect people who were ill-equipped for farm work. I analyze how rural people managed to refuse to take in urban exiles, and conclude by addressing how deportation to villages during the Cultural Revolution sheds light on rural-urban relations in Mao's China. In essence, forcing political outcasts to cross the rural-urban divide helped to define the boundary between city and countryside, for the practice cast cities as pure, privileged spaces and turned villages into dumping grounds for undesirables.

### Rationale and Policy Development

Policy directives and speeches generally explained deportation during the

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<sup>8</sup> Thurston focuses on urban intellectuals, most of whom were not targeted for deportation, but who instead went to May Seventh Cadre Schools. These were generally isolated encampments that allowed little interaction with rural people; Anne F. Thurston, *Enemies of the People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). See also Wang Youqin 王友琴, *Wenge shounanzhe* 文革受难者 [Victims of the Cultural Revolution] (Hong Kong: Kaifang zazhi chubanshe, 2004).

Cultural Revolution in terms of security and punishment. “Bad elements” were considered threats to China’s cities, which were more strategically important than villages because of the government offices and industrial development concentrated there. Class enemies were specifically targeted for punishment during the Cultural Revolution, and who better to supervise and reform them than the politically reliable poor and middle-lower peasants? There was precedent for expelling urban residents for security and disciplinary reasons. Tianjin’s Communist government had removed various types of people from the city since taking over in January 1949. They included political exiles, most notably landlords who had fled to Tianjin in the wake of land reform. After 1957, some rightists were expelled to villages, state farms, and labor camps, but most were not systematically deported to their native places. Other waves of urban-to-rural migration also predated the deportations of the Cultural Revolution, including sending cadres to labor in the countryside (*xiafang*), the “downsizing” (*jingjian*) of millions of workers addressed in Chapter 4, and the sent-down youth programs described in Chapter 5. These programs were more about easing urban employment pressures than about punishing bad elements, but they too buttressed the notion that urban space was privileged space.

During the Cultural Revolution, deportation originated in Beijing, apparently because of fears about the safety of Chairman Mao and other top leaders. Security was stepped up in the capital in response to an alleged coup attempt by General Luo Ruiqing, chief of staff of the People’s Liberation Army. Rumors circulated throughout Beijing that Lin Biao had surrounded the city with loyal troops in order to

thwart a military takeover.<sup>9</sup> According to Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong stayed out of Beijing for the first half of 1966 “because it was unsafe” for the chairman (*jiu shi yinwei bu anquan*). Landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements were then cleared out of the capital’s public security and bodyguard organizations.<sup>10</sup> The Cultural Revolution unfolded in summer 1966 in this general atmosphere of heightened security and fears of enemy plots. Mao’s endorsement of the Destroy the Four Olds campaign at a rally at Tiananmen Square on August 18, 1966, sparked the removal of class enemies and bad types from the capital. According to MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, red guard organizations supported by the State Council General Secretariat and by municipal officials ransacked homes and forcibly deported people from Beijing. On August 30, Foreign Minister Chen Yi told red guards that he approved of removing the “five black categories” from Beijing, but he also urged moderation.<sup>11</sup>

Red guards in Tianjin, closely tracking events in the capital, followed suit. Beginning on August 23, 1966, red guards ransacked the homes of potential enemies

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<sup>9</sup> On Luo Ruiqing in spring 1966, see MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 20-27. See also David Milton and Nancy Milton, *The Wind Will Not Subside: Years in Revolutionary China, 1964-1969* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 157.

<sup>10</sup> *Zhou Enlai jiejian kexueyuan Jing qu ge danwei daibiao tanhua jiyao* 周恩来接见科学院京区各单位代表谈话纪要 [Abstract of Zhou Enlai’s remarks upon receiving representatives from science academies in the capital region], January 21, 1967, in WDGW.

<sup>11</sup> MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 122.

(107,720 households were raided during the Cultural Revolution in Tianjin).<sup>12</sup> As in Beijing, beating deaths and suicides associated with the Destroy the Four Olds campaign spiked in late August 1966. Over the course of three terrible days at the end of August, 117 people attempted suicide and 79 died in Tianjin, mostly in Heping district, the site of Tianjin's most stately European-style homes.<sup>13</sup> One Tianjin official responsible for compiling reports on the suicides estimated that more than one thousand people killed themselves during the Destroy the Four Olds campaign, many of them by throwing themselves in the Hai river.<sup>14</sup>

For some of Tianjin's "five bad types" (specifically people labeled as landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, rightist, and bad elements), fleeing to a village seemed like an attractive option compared to raids and beatings at the hands of urban red guards. An internal bulletin from Tianjin's Hexi district (rechristened "Red Flag district" in August 1966) reported that people were "requesting to return to villages" (*yaoqiu huanxiang*). After a meeting for political enemies at a local police station on August 26, most of the bad types in the neighborhood voluntarily "signed up" (*baoming*) to leave Tianjin, bringing their *hukou* booklets to the station to make the move official. In a process akin to the "self dekulakization" of fearful Soviet peasants during Stalin's collectivization of 1929 and 1930,<sup>15</sup> people in Tianjin preemptively

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<sup>12</sup> Zheng Zhiying, 275.

<sup>13</sup> *Jin wan bao* [Tianjin evening news], November 24, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Interviewee 9.

<sup>15</sup> Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79-83.

brought personal property to police stations, shaved their heads, and displayed self-criticism posters outside of their homes.<sup>16</sup> Before the Cultural Revolution, Tianjin's class enemies were accustomed to regular study meetings and visits from neighborhood police. Faced with violence and humiliation at the hands of rampaging teenagers, many Tianjin residents saw familiar police officers as their protectors and viewed villages as temporary safe havens. Some preferred exile in the countryside because the benefits attached to urban residence were meaningless after persecution became a daily reality. Even though the goal of Ding Yun's protests and petitions was to maintain her city job and residency, she too sought refuge in the countryside when she felt threatened in Tianjin.

On October 6, 1966, the Tianjin municipal government—under fire for having “suppressed the masses” during the first months of the Cultural Revolution—issued its first official order on deporting the five bad types to villages for “supervision and reform through labor.” Over the next two months, city authorities refined deportation policy. One report about how to apply Beijing's experience to Tianjin targeted bad types who had come to the city from villages, towns, and county seats “after victory in the war of resistance against Japan, and who can be accommodated in their native places,” as well as those “with rather big historical crimes and bad behavior.” Further, bad types with “reactionary thought” who lived in “strategic units and national

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<sup>16</sup> “Dangqian shehui shang de wulei fenzi he fandong zibenjia de jizhong dongtai” 当前，社会上的五类分子和反动资本家的几种动态 [Several current trends among five bad types and reactionary capitalists], *Tianjin shi Hongqi qu wenhua geming jianbao* 4 (September 12, 1966): 2, HDA, 1-6-33C.

security locations” and who had someone to support them in villages should be deported. If their children had no jobs in the city, the kids also had to leave. Bad types originally from big cities or who had lived in Beijing for “a long time (several tens of years)” were exempt from deportation.<sup>17</sup> The key variables at this point were national security and the timing of migration to the city (pre-1945 versus post-1945).

Table 4. People Deported from Tianjin During the Cultural Revolution

	Deportees	Accompanying Family Members	Subtotal
Late 1966-Early 1967	10,292	15,621	25,913
After May 1968	5,396	10,262	15,658
Total	15,680	25,883	41,571

Source: “Liu Zheng tongzhi zai shiwei luoshi qiansong zhengce he jiaqiang dui qingshaonian guanli jiaoyu gongzuo huiyi de jianghua” 刘政同志在市委落实遣送政策和加强对青少年管理教育工作会上的讲话 [Comrade Liu Zheng’s speech at the work meeting on implementing deportation policy and strengthening management and education of youths], April 1, 1972, APA. Liu Zheng, a military officer in charge of Tianjin’s public security, was also a vice-director of the city’s Revolutionary Committee.

Tianjin officials invented new funding streams to pay for the removal of almost twenty-six thousand people in 1966-67. An “extremely urgent” November directive from the Tianjin municipal government mandated that city work units were responsible for covering the travel expenses, living stipends, and settlement funds for deportees and accompanying dependents. If the deportation targets were jobless, the Tianjin Civil Affairs Bureau would pay. But this rule only applied when entire families were deported. If any family members remained on the job in Tianjin, they

<sup>17</sup> “Beijing dui guanyu chuli wu lei fenzi banqian de yijian jianghua” 北京对关于处理五类分子搬迁的意见讲话 [Beijing’s opinion and talks on handling the relocation of the five types], *Zhong gong Hongqi quwei wenge bangongshi cankao cailiao* 4 (October 27, 1966): 1, HDA, 1-6-33C.

were ordered to cover deportation costs themselves, if necessary by drawing upon funds and property that had been confiscated by red guards and handed over to state banks and security offices for safekeeping. If villages made additional financial demands to cover housing and food for deportees, these costs could be supplemented by booty collected during house raids. “Banks can make payments after the district Urban-Rural Liaison Station and the deportee’s original unit consult,” the directive ordered.<sup>18</sup> This policy makes it clear that Tianjin officials not only explicitly legitimized deporting political enemies by clarifying who to expel and how to expel them, they also endorsed red guards’ home invasions by using confiscated money and property to fund the deportations.

Sociologist Yang Su has shown that central directives condemning violence and urging moderation were quickly outstripped by events on the ground during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>19</sup> This was also true of deportation work. In January 1967, Zhou Enlai told a group of representatives from science academies in Beijing that Chairman Mao disliked red guards’ practice of forcing political enemies back to villages (*ganhui nongcun*). “I asked the chairman for instructions and he ordered that aside from certain *laogai* criminals, it is better to digest others oneself than to push the

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<sup>18</sup> Tianjin shi renmin weiyuanhui 天津市人民委员会, “Guanyu qiansong di fu fan huai you wu lei fenzi huixiang jiandu laodong gaizao youguan wenti de buchong tongzhi” 关于遣送地富反坏右五类分子回乡监督劳动改造有关问题的补充通知 [Supplementary order on issues related to deporting the five bad types to villages for supervision and reform through labor], (66) Weimizi 委秘字 151 (November 14, 1966), HDA, 3-2-133C.

<sup>19</sup> Yang Su, “Mass Killing in the Cultural Revolution: A Study of Three Provinces,” in Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, 119.

contradiction up or pass it down to the lower levels,” Zhou explained. “What the chairman said about digesting them oneself is still correct.”<sup>20</sup> Zhou’s remarks, which were widely circulated, may have encouraged many deportees to return to cities in early 1967. But the deportation program continued.

Even though deportation apparently ran counter to Mao’s stated desires, Tianjin officials and zealous residents erred on the side of excess in trying to purify proletarian cities. Their efforts were soon rewarded. In Tianjin, many families targeted by red guards for raids and deportation did not belong to the “five bad types” at all, but were still considered fair game because of a capitalist background—or simply because someone had lodged an accusation against them. But instead of insisting that deportation be limited to members of the five categories, central leaders in Beijing actually expanded the range of expulsion targets in order to legitimize red guards’ actions after the fact. In March 1967, party center circulated *Zhongfa* [1967] 101, which included a new list of deportable individuals—the “ten types of people” (*shi zhong ren*). This document was issued in response to the large number of deportees who had “flowed back” into Beijing as the course of the movement shifted and power seizures took place in every work place. Deportees, including Ding Yun, assumed that because the original deporting agency had been overthrown, their expulsion was invalid. Ding and many others returned to work and even had their

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<sup>20</sup> Zhou Enlai *jiejian kexueyuan Jing qu ge danwei daibiao tanhua jiyao*, in WDGW. See also Michael Schoenhals, “Cultural Revolution on the Border: Yunnan’s ‘Political Frontier Defence’ (1969-1971),” *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, no. 19 (2004): 38.



urban *hukou* restored by whatever mass organization had taken over the office.

The “ten types” document assailed the return to cities of people such as Ding Yun as “wantonly overturning the verdicts and unreasonably causing trouble.” Party center had decided that even more individuals were disqualified from urban residency. The new list of deportable enemies cobbled together definitions of counterrevolutionaries and bad elements that dated from the mid-1950s.<sup>21</sup> The roster included:

1. Landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, rightist, and bad elements who maintain a reactionary standpoint (including those with bad behavior after being uncapped);
2. Landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, rightist, and bad elements discovered to have evaded detection, based on substantial evidence;
3. Puppet army (company commander and above), puppet government (baozhang and above), puppet police (chief and above), and spy elements with bad behavior;
4. Middle and small reactionary secret society leaders and professional sect employees with bad behavior;
5. Backbone elements from reactionary party organizations with bad behavior;
6. Capitalists and property owners who maintain a reactionary standpoint;
7. Elements with bad behavior after finishing prison, *laojiao* or detention sentences;
8. Embezzlers, thieves, and profiteers;
9. Family members of executed, jailed, detained, or escaped

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Zhongyang shi ren xiaozu 中央十人小组, “Guanyu fangeming fenzi he qita huai fenzi de jieshi ji chuli de zhengce jixian de zanxing guiding” 关于反革命分子和其他坏分子的解释及处理的政策界限的暂行规定 [Provisional regulations on policy boundaries for explaining and handling counterrevolutionary and other bad elements], March 10, 1956, cited in Tianjin gongan ju 天津工安局, “Guanyu bianfa zhongyang youguan huading zhuanzheng duixiang zhengce jixian de tongzhi” 关于编发中央有关划定专政对象政策界限的通知 [Circular distributing party center’s policy boundaries delineating targets for the exercise of dictatorship], November 23, 1963, APA.

counterrevolutionaries who maintain a reactionary standpoint;  
 10. Elements with criminally indecent or thieving behavior who have not reformed themselves after repeated education.<sup>22</sup>

This order—to be “forcibly” carried out by revolutionary mass organizations if individuals refused to leave voluntarily—meant that under categories six, eight, and ten, almost anyone could be expelled from cities. Many city residents had broken rules in order to get food on the black market during the post-leap famine, which made it plausible to accuse them of theft or profiteering. Anyone accused of having an adulterous affair could be deported for their “indecent behavior” (*liumang xingwei*). And anyone who had been part of a business or made a profit before nationalization in 1956 could be labeled a reactionary capitalist.

Compared with life before the Cultural Revolution, 1967 was a turbulent year in Tianjin. But relative to events elsewhere in China, Tianjin was calm. Factional battles took place, protesters temporarily halted rail service, a theater troupe performed the infamous *Madman of the New Age* play, rebels torched a prominent university administrative building, and the mother of a slain Tianjin rebel staged a sit-in outside of Zhongnanhai. But overall, a strong military presence in the city limited violence in 1967. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals rightly call the establishment of Tianjin’s Revolutionary Committee in December a “peaceful transition” that was “as orderly as could be expected.”<sup>23</sup>

While Tianjin’s political future was being hammered out in lengthy meetings

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<sup>22</sup> *Zhongfa* [1967] 101 (March 18, 1967), in WDGW.

<sup>23</sup> MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 242-43.

in Beijing, additional directives from Tianjin's military leadership clarified the scope of deportation. Even if the deported "ten types" had reacquired Tianjin *hukou* upon returning from villages in late 1966 or early 1967, they were still subject to redeportation. In addition, confusion about the list of ten types was cleared up: the category of puppet army officers included military doctors and musicians at the company commander rank or above. Reactionary party backbones (type five) referred to Nationalist officials serving after 1946, or those who had committed serious crimes giving rise to popular indignation before 1946. Type six capitalists indeed included people who had made profits between 1949 and 1956.<sup>24</sup>

These rules were put on the books in 1967, but were not fully implemented until Tianjin's new Revolutionary Committee consolidated control in early 1968. Only then did most deportees who had made their way back to Tianjin face re-expulsion. Others who had never been deported also found themselves at risk. In March 1968, the Tianjin Revolutionary Committee established a Headquarters for Sorting Out Work (Qingli gongzuo zhihuibu), staffed by thousands of cadres and charged with getting people who had entered Tianjin during 1966 and 1967—

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<sup>24</sup> Zhongguo renmin jiefang jun Tianjin shi gongan ju junshi guanzhi weiyuanhui qiansong bangongshi 中国人民解放军天津市公安局军事管制委员会遣送办公室, "Guanyu guanche Zhongguo renmin jiefang jun Tianjin shi gongan ju junshi guanzhi weiyuanhui 'Guanyu wenhua da geming zhong bei qiansong hou fan Jin renyuan de chuli banfa' ruogan tiaowen de lijie yijian (caogao)" 关于贯彻中国人民解放军天津市公安局军事管制委员会“关于文化大革命中被遣送后返津人员的处理办法”若干条文的理解意见（草稿）[Draft opinion on interpreting several clauses of the PLA Tianjin Public Security Bureau Military Control Committee's "On handling people who returned to Tianjin after being deported during the Cultural Revolution"], November 14, 1967, APA.

including rebels from other places, returned sent-down youth, and deportees—to leave the city.<sup>25</sup> The next month, the Revolutionary Committee issued a directive guiding deportation work for the year. Deporting the dregs of society in 1966 had “protected social order and strengthened the dictatorship of the proletariat,” but unfortunately approximately half of the original deportees had returned to Tianjin “without permission.” The Revolutionary Committee reorganized deportation “offices” into “work groups,” affirmed previous directives about the ten types, and set financial guidelines for the renewed expulsion program. If political exiles were unable to pay for their own travel and living costs, the state could maintain them in villages at a level “lower than the standard of living of local poor and lower-middle peasants.” This meant a stipend of 4 to 6 yuan per month that would last only until the summer or fall harvests. Deportees were also entitled to farm tools worth a maximum of 15 yuan per individual or 40 yuan per family.<sup>26</sup>

It took several months of planning before the new wave of deportations began in summer and fall 1968. This coincided with the Cleansing of the Class Ranks campaign, and was often more brutal and humiliating than the events of 1966. The

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<sup>25</sup> Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui 天津市革命委员会, Tianjin zhujun zhizuo lianluozhan 天津驻军支左联络站, and Tianjin jingbei qu 天津警备区, “Guanyu jianli qingli gongzuo zhihuibu de jue ding” 关于建立清理工作指挥部的决定 [Decision on establishing a Headquarters for Sorting Out Work], March 20, 1968, APA.

<sup>26</sup> “Guanyu jixu zuo hao zai wenhua da geming zhong bei qiansong hou fan Jin renyuan chuli gongzuo de tongzhi” 关于继续做好在文化大革命中被遣送后返津人员处理工作的通知 [Directive on continuing to do a good job in handling people who returned to Tianjin after being deported during the Cultural Revolution] *Jingde* [1968] 64 (April 1, 1968), APA.

leaders of Revolutionary Committees in factories and work units took revenge on deportees, many of whom had lost out in the factional disputes of 1967. Formal deportation papers issued by work units and district Revolutionary Committees in 1968 did not simply order “deport to native place,” but stated, “after knocking him over with criticism and struggling against him rotten (*pi dao dou chou*), deport him to his native place for supervision and reform.”<sup>27</sup> Tianjin’s top leader Xie Xuegong, who took over in the city in late 1966 after former party secretary Wan Xiaotang’s death, placed his imprimatur on renewed deportations during a speech in May 1968. Xie’s remarks are a smoking gun, leaving no doubt that Tianjin’s municipal leadership supported forcible expulsions:

A small handful of unreformed landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist elements are seizing the opportunity to take action and retaliate. The red guard little generals kicked out these reactionary scoundrels, but last year when Tianjin was rather chaotic for a time, they ran back here, besieged neighborhood activists, and retaliated. Letting these people remain in Tianjin is tantamount to negating the contributions of the red guard little generals. Recently, our Headquarters for Sorting Out Work has attacked these landlord, rich peasant, counterrevolutionary, bad, and rightist elements, making them obediently return to their native places to accept reform.<sup>28</sup>

The deportations of 1968 were more about punishment and revenge than about urban

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<sup>27</sup> Deportation file 27, APA.

<sup>28</sup> “Yi Mao zhuxi zui xin zhishi wei gang, chengsheng qianjin, ba ‘yi pi san cha’ yundong jinxing daodi—Xie Xuegong tongzhi zai ‘yi pi san cha’ yundong jingyan jiaoliu dahui shang de jianghua” 以毛主席最新指示为纲，乘胜前进，把“一批三查”运动进行到底——解学恭同志在“一批三查”运动经验交流大会上的讲话 [Taking Chairman Mao’s newest order as the guiding principle, advance on the crest of victory and carry out the “one criticize, three checks” movement to the end—Comrade Xie Xuegong’s speech at the meeting to exchange experiences about the “one criticize, three checks” movement], May 5, 1968, APA.

security. They were a recipe for violence.

A cadre in Tianjin's construction bureau named Wang was labeled a bad element and expelled to his home village in Shandong on August 13, 1968. In a letter of appeal to Tianjin authorities, he claimed that before being forced to leave the city, he had been pushed to the ground and clubbed when interrogators tried to make him confess to being a "reactionary rich peasant, historical counterrevolutionary, and traitor." Wang complained about the violence to his boss, who agreed that confessions should not be forced. But as Wang left the office, he was seized, blindfolded and beaten unconscious by members of his work unit responsible for the Cleansing the Class Ranks campaign. When Wang woke up he confessed to whatever his tormentors wanted.<sup>29</sup>

Approximately one third of all of Tianjin's deportees were expelled in 1968 (see Table 4). Only at the end of the year did deportations slow down, gradually coming to an end in 1969. This shift can be traced to Mao's December 1, 1968 order that the "scope of attack should be small, while the scope of education should be broad." Mao's statement was part of his comments on a report by the Revolutionary Committee of the New China Printing Plant in Beijing (run by PLA Unit 8341, the Politburo's bodyguard corps).<sup>30</sup> The report recommended that only landlords and rich peasants who had fled the countryside should be deported to their native places, so that the local masses could exercise dictatorship over them. All other people with political

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<sup>29</sup> Deportation file 78, APA.

<sup>30</sup> See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, 255.

problems were to remain at the printing plant to be “digested” (*xiaohua*), supervised, and reformed through labor.<sup>31</sup> The ten types subject to deportation had just been reduced to two. Although no rationale was provided for singling out landlords and rich peasants, the ruling was consistent with the party’s land reform-era practice of sending rural exploiters to face the wrath of those they had oppressed.

Over the course of 1969, Tianjin work units gradually began reinvestigating and reclassifying deportees. It was a challenge to try to turn back the clock without admitting that the entire program was wrong. The official line was that “deportation in the past was entirely correct. Not deporting anymore is carrying out Chairman Mao’s newest order.”<sup>32</sup> Partly motivated by reluctance to completely repudiate deportation policy, and also in keeping with escalating war fears that mandated dispersing China’s urban coastal population to isolated areas, deportees and their families were ordered to stay in villages. The reevaluations changed some deportees’ political status from enemies to “return-to-village producers” (*huanxiang shengchanzhe*). This was the same label given to urban workers who were downsized

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<sup>31</sup> “Zhong gong zhongyang, zhongyang wenge pifa ‘Beijing shi geming weiyuanhui zhuanfa Xinhua yinshuachang zai duidai douzheng zhong jianjue zhixing dang de “gei chulu” zhengce de jingyan de baogao” 中共中央、中央文革批发《北京市革命委员会转发新华印刷厂在对待斗争中坚决执行党的“给出路”政策的经验的报告》 [Party center and the Central Cultural Revolution Group circulate “Beijing Revolutionary Committee circulates the New China Printing Plant’s report on its experience resolutely carrying out the party’s policy of ‘giving a way out’ in handling struggle”] *Zhongfa* [1968] 165 (December 3, 1968), in WDGW.

<sup>32</sup> Tianjin shi di yi jixie gongye ju geming weiyuanhui 天津市第一机械工业局革命委员会, “Guanyu yi pizhun qiansong, bu zai qiansong chongbao pishi de tongzhi” 关于已批准遣送, 不再遣送重报批示的通知 [Directive on resubmitting orders to no longer deport already approved deportees], June 26, 1969, APA.

during the post-famine readjustment of the early 1960s, and it meant that rehabilitated deportees were now entitled to receive severance or retirement payments (*tuizhi fei* or *tuixiu fei*) from their work units. But only in rare cases were people allowed to regain urban jobs and residency permits. Deportees hoping to return to Tianjin would have to wait for a fuller reinvestigation in 1972, and for most people relief did not come until after 1978.

We have seen that expelling urban political outcasts to villages was initiated in 1966 by red guards who were supported by central and municipal officials. Over the following two years, the deportation program was gradually institutionalized and governed by a bureaucracy with confusing rules and piles of paperwork covered with red stamps. By the time that party center began to back away from widespread deportations at the end of 1968, hundreds of thousands of lives had been affected. How did deportees handle their fates?

### Fighting Deportation

Many of the deportees whose files I collected did not meekly accept their expulsions from Tianjin. They saw deportation as an unfair, illegitimate, and illegal policy, and they used a variety of strategies—including writing letters, visiting government offices, sit-ins, and threats of violence—to fight deportation orders. Writing of the disenfranchisement of millions of political outcasts in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s, historian Golfo Alexopoulous draws upon individual appeals and petitions to show a “dual process” of exclusion and inclusion. When



excluded outcasts in the Soviet Union pleaded to regain their rights, they were actually asking to be included in—and thereby validating—a “class-based political community.” Alexopoulos writes, “The deprivation and the reinstatement of rights form two aspects of a single campaign to construct a national community of the proletariat.”<sup>33</sup> A parallel process took place in late 1960s China, but with an important distinction. Because the main point of deportation was to deprive outcasts of coveted urban residency, it actually split the national community in two.

In Cultural Revolution-era China, the immediate goal of appeals was to clear one’s name and remove political labels, but in most cases the ultimate motivation was to regain urban residency and employment. Even after deportees had been politically rehabilitated and reclassified as “return-to-village producers,” they still fought to leave villages and return to Tianjin. A significant number of exiles went back to the city without permission during the Cultural Revolution. In 1972, Tianjin’s top public security official remarked that more than seventeen thousand deported people—over 40 percent of the total—had “flowed back” to Tianjin.<sup>34</sup> Their disruptive presence in the city, where they slept at the train station or at the gates of their original work units,

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<sup>33</sup> Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin’s Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926-1936* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>34</sup> The source does not specify whether these returnees came back to Tianjin during the December 1966-January 1967 period and were redeported, or whether they came back to Tianjin between 1968 and 1972; “Liu Zheng tongzhi zai shiwei luoshi qiansong zhengce he jiaqiang dui qingshaonian guanli jiaoyu gongzuo huiyi de jianghua” 刘政同志在市委落实遣送政策和加强对青少年管理教育工作会议上的讲话 [Comrade Liu Zheng’s speech at the work meeting on implementing deportation policy and strengthening management and education of youths], April 1, 1972, APA.

spending their days as full-time petitioners, played a major role in official efforts to reassess the deportation program and to rehabilitate deportees.<sup>35</sup>

Fighting deportation was generally effective in making urban officials pay attention to exiles' demands. But for certain individuals, resistance could be terribly counterproductive, resulting in even worse punishment or violent reprisals. Whether resistance strategies were successful primarily depended on timing and the political atmosphere. Appeals backfired in summer 1968 but were viewed much more favorably in spring 1972, following Lin Biao's death. Other variables, including deportees' personal relationships, involvement in factionalism during the Cultural Revolution, health, "behavior" (*biaoxian*), and "attitude" (*taidu*), also affected how they were handled. The urban officials who had originally signed off on deportations were in charge of reevaluating cases. They were reluctant to admit mistakes and welcome back former rivals. They were also under tremendous pressure to limit migration to Tianjin. This meant that many deportees had to wait until the late 1970s to finally regain legal residency in the city.

Deportees from the Hongqiao district food supply system (making up the bulk of the files in my possession) generally experienced the following pattern: deported in fall 1966; returned to Tianjin ("without permission") during winter 1966-67;

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<sup>35</sup> "Some children of ten types and ten types [themselves] are vagrant in Tianjin, doing bad things or staying with relatives and friends and not returning to villages, avoiding being supervised and transformed by the poor and lower-middle peasants;" Nankai qu qingli gongzuo fen zhihui bu 南开区清理工作分指挥部, "Guanyu jixu zhua hao qiansong gongzuo yijian de baogao" 关于继续抓好遣送工作意见的报告 [Report on continuing to firmly grasp deportation work], March 20, 1969, circulated by the Nankai District Revolutionary Committee as *Nange* [1969] 18 (March 27, 1969), APA.

redeployed in summer and fall 1968; reevaluated in 1969 or 1972. Reevaluations had several possible outcomes (see accompanying table for an unscientific tally from my files). First was no change in status, meaning that the deportee and his or her family had to stay in the village as enemies of the people. Second was reclassification of the original problem as a “contradiction among the people” (in other words, a non-antagonistic problem, as opposed to an enemy of the people), granting the deportee “return-to-village” status and earning him a severance or retirement payment but denying him Tianjin residency. Third was complete rehabilitation and a return to Tianjin. How vigorously deportees appealed affected how their reinvestigations were handled. In 1972, people who had returned to Tianjin in protest were reinvestigated before people who were still in villages; those who wrote letters and presented petitions were also given priority.<sup>36</sup>

Table 5. Outcomes for 78 Deportees from Tianjin, through 1972

Original verdict upheld, stayed in countryside	10
Political rehabilitation, stayed in countryside with “return-to-village” status	27
Political rehabilitation, regained Tianjin residency and job	24
Ordered to be deported but rehabilitated before leaving, allowed to stay in Tianjin	2
Died	7
Result unclear	8
Total	78

Source: Deportation files, APA.

Guo Deren was an example of how forceful appeals sometimes backfired. In 1966, Guo was the thirty-seven-year-old manager of the Hongqiao District Food and

<sup>36</sup> “Liu Zheng tongzhi zai shiwei luoshi qiansong zhengce he jiaqiang dui qingshaonian guanli jiaoyu gongzuo huiyi de jianghua.”

Beverage Management Department's East Is Red Grocery Store.<sup>37</sup> His family background (poor peasant) and class status (worker), offered no clue that he might suffer during the Cultural Revolution. But in October 1958, "because he was unhappy with the Great Leap Forward," he had refused to follow orders to sell large quantities of sweet potatoes (a common supplement when grain was short), resulting in a two week suspension from work. This was a mark against him, but the official reason for his deportation as a "bad element" was having had illicit sexual relationships with three of his female coworkers (intercourse with two and mutual masturbation with the third). Guo was kicked out of Tianjin in September 1966, but the following January he returned to the city from his home village in Henan.

Back in Tianjin, Guo immediately appealed his deportation. He organized a group of "six or seven of the masses who were unclear about the truth" to advocate on his behalf, and "set up his own tribunal" (*si she gongtang*). Guo's organizing was effective in getting the political instructor at his shop to rehabilitate him and to burn materials related to his case. Guo also managed to convince officials from his home village to sign off on his rehabilitation. Happy at having reclaimed his urban salary and ration tickets, Guo celebrated by setting off firecrackers and by posting a notice of "glad tidings" (*tie xibao*). This was a mistake. So was trying to exact revenge by pouring a foreign substance into his boss's tea mug when he thought no one was looking (initial tests for poison were inconclusive) and adulterating the fried cake batter at work. The Hongqiao District Revolutionary Committee deported Guo to

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<sup>37</sup> Deportation file 25, APA.

Henan for a second time in September 1968. When he was finally reinvestigated in July 1972, the original verdict was upheld. Why? In 1967 Guo had “continued pursuing women and taking liberties with them, engaging in criminally indecent behavior,” and he “destroyed production” (by ruining the cake batter). Moreover, after returning to his home village for a second time, Guo had not labored enthusiastically and but instead had “incited the masses to struggle against one another.”

The file does not include any letters from Guo himself, so we do not know his side of the story. But it is worth pointing out that he was deported for behavioral—not political—reasons. His family background and class status were impeccable, but he was a nightmare of a coworker. His sexual misconduct may have ensured his redeportation in 1968, but was probably not enough to ruin his hopes for redemption in 1972. It was his energetic efforts to appeal and avenge his first expulsion that sealed his fate. Because he went overboard in resisting deportation, he remained a political enemy in the countryside, presumably until the late 1970s.

This conclusion is supported by a similar case with a different outcome. Huang Yuanzhi, a man of middle-peasant background who was classified as a capitalist because he ran a noodle stand with his father between 1947 and 1956, continued making noodles in a collective after nationalization.<sup>38</sup> Like Guo Deren, Huang was deported from Tianjin as a “bad element” for having had sex with three women between 1958 and 1964. After being forced to move to his birthplace in

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<sup>38</sup> Deportation file 38, APA.

Shandong in November 1966, Huang came back to Tianjin in February 1967. He approached the leaders of his work unit and complained. He asked, “On what basis did you send me out?” He argued, “Party center has regulations that allow everyone to return [to cities] now. Now that I’m back, arrange a job for me.” These appeals were ineffective. Without employment, a salary, or ration tickets, Huang went to the grocery shop and demanded food, saying, “if the leaders won’t give me grain, I’ll eat the work unit’s. They can’t let me starve.” Huang also threatened to “smash the dog heads who posted big character posters against me.”

By mid-1968, these “dog heads” were probably calling the shots in the Hongqiao Food and Beverage Management Department’s Revolutionary Committee. Huang was redeported to Shandong in October 1968. When he was reinvestigated in 1972, his work unit recommended classifying him as a “return-to-village” laborer and giving him a severance payment, because “he is not consistently bad. His hooligan ways are not enough to make him a bad element.” Huang Yuanzhi’s original sexual misconduct was similar to Guo Deren’s, but his appeals in 1967 were mild in comparison. While Guo had organized others, set up his own court of law, and messed with his boss’s tea, Huang had merely complained, argued, and taken enough food to stave off hunger. Yes, he had threatened to smash heads, but he never acted on the threat.

Huang’s case was different enough from Guo’s for Hongqiao food and beverage officials to endorse rehabilitation. But when this decision was presented to the Hongqiao District Revolutionary Committee for approval, it was overruled in June

1972 with three terse sentences: “Huang’s behavior in the village is bad, he should still be labeled as a bad element. Continue to supervise and reform. Treat as a deportee” (rather than as return-to-village). Remarkably, officials at Huang’s workplace did not accept this judgment. They waited three months and resubmitted a duplicate reinvestigation report, hoping that district cadres would forget having seen Huang’s file before (and that political loosening following the death of vice-chairman Lin Biao would filter through the system). It worked. In October 1972, the district signed off on the Food and Beverage Department’s recommendation to remove Huang’s “bad element” label and to treat him as a return-to-village producer. Huang was no longer an enemy of the people, but he was not completely satisfied. The final note on his file reads, “This person’s opinion: requests to return to Tianjin” (*benren yijian yaoqiu hui Tianjin*). Regaining urban residence was at least as important to deportees as political rehabilitation was.

Guo Deren and Huang Yuanzhi were deported from Tianjin for similar reasons. They both resisted their deportations, Guo much more fiercely and disruptively than Huang. Against the odds, Huang managed to get his name cleared in 1972, while Guo was denied. The key difference in the Hongqiao Food and Drink Department’s disposition of their cases appears to be Huang’s milder behavior in trying to overturn his verdict.

Yet while Guo Deren’s abrasive appeals seemed to hurt his chances for rehabilitation, others who resisted vociferously obtained relief. For example, Ren Haitang was deported because she stole cash and ration tickets from work during the

famine.<sup>39</sup> Her work unit described Ren, forty-three years old in 1966, as having “private sector” (*sifang*) status and a middle-peasant background, and called for her to be deported as a bad element. The Hongqiao District Revolutionary Committee agreed that she should be redeported to Hebei’s Dachang Hui autonomous county in 1968, but as a “capitalist maintaining a reactionary standpoint.” Ren, along with her husband, had run a flatcake and noodle stand between 1938 and 1956. More relevant to Ren’s second expulsion from the city was her participation in a rebel faction in 1967. The group was affiliated with Dalianchou, the rebel umbrella organization that was disbanded by Chen Boda and told to submit to the favored faction, Wudaihui, two months before Tianjin’s Revolutionary Committee was formed.<sup>40</sup> While back in Tianjin in 1967, Ren protested her original deportation by bringing her children to her office to “raise a big fuss” (*da nao*), and she also went to Beijing to appeal her case at party center. She was then forced to return to her home village in September 1968.

But Ren was rehabilitated much earlier than Guo or Huang. In December 1969, officials at Ren’s work unit held that it was “inappropriate” for her to be labeled a reactionary capitalist. Her class status was actually “independent laborer” (*duli laodongzhe*), and her problems, including stealing food in the early 1960s and trying to “overturn the verdict” (*fan an*) in 1967 were not enough to make her a political enemy. Ren had to stay in her home village, but was granted return-to-village status. Why did Ren receive favorable treatment? She had resisted like Guo and Huang.

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<sup>39</sup> Deportation file 62, APA.

<sup>40</sup> *Zhongyang shouzhang jiejian Tianjin fu Jing daibiaotuan jici tanhua huibian*, 57-64.



Unlike the two men, she had participated in a losing rebel faction. It may have also been crucial that she had no reported history of sexual misconduct. The only blemish on her record before the Cultural Revolution was stealing from the workplace during the famine. We cannot know which variable tipped the scales in Ren's favor in 1969. But it does seem clear that her efforts to fight against exile—deploying her crying children and petitioning in Beijing—did not hamper her rehabilitation. Measured resistance got her noticed.

Ren's happy news in December 1969 meant material benefits, an end to social ostracism, and a restoration of citizenship rights. But just like the philanderers Guo Deren and Huang Yuanzhi, Ren Haitang was still stuck in the countryside, unable to restore her Tianjin *hukou*. Regaining Tianjin residency was not impossible for deportees who achieved political rehabilitation. How did this happen? Sometimes the rationale for resettling exiles in the city was clear-cut. But it is often difficult to determine why some people remained shut out while others were allowed to return. One odd case involved a loose-tongued, liquor-loving man named Hao Baohua. Hao was of poor peasant background, but was approved for removal to Xinyang in Henan along with his wife and seven children as a “reactionary capitalist.”<sup>41</sup> He was called a capitalist because he ran a tofu shop in Tianjin for twenty years, employing three laborers and accumulating capital worth almost 3,000 yuan before nationalization. Ironically, Hao's eminently urban business was grounds for depriving him of city residency. Hao was labeled reactionary because he predicted the imminent return of

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<sup>41</sup> Deportation file 35, APA.

Chiang Kai-shek in 1962, and during the Cultural Revolution he said he preferred pre-1949 theater to Jiang Qing's modern dramas, which sounded to him like "dogs fighting" (*gou dajia*). Also, Hao took advantage of the period's disorder to appropriate more than ten liters of liquor from a Tianjin warehouse.

Unlike the individuals in the previous examples, Hao was not forced to leave Tianjin in fall 1966. On June 30, 1968, during the second round of deportations from Tianjin, the Hongqi District Revolutionary Committee approved deporting Hao to Henan, but there is no evidence in his file that he ever left the city. It turned out that Hao did not have to leave, because a reexamination in 1969 allowed him to remain in Tianjin. On a form titled "no longer deporting people already approved for deportation," the neighborhood grocery store where Hao still made tofu recommended: "because Hao Baohua's ancestral home is Tianjin, there is no way to deport him." Instead he was to be supervised and educated in his original work unit. Four higher levels of bureaucracy endorsed this opinion, remarking that in the spirit of the "December 1 order" (Mao's late 1968 comment on uniting broadly and attacking narrowly, which put a halt to most new expulsions), Hao was no longer deportable, even though he was still considered a reactionary capitalist.

This is strange. Of course Hao could not be sent to the countryside if his "ancestral home" was Tianjin. It is unclear why his native place was listed as Xinyang on his deportation order, or why he was approved for deportation in the first place. According to the biography in his file, Hao had attended an elementary school in the Xiyuzhuang neighborhood of Tianjin, then worked as a cook for six years in and

around the city before setting up his tofu shop. There is no indication that he actively protested his deportation order, or that he took any initiative during the Cultural Revolution aside from deriding Jiang Qing or drinking heavily. He simply never left the city, because there was nowhere else for him to go.

While Hao Baohua averted exile but kept his status as a political enemy, others who were expelled managed to make their way back to Tianjin. One seventy-three-year-old of rich peasant status—a category still marked for deportation even after Mao’s moderating order of December 1968—had his Tianjin *hukou* restored in late 1969 because he was elderly and ill.<sup>42</sup> He returned to the city for good from his Hebei village. This ruling recognized that deportation could be a burden on villages, and also implicitly admitted that rural medical care was not up to urban standards.

While the rationale for the old Hebei man’s return to Tianjin was clear, another returnee’s case was less easily explained. A woman named Yao was deported twice to Hejian county in Hebei because she had illicit sexual relations with three men and stole 540 yuan in cash and 960 jin of grain tickets during the famine.<sup>43</sup> Yao was given a capitalist label and her house was ransacked. When she was back in Tianjin in 1967, she reportedly said, “I’m not going to buy new furniture, I’ll just confiscate some. I learned this from the working class.” But in May 1969, her problem was reclassified because she had openly confessed to her misdoings and was willing to be reeducated. Yao was allowed to resettle in Tianjin, even though she was still considered a

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<sup>42</sup> Deportation file 59, APA.

<sup>43</sup> Deportation file 33, APA.

capitalist. It appears that her good behavior in her home village encouraged reinvestigation officials to view her favorably. But we can only speculate as to why someone with a capitalist label could return to Tianjin while others remained banished to the countryside after being exonerated. The results of deportees' petitions and appeals seem random because the files leave too much unsaid—and because the process itself was quite arbitrary. The files do not reveal whether personal relationships, backdoor bribery, bureaucratic whims, or the employment needs of urban work units were decisive in determining outcomes. Perhaps deportees such as Yao were also left scratching their heads about when and why their appeals were denied or accepted. The only consistency in the files is that urban residence was a privilege worth fighting for.

Yao may have been disappointed that she was still an enemy of the people in 1969, but she did not complain about having her Tianjin residency restored. Less fortunate exiles completely lost hope. This is not surprising. The arbitrary handling of their cases, combined with the sometimes counterproductive consequences of forceful resistance to deportation, devastated deportees who had no way of predicting when policies might change. Suicide was the most extreme type of resistance to the prospect of being expelled from Tianjin. Four of the deportees whose files I collected committed suicide (three killed themselves in Tianjin and one threw himself into a well after arriving in his home village).

Failed attempts to fight deportation likely contributed to the suicide of Liu Ende, who drank bitter melon (a liquid used to turn soy milk into tofu) the day before he

was going to be forcibly removed from Tianjin. Liu was considered a capitalist during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution because he had run a wonton (*huntun*) stand before nationalization.<sup>44</sup> Red guards ransacked his home in fall 1966 but did not kick him out of the city at that point. Liu reacted angrily to the raid. The Hongqiao District Revolutionary Committee's August 1968 order to expel Liu, his wife, and three children to his home village in Shandong was based entirely on his vociferous opposition to mistreatment from red guards. According to his work unit, Liu had to be deported because: (1) he acted hatefully toward the red guards and revolutionary employees who ransacked his home; (2) he tried to overturn his verdict and directed his children to make demands at his office on multiple occasions; and (3) he maintained a reactionary standpoint. Liu's resistance was annoying and possibly threatening to the leaders at his work unit. The second wave of deportations in 1968 was a convenient way to get rid of him.

When it became clear to Liu that his family's deportation was imminent, he argued against the action on legal grounds. He said that the Tianjin Military Affairs Committee's Notice Number Four of March 1967 (a document legitimizing Tianjin's deportation policy and clarifying the ten types) was "concocted by a few people. Because it has no mass base, Notice Number Four is invalid."<sup>45</sup> In retrospect, we can

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<sup>44</sup> Deportation file 43, APA. Even though Liu never left Tianjin, his deportation order of 1968 categorizes him as a "deported person" (*bei qiansong renyuan*).

<sup>45</sup> The full text of Notice Number Four is included in "Guanyu jixu zuo hao zai wenhua da geming zhong bei qiansong hou fan Jin renyuan chuli gongzuo de tongzhi."

see that Liu had a good point. But in 1968, his questioning of a document issued by the military affairs committee was seen as a “venomous assault on the mighty PLA.” His comment was added to his file as evidence against him.

When Liu poured poison down his throat on the eve of his deportation in September 1968, he had no idea that he would have been exonerated in 1972, if not earlier. A reassessment in July 1972 ruled that his wonton business was too small to make him a capitalist. His status should have been “petty proprietor” (*xiaoyezhu*). He had committed mistakes during his vigorous appeals to correct his class status, but this was a contradiction among the people and not grounds for deportation. Liu’s suicide, much like Ding Yun’s, was attributed to his “misunderstanding of policy” (*dui zhengce bu lijie*). Liu understood perfectly well that he had been wronged by the deportation program. In his despair, he may have failed to realize that if he had waited, the policy would change.

By choosing death over exile in the countryside, Liu Ende was in the minority. Most deportees lived in villages for years. What was life like for political outcasts in villages during the Cultural Revolution? How did villagers react to this influx of people who were often disgruntled and inept at farming?

### The Village Side

In an April 1, 1972 speech calling for full reinvestigations of deportation cases, Tianjin’s top security official Liu Zheng ordered urban officials to travel to the countryside. City cadres were to cooperate with commune and village officials in

researching the historical crimes and recent behavior of deportees. Likewise, if rural cadres arrived in Tianjin on deportation-related business, urban officials were to work enthusiastically with them. “Do not ignore them,” Liu instructed. If reassessments of deportees were not handled well, Liu continued, “it will affect uniting the many, social order, the party’s authority, urban-rural relations, and worker-peasant relations.”<sup>46</sup> Liu was right. Earlier policy documents and speeches about deportation never mentioned urban-rural relations, instead focusing on the disadvantages of letting political enemies remain in strategically important cities. But since fall 1966, deportation had had immense implications for the relationship between city and countryside.

First, villages had to accommodate hundreds of thousands of city dwellers who had been away from their ancestral homes for decades. Some had never even set foot in the countryside. Unlike the millions of urban workers who also crossed the urban-rural divide when they were downsized during the early 1960s, the deportees of the Cultural Revolution often had little or no experience with agricultural work. Villagers, including rural officials, saw the deportees as unwelcome competitors for limited housing and food.<sup>47</sup>

Second, the deportation program required regular communication and

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<sup>46</sup> “Liu Zheng tongzhi zai shiwei luoshi qiansong zhengce he jiaqiang dui qingshaonian guanli jiaoyu gongzuo huiyi de jianghua.”

<sup>47</sup> The other side of this coin was that deported outcasts freed up some of the most desirable real estate in Tianjin, leading the Tianjin Revolutionary Committee to prohibit “sudden moves” (*tuji banjia*) and squatting in deportees’ vacant homes. Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, *Tongzhi* 通知 [Directive], *Jing* [1969] 99 (September 9, 1969), APA.

interaction between urban and rural officials. Village cadres haggled with city authorities over how to handle deportees. Rural officials demanded financial compensation or simply refused to accept exiles, forcing them back to Tianjin, homeless and jobless.<sup>48</sup> During the reinvestigations of 1972, rural and urban cadres met (usually in the countryside) to negotiate rehabilitations and changes in *hukou* status. These were high-stakes interactions for everyone involved. City bureaucrats had orders to prevent deportees from returning to Tianjin, even if the exiles had been politically rehabilitated. The urban officials had an inherent advantage over their rural counterparts because they were higher in the administrative hierarchy—and were therefore in charge of “putting policy into practice” (*luoshi zhengce*, a euphemism that actually meant redressing injustices caused by the party). Village leaders were pressured from above by commune officials demanding grain deliveries and from below by villagers who wanted their fair share of the crops. Gaming the system to maximize the amount of food that stayed in villages was a common practice for many rural residents during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>49</sup>

How to feed extra, unwanted mouths without shortchanging other villagers was

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<sup>48</sup> As of May 1969, Heping district counted 135 deportees who had returned to Tianjin without permission. Of these, 51 came back to the city because villages refused to accept them, and 61 came back because they were too old or ill to support themselves in villages, or because their native places were in a strategic coastal or border region. Heping qu qingli gongzuo fen zhihui 和平区清理工作分指挥部, “Guanyu xuexi guanche “jiu da” jingshen luoshi zhengce, zuohao qiansong gongzuo de anpai yijian” 关于学习贯彻“九大”精神落实政策, 作好遣送工作的安排意见 [Plan on studying and carrying out the spirit of the Ninth Party Congress on implementing policy and doing deportation work well], May 23, 1969, APA.

<sup>49</sup> Gao Wangling.



a question that vexed rural officials. In turn, aching hunger became a main concern for deportees, who rarely earned full allotments of work points and whose standard grain allocations were capped at the lowest possible rate. I met one Tianjin man named Zhou whose family of six was deported to his father's home village in Wuqing county, between Tianjin and Beijing.<sup>50</sup> Zhou's father had owned a small shoe workshop before nationalization. Predictably, this was grounds for expulsion in fall 1966. Zhou was twelve years old, and this was his first trip to the countryside. In 1967, a "mass organization" in the village kicked out Zhou's entire family and sent them back to Tianjin, calling the father's problem insufficient grounds for expulsion. In 1968, they were redeported to Wuqing, where they stayed until 1978.

When I asked Zhou to describe his time in the village, he spoke at length about hunger, not political discrimination. He remembered that his father was periodically criticized at meetings. But Zhou said that he was treated like any other villager, especially after he abandoned his Tianjin dialect and began speaking like a local. Crossing the boundary between city and countryside made Zhou aware of one of the defining elements of cultural difference between the two realms, so he changed his speech and adapted. Annual summer flooding made grain scarce and expensive in the low-lying parts of Wuqing county. To help his family survive, Zhou strapped a small scale to a borrowed bicycle and rode on long overnight trips to areas unaffected by floods. Black market grain was cheaper in hilly Jixian and Zunhua counties. Zhou bought what he could and carted it back to Wuqing. He used his scale to resell the

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<sup>50</sup> Interviewee 13.

grain at higher rates after keeping enough for his family's own needs. Zhou no longer had to peddle grain after the early 1970s, when a corvee labor team dredged a nearby river. This limited the damage caused by summer rains, and is a reminder of the rural infrastructural development that continued throughout the Cultural Revolution, improving the lives of many villagers by leaving them less vulnerable to natural disasters.

Zhou and his family made do in the village, raising few complaints, focusing on feeding themselves, and waiting until the Cultural Revolution ended to resettle to Tianjin. Other deportees were less cooperative and caused headaches for rural officials. Zhang Dajun, a clerk at a food shop in Tianjin's central Heping district, was expelled to Shandong in 1968.<sup>51</sup> His alleged crimes were almost all related to factional disputes during the Cultural Revolution, when he joined a rebel group and falsified his past, claiming to be a party member, martyr's son, and revolutionary soldier who had once worked for Chen Boda as a messenger. Lying about his identity made him a "bad element." After arriving in his Shandong hometown in 1968, Zhang attended two compulsory meetings for the village's political enemies. He then locked himself in a room and never came out again, refusing to go to meetings or do farm work. Family members delivered his food. He did not even leave the room to urinate or defecate. In contrast, Zhang's wife (who also refused to work) went out often. She quickly blew the couple's settlement allowance of almost 600 yuan on food and liquor at a nearby rural market, and badgered her brother-in-law for more money.

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<sup>51</sup> Deportation file 75, APA.

When Zhang was reinvestigated in 1973, village leaders, sensing a chance to get rid of Zhang and his wife, wrote a letter to his work unit in Tianjin:

About the deportation of Zhang Dajun to us during the Cultural Revolution: At that time our village did not have a party branch and it was pretty chaotic. The masses had complaints back then. After we established a party branch, in the process of putting into practice all types of party policy (*luoshi dang de ge xiang zhengce*), we deemed that because Zhang's mistakes were committed in Tianjin, he should be reformed there and should not have been deported. Zhang's problem is still unresolved. Owing to poor production conditions here, every year Zhang often eats state-supplied grain and gets welfare relief. If he keeps living here it will be truly difficult. In accordance with the masses' complaints and multiple investigations, our party branch does not consent to settling Zhang in the village.

After the reinvestigation was complete, Zhang's "bad element" label was removed.

Because he did not work and the "village, commune, and county had gotten in touch many times and were determined to not accept him," Zhang and his family were allowed to return to Tianjin.<sup>52</sup> The village appeared to have won this battle. The real winner was Zhang himself, for his asocial behavior earned him the urban residency that he wanted so badly.

Village leaders successfully argued against Zhang's settlement in the countryside because he was a burden and his political problems had nothing to do with the village. This was a common line of argument from villagers who resented the impact of the deportation program. In spring 1967, a rural cadre in Shandong wrote a

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<sup>52</sup> The family's return was approved by his work unit, the district vegetable company, and the district revolutionary committee, but the Tianjin Municipal Implementing Deportation Policy Office wrote, "does not meet all of the qualifications for returning to Tianjin." It is not clear if or for how long this ruling delayed Zhang's return, but a 1978 document in his file indicates that he and his family did return to Tianjin in 1973.

pleading letter to Tianjin officials about a fifty-seven-year-old man named Tao Ligong who had been deported as a “puppet army official:”

Tao left here when he was twenty *sui*; he has been gone for thirty-eight years. During these thirty-eight years he cut off relations from his family. We only admit that according to his ancestral native place (*benji*), he is from our village. In reality he is no longer from our village. When you sent him and his family here last October, we did not understand the situation and did not realize the difficulties they would bring to our village. Village life is mainly based on physical labor. But Tao Ligong is old and weak. His son is only six years old. Also we have many people here and land is scarce. It is difficult to survive. Under these circumstances, the villagers have big complaints about adding people who cannot labor. They also often gossip, saying, “Tao was away from home for thirty-eight years and had no contact with his family,” “We do not admit that he is from our village” (*women bu chengren ta shi zamen cun shang de ren*), “We cannot labor for the sake of feeding him,” “We cannot support him,” “Let them go back to where they came from” (*jiao tamen you nali lai de zai hui nali qu*), and so on. This type of irresponsible talk has certainly brought difficulties, disunity, and a negative impact to our village. If this is not resolved quickly the villagers’ complaints will surely be huge, affecting their production mood. The production team’s opinion is that it firmly does not want him and his family. We ask that you accommodate him away from here.<sup>53</sup>

Tao’s unwelcome presence in his ancestral home prompted rural people to define themselves in opposition to urbanites. Notably, the Shandong villagers expressed their idea of rural-urban difference in terms of community and labor, not the *hukou* system. Administrative structures such as household registration and grain rationing contributed to the rural-urban gap in socialist China, but difference came into focus only when people moved between the two realms and interacted with one another.

Even though Tao had been born in rural Shandong, villagers no longer

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<sup>53</sup> Deportee file 52, APA.

considered him a native. He had been away for too long, had not even bothered to write or visit, and did not contribute to the collective. The harsh response to Tao's arrival ("he is not from here," "go back to where they came from") reflects rural hostility to deportation. Rural people were not consulted about an official program that would cause them hardship. If villagers had a choice about which city residents to accept, they would have selected someone younger and stronger who fulfilled family and community obligations. They certainly would not have chosen Tao. Tao and his family did return to Tianjin in mid-1967, but they were redeported to Shandong the following year. When city officials reclassified his problem as a contradiction among the people in 1972, they ordered him to remain in Shandong as a return-to-village producer.

Villages were at a disadvantage in battles over how to handle unwanted exiles. But rural cadres tried to squeeze lemonade out of the deportation lemon. The Nankai district bureaucracy in charge of dealing with the fallout from deportations in 1969 reported that 243 people approved for expulsion had never left Tianjin. Villages' excessive demands for settlement funds from urban work units—as much as 1,000 yuan per deportee—was partly to blame for this.<sup>54</sup> In addition, village officials sometimes appropriated entire severance payments that were intended to go to rehabilitated deportees. A document issued by the Tianjin Revolutionary Committee in August 1969 asked city officials to "persuade" villages to give the payments to individual deportees, but also acknowledged that the money was probably long gone.

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<sup>54</sup> Nankai qu qingli gongzuo fen zihui bu.

Tianjin's top leaders ruled: "If the payment went to the brigade, in principle seek the return of funds. If the village has genuine difficulties, this can be dealt with according to the situation."<sup>55</sup> This left a major loophole—what village in China could not claim difficulties in 1969? Villages were genuinely worse off than cities during the Mao period. Rural cadres played up this inequality in an attempt to get as much money as possible out of deportees and city offices.

Rural officials made bald demands for cash when cadres from Tianjin showed up to sort out deportees' cases in 1972. The Tianjin Number Two Steel Rolling Mill's successful parrying of village demands was circulated citywide in a packet of "study and reference materials" about how to "put repatriation policy into practice." Factory bureaucrats went to Anxin county in Hebei to investigate a man named Chen who had been removed from Tianjin because of his "puppet army" history. They decided that Chen was not an enemy of the people and that he should remain in the village with a severance payment.

But the factory cadres ran into opposition from village leaders, who reportedly said, "It was you who deported Chen here, now take him back." Village officials also pointed out that Chen's family ate more grain than they earned through work points every year, and that the family owed the production team more than 300 yuan. That sum should be deducted from Chen's severance payment, the village leaders said.

Factory cadres complained about this demand to commune headquarters, which sent

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<sup>55</sup> Tianjin shi geweihui hexin xiaozu 天津市革委会核心小组, "Yanjiu guanyu chuli qiansong daoliu renyuan de yijian" 研究关于处理遣送倒流人员的意见 [Opinion on researching how to handle deportees who flowed back], August 23, 1969, APA.

officials to convince the brigade leadership to let Chen stay in the village and keep the money. “In order to express the policy’s warmth, we secured the brigade’s agreement that Chen’s grain debt would not be deducted from his severance payment,” factory officials reported. “First let Chen get his life in order, then let him gradually pay back the debt.”<sup>56</sup> We do not know whether Chen ever repaid the village. But village leaders did not get the immediate windfall they wanted.

Urban officials tended to blame their rural counterparts for the problems that dogged deportation work. In 1969, Liu Zheng told Tianjin authorities to find out why villages had refused to accommodate deportees and to “do good political thought work on the village side.”<sup>57</sup> Three years later, Liu said that almost twenty thousand exiles had flowed back to Tianjin because “they could not get appropriate accommodation in villages.”<sup>58</sup> To be fair, Liu also criticized urban work units for expelling people without contacting villages first and for arbitrarily labeling undesirables (Liu was especially galled by such ridiculous grounds for deportation as “reactionary element who maintains the standpoint of a rich peasant’s wife”).<sup>59</sup> But it seems misguided to

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<sup>56</sup> Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui renmin baowei bu 天津市革命委员会人民保卫部, *Tianjin shi luoshi qianfan zhengce jingyan xuexi cankao cailiao* 天津市落实遣返政策经验学习参考材料 [Materials for study and reference on experiences of putting repatriation policy into practice], July 26, 1972, APA.

<sup>57</sup> Heping qu qingli gongzuo fen zhihui bu.

<sup>58</sup> “Liu Zheng tongzhi zai shiwei luoshi qiansong zhengce he jiaqiang dui qingshaonian guanli jiaoyu gongzuo huiyi de jianghua.”

<sup>59</sup> “Gaoju ‘jiu da’ tuanjie, shengli de qizhi jin yi bu luoshi dang de ge xiang zhengce—Liu Zheng tongzhi liu yue ershiqi ri zai qu, ju fuzeren huiyi shang de jianghua jilu

blame villagers for rejecting or taking advantage of a costly policy they had no voice in making.

It was especially difficult for villagers to accept why they had to continue to house and feed already exonerated deportees who desperately wanted to return to Tianjin. The Tianjin Fabric Factory rehabilitated a deported worker named Li in 1970.<sup>60</sup> After changing his class status from “reactionary capitalist” to “staff member in the old society” (*jiu zhiyuan*), the factory paid Li more than 6,500 yuan in severance funds (calculated on the basis of seniority and back wages). But in 1972, Li and nine of his family members showed up at his factory office in Tianjin, saying that because Li’s name had been cleared, “we should return to Tianjin and get our *hukou* back for it to count as putting the policy into practice.” Li and his family did not consider his case resolved until they regained Tianjin residency. Factory officials quickly rejected this argument, saying, “You cannot view the policy as being put into practice or not based on whether you return to Tianjin.” Putting policy into practice (meaning fixing messes caused by deportation) was about addressing deportees’ political and economic status, not about urban residency, the bureaucrats explained. “Neither we nor the

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zhaiyao” 高举“九大”团结、胜利的旗帜进一步落实党的各项政策——刘政同志六月二十七日在区、局负责人会议上的讲话记录摘要 [Hold aloft the Ninth Party Congress’s banner of unity and victory, go a step further in putting all party policies into practice—Abstract transcript of Comrade Liu Zheng’s talk at a meeting of district and bureau leaders on June 27]. Reprinted by Yi jixie ju renmin baowei zu 一机械局人民保卫组, July 10, 1969, APA. According to Alexopoulos, similar absurdities took place in the Soviet Union. One woman was disenfranchised after being labeled as “the mother of a deported hooligan.” Alexopoulos, 55.

<sup>60</sup> The following paragraphs are from Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui renmin baowei bu, 18-24.



village treat you as an enemy of the people, but rather as our own comrade. How can you say that the policy was not put into practice?” they asked.

Li retorted that his family had been forced to return to Tianjin because the village did not want them. The family squatted at the factory and stayed for two months, interrupting policy lectures by shouting and threatening that “we won’t leave even if it kills us. If anything happens, the factory is responsible.” Finally the factory sent a work team to Li’s home village in Weixian. The team first reported to the county party committee, where county leaders commended the group for traveling such a long way and for not resting during the May 1 holiday. Next the factory cadres spoke with commune and village cadres. The village leaders said that in principle they supported keeping Li and his family. But because the village was poor, accommodating the large clan was difficult and villagers were complaining.

At this point the commune party secretary intervened, saying that more people in the village equaled more labor power. “Putting policy into practice is not about who has complaints, it is about who obeys Chairman Mao,” the commune leader exhorted, adding, “Tianjin is so far away and these people have come to put policy into practice for Li.” Overruled, the village cadre agreed to travel to Tianjin to persuade Li and his family to return. If he was forced to house the large and disgruntled family in the village, the least he could get in return was a junket to the city.

According to the fabric factory’s report, Li’s resistance crumbled when the village boss showed up in Tianjin and told him, “It is incorrect for you to say that the

brigade does not want you...how could we not want you?" The next day, the factory party secretary authorized the use of the work unit's vehicle to return the family to the countryside. He told them to write a letter if they had any more troubles. Problem solved. The fabric factory's conduct was lauded as a model experience. Factory cadres had succeeded because they "relied on rural county, commune, and brigade party organizations to wipe clean ideological obstacles and unify understanding." What unified urban and rural officials was that none of them wanted to deal with Li and his family's complaints. This meant that whoever was lowest on the administrative totem pole was stuck with the family. If the village had managed to keep Li out, the story would never have been circulated as a citywide model. But pushing off urban problems on the countryside was worthy of emulation.

#### Deportation and the Rural-Urban Divide

After cadres from the Tianjin Number Two Steel Rolling Mill convinced rural officials in Anxin county to keep deportee Chen and absorb his family's grain deficit, they wrote, "Putting deportation policy into practice gave us and the poor and lower-middle peasants an education in [class] line and policy, and established closer relations between city and countryside."<sup>61</sup> It is easy to dismiss this as the type of pabulum that dominates official writings from the Cultural Revolution. But is it possible that the factory cadres were on to something? Did the deportation of political exiles actually end up bridging the rural-urban divide?

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<sup>61</sup> Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui renmin baowei bu, 15.

Inspired by the practice of sending landlords back to villages to face the wrath of the exploited masses, and justified by calls for heightened security in cities during the early days of the Cultural Revolution, deportation was never meant to shrink the gap between city and countryside. Expelling political exiles from cities was purely punitive. It was akin to prison labor, but instead of separating convicts from society and sending them to remote gulags, they were dumped in villages throughout China. This punished both deportees and the villages that hosted them. And none of the lofty rhetoric that accompanied the sent-down youth program—about tempering souls in the revolutionary countryside or bringing advanced culture to villages—was associated with deportation. The deportation program laid bare a system in which cities were politically and economically privileged, while villages became landfills for the “dregs of society.” It bears remembering that the full name of the “meat grinder” that chopped up China during the 1960s and 1970s was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.<sup>62</sup> Because most proletarians lived in urban areas, cities were special places. In the era’s heightened atmosphere of class struggle, urban zones had to be cleansed of impurities. There was only one way for impure elements to go: “down” to villages.

Why did Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai’s exhortations against passing contradictions down to the lower levels go unheeded for so long? Why, instead, was deportation effectively legalized? Why was it wholly abandoned and repudiated only

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<sup>62</sup> The “Outline of Project 571” associated with Lin Biao’s son Lin Liguang refers to China’s state machinery during the Cultural Revolution as a “meat grinder” (*jiaorou ji*). Wang Nianyi, 419.

after Mao's death? In the preceding chapters we have seen that pre-1949 attitudes about the superiority of urban space combined with the entire logic of China's Stalinist industrialization program to produce an environment in which people began to take for granted the idea that cities were privileged and protected spaces. Rural China was expected to sacrifice its interests for the sake of rapid urban industrialization, and accepting political exiles was indeed a form of sacrifice for villages, just as bearing the brunt of the famine had been a few years earlier. The cumulative effect of the policies that had disadvantaged rural China under Mao made it easy for the people who carried out deportations to assume that they were doing the right thing by sending political outcasts to villages.

Yet while the deportations of the Cultural Revolution were a massive injustice for deportees and villagers alike, in a sense the cadres from the steel rolling mill were correct that the entire experience had brought city and village closer together. Villagers learned about how the Cultural Revolution was unfolding in multiple ways, from red guards on the march to loudspeaker broadcasts. But the appearance of entire families of humiliated political outcasts in villages was a clear signal to rural residents that something important and unprecedented was taking place. For some villages, the methods and magnitude of the Cultural Revolution did not hit home until deportees arrived.

Later reassessments of deportees were another way that deportation bridged the rural-urban gap. How often during the Cultural Revolution did urban officials sit down with rural cadres to make deals? Probably more often than most scholars realize,

but the reinvestigation of deportees in 1972 was a chance for city and village leaders to meet and forge agreements on the sensitive issue of how to backtrack on deportation without negating the entire Cultural Revolution. To be sure, urban officials had the upper hand in these dealings. County and commune authorities, who did not have to deal with the headaches caused by deportees on a daily basis, usually sided with city reinvestigation teams against village cadres who complained about practical hardships. But local leaders sometimes stood their ground and pushed back.

Returning now to Mr. Zhou, the deportee who as a teenager had bicycled around the countryside north of Tianjin in search of cheap grain. When I talked to him in 2005, he depicted his experience in the countryside in shades of grey—a color that all scholarship on the Mao years should strive for. “I’m thankful for the ten years I had in the village,” Zhou told me. “Just look at me! I’m buff! I never get sick and I’m in better health than other people my age. That’s because I exercised for ten years in the village. The only thing I regret is my low educational level.” Zhou and his family were victims of an anti-rural logic that cast the countryside as a prison for urban exiles in 1960s and 1970s China. But his appreciation for the rewards of his ten years in Tianjin’s hinterland suggests a more complicated reality.

The following chapter will trace how the complexities of everyday life during the 1960s and 1970s challenged state definitions of urban and rural space. In spite of administrative labels, all space in China during the Mao period remained relational and contested.

## 7. Neither Urban nor Rural: In-Between Spaces in the 1960s and 1970s

Imagine a huge ironworks administered by the Tianjin Metallurgical Bureau, staffed by thousands of Tianjin workers. Next to the factory complex are dormitories, schools administered by Tianjin educational authorities, a branch of the Tianjin Public Security Bureau, and Tianjin banks and department stores. Steaming Tianjin “Dogs Ignore” stuffed buns (*gou bu li baozi*) are on sale, and vehicles displaying Tianjin license plates zoom by. What’s strange about this picture? For one, it cannot be found anywhere near the city of Tianjin. The Tianjin Ironworks, these days known as the Tianjin Tiantie Metallurgical Group Corporation Ltd., is located in a steep mountain valley in the far southwest corner of Hebei Province. Since 1969, the ironworks has been an island of Tianjin land, 260 aerial miles away from the actual city.

In 1956, another type of island emerged much closer to Tianjin. The Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm is only a thirty minute bicycle ride southwest of the city. Yet in a China divided into “urban” and “rural” spaces, the Tianjin-administered farm does not fit neatly into either label. Since its establishment, the farm has produced such agricultural goods as vegetables, milk, eggs, and grain, but the people doing the producing called themselves workers, not peasants. Even though they fed pigs and hoed fields all day long, people laboring at the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm earned monthly wages and held non-agricultural *hukou*. Peasants in neighboring villages earned workpoints, not cash, for similar labor.

During the 1960s and 1970s, spaces like the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm and the Tianjin Ironworks were located in geographically rural settings, but were enclaves where residents assumed and maintained urban identities. Enclaves' urban administrative space clashed with their rural physical space. They expose the inadequacy of analyzing China through fixed "urban" and "rural" labels. Since the mid-1950s, household registration (*hukou*) and grain rationing systems divided China into urban and rural spheres, but these administrative categories—even as they shaped life choices and opportunities—did not mesh with lived reality.

Enclave factories and state farms may have been anomalous in a landscape dominated by collective farms, county towns, and industrial cities. Nonetheless, they suggest that few spaces were exclusively urban or rural during the Mao Zedong era. Whether we define spaces by their population size or density, economic activity (farming or industry), the stamp in residents' *hukou* booklets (agricultural or non-agricultural), or by what people called themselves and others (peasants, workers, villagers, city people), we discover that every officially "urban" space contained elements normally associated with the countryside, and vice versa. Some villages had industry; certain city residents grew vegetables and raised chickens. Some people who lived in settlements of more than 10,000 residents held agricultural *hukou* and worked in the fields.

This is not to say that the *hukou* system was irrelevant during the Mao period, or that urban and rural labels were meaningless. Both were crucial in people's everyday lives. When these powerful administrative designations were clinically

imposed on a complicated geographic and human landscape, individuals and families had to sort out the mess. Labels and categories pushed people into choices and situations that they might not have considered otherwise. But people pushed back.

This chapter focuses on the people in and around two category-busting spaces. I explain the rationale behind the founding of the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm and the Tianjin Ironworks, and then explore the mixing of different types of people at the farm and ironworks. I then discuss how intermediate space affected questions of marriage, family, and economic viability. People sent to the farm and ironworks from Tianjin fought hard to hold on to the benefits that came along with their official urban identities. Their interactions with local people made them acutely aware of how much they had to lose. In contrast, while the lives of local villagers were disrupted, they discovered that they could take advantage of the enclaves next door.

### Proletarian Peasants

In the latter half of 1955, as collectivization proceeded throughout much of rural China, Tianjin's municipal government ordered its labor bureau to establish a state farm on previously uncultivated swampland southwest of the city. The purpose of the farm was to provide paid jobs for unemployed city workers. The new unit was named "Worker-Peasant Alliance," an often-used theoretical construct in the mid-1950s. But at this point in the farm's history, there were no peasants, only workers.<sup>1</sup>

Cai Shiming, a city man who began working at the farm in 1962, heard that it

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<sup>1</sup> NCS, 1.



was named by Mao Zedong himself. Mao visited the suburban village of Wangdingdi on January 12, 1956, to inspect the advanced unit's collectivization progress.<sup>2</sup>

Standing on a hill outside of the village and gazing out upon the bog to the west, Mao reportedly said, “establish a farm there, worker-peasant alliance.” Mao did visit Wangdingdi, but Cai's story is apocryphal, given that the labor bureau already had orders to found the farm before Mao's supposed utterance. Cai remains convinced of Mao's fateful hand in the farm's founding. “It's amazing how those few words changed my life and changed the lives of so many people,” Cai said.<sup>3</sup>

Cai was right that the farm would eventually affect thousands of people, but in its first years, the farm was small. In March 1956 around 200 unemployed workers from Tianjin moved to the farm. Their first tasks were to drain the bog and remove alkaline soil. Aside from swampland, this peripheral space on the outskirts of Tianjin included higher ground dotted with grave mounds. The workers labored to remove the tombs. By the end of 1956, workers had dug up more than 30,000 “ownerless” grave mounds. According to a manuscript history of the farm, “all types of coffins formed a small mountain.”<sup>4</sup>

For the city workers, who lived in tents and earned monthly wages between 28

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<sup>2</sup> Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui 中共天津市委党史资料征集委员会, ed., *Mao Zedong he Tianjin renmin zai yiqi* 毛泽东和天津人民在一起 [Mao Zedong together with the people of Tianjin] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1993), 27-29.

<sup>3</sup> Interviewee 57.

<sup>4</sup> NCS, 3.

and 38 yuan, laboring at the farm was less than ideal. During the second half of 1957, more city factory jobs became available. The farm workers wanted out. They began taking long vacations, asking for sick leave, and skipping work. In 1957, the farm fell far short of its production targets, and had an operating deficit of more than 300,000 yuan. The labor bureau decided that relying on unemployed city workers as the only source of employees was “inappropriate,” and anyone who wanted to leave the farm for a city job was allowed to go. Almost everyone left.<sup>5</sup> Tianjin agricultural officials transferred several hundred agricultural workers from other suburban state farms to Worker-Peasant Alliance, and the farm began hiring peasants as temporary workers.

Transforming “peasants” (*nongmin*) into proletarian “agricultural workers” (*nongye gongren*) was in tune with the national goals of state farms in the mid- to late-1950s. Model state farms were large, mechanized, and proletarianized. In other words, state farms were supposed to be more advanced and modern than village agriculture. As one pamphlet extolling the virtues of the model State Friendship Farm (Guoying youyi nongchang) in Heilongjiang explained, “a state farm is an agricultural factory on a large plot of state land that uses mechanized agriculture to carry out large-scale production. The people who produce here are agricultural workers, they earn wages based on the quality and quantity of their labor, just like workers in a factory.”<sup>6</sup> And unlike peasants in villages, it went without saying.

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<sup>5</sup> NCS, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> Guo Wenyu 郭文培, *Guoying nongchang* 国营农场 [State farms] (Beijing: Chaohua meishu chubanshe, 1957), inside cover.

In the mid-1950s, China's state farms were modeled on the Soviet Union's *sovkhoz*, which employed "proletarians" who lived in huts, barracks, and then dormitories. In 1952, a team of Chinese "peasant representatives" went to the Soviet Union to tour state farms. What the Chinese team learned about state farm organization and production was reprinted in pamphlet form at least three times, and Soviet advisers helped to establish the Friendship Farm in Heilongjiang.<sup>7</sup> In late 1957, there were 107 state farms in China. Twenty years later, there were more than 2,000.<sup>8</sup> State farms, particularly those near cities, were intermediate spaces between rural and urban China. Their focus on cultivation and livestock was rural, but their factory-style organization and administrative designation were urban. By the early 1960s, wages at Worker-Peasant Alliance were based on nationally-mandated salary standards for agricultural workers. Like city workers, they held non-agricultural *hukou* and received guaranteed grain rations.

### Tianjin's Third Front

The Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm and other state farms established in the 1950s followed a Soviet model that aimed to mechanize the countryside and proletarianize peasants. In contrast, third front factories like the Tianjin Ironworks emerged during the anti-Soviet 1960s. Barry Naughton describes the third front of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Sulian de guoying nongchang* 苏联的国营农场 [Soviet state farms] (Beijing: Shidai chubanshe, 1956 [1953]).

<sup>8</sup> Guo Wenyu, inside cover; RMRB, November 20, 1977, 1.

1960s and 1970s as a “purposive, large-scale, centrally-directed programme of development carried out in response to a perceived external threat with the broad support of China’s national leaders.”<sup>9</sup> The “big third front” refers to the dispersal of industrial projects in China’s southwest, especially in Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, and in the northwest, including Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai. Central leaders including Mao, Zhou Enlai, and Lin Biao thought that building an industrial system in these remote areas would minimize damage from air attacks and allow China to fight a protracted war against the United States or Soviet Union. In addition to the big third front, each province and special municipality like Tianjin was to establish its own “small third front” of remote, dispersed industry.<sup>10</sup>

In 1969, Tianjin needed iron. The city had a steel mill but no local source of metals. Xie Xuegong, Tianjin’s top leader during the Cultural Revolution, traveled reluctantly to Shandong province to ask for iron. Xie procured 80,000 tons of iron for the use of Tianjin’s steel industry, but Tianjin officials wanted to be self-reliant. Originally, Tianjin planned to build its ironworks near Tangshan, but the location was too close to the coast and therefore did not meet “small third front” standards.<sup>11</sup>

Shi Zhirui was part of the investigation team sent by Tianjin’s metallurgical bureau to the Taihang mountains in southwest Hebei to scout out mine and factory

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<sup>9</sup> Barry Naughton, “The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior,” *China Quarterly*, no. 115 (1988): 351.

<sup>10</sup> Naughton, “The Third Front,” 368.

<sup>11</sup> Tianjin tiantie yejin jituan youxian gongsi 天津天铁冶金集团有限公司, ‘35 *licheng* 历程 [35 year course] (n.p., 2004), 41.

sites. Not only did there have to be sufficient iron and coal mines to fuel the ironworks, the site had to follow the “six-character principle” for third front construction: “mountainous, dispersed, and concealed” (*kaoshan, fensan, yinbi*).<sup>12</sup> Shexian county, at the junction of Hebei, Shanxi, and Henan provinces, fit the bill. As one official put it, the site chosen for the ironworks was at the rear of Tianjin’s small third front but was in the forward position of the national big third front.<sup>13</sup>

Because the area selected for Tianjin’s ironworks was in Hebei province, the construction project was originally conceived as a collaborative effort between Tianjin and the province. But the alliance between the city and Hebei would quickly crumble. On August 5, 1969, national economic planner Xie Beiyi convened a meeting in Shijiazhuang, Hebei’s provincial capital. The chair of the project team was from Hebei, the vice-chair from Tianjin. Meeting participants agreed that the ironworks would produce 1.5 million tons of pig iron annually for the exclusive use of Tianjin’s steel industry, and would also produce 600,000 tons of steel and 500,000 tons of rolled steel per year. Hebei and Tianjin would cooperate in the plant’s construction, which would be funded by the national government. Finally, the ironworks would be named

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<sup>12</sup> Shi Zhirui 史志瑞, “Tiantie jianchang zhichu de huiyi” 天铁建厂之初的回忆 [Memories of establishing the Tianjin Ironworks], *Tansuo yu yanjiu*, no. 3 (August 5, 1999): 302-3. Many, including Shi Zhirui, attribute this six-character phrase to Lin Biao, but recent research indicates that Zhou Enlai first came up with the principle in 1964. See Chen Donglin 陈东林, “1964 nian san xian jianshe juece qianhou de zhongyang fenqi” 1964 年三线建设决策前后的中央分歧 [Party Center’s dispute during the 1964 third front construction policy-making process], *Lengzhan Zhongguo wang* (June 28, 2005), [http://www.coldwarchina.com/zgyj/whdgm/000966\\_3.html](http://www.coldwarchina.com/zgyj/whdgm/000966_3.html).

<sup>13</sup> 35 *licheng*, 41.

“Project 6985,” because that was the date of the meeting in Shijiazhuang.<sup>14</sup>

As planning continued during late summer and early fall 1969, Tianjin and Hebei officials clashed. The iron was for Tianjin, but the land was in Hebei. Each side wanted the final say on planning decisions large and small. Fifty heavy trucks were assigned to the project. As soon as the vehicles arrived in Shexian county, Hebei and Tianjin cadres demanded that their own drivers take control of the trucks.<sup>15</sup> Turf battles over scarce resources had been part of the command economy since the 1950s, and this did not change during the Cultural Revolution. Authorities in Beijing caught wind of the dispute, and in November 1969 they awarded Tianjin full jurisdiction over the project. Tianjin was able to appropriate Hebei land for its own use.

Tianjin would have its iron island in the mountains, but the specific site still had to be chosen. After Tianjin took over the ironworks project, city cadres and engineers made the long journey from Tianjin to Shexian. They sparred over where to build the plant. In this and all other project decisions, urban officials—and not local people—would dominate the conversation. But many local residents took advantage of the situation to ensure favorable outcomes for themselves.

#### Encounters at the Ironworks Enclave

The top leaders of the ironworks project who arrived in Shexian county in late 1969 had all been forced out of office and detained in late 1966 and early 1967. They

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<sup>14</sup> Shi Zhirui 303; '35 *licheng*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Interviewee 11.

had been rehabilitated only a few months before being assigned to Project 6985. Most of them welcomed the opportunity to get away from Tianjin's highly politicized atmosphere. Yang Zhengmin was named director of project headquarters. Before the Cultural Revolution, he was Tianjin's vice mayor in charge of economic planning. Yang was the son of Shaanxi warlord general Yang Hucheng (of Xi'an Incident fame). After arriving in Shexian county, Yang called together headquarters officials, including former Tianjin Metallurgical Bureau director and Long March veteran Li Xianyuan, and Nie Bichu, who would become Tianjin's vice mayor in the late 1980s. Finding an appropriate site for the ironworks was at the top of their agenda.<sup>16</sup>

Two locations made the final cut. Xigang was in a gorge close to the county seat. It had abundant water resources and some of the best farm land in the mountainous area. But in order to build there, about one hundred households would have to be moved. Xigang's water independence had not come easily. In 1958, girls from the village sold their braids and earrings in order to fund an irrigation project. The Gengle site was larger, but its topography was so steep, rugged, and rock-strewn that not as much arable land would be affected. Ironworks leaders presented these two options to Tianjin Revolutionary Committee Vice-Chair Chi Biqing. He chose Gengle.<sup>17</sup> The decision to build at Gengle was made in the city. But project leaders were aware that construction would disrupt village life, so they chose the site that they thought would have the least adverse impact. Gengle residents would soon have

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<sup>16</sup> Shi Zhirui, 304.

<sup>17</sup> Shi Zhirui, 304.

40,000 new neighbors.

During planning and construction in 1969 and 1970, city officials interacted with villagers every day. Headquarters authorities moved into homes in Gengle, a large settlement of several connected villages with a population of 8,642 in 1970.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that the sheer size of Gengle stretches the definition of “rural.” Most Gengle residents held agricultural *hukou* and farmed, but for a while, the size of their settlement dwarfed the ironworks’ construction site. “Rural” and “urban” spaces were administrative categories rather than precise geographical descriptors. The ironworks was an intermediate space, but in its own way, so was Gengle. The urban *hukou* held by the newcomers from Tianjin were indeed an important marker of difference. Yet in everyday interactions, simple differences between insiders and outsiders, between locals and strangers, were more apparent than administrative designations.

Yang Zhengmin and Li Xianyuan lived with Gengle native Zou Shaorui. Yang sat down with his host and asked for local support. “If you peasants don’t help us, we cannot build it,” Yang told Zou. “Worker-peasant alliance, you know.”<sup>19</sup> The official rationale for the ironworks was war preparation, not cooperation between city and countryside or rural development. But Yang Zhengmin knew that the project could ill afford local resistance, so he invoked the well-worn worker-peasant alliance formulation.

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<sup>18</sup> *Gengle zhen zhi* bianzuan weiyuanhui 《更乐镇志》编纂委员会, ed., *Gengle zhen zhi* 更乐镇志 [Gengle town gazetteer] (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2001), 231.

<sup>19</sup> Interviewee 73.



In practice, this meant monetary compensation for the terraced land that would be destroyed and leveled for factory use. Ironworks employees also paid villagers for rent and food costs until workers' dormitories were built. In exchange, Zou Shaorui and other local authorities were expected to convince villagers to accept the deal and to smooth over any conflicts that might arise. The ironworks had a home, but it would hit road blocks before its first iron oozed out of the blast furnace. In one dispute, apparently over land use, a village party secretary dug a deep ditch across the road heading to the ironworks site. Trucks loaded with construction supplies could not get through. County-level cadres finally arrived and persuaded the secretary to reopen the road.<sup>20</sup>

Project 6985 officials, even those originally from villages themselves, were shocked at the conditions they encountered in Gengle. Zhao Yingjie was an official in Tianjin's city government before he was sacked during the Cultural Revolution. He was sent to Shexian in late 1969. After arriving in Gengle, Zhao moved into a villager's home along with three other Tianjin people. Zhao paid 1 mao (.10 yuan) plus 3 *liang* of grain ration tickets for each meal. He gagged on the stir-fried rice chaff his hosts offered. "It was so poor there," said Zhao, who had grown up in a central Hebei village. "This place had been liberated for so many years, how could it still be this way?"<sup>21</sup> Zhao and his Tianjin colleagues always felt hungry. They regularly snuck off to a supply depot, bought eggs and potatoes, and hid them in the

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<sup>20</sup> Interviewee 73.

<sup>21</sup> Interviewee 11.

teapot in the center of their room. After their village hosts had gone to sleep for the night, the men quietly nibbled on their stash.

Long March veteran Li Xianyuan also remarked on the poverty of the area. “You can really call it a ‘poor and out of the way place’,” he wrote, “it had a bit of the flavor of the war of resistance.” Hardy Li could handle everything except Gengle’s water. The nearest river was about twenty kilometers away, too far for daily trips. Instead, Gengle villagers dug holes in their yards and drank the rain and snowmelt that accumulated there. Almost all Tianjin people who stayed in Gengle reacted with horror to the murky “pit water” (*yao shui*). “It goes without saying that there were lots of bacteria in the water,” Li Xianyuan wrote, “We could even see insects, roots, and dirt. It was enough to make city people terrified.” Li remembered that Yang Zhengmin made a point of gulping the yellow water, bugs and all, in front of his village hosts.<sup>22</sup> He did not want to disrespect the villagers. There was nothing else to drink anyway. Other Tianjin people, less concerned with social niceties, filtered the water through handkerchiefs before drinking it.

The first few dozen officials stationed in Gengle in late 1969 got along well with their hosts. Yang Zhengmin and Li Xianyuan exchanged Spring Festival gifts with their village “landlord” (*fangdong*, not *dizhu*) and helped him with favors for years after the two Tianjin cadres were transferred away from Project 6985. But when tens of thousands of outsiders arrived in the valley in 1970, tensions were impossible to avoid.

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<sup>22</sup> TJRB, November 13, 2001, 11.

Distinct groups came together to build the ironworks: hundreds of technical experts from the Baotou and Beijing steel mills; around 5,000 demobilized soldiers from the Beijing Military Region's Tianjin garrison; about 10,000 Tianjin middle school graduates from the classes of 1969 and 1970; and at least 10,000 *mingong* (peasant contract laborers on temporary leave from their Hebei communes).<sup>23</sup> The *mingong* returned to their rural communes after the initial construction ended, while the ex-soldiers and Tianjin youth stayed on as salaried employees and officials at the project's factories and mines. In addition to the soldiers, students, and *mingong*, other Tianjin units were transferred to Shexian to serve the ironworks. Doctors and nurses from the well-regarded Tianjin Number 3 Hospital moved their entire operation, including all staff and equipment, to the plant site. Several thousand Tianjin construction workers charged with building dormitories and office space also arrived in the valley.

We know very little about the thousands of *mingong* who cycled through the construction site. The historical record privileges the memories of the Tianjin middle school graduates. Commemorative literature and television programs focus on city youth who cried when they disembarked at the empty train station near Gengle in 1970 and who sob when they retell the story today. Working in isolated Shexian was undeniably arduous; perhaps terrible untold stories cause the tears to flow. According

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<sup>23</sup> Currently available published sources and memoirs differ on the size of each group. The range for demobilized soldiers is 3,000 to 7,000; for Tianjin youth, 3,000 to 12,000; and *mingong* from a low of 10,000 to a high estimate of 50,000. '35 *licheng*, 43-44, 46; TJRB, November 13, 2001, 11.

to Wu Yifu, who was the project vice-director in charge of personnel, “there were lots of accidents and many workers were killed and injured, they sacrificed for the project.”<sup>24</sup> Urban youths’ memories reflect genuine difficulties, but also reveal a sense of entitlement and an assumption of natural difference between life inside and outside the ironworks island.

According to one teen who was sent to ironworks-affiliated mines, an assignment to 6985 was actually coveted by Tianjin youth. Most students from previous classes had been assigned to rural communes and ordered to become peasants. In contrast, the ironworks offered worker status, decent salaries, guaranteed grain, and the chance to hold on to Tianjin *hukou*.<sup>25</sup> The enclave was geographically distant, but it was still officially Tianjin. The ironworks’ administrative status meant that it might be possible for the youths to return to Tianjin in the future, an option denied to urban teens who were sent to villages.

Because of the strategic nature of the third front, the ironworks was technically secret. Students had to have favored class labels and meet high political and performance standards before being approved to work there.<sup>26</sup> However, even though the ironworks was more desirable than becoming a sent-down youth in a village, for

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<sup>24</sup> ‘35 *licheng*, 45. Judith Shapiro writes that the death rate for workers at the Panzhihua Steel Mill, a massive third front construction site in Sichuan, averaged a shockingly high 5.42 percent. Judith Shapiro, *Mao’s War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 152.

<sup>25</sup> Interviewee 92.

<sup>26</sup> Interviewee 55; interviewee 75.

most graduates it was still inferior to staying in Tianjin proper. Urban authorities raised the expectations of the teens, which inevitably led to disappointment after they arrived in Shexian.

One of the first trainloads of youths arrived in March 1970. The train stopped at Piandian station, which had no platform, just a hut. The students thought that the conductor must have made a mistake. They expected an expanse of tall buildings and smokestacks, with wide roads extending in all directions. But they saw no roads at all, only a few one-story buildings. In the distance, a group hiked toward the train, pounding drums, beating gongs, and waving red flags. It dawned on the new arrivals that this was a welcoming party of Tianjin youths who had arrived a few days earlier. “Oh my God, this is 6985?!” they exclaimed. “That’s right, get off the train!” the conductor ordered.

The youths had also been informed that Project 6985 was near the south, “where all seasons are like spring.” They were told to leave their long underwear behind. But the mountain air was frigid, and the winter was long. It snowed as late as April that year.<sup>27</sup> They were the best of the class of 1970. They came from the most revolutionary of class backgrounds. This was their reward? Many of the students felt tricked. They had not gone to school for years in order to make bricks or build roads in this forsaken place.

Some of the students began to act up and demand better conditions, making life

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<sup>27</sup> Tianjin tiantie yejin jituan youxian gongsi 天津天铁冶金集团有限公司, *Tiantie jingshen tiantie ren* 天铁精神天铁人 [Tiantie spirit, Tiantie people] (n.p., 2004), 117.

difficult for their supervisors, many of whom were demobilized soldiers. “It was tough to manage them,” acknowledged one ex-soldier originally from a Hebei village. “They could not adapt” to the difficult conditions at 6985. They often stirred up trouble, forming gangs and brawling over trivial matters, the veteran said.<sup>28</sup> The worst troublemakers were the young men assigned to make tiles for the blast furnaces. Others called them “big bricks” (*da wa*) behind their backs. A sympathetic supervisor explained their misbehavior: “Their character was okay, but they were young and ignorant. They overemphasized a code of brotherhood and had low self-esteem because they were not happy with the type of work they were doing.”<sup>29</sup> During the early 1970s, in administrative terms these workers lived on an urban island, in that their wages and Tianjin *hukou* differentiated them from unpaid rural people in nearby villages. But before the first blast furnace and dormitories were complete, there was no physical barrier that kept the youths apart from local peasants. What happened when they met?

At first, the students and villagers looked at one another with mutual suspicion. Often, this distrust was warranted. Liu Hongwu, a Tianjin student who arrived in Shexian in 1970, said that “the city people looked down on the peasants. They wore dirty cotton clothes and just sat in their doorways, they even ate their meals sitting on the stoop.” Liu noticed that locals interpreted the Tianjin youths’ new, clean clothes as a sign that the city youths “did not work” (*bu gan huor*). “Because we came to their

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<sup>28</sup> Interviewee 75.

<sup>29</sup> *Tiantie jingshen*, 118.

hometown, they thought we should obey them,” Liu complained.<sup>30</sup> The teenager sensed that the villagers could not stand the students. He was right.

“We couldn’t stand the students,” said Zou Shaorui, the Gengle native who had been a friendly host to top ironworks leaders. Villagers’ main complaint was not that the students did not work, but that they stole fruit, corn, and nuts from village fields and orchards. Persimmons and walnuts normally ripened in August, but the students picked and ate them in July.<sup>31</sup> Liu Hongwu admitted that he was part of a group of Tianjin youths who stole walnuts from a vendor in the Shexian county town. This was a fun diversion for the city teenagers, who probably did not pause to consider that they were robbing villagers of a crucial source of income.

Students flaunted their sense of entitlement. The youths requested that their hard physical labor be rewarded with dumplings every Sunday. Peasants could afford the luxury perhaps once a year. The demand was granted, but only for young women.<sup>32</sup> In 1970, around one-third of the Tianjin youths were female, and they were organized into a separate work unit. Male workers at the ironworks were allowed an annual *jiaozi* meal, but women could eat them weekly. Pulling off the weekly dumpling feast presented logistical difficulties for the young Tianjin women. The nearest meat shop was three miles away from their worksite. On one occasion, five female workers pushed a cart to the shop. By the time they arrived, the day’s meat

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<sup>30</sup> Interviewee 92.

<sup>31</sup> Interviewee 73.

<sup>32</sup> Interviewee 93.

had already sold out. They argued with the local butcher and begged him to make an exception. When that did not work, they all started crying. The exasperated man fetched a hog and slaughtered it right in front of the sniveling teens. Before handing over the meat, he said, “Don’t you cry, my pig’s life was only one day shorter.”<sup>33</sup>

The Tianjin youths flouted rules and ignored the costs of their stealing and wheedling. It was, therefore, no surprise when locals took what they could from the factory. According to a history of public security at the ironworks, “owing to the complicated make-up of the personnel and the effects of the Cultural Revolution,” construction materials and funds were stolen at an alarming rate in 1970.<sup>34</sup> The report does not specify who was robbing the site, but the formation of a new *hukou* inspection team in September 1970 aimed to keep villagers out. One of the stated goals of the *hukou* team was to keep “population from nearby villages from flowing into the construction site.”<sup>35</sup> The island’s boundaries were taking shape, but they were never impermeable.

Ten years after the factory produced its first iron in 1972, peasants had literally torn holes in the wall around the ironworks. In the early reform period’s atmosphere of uncovering corruption and inefficiency, the national *Economic Daily* splashed an exposé of fiscal disarray and looting at the ironworks on its front page. Although the

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<sup>33</sup> *Tiantie jingshen*, 118.

<sup>34</sup> Lu Jinjun 陆进军, Yu Xianbiao 余仙彪, and Zhao Jie 赵洁, “Pijing zhanji dandang tiecheng weishi” 披荆斩棘 担当铁成卫士 [Hacking our way through difficulties, bodyguards of the iron city], *Tansuo yu yanjiu*, no. 3 (August 5, 1999): 204.

<sup>35</sup> Lu, Yu, and Zhao, 205.



report is from the early 1980s, its contents, along with public security histories, suggest that looting occurred throughout the 1970s. The article, published in December 1983, was accompanied by two photos. The first showed “a few peasants from around the factory” sneaking metal through a hole in the wall surrounding the ironworks’ perimeter. The next photo was a close-up of a Shexian man selling stolen pig iron at an open-air market. He told *Economic Daily* reporters, “I go [to the ironworks] once a day and take 50 kilos. The commune buys it for 6 fen (.06 yuan) per kilo, so that’s 3 *kuai* (yuan). It’s better than doing farm work.”<sup>36</sup>

According to the article accompanying the photos, peasants from Gengle and Jingdian communes carried off 50 tons of iron, 100 tons of coke, and 100 tons of coal in 1982. The problem continued in 1983: materials continued to disappear, and in the dry season, peasants “from all over the factory district” used factory water to irrigate their fields, costing the ironworks several hundred thousand yuan. For the people who made off with free iron and water, the benefits of having an ironworks next door was making up for the fruit and nuts stolen by the spoiled Tianjin youths.

Not all of the economic benefits reaped by villagers were illicit, nor were all interactions between locals and outsiders antagonistic. Throughout the 1970s, peasants and ironworks employees interacted at twice-weekly markets. They also traded and bartered in other settings. A boy who grew up in a nearby village carried persimmons, corn, walnuts, and eggs on a shoulder pole to the ironworks. He followed the plant’s work calendar, going straight to the ironworks perimeter on

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<sup>36</sup> *Jingji ribao* 经济日报 [Economic Daily], December 18, 1983, 1.

Sundays, not on customary market days. Income from these sales to Tianjin workers supplemented his family's income.<sup>37</sup>

Some Tianjin youths pilfered extra corn buns from their own cafeteria. After dark, they snuck down to Gengle to trade the buns for walnuts and persimmons. They also took their extra grain ration tickets down the hill and traded them for eggs.<sup>38</sup>

Workers and peasants exchanged gifts. One Tianjin teen who worked in the ironworks' mines brought sacks of high-quality paddy rice back from his new year's vacations in Tianjin. He gave them to the families who had hosted him during his first two years at the mines. When he returned to Tianjin for good in 1974, his village friends sent him off with bags of local products.<sup>39</sup>

After the blast furnace opened in 1972, a clearer line demarcated the urban enclave from the village. Roads were better and buildings taller inside the island; higher-quality schools and hospitals catered exclusively to ironworks staff and dependents. Perimeter walls were built. Yet people were not prohibited from crossing the line for temporary visits. Sometimes villagers entered the ironworks compound to enjoy performances; ironworks employees also walked down the hill to watch movies, opera, and political meetings in Gengle.<sup>40</sup> These were perhaps the most pleasant interactions of all. In the early 1970s, Tianjin youths formed a propaganda

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<sup>37</sup> Interviewee 74.

<sup>38</sup> Interviewee 92.

<sup>39</sup> Interviewee 55.

<sup>40</sup> Interviewee 72.

performance team, putting on shows like “I Vow to Give My Youth to the Third Front” and “Taihang Battle Song.” One former member of the propaganda team recalled that huge crowds of peasants always turned out for their shows in Shexian.<sup>41</sup> The annual performance in Gengle by a Henan-style drama troupe was a treasured ritual for villagers and an inscrutable spectacle for Tianjin youths, who loitered around the edges of the village square, unable to comprehend the local dialect.<sup>42</sup>

Even though the two groups intermingled at markets and shows, they were easily distinguishable. No unique island identity formed during the 1970s. Those with regular jobs inside the ironworks considered themselves urban workers. They had Tianjin *hukou* to prove it. Locals’ lives were hugely affected by the presence of the huge industrial compound (not least of which by the pollution poisoning their air and water). But they could not become a part of that world, at least not until the mid-1980s. Some did not want to become ironworks workers. Zou Shaorui thought that he could have asked his former tenants for a factory position. “I needed to plant my fields,” he said. “I don’t understand the blast furnace, I don’t have that ability. I could have asked and they would have given me a job, but I did not want to bother the leaders.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Yang Dianqi 杨殿麒, “Gongdi shang de wenyi xuanchuan dui” 工地上的文艺宣传队 [Culture and propaganda team at the construction site], *Tansuo yu yanjiu*, no. 3 (August 5, 1999): 307-8.

<sup>42</sup> Interviewee 92.

<sup>43</sup> Interviewee 73.

### Finding Middle Ground at the State Farm

Both the ironworks and the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm closer to Tianjin were privileged spaces compared to the surrounding countryside. The ironworks had a clear, consistent goal throughout the 1970s: to produce metal for Tianjin. In contrast, the farm's name, mission, and administrative status changed repeatedly. The farm first opened under the auspices of the Tianjin labor bureau. In late 1957 it was taken over by the city's agriculture, forestry, and irrigation bureau. At the beginning of the Great Leap Forward it became part of Tianjin's Nankai district, then in late 1959 the Tianjin livestock and poultry bureau took over. In the 1960s the city's agricultural cultivation bureau was in control, but for a year during the Cultural Revolution, the farm was caught in a tug-of-war between the agricultural bureau and the city's education system. With each administrative change, production tasks swung wildly. The farm's main products were usually paddy rice, vegetables, eggs, and milk, but in September 1958, as part of the leap's hygiene drive, all cows within the Tianjin city limits were shipped to Worker-Peasant Alliance over the course of three days. Many of the cows fell ill, froze, or starved to death because of a feed shortage.

A year later, the farm pioneered a model "pig cafeteria" that garnered national recognition. The cafeteria was meant to "transform the backward way of feeding pigs separately in individual stalls," by cycling the hogs in shifts through a two-story collective dining hall (farm employees lived on the top floor). Over the course of eight months in 1959, the farm's pig herd grew from 335 to 1,842, and numbers continued to skyrocket after the Agricultural Publishing House in Beijing published a

short book about the experiment.<sup>44</sup> As forward thinking as the cafeteria was, it failed in winter 1960, when there was not enough food to sustain humans, let alone livestock. Even after grain was transferred from farm's liquor distillery to save the animals, most of them starved: 4,255 pigs and 82,825 chickens died at the farm in 1960.

At least 250 farm employees suffered from edema at the height of the famine, but the farm recovered and received infusions of new workers in the 1960s and 70s. While personnel at the Tianjin Ironworks remained relatively static during the 1970s (Tianjin workers and demobilized soldiers), Worker-Peasant Alliance was home to many different types of people over the years. People from villages in the Tianjin region got jobs at the farm in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Urban people labeled as “rightists” (375 of them in 1959) and, during the Cultural Revolution, as “freaks and monsters,” were sent there for punishment and reeducation. Two waves of Tianjin “educated youth” (*zhiquing*) were assigned to work at the farm: almost 1,000 in 1962 and 1963, and 2,200 between 1973 and 1979.<sup>45</sup>

Less easily categorized groups moved in, including 643 “personnel without *hukou* who flowed back to Tianjin” (*daoliu fan Jin wu hukou ren yuan*) in 1961. These were mostly people who had moved away from Tianjin by state fiat (thousands were sent to Qinghai province in the 1950s; more than half of them returned to the city

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<sup>44</sup> Tianjin shi xumu ju 天津市畜牧局, ed., *Tianjin shi gongnong lianmeng xumu chang chuangan “zhu shitang” de jingyan* 天津市工农联盟畜牧场创办“猪食堂”的经验 [The Tianjin Worker-Peasant Alliance Stock Farm's experience in setting up a “pig cafeteria”] (Beijing: Nongye chubanshe, 1960), 1, 3.

<sup>45</sup> NCS, 29-30, 130.

without official authorization). They wanted back into the city, but their *hukou* remained outside of Tianjin. As we saw in Chapter 4, it was difficult to regain urban residency during the downsizing that followed the leap. As a compromise, the backflow households (*daoliu hu*) were allowed to settle at the state farm, an intermediate zone between villages and the city.<sup>46</sup>

Barber Xing Bo did not care whether his customers were city people or ex-peasants like him. As long as they lived at the farm, he cut their hair. Xing Bo came from a long tradition of Baodi barbers. He learned to cut hair in his Baodi village, and continued to ply the trade after migrating to Tianjin in 1958 at the age of seventeen.

Freelance hair-cutting was unsteady. When Xing heard that forty other men from his village, including his uncle, were getting temporary jobs at the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm, he jumped at the opportunity. The sojourning men had permission from their home village, which docked their wages. But during the leap famine, many of Xing's fellow villagers returned home when daily food rations at the farm were slashed. Along with four other men from his village, Xing Bo stayed on until he retired in the 1990s. By 1961, he could keep his own wages, and in 1964, he obtained a non-agricultural *hukou*. Garrulous, self-deprecating, and a legendary drinker, Barber Xing was quick to befriend co-workers. His buddies were mostly men from villages next to the farm who had been hired on during the late 1950s and early 1960s, men like Wu Mengyong, from the nearby village of Yangwuzhuang. Xing and Wu became mentors to the city youth sent to work on the farm's vegetable team.

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<sup>46</sup> NCS, 28-29.

The farm's first group of urban youth came from Tianjin technical schools that had shut down during the post-leap retrenchment. Hundreds of teenagers who had been trained as technicians suddenly learned that they would become "agricultural workers." Fixed wages and rations, plus the farm's proximity to the city, tempered the youths' disappointment. Cai Shiming had hoped to become a factory worker. When he was assigned to Worker-Peasant Alliance, he thought that state farms were all prison camps.<sup>47</sup>

After he made the short bus trip to the state farm, Cai learned that even though some rightists were detained there, he was not a prisoner. Farm work was tough, but he earned a decent salary and could go home frequently. During the 1960s, urban youths bicycled to Tianjin for family visits every weekend. Barber Xing remembered that in the 1970s, recently hired Tianjin youth essentially lived at home in the city and commuted to the farm by bicycle every day. They rarely stayed overnight at the farm. Xing and friends like Wu Mengyong rode their bicycles to Tianjin as often as they could. At the parks, movie theaters, and restaurants where the men spent their wages, they tried to fit in with other city workers. When Xing chatted with the rightists or educated youth whose hair he cut, he discovered that he had visited more Tianjin attractions than they had.

One farm worker, a driver, entered Tianjin quite often. He delivered fresh milk to the Shaoxing Road milk station every night at 11 p.m. In late 1958, the farm's single truck was too small for the volume of milk produced by the influx of new cows

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<sup>47</sup> Interviewee 57.

at Worker-Peasant Alliance, so the driver towed a massive vat of sloshing milk behind a tractor. The tractor's engine blasted like an artillery explosion every half-second, shaking city residents awake each night.

After several weeks of interrupted sleep, people who lived near the milk depot protested. They set up a road block and emptied buckets of water on the road, which iced over in the frigid winter air. Protesters stood their ground and the driver was unable to deliver his milk. This was a problem for both the farm and for city authorities in charge of the urban food supply system. Urban officials quickly approved the farm's request for a large new truck.<sup>48</sup> The outcome of the confrontation between city people and the farm truck was positive for both sides. Residents of Shaoxing Road caught up on their sleep, while the farm got a brand new vehicle.

Barber Xing Bo's friend, dairy worker Wu Mengyong, was overjoyed when he had saved enough money to purchase new wheels. His bicycle allowed him to take occasional weekend trips to Tianjin with Barber Xing. More often, he cycled to see his family in Yangwuzhuang, which was much closer. With his stable farm job, Wu felt luckier than his fellow villagers, who had only enjoyed salaried life for a short four years before their wages were cut off. Yangwuzhuang was one of two villages right next to Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm. In 1960, the farm expanded its boundaries and absorbed the villages. Yangwuzhuang and Huazhuang, with a combined population of about 1,200 residents, had attained the strange administrative

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<sup>48</sup> NCS, 21-22.



status of “transitional villages” (*guodu cun*).<sup>49</sup>

The villages maintained their original collective work teams and still handed over grain to the state, but the farm made investments in electricity, irrigation, drainage, and machinery. It also paid villagers regular wages for tasks like providing hay for the farm’s dairy cows. Villagers made 20 percent less than regular state farm salaries, but 30 percent more than they had ever earned as commune members. Infrastructure improvement and guaranteed salaries made Yangwuzhuang and Huazhuang beacons for outside families with marriageable daughters. Bachelors in the transitional villages became hot commodities, and forty-three women married into the two hamlets over the course of two years. Not surprisingly, peasants in neighboring villages clamored to “transition” into the farm.

But problems arose. Farm authorities waited in vain for policy guidance about how to formally transform villagers into state farm workers, and the “transitional” villagers wondered if they would ever become full-time agricultural employees. They received salaries for collecting hay, but had little incentive to do collective work. Salaries kept coming in as weeds sprouted and tools disappeared. Wandering sheep gobbled up seventeen acres of Yangwuzhuang’s spinach crop.

The experiment fell apart in 1964. The villages’ transitional status was cancelled, and residents no longer received wages. Thirty-six fortunate villagers, including Wu Mengyong, were hired on as full-time farm employees. Wu moved to the dairy team and milked cows every day next to a Tianjin woman who had been sent

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<sup>49</sup> Data on transitional villages are from NCS, 23-25, and interviewee 59.

down to the farm after her technical school shut down in 1962. A few years later, the pair got married in Yangwuzhuang. By then, his fellow villagers envied Wu's salaried job. They had been fired by the farm, but the two villages were technically still part of Worker-Peasant Alliance territory—rural enclaves stuck within the state farm island.

The failed transitional village experiment and the influx of people at the farm highlight the state farm's position in the middle of an urban-rural hierarchy.

Yangwuzhuang and Huazhuang were administratively subordinate to the state farm, whether or not villagers earned state wages. Since the farm's inception, rural people eagerly sought job security there. With their salaries, new bicycles, and leisure time, agricultural employees from village backgrounds considered themselves on par with city factory workers. A job at the farm meant upward mobility for rural people. But for city youth sent there in the 1960s, it was mediocre, and not what they had hoped for. For political outcasts exiled from the city during the Cultural Revolution, the farm was punishment.

### The Cultural Revolution In Between

Recent scholarship has thrown doubt on the notion that the Cultural Revolution was primarily an urban upheaval characterized by rampaging red guards and battling factions. We now know that violence and factionalism were widespread in some rural areas, and that village power structures were shaken and often overturned.<sup>50</sup> Other

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<sup>50</sup> See chapters by Yang Su and Jiansui He in Esherick, Pickowicz, and Walder, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*. See also Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China*, 84-111.

villages apparently experienced few disruptions.<sup>51</sup> It is more accurate to speak of many Cultural Revolutions—some soft, some hard; some short, some long—taking place in cities and villages. What did the Cultural Revolution mean for the enclaves? Neither the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm nor the Tianjin Ironworks were spared from upheavals. The ironworks, founded in 1969, was itself a product of the period's international tension and urban turmoil. The course of the Cultural Revolution in the two spaces highlights their intermediate nature.

Worker-Peasant Alliance was similar to much of rural China in that its Cultural Revolution effectively began in 1964 with the Four Cleanups movement. In September, a two hundred-member work team from the Tianjin agricultural cultivation bureau arrived at the farm. Urban cadres viewed the state farm as a rural space prone to corruption. Much like the work teams described in Chapter 5, the Tianjin agricultural officials attacked malfeasance among state farm cadres and re-investigated the class status of employees. By 1965, well before most city residents could have predicted the turmoil of the coming year, the state farm hosted intense struggle meetings. At one study session, a jittery cadre blurted out that China had two guiding principles. The first was the "United Nations," the second was "class struggle." He was right about the latter concept, but horribly confused about the former (in 1965, *People's Daily* was full of articles denouncing the international body as a handmaiden

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<sup>51</sup> Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and Their Impact on China's Rural Development* (New York: Garland, 2000); Mobo Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

to American imperialism). The cadre suffered through multiple struggle sessions after his misstatement.<sup>52</sup>

In July 1965, the work team announced the end of the Four Cleanups. Seven people had attempted suicide (two died), and two people with “historical problems” had simply disappeared. Li Zhi, the official who had led the farm since 1957, was demoted because of his “unclear class line,” “excessively patriarchal work style,” and “capitalist management.” Members of the work team stayed on to take charge of farm operations: the new farm party secretary and one party vice-secretary, plus a vice-director, were from the work team. The Four Cleanups movement was primarily rural, and through early 1966, the farm was following a rural pattern.

In June 1966, Tianjin’s agricultural bureau sent another work team to the farm. This “Four Cleanups Reinvestigation Work Team” was quickly rendered obsolete by the developing Cultural Revolution. Now, the farm followed what was happening in Tianjin. Like people in urban work units, farm employees pasted big-character posters and formed revolutionary mass organizations.<sup>53</sup> Wu Mengyong and other workers rode bicycles to Tianjin to join mass marches and read big-character posters. Educated youth at Worker-Peasant Alliance united with workers at other state farms to establish the short-lived “Tianjin State Farm Rebel Corps.”<sup>54</sup>

Rebels overthrew the farm leadership, which was still dominated by former

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<sup>52</sup> NCS, 38-39.

<sup>53</sup> NCS, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Interviewee 46.

members of the Four Cleanups work team. Two main rebel factions emerged in January 1967. After three months of struggle, the January 31st faction claimed victory when security officials in Tianjin declared the January 23rd faction an illegal counter-revolutionary organization and arrested its top leader. In April, victorious rebel chief Feng Jinsheng took over as chair and old party secretary Li Zhi became vice-chair of the farm's temporary leadership group. When the farm's Revolutionary Committee was officially established in December 1967, the two had switched positions.

Supporters of the vanquished January 23rd faction fled to Tianjin, linked up with other disaffected rebels there, and made occasional forays into Worker-Peasant Alliance territory. They threatened to “wash the farm in blood” and warned that a convoy of thirty trucks loaded with five hundred warriors would soon attack. In response, the new Revolutionary Committee organized armed patrols on horseback and set up road blocks. The threatened attack never came.<sup>55</sup>

Farm employees returned to work, but not to normalcy. In April 1968, one farm worker was sentenced to twenty years in prison for the counter-revolutionary crime of altering his copy of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. The worker had underlined and embossed key sections of the bible during a study section (he was released in November 1979).<sup>56</sup> Wu Mengyong and Barber Xing Bo were careful when they got together with their young city friends to drink potent liquor. Afraid of being

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<sup>55</sup> NCS, 46-47.

<sup>56</sup> NCS, 132.

seen as a plotting faction, the men avoided talking about politics.<sup>57</sup> Still, they could not help whispering when rebel leader Feng Jinsheng died in a drunk driving accident. Xing Bo used to drink with heavy-set Feng, a skilled brawler who always toted a big knife. After Feng joined the Revolutionary Committee, Xing did not see much of him any more.<sup>58</sup>

Because Worker-Peasant Alliance was part of Tianjin's agricultural bureaucracy, it was hit relatively hard by the Four Cleanups movement, like parts of rural China. But its proximity to Tianjin enmeshed the farm in urban turmoil in 1966 and 1967, as employees marched down Tianjin streets and representatives of city rebel groups came and went. More than any other factor, however, state-mandated migration marked the farm as a middle ground during the Cultural Revolution. On the one hand, the settlement of 2,200 urban educated youth at the farm during the 1970s colored the space rural, even though unlike youth sent down to villages, those at the farm held non-agricultural *hukou*. On the other hand, beginning in 1968 the farm carried out the national policy of deporting political outcasts to villages. As we saw in Chapter 6, the official rationale for removing the "ten types of people" from cities was ostensibly based on national defense: China's cities were more strategically important than villages. But the message received by citizens was that political outcasts were not qualified to enjoy the privileges of urban life. Banishment to villages was their punishment.

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<sup>57</sup> Interviewee 59.

<sup>58</sup> Interviewee 18.

During the Cultural Revolution, Worker-Peasant Alliance deported ninety-nine people to villages.<sup>59</sup> The more deportations farm leaders made, the more revolutionary they appeared. The official national list of the ten types of deportable people left plenty of room for interpretation at the local level. It was up to each sending unit to determine whether suspects' reactionary standpoint and bad behavior warranted deportation. A fifty-two-year-old farm employee was deported to his home village on the basis on his landlord-capitalist label, but the village refused to take him, pointing out that he had been reclassified as an agricultural laborer during the Four Cleanups. One educated youth sent to the farm in 1963 had a clean family background, but had grumbled about the new Revolutionary Committee. This offense was enough to deport him, along with his wife and two children, to his father's home village.<sup>60</sup>

That the farm was a receiving point for educated urban youth but a sending unit for political outcasts underlines its intermediate spatial status. It was neither urban nor rural, but was somewhere in between. Life at Worker-Peasant Alliance during the late 1960s and early 1970s combined rural and urban aspects of the period. In the case of the Tianjin Ironworks, it is more accurate to refer to a Third Front Cultural Revolution. Work started on the ironworks after the initial phase of the Cultural Revolution had ended, but the entire rationale for the enclave was based on one of the period's defining slogans: "prepare for war, prepare for famine, for the sake

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<sup>59</sup> NCS, 48.

<sup>60</sup> NCS, 47-48.

of the people” (*bei zhan, bei huang, wei renmin*).<sup>61</sup>

Debate over where to put the ironworks—in water-rich Xigang or in rugged, dry Gengle—became so heated that beleaguered Tianjin officials who were relieved to flee the city felt that Cultural Revolution politics had followed them to the mountains. According to Shi Zhirui, the conflict turned acrimonious and led to criticism meetings. Author Ran Huaizhou fictionalized this dispute in his 1974 novel, *Jianshezhe* [Builders]. In the 534-page novel, a nerdy engineering expert named Zhang tries to persuade his colleagues that the flat, well-irrigated site is the only realistic place to put a functioning ironworks. But other officials, along with local peasants, want the site to be concealed deep in the mountains in accordance with Mao’s directions on war preparation. Fortunately, peasants know about a plentiful mountain spring near the steep Gengle site (called Wohupo in the book). Meanwhile, a local landlord and a “landlord-capitalist” from Tianjin hatch a plot to sabotage construction. They plan to take advantage of nerdy Zhang’s points to get construction started at Xigang (fictionalized in the novel as Caomawa). Once the building site had eliminated the best agricultural land in the county, the class enemies would derail the project by accusing it of “destroying the worker-peasant alliance.”<sup>62</sup>

Naturally, in the novel heroic poor peasants and wise leaders thwart the plotters and build the ironworks in the precipitous valley. Tianjin leaders indeed

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<sup>61</sup> Judith Shapiro’s translation.

<sup>62</sup> Ran Huaizhou 冉淮舟, *Jianshezhe* 建设者 [Builders] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1974), 128.



chose the less practical site for the ironworks. This required extensive earth moving and road building, and contributed to injury-causing accidents and major delays. Ran Huaizhou may have invented the landlord plot, but the decision to build at Gengle was real. This choice, made in the Cultural Revolution atmosphere of war fears and anxiety about not seeming revolutionary enough, triggered a series of problems that would take years to resolve.

### Problems and Resolutions

Naughton writes that Third Front construction “was immensely costly, having a negative impact on China’s economic development that was certainly more far-reaching than the disruption of the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>63</sup> The Tianjin Ironworks was certainly costly. For eleven years, the project was deep in the red (see accompanying table). Of all the industrial units under Tianjin’s control in the 1970s and early 1980s, the ironworks was the city’s biggest money loser; its massive deficits ranked second in the metal industry nationwide.<sup>64</sup> However, far from being separate from the Cultural Revolution’s tumult, the Third Front was very much a part of the period. Like the ransacking of homes by red guards and the deportation of political outcasts from cities, which observers have mistakenly called chaotic “disruption,” the Third Front was sanctioned by the state and managed by a massive bureaucracy.

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<sup>63</sup> Naughton, “The Third Front,” 351.

<sup>64</sup> *Jingji ribao*, December 19, 1983, 1.

Table 6. Production and Profit at the Tianjin Ironworks, 1970-1991

Year	Pig Iron (tons)	Profit/Loss (RMB)	Year	Pig Iron (tons)	Profit/Loss (RMB)
1970			1981	391,348	-19,910,000
1971			1982	425,386	-13,090,000
1972	41,018	-12,450,000	1983	505,576	-10,750,000
1973	59,161	-18,796,000	1984	702,659	1,362,000
1974	56,618	-17,678,000	1985	816,529	20,799,000
1975	129,753	-27,890,000	1986	911,280	17,634,000
1976	154,561	-31,290,000	1987	1,015,449	20,676,000
1977	320,074	-22,485,000	1988	979,371	14,005,000
1978	430,687	-22,995,000	1989	1,081,444	24,199,000
1979	403,178	-30,880,000	1990	979,371	25,541,000
1980	451,307	-16,418,000	1991	1,081,444	30,266,000

Source: '35 licheng, 14-15.

The ironworks did not bleed money simply because it was built at an isolated, topographically challenging site. Construction was rushed and sloppy. Leadership constantly changed, and employees complained, protested, and tried to leave. The plant was functioning, but only barely. In February 1972, employees fired up the site's coke furnace. Two months later, when the blast furnace began producing pig iron, Tianjin's number two party secretary General Wu Dai was there for a ribbon-cutting ceremony. On May 15, top leader Xie Xuegong welcomed the arrival of the plant's first delivery of iron to the Tianjin train station; three days later, the event was celebrated in *Tianjin Daily*.<sup>65</sup>

Behind his smiles in public, Xie was fuming. The original plan had the ironworks producing 1.5 million tons of pig iron each year, plus steel, but even after the plant's second coke and blast furnaces opened in July 1975, the flow of pig iron that actually passed quality control standards was a mere trickle. Steel was completely

<sup>65</sup> '35 licheng, 37, 42; *Tiantie jingshen*, 120.

out of the question. That year, Xie traveled to the ironworks. At a huge meeting of officials and employees, Xie railed that the plant's low output defied the principles of mathematics. He said that at the ironworks, "one plus one equals one," because the two blast furnaces were not even producing what a single one should. "Produce more iron, produce good iron," he exhorted workers.<sup>66</sup>

Production did increase somewhat after Xie's criticism, but as long as leaders and workers were unstable and unhappy, the ironworks would continue to underperform. Between 1969 and 1983, there had been thirteen different directors at the ironworks; the shortest term was less than half a year. A predictably critical post-Cultural Revolution account charged that plant leaders were clueless: "most did not understand production technology and management, and they did not work hard to become experts. Some even bragged that they were 'clods' (*da laocu*)."<sup>67</sup>

To be fair, ironworks leaders were bedeviled by shifting national policies. After Lin Biao's death in September 1971 and China's rapprochement with the United States, the third front was already politically obsolete. In 1972, investments decreased and plans were cut back. National planners classified the Tianjin Ironworks as a "delay building" (*huan jian*) unit, and central government investment in the project dried up.<sup>68</sup> As Tianjin struggled to fund the plant on its own, the scale of the project shrunk. Almost all of the Tianjin construction workers at the site (more than 4,000)

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<sup>66</sup> *Tiantie jingshen*, 120.

<sup>67</sup> *Jingji ribao*, December 19, 1983, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Wang Jinming, 41.

and more than 3,000 Tianjin youths were reassigned back to the city. Many of those left behind in Shexian requested transfers, but as former factory leaders remembered, “the city government was afraid that the hearts of people at the site were chaotic, so it adopted a lockdown policy of not allowing even one [more] worker to return to the city.”<sup>69</sup>

When little changed after Mao’s death and the end of the Cultural Revolution, ironworks employees’ passive slowdowns turned into open resistance. Workers demanded transfers back to Tianjin. At the very least, they wanted better lives at the ironworks. This second demand centered on marriage and family issues. The demobilized soldiers assigned to the site in 1970 were mostly from villages in north China. By 1978, they had been living apart from their wives for more than ten years, and were only allowed home leave every year or two. The men held Tianjin *hukou*, but their wives and children had agricultural *hukou* and were not allowed to move to the ironworks.

While ex-soldiers asked to be reunited with their wives, the Tianjin youths demanded wives, period. By 1978, most of the Tianjin middle-school graduates left in Shexian were men. They were in their mid-twenties, with no good marriage prospects. The young men ruled out marrying local women because of cultural differences, the tense history between the ironworks and nearby villages, and, most important, the women’s rural *hukou*. Workers at the ironworks remembered that the frustrated Tianjin men organized marches and sit-ins at factory headquarters. More than three

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<sup>69</sup> ‘35 *licheng*, 47.

hundred of them even traveled back to Tianjin for sustained protests in 1979. There, the men occupied offices, lay down in front of the municipal government gate, and held a “teach-in” (*xuanjiang*) that attracted a crowd of onlookers. On three occasions the protesting ironworks employees marched through city streets and blocked traffic, yelling “we want jobs, we want democracy, we want freedom, we want wives” (*yao gongzuo, yao minzhu, yao ziyou, yao laopo*).<sup>70</sup> This last demand was the most pressing of all. Finally, ironworks leaders agreed to listen to the men’s demands at a large meeting in the main auditorium back in Gengle.

As Nie Bichu recalled, ironworks and Tianjin officials worked together to address the “youths’ conjugal fate” (*xiao qingnian de yinyuan wenti*).<sup>71</sup> Hao Cheng, the ironworks’ party secretary between 1978 and 1980, arranged a novel solution called the “recruit fiancées” (*zhao weihunqi*) policy. The men were given two options. They could quit the ironworks and return to Tianjin, but they would receive no assistance in finding jobs and wives there. With thousands of returned sent-down youth already crowding the city and looking for work, this was a risky choice, but many took it. Or, the Tianjin men could agree to stay at the ironworks and the factory would resolve their conjugal fate.

The demobilized soldiers put out word to their home villages in Hebei and Shanxi that ironworks employees required wives. Eligible village women who were

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<sup>70</sup> Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, *Tongzhi* 通知 [Directive], *Jingefa* [1979] 33 (April 10, 1979), APA.

<sup>71</sup> '35 *licheng*, 41. The following narrative is based on conversations with interviewees 71, 72, 73, and 92.

chosen by ironworkers would get non-agricultural *hukou* and paying jobs on-site. Young women, eager to receive these benefits, made their way to Shexian (by the hundreds, according to one source). What followed was a remarkable state-sanctioned singles event. The Tianjin men who had chosen to stay at the plant met with rural prospects (collectively named Qiu Xiang, after the folk tale “Tang Baihu Chooses Qiu Xiang”) in a series of interviews that ended when both parties assented to a match. Not all women who came were chosen. Generally, women with some education who were from villages near Tianjin were the hottest picks, because their customs and cooking were familiar to the Tianjin men. We can only imagine what rural bachelors were thinking as the most attractive women in their region packed their bags and left to marry urban strangers.

Gengle villagers did not have a problem with the arrangement. They knew about “choosing Qiu Xiang” (*dian Qiu Xiang*), but it affected few of them directly. Gengle militia leader Zou Shaorui was still friendly with ironworks leadership. Hao Cheng tried to arrange for Zou’s daughter to become a Qiu Xiang. This would have meant a salary and a non-agricultural *hukou* for the young woman, but she refused. There were very few marriages between ironworks workers and locals, Zou said, because Gengle people did not like to marry outsiders. “We’re pretty conservative,” Zou explained.

The Tianjin men had either quit and returned to the city, or, buoyed by martial bliss, stayed behind to continue working at the ironworks. But demobilized soldiers, who had played a major role in arranging the Qiu Xiang matches, still endured

separation from their own families. By 1980, the veterans had the option of retiring and being “replaced” (*dingti*) at the factory by one of their children. But most of them were too young to retire. If the Tianjin youths’ Qiu Xiang could move to the factory, why were the soldiers’ families still shut out?

The ex-soldiers’ consternation may have contributed to a protest in 1982 called the “February 19 incident,” when people “surrounded and besieged” (*weigong*) factory leaders.<sup>72</sup> Again, loud resistance got leaders’ attention. In 1983, Tianjin Vice-Mayor Hao Tianyi visited the ironworks and surveyed employees. Family problems and an unreliable supply of meat and eggs topped the list of complaints. In February 1984, Nie Bichu, Tianjin’s vice mayor in charge of economic planning, called a meeting of top city officials to discuss problems at the ironworks. Tianjin officials decided that ironworks employees would be guaranteed a quarter kilo of meat and a quarter kilo of eggs per month. Workers were also allowed to quit the ironworks and reunite with families in their home villages. If they stayed, two of each worker’s children could be hired as ironworks employees under a deal remembered as the “recruit old workers’ children” (*zhao lao gongren zinu*) policy. Once the army men’s children entered the ironworks, their wives began to arrive, too. Finally, in 1985, the women were granted non-agricultural *hukou*.<sup>73</sup>

The family problems of some workers had been resolved, but so many people had left the ironworks in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the site was experiencing

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<sup>72</sup> Lu, Yu, and Zhao, 205.

<sup>73</sup> '35 *licheng*, 48; interviewee 71.

a labor shortage. Ironworks leaders admitted that because of the “reality that the ironworks is in a mountain village...it would not work to transfer new employees and cadres in from Tianjin any more.” In 1970, faced with a choice between a job at the ironworks and becoming an unpaid sent-down youth in a village (which meant being locked out of Tianjin, perhaps forever), the Tianjin youths had gone to Project 6985. After the sent-down youth program was cancelled, nobody from Tianjin wanted to go to Shexian. The ironworks needed a new source of labor.

The plant began hiring people from Shexian to fill its empty production positions.<sup>74</sup> Locals were hired on as long-term contract workers. They kept their agricultural *hukou* and did not get guaranteed grain rations. A March 1984 *People's Daily* article lauded the ironworks' recruitment of 550 “peasants who work at the factory during the day, eat and live at home after work, and can plant their fields in their spare time and on holidays.” The article trumpeted the advantages of employing peasant contract workers: “if they do a good job, they can extend their contracts; if they do a bad job, the factory has the right to fire them.”<sup>75</sup>

The influx of local contract workers accompanied other big changes at the ironworks in the 1980s. The December 1983 *Economic Daily* exposé on the factory (titled “Non-experts in charge, chaotic management, serious waste, shocking deficits: The Tianjin Ironworks absolutely cannot continue in its old ways”) was a signal that problems at the ironworks had attracted the attention of central authorities. Indeed,

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<sup>74</sup> '35 *licheng*, 48

<sup>75</sup> RMRB, March 29, 1984, 2.



Vice-Premier Wan Li visited officials in Handan, Shijiazhuang, and Tianjin to discuss the possibility of Hebei province assuming control of the plant. Hebei leaders were interested, and some Tianjin officials welcomed the chance to jettison the costly enterprise. The patch of Tianjin land was on the verge of being recovered by Hebei.

Tianjin vice-mayor Hao Tianyi, who had been the top party secretary at the Baotou Steel Mill in the late 1970s, wanted the ironworks to remain Tianjin territory. In the reform period, the city still needed metals. Hao convinced his reluctant Tianjin colleagues that the city should lobby to keep the enclave. He traveled to Beijing and persuaded national economic planners that the ironworks simply needed good management and better coordination between its coke and blast furnaces. Central authorities decided that the enclave would still be part of Tianjin, but under a new arrangement. The city would no longer cover the plant's economic losses, but in the event that the ironworks actually made money, Tianjin would not receive profits either. In order to survive, the ironworks had to become financially sustainable. It could reinvest its profits in future improvements, but its iron still had to go to Tianjin.

In 1984, the ironworks turned its first profit. It began producing steel in 1994. Today, the Tianjin Tiantie Metallurgical Group Corporation's fuel, lime, iron, and steel factories line the highway for miles east of Gengle. Chief Executive Officer and party secretary Liu Zhijia, a former electrician who moved to Project 6985 from Tianjin in the early 1970s, is a national labor model. When workers with Tianjin *hukou* retire, the company gives them comfortable apartments, but not in Shexian. The dwellings are in a gated community on the outskirts of Tianjin. It is taken for

granted that the workers want to retire to the city.

Tianjin Tiantie is the largest employer in Shexian; most production workers today are local contract laborers. Thanks to the deal struck by Hao Tianyi in 1984, the company is also the county's largest taxpayer. Its success has fueled regional economic development. Gengle, now a township, has learned from its neighbor: 4,377 people are employed at the more than forty town and village enterprises (TVEs) that have sprung up there in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>76</sup> When I visited in 2005, some villagers were moving into new high-rise apartments that loomed over mud-brick houses, dirt roads, and the old stage in the central town square. The new dwellings were better-equipped than the workers' dormitories at the ironworks where Tianjin managers lived. The material gap between the two spaces was narrowing, but the cultural divide between Tianjin employees and Gengle residents remained.

Closer to Tianjin proper, huge new buildings have appeared at the Worker-Peasant Alliance farm in recent years, but for different reasons. Tianjin's expanding urban boundaries have reached the farm. The road from Wangdingdi (where Mao visited in 1956) to the farm's vegetable team passes by several new schools, research institutes, and businesses. These stand on what was once Worker-Peasant Alliance farm land. The bus then passes a set of decrepit four-story apartment buildings, known as the Worker-Peasant Mansions, built for farm workers in 1979. The farm's vegetable team remains as it was in the 1960s and 1970s: single-story brick houses and dirt alleys.

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<sup>76</sup> *Gengle zhen zhi*, 127-28.

The farm and ironworks experienced similar difficulties in the 1970s and 1980s, including leadership change, worker flight, and economic losses, but saw different outcomes. Many of the 2,200 educated youth sent to the farm in the 1970s were unenthusiastic about their assignment. Picking vegetables and milking cows next to urban political exiles felt like punishment. They spent as much time in the city as possible, and left the farm as soon as they had the chance. Five hundred were assigned to city jobs in 1976 and 1977. By 1980, all of the educated youth sent to the farm during the 1970s had returned to Tianjin. In 1978, the number three agriculture team had 1,210 workers. By 1982 the number had shrunk to 154.<sup>77</sup>

No space is natural; all spaces are constructed and shaped by social, economic, and political forces. But the ironworks and state farm were perhaps more artificial than Tianjin neighborhoods or north Chinese villages. These intermediate zones were established by state mandate. Without state intervention, these spaces would wither and die. That is what happened at the Worker-Peasant Alliance Farm, which is slowly disappearing. The ironworks was such an artificial state-constructed space that without the policy of recruiting wives for Tianjin workers, it was impossible for residents to reproduce and sustain the island.

The state farm and the ironworks complicate the stock image of a sharp dichotomy between rural and urban China during the 1960s and 1970s. The islands of Tianjin land in the suburbs and in the Taihang mountains carried urban administrative designations, and the people who worked inside the enclaves called themselves urban

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<sup>77</sup> NCS, 74.

workers. But the spaces' geographic settings—and the villagers who knocked holes in their walls—clashed with official designations. During the Mao period, the state had the power to bestow absolute labels on people and spaces, and it had the carrots (material benefits for urban residents) and sticks (restrictions on movement) to make its categories meaningful. However, black-and-white administrative categories did not automatically simplify a complex society, nor did they guarantee obedience. At the Worker-Peasant Alliance and the Tianjin Ironworks, city people seeking happy family lives and villagers in need of extra income not only contested the artificial urban-rural divide, they won significant victories against it.

The experiences of people affected by the state farm and ironworks illustrate the variety of factors that defined “urban” and “rural” in Mao’s China. Administrative categories, notions of work and labor, and cultural differences including food, clothing, and language all came into play. Early visitors to Gengle had trouble adjusting to the local diet, choked on the dirty water, and gaped at villagers’ dirty clothing. Villagers eyeballed the outsiders’ clean suits and assumed that the ironworks employees did not do real work. The two groups sometimes came together for cultural functions and to trade cafeteria food for fruit and nuts. But these interactions were not entirely friendly. Villagers mistrusted young ironworks employees who pilfered fruit, while factory officials struggled to keep locals from stealing industrial products. Different dialects increased the likelihood of misunderstandings.

All of these factors converged in the handling of the marriage problem at the ironworks. *Hukou* and jobs were certainly important. Tianjin women who already

held urban *hukou* would have been the most desirable match for the young men, but they had little incentive to relocate to a remote mountain compound. In contrast, the promise of non-agricultural *hukou* and paid work offered a rare opportunity for rural women to leave their home counties and improve their economic standing. Women from areas of Hebei province closer to Tianjin seemed more attractive to ironworks men than Gengle women, who ate strange food and spoke a different language. The feeling was mutual. Gengle women were uninterested in marrying into the factory, even though they could have gotten jobs and Tianjin *hukou*. At least in this regard, the cultural aspects of rural-urban difference were more important than administrative distinctions.

In the final chapter, we turn to another unique place: a village called Xiaojinzhuang north of Tianjin where residents sang revolutionary opera, wrote poetry, and, beginning in 1974, guided tours for thousands of urban visitors. Like residents of Gengle, the people of Xiaojinzhuang had to contend with an invasion of disruptive outsiders from Tianjin. They also took advantage of this turn of events, and some even became famous. However, their fame was fleeting, and did not translate into power.

8. Staging Xiaojinzhuang: The Urban Occupation of a Model Village, 1974-1978

As I stepped out of a minivan and greeted Wang Zuoshan, the sixty-nine-year-old former village party secretary of Xiaojinzhuang, my taxi driver suddenly realized that he recognized the old man. Driver Li had last seen Wang in the late 1970s, when Li was an elementary school student in the Baodi county seat, a town about forty-five miles north of Tianjin and fifty-three miles southeast of Beijing. Li was part of a crowd of 10,000 watching transfixed as Wang, kneeling on an elevated stage in the town's main square, bowed his head and accepted the slaps and insults of his accusers.<sup>1</sup> This was a time of political upheaval in China. Mao Zedong had died, and his wife and the rest of the "Gang of Four" were arrested as the curtain fell on the Cultural Revolution. But after Mao's death, Wang Zuoshan was the target of a classic Cultural Revolution ritual, the mass criticism and struggle meeting.

Wang Zuoshan had the misfortune of being the leader of Xiaojinzhuang, a village of 101 households on the Jian'gan river. His village, about a thirty minute drive east of the Baodi county seat, became a national model for arts and culture after Jiang Qing visited in June 1974 and called it her "spot." Wang and other villagers emerged as the poetry-writing and opera-singing stars of a political drama sponsored by Jiang and staged by her allies in the Tianjin municipal leadership. Xiaojinzhuang's

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewee 99, Interviewee 100.

fortune was tied to Jiang Qing and other “radicals” who sought power by affirming the anti-capitalist, collectivist Cultural Revolution policies of constant class struggle and strict artistic standards. The model village became a weapon in the radicals’ 1974-1976 political battle against “moderate” targets of the Cultural Revolution like Deng Xiaoping, who advocated economic pragmatism, a limited return to private plots in agriculture, and more relaxed arts policies.<sup>2</sup>

Yet Xiaojinzhuang and its residents were more than just bit players in the mid-1970s drama over whether to embrace or repudiate the radical politics of the Cultural Revolution. As a rural model, Xiaojinzhuang was presented to all of China as a cultural utopia worthy of emulation. The fantasy image of Xiaojinzhuang, which included a vibrant night school, prolific poets, skilled singers, and policies encouraging gender equality, was only loosely based on village reality. It was instead the invention of urban politicians who consistently displayed a profound disdain and distrust of rural residents. While the most prominent aspects of Xiaojinzhuang’s model utopia changed according to the shifting needs of city authorities—from agricultural advances in the early 1970s to education, culture, and women’s equality in 1974, and finally to anti-Deng Xiaoping insults in 1976—villagers’ lack of political influence remained constant. Xiaojinzhuang’s inferior position allowed city officials to colonize the village and transform it into their cultural theme park. This development sparked discontent from people who lived in and around Xiaojinzhuang.

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Friedman, “The Politics of Local Models, Social Transformation and State Power Struggles in the People’s Republic of China: Tachai and Teng Hsiao-p’ing,” *China Quarterly*, no. 76 (1978): 874.

In spite of their political subjugation, villagers asserted their agency in a variety of ways. Some embraced the experience of living in a model village and garnered national fame, while others complained about the urban-imposed changes.

When Wang Zuoshan knelt in front of thousands and winced from stinging slaps in the late 1970s, he and his village were double losers. Not only was their political line deemed incorrect after Jiang Qing's arrest, but they were victims of a pervasive anti-rural bias that predated the founding of the People's Republic and that had been reconfigured by moments of rural-urban contact over the course of the Mao years. Like the rest of rural China during the 1970s, Xiaojinzhuang occupied the lowest rung in a political hierarchy dominated by city officials.

This hierarchy helps to explain how the countryside became a dumping ground for urban political exiles during the Cultural Revolution (see Chapter 6), and it is also what allowed urban officials to colonize model villages while denying villagers a voice in the political and economic decisions that affected them most. Yet while urban politicians had the upper hand in establishing and manipulating models, some residents of model villages enjoyed newfound privileges and benefits, however short-lived. Because city officials felt the need to cultivate prominent rural models during the 1970s, villagers like Wang Zuoshan who collaborated in the model-making process were able to gain more power, fame, and leisure time than they had ever imagined. Wang's rise and fall can be explained by a political culture that publicly celebrated rural China while privately scorning villages and the people who lived in them.



With fewer than 600 residents, Xiaojinzhuang is a small village by north China standards. The village was known for growing garlic but boasted no remarkable achievements during the 1950s and early 1960s, when it suffered from constant flooding and low-yielding saline-alkaline soil. During the Great Leap Forward in 1959, villagers labored for a month removing water from low-lying land near the river. They threw seeds onto the exposed mud and reported their success to nearby Lintingkou, the commune headquarters and local market town, but a few days later a rainstorm washed away their hard work. Xiaojinzhuang residents went hungry and gnawed on raw garlic for sustenance.<sup>3</sup>

Rural Baodi had long enjoyed a rich cultural life. Many villages had their own opera troupes, and most villagers could sing a few lines of *pingju*, the local opera of north China.<sup>4</sup> During the Cultural Revolution, old opera ensembles were dismantled, but some people in Baodi continued to sing the didactic revolutionary model operas promoted by Jiang Qing. Xiaojinzhuang itself escaped major turbulence during the early stage of the Cultural Revolution. There was no temple to smash, so people burned books and struggled against a poor soul who was designated a “capitalist roader.”<sup>5</sup> During the power seizures that swept across China in 1967, some

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<sup>3</sup> Liu Bingrong 刘秉荣, “Wo suo zhidao de Xiaojinzhuang” 我所知道的小靳庄 [What I know about Xiaojinzhuang], *Dangshi bolan* 6 (2002): 40.

<sup>4</sup> Liu Bingrong, 40.

<sup>5</sup> GJG:1, 5.

Xiaojinzhuang brigade leaders were forced to “step aside” (*kaobian zhan*).<sup>6</sup> Wang Tinghe, a longstanding leader who had served as village party secretary, was punished for his “capitalist roader mistakes,” but he returned as a vice-secretary shortly after Xiaojinzhuang’s government was reconstituted as a revolutionary committee.<sup>7</sup> This was a typical pattern in rural north China, and there appeared to be little about the village’s experience in 1966-1969 to foreshadow Xiaojinzhuang’s meteoric rise.

### Setting the Stage: The City in the Countryside

Without question, it was Jiang Qing’s visit in June 1974 that catapulted Xiaojinzhuang to national prominence. In the immediate wake of Jiang’s tour, the city headed for the countryside, an event which intimated drastic changes for the village. In effect Xiaojinzhuang was set apart from the surrounding countryside, even though its physical location in rural China’s was never in question. Tianjin-based authorities and work team members occupied the village and packaged it into their utopian vision of rural China. This image was the product of urban officials’ imaginations and the political dicta of the time, which required rhetorically supporting the virtues of rural socialist construction. Urban and military models were fine, and Jiang Qing had those too. However, as an ambitious politician and cultural revolutionary, she needed the jewel in the crown of the “worker-peasant-soldier” triumvirate. She needed a rural model, and Tianjin leaders placed it in her lap. For Jiang, it was immaterial that the

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<sup>6</sup> Interviewee 104.

<sup>7</sup> GJG:2, 12.

city's role in staging the Xiaojinzhuang show would shape the village into a repository of urban imaginings of the countryside.

If Jiang Qing was seeking a model village, why did she settle on Xiaojinzhuang? A confluence of village achievements, county-level model-making efforts, city involvement, and national elite politics set the stage for the 1974 occupation. Xiaojinzhuang's rise was neither random nor predetermined. Instead, it was the product of a political environment that pressed local officials into grooming potential rural models so that provincial, municipal, or national officials could draw upon them for symbolic or publicity purposes. Ubiquitous propaganda trumpeted rural achievements, but only partially concealed the contemptuous view many urban elites held of Chinese villagers. The model-making process—coupled with anti-rural attitudes—denied local autonomy to affected villages and sparked intra-village friction, even as it led to fame and new opportunities for some residents.

Xiaojinzhuang first appeared as a blip on the radar screens of Baodi county and Tianjin municipal leaders during the early 1970s. Local authorities had learned not to expect much from the small village. With its poor soil and vulnerability to flooding, Xiaojinzhuang was known as a place with serious and long-standing problems. Things began to change after 1969, when villagers worked during the winter transporting frozen earth to fill in salty swampland near the river.<sup>8</sup> They also dredged the river-bed, built a dyke, and covered the saline-alkaline soil with river mud.<sup>9</sup> These

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<sup>8</sup> GJG:1, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewee 4; Pien Tsai, "Peasant Poets of Hsiao-chin-chuang," *Chinese Literature* 10

efforts began to pay off with several seasons of increased agricultural yields that attracted the attention of commune and county officials. By 1973, the year that Baodi county became a part of the newly established Tianjin municipality, Xiaojinzhuang produced 551 catties per *mu* and was recognized for its special achievements by Tianjin authorities.<sup>10</sup> Breaking out of mediocre economic performance was a precondition that had to be met before any village could garner model status.

Crucial to Xiaojinzhuang's local notoriety was the long-term residency of a Baodi county cadre named Hu Penghua. In April 1972, the county propaganda department dispatched Hu to Xiaojinzhuang with orders to develop the village into a model unit. Hu, a Baodi native who graduated from a local high school in 1964, visited a number of other villages before finally settling on Xiaojinzhuang as a promising site. Xiaojinzhuang caught Hu's eye because of its united leadership, comparatively educated populace, and recent agricultural gains.<sup>11</sup>

One of Hu's main tasks in Xiaojinzhuang was to work with the brigade party branch to establish a political night school (*zhengzhi yexiao*) as part of the national

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(1974): 96-97.

<sup>10</sup> On local honors see TJRB, December 19, 1973; on grain yields see Ren Xizeng 任锡曾, "Jiang Qing shu Xiaojinzhuang de qianqian hou hou" [The whole story of Jiang Qing establishing Xiaojinzhuang (as a model)], *Guoshi yanjiu cankao ziliao* 1 (1996): 18. My thanks to Michael Schoenhals for providing me with this source. See also Wang Yan 王岩, "Xiaojinzhuang yishi" 小靳庄轶事 [Xiaojinzhuang anecdote], *Lingdao kexue* (October 2002): 14; and GJG:1, 5. Before August 1973, when Tianjin became the administrative equivalent of a province (*zhixia shi*), Baodi county was part of Hebei province's Tianjin prefecture.

<sup>11</sup> Interviewee 4.

movement to study Dazhai, China's most famous model village. The school met three nights a week and provided basic literacy training for illiterate and semi-illiterate residents, along with courses for young people in current events, politics, and agricultural technology.<sup>12</sup> If energetic youth had time they sang model opera excerpts and invented lively political jingles.

Hu's work directing the night school would have attracted little attention had he not produced a steady stream of glowing reports for county officials about Xiaojinzhuang's educational and agricultural progress. Two journalists from a local newspaper in Hebei province caught wind of Hu's reports and decided to visit Xiaojinzhuang. Hu recalled that the propaganda articles he co-authored with the two journalists resulted in several full page spreads on Xiaojinzhuang. In turn, this publicity led to inspection visits by Hebei provincial propaganda officials and Zheng Sansheng, second party secretary in Hebei and commander of the Tianjin garrison. But in August 1973, administrative reshuffling placed Baodi county under the control of Tianjin municipality. Hebei authorities could not foster the promising village as a potential model anymore, because Xiaojinzhuang was no longer under their jurisdiction. Tianjin officials like Major General Wu Dai, however, could not have been more pleased. The city could now draw upon advanced rural units in Baodi as political resources in upcoming campaigns.

Xiaojinzhuang would have remained a simple local success story, had Wu Dai

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<sup>12</sup> Ren Xizeng, 18; Interviewee 4. See also *Xiaojinzhuang zhengzhi yexiao ban de hao* 小靳庄政治夜校办得好 [Xiaojinzhuang's political night school is good] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1974), 4.

not taken an interest in the village. General Wu, along with his fellow Tianjin party secretaries, particularly cultural leader Wang Mantian and first secretary Xie Xuegong, were perfectly situated to become the producers and stage managers of the Xiaojinzhuang show. The role of municipal authorities in elevating the village to national stardom under Jiang Qing's sponsorship should not be underestimated. They publicized the model in the Tianjin press, invited village representatives to city meetings on agriculture and women's issues, and funneled resources to favored rural units. Just as important, Tianjin leaders' reputations as cultural revolutionaries allowed them to bring the village to Jiang Qing's attention. While Wu Dai was a survivor, a military man who rose in prominence after Lin Biao's death, Xie Xuegong and Mao Zedong's cousin Wang Mantian were politicians whose careers took off during the Cultural Revolution. All three promoted their city as a base from which Mao's wife could bolster herself and her politics. Xiaojinzhuang would be but one part of the package that Tianjin leaders presented to Jiang Qing—the rural part.

Agriculture in Tianjin fell under the purview of General Wu, who was serving concurrently as vice political commissar of the Beijing military region and Tianjin's second party secretary. Wu's military background made him averse to sitting behind a desk in his city offices. He much preferred driving around the countryside on inspection visits to sitting idle in his city office.<sup>13</sup> Wu enjoyed touring villages, chatting with cadres, and checking up on agricultural production. He visited Xiaojinzhuang and other nearby brigades several times and built up amiable working

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<sup>13</sup> Interviewee 9.

relations with local officials.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the good impression Wu Dai had of Xiaojinzhuang, by early 1974 he had not yet settled on the village as a favored spot. In January 1974, Wu Dai sent a ten-person “Spread Dazhai Counties Work Team” (Puji Dazhai xian gongzuo zu) to Baodi county. The work team bypassed Xiaojinzhuang and set up shop instead in Dazhongzhuang, a larger village and commune headquarters that had come to Wu Dai’s attention on one of his rural tours.<sup>15</sup> But only a few weeks after the work team’s arrival, a new nationwide political movement blew on the scene, confounding the outside cadres in Dazhongzhuang and paving the way for Xiaojinzhuang’s rise.

Perhaps Wu Dai viewed Dazhongzhuang as the most appropriate spot for a work team to preach the Dazhai message of self-reliance and innovation in agriculture. Yet the new campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius, initiated by Jiang Qing and her allies with the approval of Mao at the end of 1973, was better suited to Xiaojinzhuang. At the national level, this campaign pitted political beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution like Jiang Qing against veteran officials linked to Premier Zhou Enlai. Both sides utilized esoteric historical arguments to battle over the significance of the past eight years and who would lead China after Mao.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, in Chinese villages the campaign bore scant resemblance to the epic

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<sup>14</sup> Journalist Gao Jianguo reports on the first visit of a general in a jeep from Beijing, GJG:1, 4; Wang Zuoshan told a reporter in March 2002 that Wu Dai inspected the village on several occasions, Wang Yan, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Interviewee 9.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic*, 3rd

struggle between Confucianism and Legalism depicted in national magazines and newspapers.

According to the former head of the 1974 work team, farmers in Dazhongzhuang, like their counterparts throughout rural China, were unenthusiastic about the anti-Confucius campaign.<sup>17</sup> The work team struggled to connect with residents who had never read any of Confucius's works. Under pressure from superiors in Tianjin to produce positive reports about the campaign, harried urban cadres called meetings and urged farmers to rail against feudal sayings. Although *Tianjin Daily* featured several vague front page articles praising Dazhongzhuang's achievements, the unwieldy anti-Confucius movement was threatening to sink the village's utility as a model.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, Tianjin municipal leaders including Wu Dai learned that Jiang Qing wanted to visit their city after she read an internal report about vigorous "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius" activities at the Tianjin railway station. She would be coming to promote the campaign by identifying and publicizing additional models, including an army unit and a village.<sup>19</sup> Wu Dai was well aware of his work team's troubles in Dazhongzhuang. He realized that smaller Xiaojinzhuang, with its night school and more lively cultural activities, might be just what Jiang Qing was

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ed. (New York: Free Press, 1999), 392-93.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewee 9.

<sup>18</sup> TJRB, February 12, 1974, 1; TJRB, March 1, 1974, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Interviewee 9.



looking for.

On June 19, 1974, Jiang Qing spoke in Tianjin at a large meeting about the historical struggle between Confucianism and Legalism.<sup>20</sup> After her speech, Tianjin leaders puffed up the package they were offering to Jiang Qing. At a Tianjin hotel, municipal officials reported to Jiang on a number of advanced villages in the region. None especially interested Jiang until Wu Dai mentioned an exciting village that boasted a successful night school and lively cultural activities.<sup>21</sup> Tianjin authorities carefully stressed that Xiaojinzhuang's night school not only excelled at political study, but also featured revolutionary model opera singing and poetry readings.<sup>22</sup> The mention of singing got Jiang Qing's attention. As the promoter of officially sanctioned model dramas during the Cultural Revolution, it was pleasing to hear that villagers in rural China were singing "her" songs.<sup>23</sup> "I want to go to Xiaojinzhuang,"

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<sup>20</sup> Copies of her speech were first circulated as important study materials, but after 1976 were distributed again as examples of her ambitious "bid to be empress." Ross Terrill, *Madame Mao: The White-Boned Demon*, revised edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 265. *Jiang Qing tongzhi zai "Tianjin shi ru fa douzheng shi baogao hui" shang de zhongyao jianghua* 江青同志在“天津市儒法斗争史报告会”上的重要讲话 [Comrade Jiang Qing's important talk at the Tianjin meeting on the history of the struggle between Confucianism and Legalism], June 19, 1974, 1, 9, 11. Thanks to Michael Schoenhals for sharing this transcript with me. Also, Interviewee 102.

<sup>21</sup> Interviewee 9; Ren Xizeng, 18.

<sup>22</sup> GJG:1, 5

<sup>23</sup> Xiaomei Chen debunks the notion that Jiang Qing created the eight model works all by herself, but it is clear that Jiang was proud of her role in shaping and producing the operas, dramas, and ballet. Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 86, 105-7.

Jiang said, and after perfunctory protestations that the road to the village was too rough, her Tianjin allies assented to the visit.<sup>24</sup>

Propaganda about Xiaojinzhuang ramped up. On the morning of June 21, 1974, a report about the village's night school appeared on the front page of *Tianjin Daily*.<sup>25</sup> Wu Dai also summoned Baodi county leaders and Xiaojinzhuang's party secretary Wang Zuoshan to a meeting in Tianjin.<sup>26</sup> Wang called back to the village and told his colleagues in the party branch to expect an inspection visit from a central leader. Municipal authorities informed villagers of their scripts, instructing them to prepare a meeting to criticize reactionary sayings and to be ready to sing excerpts from revolutionary model operas. Baodi cadre Hu Penghua scrambled to coach seventeen hand-picked villagers on their lines.<sup>27</sup>

To many villagers, a visit from Mao's wife was an honor and an exciting diversion. But Xiaojinzhuang residents had no say in the matter, scant advance warning, and little idea of how drastically Jiang's interest in their home would change their lives. The village was enmeshed in a model-making process that kept political control out of villagers' hands. Xiaojinzhuang had already become a tool of urban politicians eager to earn points in an environment that required rhetorical celebration of rural achievements.

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<sup>24</sup> GJG:1, 6.

<sup>25</sup> TJRB, June 21, 1974, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Interviewee 101.

<sup>27</sup> Interviewee 4; GJG:1, 6.

By encouraging Mao's wife to visit Xiaojinzhuang, Tianjin leaders had placed the village on a national stage. The urban invasion of Xiaojinzhuang began in earnest when Jiang Qing stepped out of a sedan in the center of the village on the morning of June 22, 1974. She was wearing a skirt and white sandals, and she was not alone. Her entourage totaled around forty people, including opera singers, cultural officials, Tianjin leaders, and members of the Liang Xiao writing group (a team of professors from Tsinghua University and Beijing University who were the rhetorical brain trust behind a series of historical articles linking Lin Biao's "revisionism" to Confucius).<sup>28</sup> Also on hand were Xing Yanzi and Hou Jun, Baodi county's two famous "iron girls" (*tie guniang*) who had been celebrated as models since the early 1960s for volunteering to return to their villages instead of pursuing city jobs or university educations.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to Jiang's visit to Xiaojinzhuang, several village residents would soon join Xing and Hou in the pantheon of Baodi villagers turned national celebrities.

Jiang Qing toured the village and nearby fields, and then the pre-selected Xiaojinzhuang villagers joined Jiang and her entourage for a meeting.<sup>30</sup> Young women sang excerpts from revolutionary operas, which pleased Jiang. In an anti-Confucian mood, Jiang also took it upon herself to suggest name changes for villagers

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<sup>28</sup> "Liang Xiao" was the pen name under which articles by the writing group were published. This was a homonym for "two schools," meaning Tsinghua and Beijing Universities.

<sup>29</sup> Hou Jun 侯隽, *Jiang Qing san ci qu Xiaojinzhuang de bufen jianghua he huodong* 江青三次去小靳庄的部分讲话和活动 [Parts of Jiang Qing's talks and activities during her three visits to Xiaojinzhuang], October 14, 1976, APA.

<sup>30</sup> Wang Yan, 14.

whose names she deemed “too feudal.” Thus Wang Xiaoxian, an instructor in Xiaojinzhuang’s political night school, became Wang Miekong (Wang “Exterminate Confucius”).<sup>31</sup> After over an hour of reports, singing, poetry reading, and name changing, the meeting broke up.

Xiaojinzhuang would do, Jiang Qing decided. As she was preparing to leave, she turned to the Tianjin leaders at her side. “Comrade Xie Xuegong, you must come here often,” she told the municipal first secretary. “This is my spot (*wo de dian*), and if you don’t run it well you’ll be prodded.” She asked to be given status reports on Xiaojinzhuang in the future, “because I don’t know how often I’ll come around to my spot.”<sup>32</sup> Jiang would only make it back to the village twice, once with Imelda Marcos in September 1974 and again in August 1976, when she was embroiled in a struggle over who would succeed the ailing Mao as China’s leader. But Jiang’s loud claim during her first visit that she was representing party center and Chairman Mao, plus her instructions to Xie Xuegong, were enough to change everything for the village. A few days after Jiang Qing’s visit, a joint Tianjin-Baodi work team, along with Beijing-based writers, teachers, and coaches, moved into Xiaojinzhuang and the commune guesthouse down the road.<sup>33</sup> This outside work team—and not the village’s party branch—was not the real center of political power in the village. It plunged into producing and staging the model village.

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<sup>31</sup> Liu Bingrong, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Hou Jun, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Interviewee 4.

Two leading journalists from the national Xinhua news agency traveled to Xiaojinzhuang and wrote a confidential article that was distributed to party center and provincial leaders throughout China. The piece alerted officials to prepare large-scale nationwide propaganda on the Xiaojinzhuang model. A separate article by the Liang Xiao writing group about Xiaojinzhuang's night school garnered Jiang Qing's approval for nationwide dissemination and appeared in *People's Daily* and *Tianjin Daily* on September 8. By fall 1974, extensive publicity had enshrined Xiaojinzhuang as a national model, and visitors began to flow into the village to view opera performances and poetry readings.

If the new work team, Xinhua journalists, and Liang Xiao writers produced these performances, then what was the script that villagers were expected to follow? In 1970s China, urban politicians did not share a uniform vision of the countryside. The image of Xiaojinzhuang presented to the nation reflected one specific use of rural China by such leaders as Jiang Qing and her Tianjin allies whose political careers depended on celebrating, defending, and continuing the Cultural Revolution. In the face of challenges from moderates like Deng Xiaoping who emphasized production, Xiaojinzhuang had to serve as proof of the benefits the Cultural Revolution had brought to villages. This vision mandated that cultural advances and attention to political movements could not be sacrificed to the details of agricultural work.

A pro-Cultural Revolution script emphasizing transformation in culture and consciousness guided Xiaojinzhuang as it ballooned from a modest local advanced unit to a national model during the summer and fall of 1974. On August 4, a front

page *People's Daily* article about “Xiaojinzhuang’s ten new things” (*Xiaojinzhuang shi jian xinshi*) conveyed the essence of radical urban elites’ utopian vision of the countryside.<sup>34</sup> The “ten new things” script, penned by Xinhua and *Tianjin Daily* journalists, along with Baodi propaganda cadre Hu Penghua, wildly exaggerated the village’s achievements.<sup>35</sup> Xiaojinzhuang’s ten innovations included starting a political night school, building up a team of poor and lower-middle peasants versed in Marxist theory and anti-Confucian history, singing revolutionary model operas, establishing an art propaganda team, writing poems, opening a library, telling revolutionary stories, developing sports activities, and “transforming social traditions, destroying the old and establishing the new” (*yifeng yisu, pojiu lixin*). This item, number ten on the list, focused mostly on women’s issues, including encouraging newly engaged women to return betrothal gifts and delay their wedding dates. The article applauded married women for drawing up birth control plans and convincing their husbands to share in household chores.

Missing from the roster of ten new things was agriculture, one of the advances that attracted county officials to Xiaojinzhuang in the first place. The script instead emphasized the village’s “revolution in the superstructural sphere” (*shangceng jianzhu lingyu geming*), a key message for culture-first politicians during the mid-1970s.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> RMRB, August 4, 1974, 1. This article was reprinted in at least seven books about Xiaojinzhuang and also appeared in provincial newspapers all across China.

<sup>35</sup> Interviewee 4. Before Jiang Qing’s visit Hu was involved in writing an article on Xiaojinzhuang’s “Eight New Things,” which was revised and augmented later in 1974.

<sup>36</sup> Jiang Qing was following Mao’s reversal of the Marxist idea that social being

The cultural bent of the ten new things comprised the main theme of the Xiaojinzhuang show, and subsequent publicity, as well as the physical appearance of the village itself, had to reflect this script. Resources, advisers, coaches, journalists, and tourists poured into the village, in effect creating a cultural theme park. In addition to funds spent on fixing the road into Xiaojinzhuang, the village received 100,781 yuan in grants, 51,800 yuan in loans, 370,000 bricks and tiles, 135.99 cubic meters of wood, 155 tons of fertilizer, and 92 kilograms of steel products. Around 9,000 yuan were spent to improve toilet facilities.<sup>37</sup>

Overall, how did Xiaojinzhuang residents handle their roles in the political drama that had overtaken the village since June 1974? Although urban politicians had taken control of the village for their own purposes, villagers still had room to maneuver and assert their own agency. Some enjoyed the privilege of living in a model village newly rich from state resources, while others rejected and deviated from the city-imposed script. A few, like village leader Wang Zuoshan, rose to become stars of the show. But life in the spotlight was not easy.

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determines consciousness. Mao believed that instead of material advances leading to cultural change, only a remolding of people's consciousness through revolutionary cultural offerings could transform the other realms of Chinese society, including economic life. Meisner, 315. See also Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Journalist Gao Jianguo gathered these figures from documents he viewed in the Baodi county archives during the 1980s; GJG:1, 11.

Stars and Show Stealers: Model Villagers Scripted and Unscripted

These days, just about everyone in Baodi has an opinion about Wang Zuoshan. “Zuoshan is a sad case,” said one county resident. “He really wanted to work for the people and for a while he got along well with Jiang Qing, but when he became county leader he lacked confidence in himself.”<sup>38</sup> Just how pitiful was this local cadre turned national star? Wang, village party secretary since 1969, received the most national exposure of anyone from Xiaojinzhuang. For the producers pushing the Xiaojinzhuang message, this hard-working young cadre was an ideal leading man. According to their script, Wang Zuoshan was undeniable proof of the success of the Cultural Revolution in rural China. Yet Wang would later self-effacingly describe himself to visitors as an “ignorant peasant,” a “donkey in a stable awaiting orders,” and a “dung beetle on an airplane, stinking to high heaven.”<sup>39</sup> There is no question that Wang Zuoshan soared like an airplane from 1974 to 1976. He threw himself wholeheartedly into his prominent role as a rural promoter of the Cultural Revolution, traveling extensively, giving speeches to cheering crowds, and bantering with such prominent figures as table tennis star Zhuang Zedong. Model villages required model village leaders, and Wang played the role with brio.

Wang Zuoshan was a young man of “poor peasant” background whose family, fleeing famine conditions elsewhere, settled in Xiaojinzhuang earlier in the twentieth

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<sup>38</sup> Interviewee 105.

<sup>39</sup> Respectively, Interviewee 101; Liu Bingrong, 42; GJG:2, 9.



century.<sup>40</sup> His status as a relative outsider may have helped him rise in the village's leadership ranks during the Cultural Revolution (later, this lack of local ties would hasten his downfall). He became Xiaojinzhuang's party secretary in 1969, when the village's party branch was reconstituted after the Ninth Party Congress. Wang was twenty-six years old at the time. After taking charge, he promoted the agricultural improvements that led to three straight bumper harvests and local recognition for the village. Young Wang Zuoshan's considerable achievements centered on increased agricultural production. Until Jiang Qing visited the village on June 22, 1974, he had managed to successfully balance the competing demands of rural residents and his superiors.

Jiang Qing's first visit was going smoothly for Wang Zuoshan until he unwittingly offended Mao's thin-skinned wife. After deferentially reporting on village achievements to Jiang, the young secretary accompanied her and Tianjin city leaders to a wheat field, where Jiang wanted to stage photos harvesting with a sickle.<sup>41</sup> Jiang took a few awkward whacks at the wheat stalks, and a concerned Wang urged her to stop, fearing that she would get tired. She exploded at the well-intentioned cadre. "Leave me alone! What the hell are you doing?" (*Ni bu yong guan wo, ni shi gan*

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<sup>40</sup> Interviewee 4; Interviewee 103.

<sup>41</sup> GJG:2, 7-8. A member of Jiang Qing's entourage described Wang Zuoshan as "fawning upon" (*bajie*), "pandering to" (*yinghe*), and "flattering" (*fengcheng*) Mao's wife, which must have been common responses to her commanding presence. Interviewee 102.

*shenme de?*) she yelled.<sup>42</sup> After this incident, Tianjin officials decided to keep Wang away from Jiang Qing for the time being. He was not allowed to leave his home when Jiang accompanied Imelda Marcos to Xiaojinzhuang in September 1974. He had a cold, he said, and city leaders were afraid he might be contagious.

Wang Zuoshan's run-in with Jiang Qing may have diminished Tianjin leaders' confidence in him, but he continued to host visitors to Xiaojinzhuang, including the writer Hao Ran, who wrote glowingly of the party branch secretary as a "heroic grassroots cadre."<sup>43</sup> Wang still carried symbolic power as a new kind of villager, a creative achiever who could combine agricultural success with cultural advances. He remained the public face of Xiaojinzhuang and was honored as a representative and standing committee member of the Fourth National People's Congress in January 1975. Wang Zuoshan attempted to patch up his relationship with Jiang Qing by sending her positive reports. For Wang, as for so many other people in China during the Cultural Revolution, Jiang's proximity to her divine husband made her a representative, if not an incarnation, of Mao himself. Wang had journalists stationed in the village write to Jiang to affirm his loyalty to her and Mao—and to their Cultural Revolution, which had transformed him into one of China's most famous villagers.

Jiang Qing appreciated Wang's enthusiasm and reportedly scribbled a note that

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<sup>42</sup> Interviewee 101; GJG:2, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Xiaojinzhuang de shenke biange* 小靳庄的深刻变革 [Xiaojinzhuang's profound change] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1975), 62, excerpted from RMRB, October 1, 1974, 5.

said, “Wang Zuoshan is a good cadre.”<sup>44</sup> After this, Tianjin leaders could not touch him, even if some of them still thought he was “uneducated and clueless” (*mei wenhua, ye mei tounao*).<sup>45</sup> Under Jiang Qing’s sponsorship, Wang attended the Central Party Academy in Beijing for six months in 1975, was promoted to Baodi county secretary in 1976, and reportedly received internal approval for a promotion to head a state-level ministry.<sup>46</sup> Wang appeared to relish his prominence and threw himself into the project of defending the Cultural Revolution and his sponsor in speeches and essays. But Wang was too deeply intertwined with Jiang Qing to survive her arrest in October 1976. His promotion to county leader had been based on her support, and for Tianjin leaders, he represented a perfect symbol in the new campaign against the Gang of Four. Many city officials used Wang’s achievements in order to gain favor with Jiang Qing, but then were the first to blame him when things turned sour. Xiaojinzhuang and Wang Zuoshan were political resources for Jiang Qing and other city leaders, more symbols than real people.

Wang Zuoshan stuck to his script, perhaps too closely, while trying to make the most out of his village’s model status. He was the only villager who was

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<sup>44</sup> Interviewee 104; GJG:2, 8.

<sup>45</sup> GJG:2, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Probably the Ministry of Agriculture. Interviewee 104; Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei zuzhibu 中共天津市委组织部, Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, Tianjin shi dang’anguan, eds., *Zhongguo gongchandang Tianjin shi zuzhi shi ziliao, 1920-1987* 中国共产党天津市组织史资料 [Materials on the history of the Tianjin CCP organization, 1920-1987] (Beijing: Zhongguo chengshi chubanshe, 1991), 392; GJG:2, 7.

incarcerated and publicly pilloried after his patron fell, but other prominent village stars also felt let down by the end of their show's run. For Zhou Kezhou, Yu Fang, and Wang Xian, the energetic young women whose very identities were shaped by Jiang Qing, the village's rise was an empowering rush.

Recent memoirs and scholarly works have highlighted the pride and excitement many young, unmarried women felt during the Cultural Revolution as they emulated the stars of revolutionary model operas and assumed local leadership and activist roles.<sup>47</sup> In Xiaojinzhuang, Zhou Fulan, Yu Ruifang, and Wang Shuxian belonged to this group. When Jiang Qing first visited the village, she bestowed new revolutionary names on the three women. Jiang's magic touch made the women's new identities even more entwined with promoting revolutionary culture. Zhou Fulan, the head of the brigade's women's association, became Zhou Kezhou (Zhou "Overcome Zhou").<sup>48</sup> Yu Ruifang, the women's leader of a village production team, became Yu Fang after Jiang eliminated the offending character "rui," which means "auspicious." Wang Shuxian (*shuxian* means "gentle and virtuous"), a militia and

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<sup>47</sup> Xiaomei Chen, 33-46; and Xueping Zhong, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di, eds., *Some of Us: Chinese Women Growing Up in the Mao Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> This apparent attack on Premier Zhou Enlai was cited after Jiang Qing's arrest as one of her most heinous acts in Xiaojinzhuang. See RMRB, January 12, 1978, 2, and Hou Jun, 1. During the "Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius" movement, Jiang directed her writing groups to attack the Duke of Zhou and the Confucian rites (*zhouli*), both of which were alleged to be attacks on Zhou Enlai after the arrest of the Gang of Four.

youth league member, was now Wang Xian (Wang “First”).<sup>49</sup> The young women activists were some of Xiaojinzhuang’s busiest stars, performing opera excerpts, giving poetry readings daily for the thousands of visitors to the village, and traveling across China and even to Japan for promotional speaking engagements. These were unique, confidence-building opportunities that would have remained outside of Zhou, Yu, and Wang’s reach had Jiang Qing chosen another village for her model.

Zhou Kezhou, Wang Xian, and Yu Fang eagerly embraced their leading roles as revolutionary young women, and promoted policies including equal pay for equal work, returning or refusing betrothal gifts, and matrilocal marriage.<sup>50</sup> But while Xiaojinzhuang was a model for equal compensation for women’s labor and fighting what Zhou Kezhou called “the buying and selling of women” in marriage, entrenched views about proper gender roles limited the scope of change, particularly outside of the confines of the model village.<sup>51</sup> Even within Xiaojinzhuang, published images reveal the limits of efforts for gender equality in rural China. Wang Xian, the captain of the village’s celebrated women’s volleyball team, said that the team was formed at the behest of local leaders. They feared that Jiang Qing would lodge accusations of

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<sup>49</sup> All three women still live in Baodi, and people acquainted with Zhou Kezhou and Wang Xian still refer to them by the names Jiang Qing gave them. Interviewee 104; Hou Jun, 1; GJG:1, 6-7.

<sup>50</sup> Interviewee 4; Interviewee 103.

<sup>51</sup> Women were elevated to local leadership positions throughout China during the “Criticize Lin Biao, Criticize Confucius” campaign, but according to Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden most men throughout north China were unenthusiastic about policies offering women equal pay. Outside of model villages male leaders ridiculed and blocked measures promoting gender equality. Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden,

male chauvinism if the only sport played in the village was men's basketball.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, no one thought to form a women's basketball team or a co-ed team. Basketball was for men, volleyball for women. And in publicity photos of the village's party branch, Zhou Kezhou sits quietly as Wang Zuoshan and four other men lead the discussion.<sup>53</sup> The proper place for the young woman heroes of Xiaojinzhuang was in the propaganda team and women's groups. The party branch belonged to men.

Of the men in the village's party branch, Wang Du was the most politically savvy. A Xiaojinzhuang native, he graduated from the commune high school in 1972 at the age of twenty-one and rapidly integrated himself into village politics, becoming a teacher in the night school, head of the village militia, and vice-secretary of the party branch by 1973.<sup>54</sup> County cadre Hu Penghua lived in Wang Du's family's home for the full three years he was stationed in Xiaojinzhuang. Hu took Wang Du under his wing and the two collaborated closely, planning the night school's curriculum and writing propaganda together. Wang Du quickly gained the trust of Tianjin leaders and Jiang Qing. Wang Du was more aware than most villagers that Xiaojinzhuang's model experience was highly scripted and he participated actively in creating and modifying the script. He was able to let his writing talents and philosophical acumen shine, but ended up frustrated by the limits of his rural status. For Wang Du, being a

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*Revolution, Resistance, and Reform in Village China*, 198-202.

<sup>52</sup> GJG:2, 13.

<sup>53</sup> "Xiaojinzhuang de xinshi" 小靳庄的新事 [Xiaojinzhuang's new things], *Renmin huabao* (March 1975): 28.

star within the confines of the model village was not enough.

Wang Du was the best poet in Xiaojinzhuang, a village full of farmer bards. While residents of rural Baodi county were renowned for their singing, humorous banter, jingles, and doggerel, Wang Du took these rhymes to a new level and reshaped his neighbors' poems into publishable form. Seven of his poems were included in the 1974 *Xiaojinzhuang poetry anthology*, and he still considers reciting his "My first visit to Beijing" at a study meeting in the capital to be one of the proudest moments of his life.<sup>55</sup> Wang Du was a product of the forgotten educational successes in China's countryside during the 1970s, when more rural youth attended elementary and middle school than at any other time in China's history.<sup>56</sup> His training allowed him to return home and teach farmers the basics of Marxist philosophy and to become a prolific writer and editor.

The problem was that Wang Du did not especially want to return to Xiaojinzhuang. He hoped to go to college. During the Cultural Revolution, however, rural primary and middle schools expanded while universities were sacrificed. University entrance examinations were abolished and the only route to college was for students classified as "workers, peasants, and soldiers" to rely on personal relations.

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<sup>54</sup> Interviewee 104; GJG:2, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Tianjin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社, ed., *Xiaojinzhuang shige xuan* 小靳庄诗歌选 [Xiaojinzhuang poetry anthology] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1974), 20-21. An English translation of the entire poem can be found in *Chinese Literature* 4 (1975): 82-83.

<sup>56</sup> Meisner, 362.

Wang Du knew full well how this worked. At a meeting in Beijing, he established a good relationship with Liu Zehua, director of the history department at Tianjin's Nankai University. Liu recognized Wang Du's academic potential and sent university representatives to Xiaojinzhuang with an official admission letter. The next step was securing approval from county and Tianjin authorities, which should not have been a problem, considering Wang Du's regular interaction with Tianjin leaders and Jiang Qing. The architects of the Xiaojinzhuang model, however, had different plans. They needed Wang Du right where he was, pumping out poetry and reports on the village's achievements.

When Tianjin cultural leader Wang Mantian heard of Wang Du's wishes, she approached him in the village and shook her head. "So, you want to go to college?" she asked. "Isn't Xiaojinzhuang one of the best universities in the country?" His hopes were dashed. "She was a city party secretary, a real big shot," he said. "She had spoken, what could I do?"<sup>57</sup> City elites had their own uses for the countryside and its inhabitants. The Cultural Revolution had expanded educational opportunities in rural areas, but increased schooling bred resentment and frustration when young educated villagers were not allowed to use their education to advance their careers.

Unable to attend college, Wang Du continued contributing to the Xiaojinzhuang script. When the village was at the forefront of the 1976 campaign to criticize Deng Xiaoping, he was quoted in *People's Daily* excoriating Deng's "nonsense and lies," and wrote poetry blasting the anti-Gang of Four April Fifth

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<sup>57</sup> Interviewee 104; GJG:2, 11.



Tiananmen incident as “noxious winds and evil waves.”<sup>58</sup> Wang Du, like village leader Wang Zuoshan, was deeply implicated in the criticism of Deng, but much better attuned to the changing political winds. He egged Jiang Qing on when she lashed out at Deng during her August 1976 visit to Xiaojinzhuang, yet after her arrest he was quickly in print criticizing her as a “scheming double-dealing counter-revolutionary.”<sup>59</sup> Always a master at adhering to and elaborating upon the scripts of the Cultural Revolution’s political drama, Wang Du knew that his old lines were passé and adopted new ones.

The celebrities of Xiaojinzhuang like Wang Du, Zhou Kezhou, and Wang Zuoshan collaborated enthusiastically in the village’s rise and participated in shaping its political script. They enjoyed their newfound fame and relished the excitement of traveling to the capital and other cities for meetings and speeches. But less prominent villagers scorned the model experience, especially when Xiaojinzhuang’s stardom led to tension between opera-singing stars and laboring farmers. In late 1974, politically correct outsiders reportedly criticized discontented villagers for circulating subversive doggerel (*shunkouliu*). One sarcastic rhyme about the “ten ranks of people” (*shi deng ren*) described how Xiaojinzhuang’s rise to national fame had privileged cultural performers and tour guides over laboring farmers.<sup>60</sup> As Perry Link and Kate Zhou

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<sup>58</sup> RMRB, August 29, 1976, 1.

<sup>59</sup> RMRB, November 26, 1976, 3. For a text that depicts Wang Du encouraging Jiang Qing to criticize Deng Xiaoping, see Hou Jun, 5.

<sup>60</sup> GJG:1, 10. This *shunkouliu* was not invented in Xiaojinzhuang, but at the time rhymes on the “ten ranks of people” were circulating throughout north China.

have shown, *shunkouliu* provide a vivid glimpse of otherwise hidden popular sentiment.<sup>61</sup>

The “ten ranks” jingle began with the “first rank,” people out making deals, living in hotels, eating bread, lavishing gifts and getting reimbursed (*pao waijiao, zhu lüguan, chi mianbao, qingke songli gei baoxiao*). It ended with those in the lowly tenth rank, the “old black class” of political enemies who had to engage in compulsory labor without earning work points. Also near the top were the broadcasters who read reports over the loudspeakers (second rank), the party secretary and militia leader (third rank), who were almost impossible to find, and propaganda team members (fifth rank), who could receive a full day’s worth of work points just by “singing a few lines of opera.” Those in the bottom half of the status ratings included cart drivers (sixth rank), livestock raisers (eighth rank), and lowly tillers and farmers (ninth rank), who “wield a hoe and gasp for air” (*pangdiren, louzhe chuba chuan daqi*).

Perhaps unaccustomed to the biting doggerel of rural north China, outsiders chastised villagers for reciting lines so at odds with the public image of Xiaojinzhuang as an idyllic farmer’s utopia. But for the circulators of the jingle, developments in Xiaojinzhuang since Jiang Qing’s visit seemed upside-down and patently unfair. Divisions within villages had always existed, and the miserable lot of those unlucky

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Interviewee 4.

<sup>61</sup> Perry Link and Kate Zhou, “*Shunkouliu*: Popular Satirical Sayings and Popular Thought,” in *Popular China: Unofficial Culture in a Globalizing Society*, ed. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 89, 91.

enough to be classified as landlords and counterrevolutionaries (the “old blacks”) had been a constant since the 1950s.<sup>62</sup> Yet the village’s rise to national fame heralded a disturbing new development. Not only had life been disrupted by an endless stream of urban cadres and tourists; villagers whose main talent was farming, not opera singing or poetry recitation, felt denigrated and excluded.

While thousands of tourists visited Xiaojinzhuang daily during the model’s high point, some outsiders stayed on for longer periods. At one point, 60 or 70 outside cadres, over 100 journalists, and more than 100 volleyball coaches, poetry tutors, and opera teachers lived in the village.<sup>63</sup> Some stayed for as long as six months, earning daily wages and food rations, and eating in a newly established cafeteria.<sup>64</sup> The tillers of the land who called themselves “ninth rank” villagers certainly benefited from the material improvements brought about by the colonization and occupation of their home, but they had to deal with constant disruptions. Tianjin authorities installed experimental drip irrigation systems on 170 acres of surrounding land and lavished fertilizer on the village, but when it came time to harvest, many young villagers were too busy receiving guests and could not work the fields.<sup>65</sup> The brigade decreed that members of the propaganda team were exempt from agricultural labor (*tuochan*), and

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<sup>62</sup> On the long-term scapegoating of rural “class enemies,” see Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), xx, 270.

<sup>63</sup> GJG:1, 10; GJG:2, 12.

<sup>64</sup> GJG:2, 12.

<sup>65</sup> GJG:1, 11.

an army unit was sent in to help collect the harvest.<sup>66</sup>

If the farmers who circulated the “ten ranks” jingle heard about the front page *People’s Daily* article celebrating how Xiaojinzhuang’s campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius had spurred agricultural production and led to a bumper harvest, they must have found fodder for more subversive verses. The October 1974 piece trumpeted the notion that cultural advances supposedly lead to improvement in material life, but everyone in the village knew that the harvest required outside assistance in order to take place at all.<sup>67</sup> Songs and poetry were supreme, but the details of agricultural production were an afterthought, not a natural consequence of Xiaojinzhuang’s “advanced superstructure.” As a model village, Xiaojinzhuang was required to have yearly bumper harvests and the appearance of agricultural abundance. But a model village featuring only sweating farmers toiling around the clock would have been boring and at odds with the point Jiang Qing and her Tianjin allies wanted to make. In their vision, villagers had to be portrayed as the source of creativity and positive knowledge. No matter that farm work required real investments of time and energy. Why not just call in the troops to take care of it?

Some residents of the village felt that stars like women’s leaders Zhou Kezhou and Wang Xian had let their suddenly acquired fame go to their heads. A sent-down youth from Tianjin who moved into the village with seven of her high-school classmates in October 1974 remembered that Wang Xian’s imperious and tough

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<sup>66</sup> Interviewee 100; Interviewee 104; GJG:1, 10-11.

<sup>67</sup> RMRB, October 28, 1974, 1.

manner of speaking scared other villagers.<sup>68</sup> Baodi cadre Hu Penghua was horrified at how arrogant certain village cadres had become, ordering others around and seeking personal benefits. “I was behind the scenes,” Hu said. “I wrote the articles but who got the credit? They did! They weren’t mentally prepared to be big stars. It was like they’d drunk half a *jin* of liquor.”<sup>69</sup> At one meeting Hu publicly criticized Zhou Kezhou for circumventing proper channels to obtain rationed wood for a new house. Shortly thereafter he requested to be transferred out of the village. The friction that arose after his carefully groomed test point became a national model had become too painful for Hu to bear.

It may not have been the intent of the Tianjin-based managers of the Xiaojinzhuang model to sow discord among rural residents and to devalue farm work, but that was the end result of their show. Disgruntled villagers accustomed to being looked down upon by urbanites made light of their plight by circulating wry jingles, but the irony of being nationally celebrated as an advanced model village while suffering new humiliations must have stung. The officially sanctioned cultural achievements seemed ridiculous and exclusive to those who witnessed the occupation of their village, so they made up their own lines and made the best of the situation. Those dissatisfied with the state of affairs must have known that it could not last forever. Indeed, payback time came after Jiang Qing’s arrest, when humbled former members of the propaganda team returned to the fields. Even into the early 1980s,

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<sup>68</sup> Interviewee 103.

<sup>69</sup> Interviewee 4.

farmers who had classified themselves into the “ninth rank” made a gleeful show of carefully supervising the ex-stars’ every swing of the hoe.<sup>70</sup>

Neighboring villagers also relished Xiaojinzhuang’s downfall. Surviving next to the noisy playhouse meant headaches. A man who lived near Xiaojinzhuang remembered that his village had to start a political night school after Jiang Qing’s visit. There, farmers memorized and recited Mao’s quotations at night after toiling in the fields, not as fortunate as Xiaojinzhuang’s agriculture-exempt propagandists.<sup>71</sup> More than 3,400 political night schools were established in the Tianjin suburbs after Xiaojinzhuang became famous.<sup>72</sup> These night schools served as safety valves for local officials required to follow their neighbor’s example. If superiors asked, village cadres could report on the glorious achievements of their own political night school, but after Xiaojinzhuang fell the schools quickly disappeared. In 1977, when Xiaojinzhuang residents like former vice-party secretary Wang Tinghe ventured outside the village, they faced snide comments from put-upon neighbors: “Oh, you’re from Xiaojinzhuang? Why don’t you sing or read some poetry?”<sup>73</sup>

When Xiaojinzhuang was riding high, other rural Baodi residents felt a mixture of envy and fear about their neighbors’ soaring stature. Some attempted to capitalize on the Xiaojinzhuang brand name. Before Xiaojinzhuang became a model, the main

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<sup>70</sup> GJG:1, 14.

<sup>71</sup> Interviewee 100.

<sup>72</sup> GJG:1, 13.

<sup>73</sup> GJG:1, 13.

access to the village was by boat across the Jian’gan river. With the huge influx of tourists in 1974, the state allocated funds for a new bridge linking the village to a nearby road. Laborers from around the Tianjin region came to build the bridge and after completing the job each worker received a commemorative shirt. The top half of the shirt displayed “Xiaojinzhuang” in three large characters, while the bottom half read “bridge-building souvenir” (*xiuqiao liunian*) in smaller script. These flashy shirts were a coveted prize for some workers. The bridge builders tucked their new shirts deeply into their pants, concealing the part identifying the shirt as a souvenir. They then went to Tianjin, where they swaggered and blustered behind the Xiaojinzhuang brand name, acting so intimidating that others dared not question them.<sup>74</sup>

For the workers who built the bridge to Xiaojinzhuang, the three Chinese characters making up the village’s name connoted power and status. By wearing new costumes and acting tough back in the city, the workers enacted roles quite at odds with the official script lauding Xiaojinzhuang as a happy pantheon of advanced culture and gender equality. Yet at the same time, the tucked-in wannabes were unintentionally engaged in a wholly accurate form of model emulation. In fact, the bridge builders had leapt beyond the showy froth of model propaganda and grasped its essence—Xiaojinzhuang meant power in the city. Far from emulating Wang Zuoshan or other model villagers, the workers proudly strutting their association with Xiaojinzhuang back in the city were excellent copies of Jiang Qing, Wu Dai, Wang

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<sup>74</sup> GJG:2, 12. According to journalist Gao Jianguo, Wang Tinghe’s point in telling this story was to show that Xiaojinzhuang indeed made mistakes but that much of its bad reputation came from people outside the village.

Mantian, and Xie Xuegong. Urban political elites had constructed a rural paradise; Tianjin workers had built a bridge. But both groups used their ties to an idealized, concocted rural China in order to strengthen their own agendas—and egos—in Tianjin.

### Xiaojinzhuang's Audience: Consumers, Tourists, and Copycats

The Tianjin bridge builders actively utilized Xiaojinzhuang's reputation for their own purposes, but most people who read or heard about the village were more passive cultural consumers. Their concern was figuring out the message behind the model. What, then, did Xiaojinzhuang mean to its audience throughout China? How aware was the public of the model's concocted nature? The reactions of cultural consumers, revolutionary tourists, and potential emulators varied according to their vantage points and the prevailing political winds. While the producers of the drama were primarily based in large cities and the model's stars hailed from the countryside, the show's intended audience was both rural and urban. Media coverage urged rural cadres to learn from Xiaojinzhuang's opera and poetry. Propaganda also provided clues to city dwellers about the relative influence of Jiang Qing and her allies. The majority of Xiaojinzhuang's audience never set foot in the village, but read about it from afar or viewed it on television. People familiar with the political use of model units knew not to accept at face value articles celebrating miraculous achievements.

Daily newspapers were the best source for decoding shifting messages about Xiaojinzhuang and its links to national politics. After Jiang Qing's first visit, a trickle of reports on the village gave way to a cascade of references. Thirty articles



mentioning Xiaojinzhuang appeared in *People's Daily* in late 1974, including eight front page pieces exclusively dedicated to village achievements in political education, poetry, women's equality, and opera singing. In 1975, Xiaojinzhuang's media prominence first soared but then dropped off entirely. Newspaper readers could have correctly concluded that the model and its sponsors had fallen into political disfavor. Sixty-two *People's Daily* pieces referring to Xiaojinzhuang appeared before June, but as the year progressed, Deng Xiaoping took control of government tasks, Mao criticized his wife for her political activities, and Xiaojinzhuang's national exposure dwindled to zero. During the four month period between August 26 and December 26, the village vanished completely from the pages of China's main newspaper.

Xiaojinzhuang residents wondered what had happened to so thoroughly stifle their village's year-old fame. At first they had no idea that Deng Xiaoping's distaste for Jiang Qing's rural model was behind the silence. Had the curtain fallen for good on the Xiaojinzhuang show, or was the media silence simply a long intermission?

The answer partly depended on the outcome of the political battle between radicals like Jiang Qing and moderates represented by Deng Xiaoping. However, the ailing Mao Zedong played a decisive role in creating the political atmosphere necessary for Xiaojinzhuang's return to national prominence. Mao's comments about art and literature, along with the general trend of moderation in mid-1975, helped banish Xiaojinzhuang to temporary obscurity. In July, Mao complained to Deng Xiaoping about the paucity of artistic offerings. "There are too few model dramas, and if people make even small mistakes they are struggled against," he said. "There

are no novels or poetry.”<sup>75</sup> We do not know whether Mao ever read the large-type anthology of Xiaojin Zhuang’s poems that Jiang Qing arranged to have printed for his ailing eyes—if he did, he must not have considered it genuine poetry.<sup>76</sup> Regardless, Xiaojin Zhuang stayed invisible until Mao decided that Deng’s policies, including his proposals on industrial rationalization, developing science and technology through borrowing from abroad, and reviving higher education, had gone too far in rolling back the Cultural Revolution.<sup>77</sup> Mao approved a new campaign attacking Deng in late 1975, and the curtain rose on Xiaojin Zhuang’s strident second act. Thanks to shifting elite politics, the rural cultural utopia morphed into an anti-Deng Xiaoping model.

*People’s Daily* readers who had forgotten Xiaojin Zhuang received a blunt reminder with their morning paper on December 27, 1975. A front page article declared, “Everyone’s familiar with Xiaojin Zhuang, an advanced model. Many concerned people are asking, ‘What new changes have occurred in Xiaojin Zhuang?’”<sup>78</sup> The model was back with a vengeance and recovered its position as a mainstay in the pages of *People’s Daily* during 1976, the final period of primacy for Jiang Qing and her allies. Three of the year’s total of eighty-two articles that referred to the village were front page screeds dedicated to Xiaojin Zhuang residents’ criticism of Deng

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<sup>75</sup> Mao also complained to Jiang Qing, “we are lacking in poetry, novels, prose, and literary criticism.” MWG, vol. 13, 443, 446.

<sup>76</sup> Baodi qu dang’ anguan 宝坻区档案馆, *Xiaojin Zhuang “dianxing” shimo* 小靳庄“典型”始末 [Xiaojin Zhuang as a model from start to finish], (n.p., 2004), 39.

<sup>77</sup> Meisner, 401.

<sup>78</sup> RMRB, December 27, 1975, 1.

Xiaoping. Twenty-four other references to Xiaojinzhuang in 1976 mentioned the village in the context of larger articles attacking Deng and proclaiming the triumph of the Cultural Revolution over its purported enemies. Readers who may have been somewhat confused about how to react to the initial 1974 coverage of Xiaojinzhuang (Should we just write poetry? Sing more often?) could make no mistake about the model's message in 1976: criticize Deng, squash any kind of market activity or agricultural sideline, and defend the glorious fruits of the Cultural Revolution from all doubters. By this time, it was clearer than ever that Xiaojinzhuang was a political tool.

The publicity blitz elicited both positive and negative reactions. Some consumers were moved to write to the village. People from Anhui, Henan, Jiangsu, Jilin, and Liaoning wrote letters to Xiaojinzhuang accusing local cadres in their provinces of various infractions.<sup>79</sup> What kind of criticism would writers include in their correspondence to Xiaojinzhuang? They probably wrote to lament the inadequate emulation efforts of local officials back at home. This was likely a tactic to gain leverage in local power struggles by supporting what seemed to be a “Maoist” project. How better to challenge local cadres than to appeal to the mecca of rural cultural transformation itself?

Letter writing was one of the only methods for people in China to raise complaints or accuse cadres of wrongdoing during the 1970s. Similarly, an inspection tour of a model unit was one of the few chances Chinese people had to travel during the final years of the Cultural Revolution. Around 100,000 sightseers toured

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<sup>79</sup> RMRB, January 12, 1978, 3.

Xiaojinzhuang during 1975, and for many visitors the opportunity to leave home and view a rural theme park was refreshing.<sup>80</sup> Xiaojinzhuang residents working in the village's new reception office ascertained the rank and origin of each visiting group, and arranged tours accordingly.<sup>81</sup> Leading cadres at the county level or higher enjoyed special treatment, including meetings with the Xiaojinzhuang party branch and opera and poetry performances. Average tourists were treated to a simpler program: look around, watch a film, and hear a villager report on the model's achievements.<sup>82</sup> Even this abbreviated itinerary excited city visitors, including one young Tianjin student who toured Xiaojinzhuang on an elementary school field trip. After inspecting a farmer's home and attempting to plant wheat in a nearby field, the student left the village impressed by its "advanced" (*xianjin*) design and exhilarated by the opportunity to see real farm fields.<sup>83</sup> For him, the rural utopia invented by Tianjin politicians was magnificent.

Other tourists approved of Xiaojinzhuang's physical appearance. The village had become a cleaner, brighter place since Jiang Qing's visit, when one writer accompanying her remembered it as "average" (*yiban*) and "nothing special" (*meiyou shenme liaobuqi de*).<sup>84</sup> Since then, material improvements had transformed the village.

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<sup>80</sup> *Baodi xian zhi*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Ren Xizeng, 19.

<sup>82</sup> GJG:1, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Interviewee 108.

<sup>84</sup> Interview 102.

A city writer who visited Xiaojinzhuang after it became a model recalled that the village lacked the “messy” qualities he expected to see in the countryside (*meiyou luan de*), and he found the poetry performance “very simple and sincere” (*hen pushi*).<sup>85</sup> The Xiaojinzhuang theme park’s combination of rural simplicity and cleanliness catered to the tastes of city visitors. They could maintain a sense of superiority over the village’s “simple farmers,” without dealing with the odors or messiness that were part of agricultural life.

Rural visitors to Xiaojinzhuang who knew what life was really like back on the farm had a different experience. They knew that the whitewashed buildings, inevitable bumper crops, and hours of free time for cultural activities were impossible to attain without massive infusions of state resources. Going on a trip was still an adventure, but figuring out how to copy the model was vexing. One young woman from Wugong village in Hebei province visited Xiaojinzhuang as part of a cultural delegation in September 1974. Wang Zuoshan was “too busy” to receive her group, but as she listened to Wang Du’s report on Xiaojinzhuang’s poetry and singing, she fretted about how to explain its significance to her village party branch. Wugong, like other villages near Tianjin, ended up copying what it could. Political night school classes commenced, villagers wrote verses, and farmers took breaks from agricultural work to sing and listen to arias.<sup>86</sup>

Local models began to earn praise for studying Xiaojinzhuang during fall 1974.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview 109.

<sup>86</sup> Friedman, Pickowicz, and Selden, *Revolution, Resistance, and Reform*, 203-4.

Villages relatively close to Xiaojinzhuang and Tianjin were the first to receive national recognition for opening night schools, forming political theory teams, and singing opera tunes.<sup>87</sup> Later, units far from Tianjin became advanced “study Xiaojinzhuang” models.<sup>88</sup> Often the villages singled out for successfully studying Xiaojinzhuang had already received recognition for copying China’s most famous rural model, Dazhai. It bears reminding that Xiaojinzhuang itself started down the road of national fame by becoming a local advanced “study Dazhai” unit. In 1964, Mao called on the nation to emulate Dazhai’s collective agriculture and self-reliance.<sup>89</sup> Mao’s elevation of Dazhai, a brigade in Shanxi’s Xiyang county, gave the model a magic aura and it remained prominent throughout the Cultural Revolution, only to be briefly eclipsed by Xiaojinzhuang in late 1974 and again in early 1976. Was there enough room in China for two rural mega-models?

Tension between Dazhai and Xiaojinzhuang was unavoidable. After coverage of Xiaojinzhuang began to surpass that of the ballyhooed Shanxi model in the national press, a group of eight delegates from Xiaojinzhuang traveled to Dazhai. By that time,

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<sup>87</sup> See RMRB, October 13, 1974, 1, for an article on Hebei’s Xiong county, and RMRB, December 8, 1974, 1, for a mention of how Hebei’s Zhengding county managed to study both Dazhai and Xiaojinzhuang at the same time.

<sup>88</sup> Propagandists awarded this label to such places as Shendaokou brigade in coastal Shandong or an army unit in Lanzhou in an informal manner, much like Xiaojinzhuang itself rose without the benefit of official directives. RMRB, July 31, 1975, 5; RMRB, May 15, 1975.

<sup>89</sup> Tang Tsou, Marc Blecher, and Mitch Meisner, “National Agricultural Policy: The Dazhai Model and Local Change in the Post-Mao Era,” in *The Transition to Socialism in China*, ed. Mark Selden and Victor Lippit (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), 266-99.

Dazhai's famous leader Chen Yonggui was in Beijing, serving as a vice-premier. Yonggui's son Chen Mingzhu chaired a meeting with the Xiaojinzhuang delegation and introduced Wang Du, politely asking for Wang's "instructions" (*zhishi*). As Chen Mingzhu waited to see if the upstart cultural model would dare to give lessons to Dazhai, Wang Du stood up and started for the front of the room with his speaking notes. Halfway to the podium a Baodi county cadre who had accompanied the Xiaojinzhuang group pulled Wang Du aside and told him, "you can't speak." Wang Du quickly opted for modesty. He strode on stage, shook Chen Mingzhu's hand, and then returned to his seat without saying a word. Chen Mingzhu interpreted Wang Du's silence as a snub and became livid after the meeting, complaining that Wang Du looked down on Dazhai. Yet lecturing Dazhai about Xiaojinzhuang's achievements would have made Chen even angrier.<sup>90</sup>

The fallout from Wang Du's silent handshake exposed the strains between the two models. Dazhai and Xiaojinzhuang were not natural antagonists, but national politics placed them in opposition. As Edward Friedman notes, both rural models were political tools.<sup>91</sup> The bigger a national model got, the less control villagers had over their own destiny. Many of Xiaojinzhuang's poems lavishly praised its model predecessor, even after Wang Du's tense moment. However, Xiaojinzhuang's rapid rise caused friction. It was irrevocably linked to Jiang Qing, while Dazhai's message had gone through so many contortions that everyone tried to claim it as a badge of

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<sup>90</sup> Interview 104; GJG:2, 11.

<sup>91</sup> Friedman, 885.

legitimacy. In 1975, Deng Xiaoping contributed to the perception that the two model villages were combatants. When Deng criticized Xiaojinzhuang for getting rich from state funds, a charge that would have been equally valid against Dazhai, he also complained, “now it’s study ‘small’ (*Xiao*), not ‘big’ (*Da*).... Xiaojinzhuang does not study Dazhai.”<sup>92</sup> Deng, in favor of private plots and agricultural modernization, appealed to his own pro-mechanization version of Dazhai to attack Jiang Qing and belittle her “spot.” All of China’s leaders paid lip service to Dazhai, regardless of where they fell on the political spectrum.<sup>93</sup>

In the end, there was room for both Dazhai and Xiaojinzhuang only while the latter’s patron was politically strong enough to bolster her utopia. Dazhai lingered on as a catch-all rural model until 1980, but soon after Jiang Qing was arrested Xiaojinzhuang became an anti-model. Even after Xiaojinzhuang’s final fall from grace, urban politicians and propagandists refused to let go of the village and its potent symbolism. Xiaojinzhuang’s night school, once lauded as a creative fountainhead, was condemned as an institution that stifled technological innovation.<sup>94</sup> Rural opera singing and poetry writing no longer shone as cultural beacons, but were presented as obstacles to agriculture and scientific education.<sup>95</sup> Even after the tourists, journalists,

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<sup>92</sup> Xiaojinzhuang literally means “Little Jin Village;” Dazhai means “Big Stockaded Village,” RMRB, February 26, 1976, 1. Deng was blasted in 1976 for “putting the experiences of Dazhai and Xiaojinzhuang in opposition,” RMRB, August 16, 1976, 3.

<sup>93</sup> David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968-1981* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 65-69.

<sup>94</sup> RMRB, August 12, 1978, 3.

<sup>95</sup> RMRB, May 21, 1978, 1; RMRB, December 11, 1978, 3.



and poetry coaches departed, Xiaojinzhuang remained on stage as a negative example until gradually fading from public view. This was a welcome development for many residents who resented the consequences of the village's stardom. For them, the only thing worse than being denigrated during the model's high point may have been the humiliation of living in an anti-model.

However, the blessed media silence after 1978 did not signal a return to normalcy for Xiaojinzhuang's ex-stars. Former leading man Wang Zuoshan struggled to adapt to a changed script. After Jiang Qing's arrest, Wang languished in detention in Baodi for almost a full year, only leaving his cell to make appearances at criticism meetings. Festering conflict in Xiaojinzhuang contributed to Wang's woes. Because his family was relatively new in the village, he lacked the longstanding lineage ties that could have softened his fall. Leaders from the dominant lineage group reportedly heaped blame on him and protected themselves.<sup>96</sup> Wang's party membership was suspended until 1984, when a Tianjin committee restored his status. One factor the committee cited in its decision was that "he is a farmer, after all, and is uneducated" (*ta bijing shi ge nongmin, you meiyou wenhua*).<sup>97</sup> Even as the relieved Wang Zuoshan celebrated this long-awaited good news, the insults continued. Wang's humbling experience with confession and self-criticism made him an adept spinner of the last official word on Jiang Qing and Xiaojinzhuang.<sup>98</sup> "Jiang Qing was plucking peaches"

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<sup>96</sup> Interviewee 103.

<sup>97</sup> GJG:2, 6.

<sup>98</sup> In late December 1976, *People's Daily* published an article by *Tianjin Daily* editors

(*zhai taozi*), he often says, meaning that Jiang stole rural innovations and used them for her own political purposes.<sup>99</sup>

There is truth to this version of the story, but the Xiaojinzhuang model's rise and fall is too complicated to fit into a simple "plucking peaches" trope. The village was doomed by its subordinate position in a political system dominated by urban politicians. Yet villagers' adoption or rejection of the model script confirms that local agency endured. In 1999, Wang Zuoshan defended himself to a local visitor, saying that he had simply followed orders. "What they made me do, I did," he claimed; "What they made me say, I said."<sup>100</sup> Granted, Wang's position as a rural cadre pressured by Tianjin officials, coupled with his understanding of Jiang Qing as a representative of the divine Mao, put him in a difficult bind. But Wang enjoyed some tasty "peaches" too. He followed his orders with flair and was honored by appointments to the National People's Conference and Central Party Academy. Similarly, Wang Du, who now runs a chemical fertilizer factory in Baodi, retains fond memories of his stardom, and Wang Xian's 1975 trip to Japan as a representative of Xiaojinzhuang was a rare chance for a rural woman to travel outside of China.<sup>101</sup>

Tianjin leaders criticized and abandoned Xiaojinzhuang soon after Jiang Qing

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accusing Jiang Qing of "plucking peaches," RMRB, December 24, 1976. This article, along with "Jiang Qing yu Xiaojinzhuang" [Jiang Qing and Xiaojinzhuang], RMRB, January 12, 1978, 2, remain the official verdict about the village's model experience.

<sup>99</sup> Interviewee 101; Wang Yan, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Liu Bingrong, 42.

<sup>101</sup> *Baodi xian zhi*, 68.

fell, but the decollectivization and money making of the reform era also left the village behind. In October 1991, Wang Zuoshan took a bus to Daqiuzhuang, a village near Tianjin that gained notoriety in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a model of reform. The new model's enterprises had transformed it into China's richest village, and Wang took his pilgrimage in order to ask Daqiuzhuang's leader Yu Zuomin for financial support. One wonders what Wang, who was more aware than anyone of the shaky stilts on which China's model villages were built, could have been thinking as he made his appeal. Xiaojinzhuang's one small metal processing factory had failed, Wang Zuoshan explained as Yu Zuomin listened sympathetically. Yu cut Wang a check for 60,000 yuan, treated him to a banquet, and sent him home in a limousine.<sup>102</sup> Yet when Wang Zuoshan reported this development to the Baodi county party secretary, the county official, fearful of the implications of horizontal ties between individual villages, ordered that Wang return the money. Wang continued to negotiate with Daqiuzhuang and eventually succeeded in garnering financial support.

Daqiuzhuang was totally discredited in 1993, when a court sentenced Yu Zuomin to twenty years in prison for stealing state secrets, hiding criminals, and obstructing justice. Xiaojinzhuang was tainted again because of its connection to its disgraced neighbor. Today, Xiaojinzhuang seems lackluster, with no industry and many young people away in the cities laboring as second-class citizens. In some ways, Xiaojinzhuang's current situation is worse than when Tianjin leaders shaped it into a

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<sup>102</sup> Bruce Gilley, *Model Rebels: The Rise and Fall of China's Richest Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 106-7.

model during the mid-1970s. In the Cultural Revolution urban politicians shielded their anti-rural bias behind paeans to village progress, but in the new millennium overt discrimination and insults against China's villagers are in vogue among city dwellers. Today, someone like Wang Zuoshan could never rise to become a county secretary or attend the Central Party Academy. Politics and national leaders have changed, but rural China's subordination persists.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Material from Chapter 8, in part, appeared in Jeremy Brown, "Staging Xiaojinzhuang: The City in the Countryside, 1974-1976," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, ed. Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew Walder (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 153-84.

## 9. Conclusion

Over the course of my year of research in Tianjin, I gradually watched the transformation of the vacant lot outside my third-floor kitchen window. A few weeks after my arrival in fall 2004, canvas tents were erected in the lot. Migrant workers occupied the tent camp through the late fall and early winter, and as I washed my dishes in the comfort of my heated apartment, I observed the migrant men and women cooking and cleaning in the open air. The workers were gutting and renovating the empty building opposite the lot. A few days after the tents came down and the workers left, fireworks celebrated the grand opening of the Pearl of the Orient Super Karaoke Parlor. The lot was paved over and on weekend nights it filled with the cars of karaoke customers.

Whether I was staring out my kitchen window or taking extended trips to the Chinese countryside, I was forced to reflect on how much has changed since the Mao era. But my research convinced me that the roots of today's inequality between city and countryside lay in the socialist period, and even earlier. The Communists came to power in 1949 based on peasant support and with a stated goal of gradually eliminating China's rural-urban divide. But Communist officials, like everyone else in China, had come of age in a society that valued cities over villages, and where clothing, skin color, language, and food marked people as rural or urban. This legacy begins to explain why contact between city and countryside after 1949 reinforced the rural-urban divide.

During the socialist period, city people had access to economic, political, and administrative resources that reproduced and deepened preexisting power differentials between city and countryside. As urban officials removed undesirables from the city, protected city residents from famine, downsized excess factory workers, attacked rural corruption, built remote ironworks, and sponsored model villages, they drew upon, reinforced, and refashioned negative stereotypes about rural people. Ingrained notions about peasants' backwardness, corruption, ignorance and political unreliability made it possible to treat rural China as a dumping ground and a political pawn. These notions also explain why villagers were expected to bear the brunt of problems that had originated in the city, including the Great Leap famine, political outcasts and sent-down youth, disruption and pollution from transplanted factories, and power plays by city-based politicians like Chen Boda or Jiang Qing.

A continuous dichotomy between urban modernity and rural backwardness links the late imperial, Republican, socialist, and reform periods. During the late Qing and Republican eras, millions of rural people moved to modernizing cities from the troubled countryside. Even as they became permanent city residents and their shantytowns became established marginal neighborhoods, migrants' presence in cities taught urbanites how to identify and think about rural people. Urban life may have seemed depraved and alienating during the first half of the twentieth century. But encountering impoverished migrants in streets and alleyways reminded people of the material and cultural superiority of cities.

Capitalist modernization during the Republican period was replaced by socialist development after 1949. In spite of the Communists' pro-peasant rhetoric, cities were as important under the socialist planned economy as they had been earlier. As nodes of modern communication, cities became essential nerve centers for the command economy that was gradually implemented during the 1950s. For the first four years of the decade, rural people followed familiar patterns on their way to cities, finding jobs, reuniting with family members, and sojourning seasonally. During the First Five-Year Plan (which included agricultural collectivization and the nationalization of private industry) and the beginning of the Great Leap Forward, state planners attempted to control and manage rural-urban movement, but migration to cities continued to increase and was still economically driven.

The failure of the leap dramatically halted China's socialist urbanization. After 1960, there was still plenty of rural-urban contact, but people moved away from cities in a series of state-mandated political movements. Downsizing and more stringent household registration policing caused Tianjin's population to decrease each year between 1961 and 1963, again in 1965 and 1966, and also between 1968 and 1970, when urban educated youth and political outcasts were sent to the countryside. The city's total population increased slowly between 1971 and 1978, when loosened restrictions on mobility and market activity unleashed a wave of rural migrants driven, once again, by economic factors. This trend continued during the reform period, and by 2005, China's population was 43 percent urban.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 126.

Table 7. Population Moving in and out of Tianjin's Urban Districts, 1961-1979.

	Moved In	Moved Out	Net Change
1961	42,476	91,232	-48,759
1962	25,910	107,483	-81,573
1963	28,329	29,349	-1,020
1964	45,566	37,446	8,120
1965	36,814	69,616	-32,802
1966	16,116	93,741	-77,625
1967	14,270	8,572	5,698
1968	18,928	90,473	-71,545
1969	19,760	187,287	-167,527
1970	22,086	94,144	-72,058
1971	22,300	15,833	6,467
1972	32,195	17,522	14,673
1973	36,123	24,005	12,118
1974	39,197	33,847	5,350
1975	46,927	20,802	26,125
1976	29,857	21,176	8,681
1977	34,452	34,641	-189
1978	81,714	21,610	60,104
1979	143,289	34,736	108,553

Source: Tianjin shi dang'anguan, *Jindai yilai Tianjin chengshihua jin Cheng shilu*, 715.

How were rural-urban interactions during the 1961-1978 period of political out-migration from cities different from economically motivated movement before and after? The key distinction was that during the 1960s and 1970s, cities became exclusive, privileged spaces. Urban residency was a prize, while rural residency was punishment. This was not simply a question of enjoying or missing out on modern conveniences and cultural offerings (as had been the case in earlier periods). It meant the granting or denial of concrete rights and benefits, including, during the famine, the right to eat. The softer cultural aspects of rural-urban difference that had taken shape between 1900 and 1961 were hardened by a system of two-tiered citizenship, which put rural people at a huge disadvantage in interactions with urbanites. The only way



villagers could win in confrontations with urban political work teams or model-making politicians was to wait for them to leave. It was also difficult for villagers to get rid of less powerful long-term urban visitors who had been banished the countryside as punishment.

At first glance, rural-urban contact after 1978 mirrored the Republican era and the early 1950s. People left villages in large numbers, mostly for economic reasons. China seemed to be back on a capitalist path toward rural-urban difference. But the contentious interactions and structural inequalities of the 1960s and 1970s had deepened the divide and left a powerful legacy. The power imbalance of the Mao era remained, and once pro-peasant propaganda disappeared, it became acceptable to openly exploit and disparage rural people.

Rural-urban inequality in incomes, benefits, and survival chances under Mao has been reproduced and expanded in the reform period. By 1978, the gap was already quite wide: urban per capita incomes were 2.6 times higher than rural incomes (and this number does not include the non-monetary benefits of urban residency, including free or subsidized housing, food, health care, and education). In the new millennium, according to economist Barry Naughton, the rural-urban divide is “significantly wider than it was in 1978.” Urban residents now earn more than three times what rural people make.<sup>2</sup> The Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao government has taken steps to address inequality, canceling the agricultural tax and increasing investment in

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<sup>2</sup> Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 133.

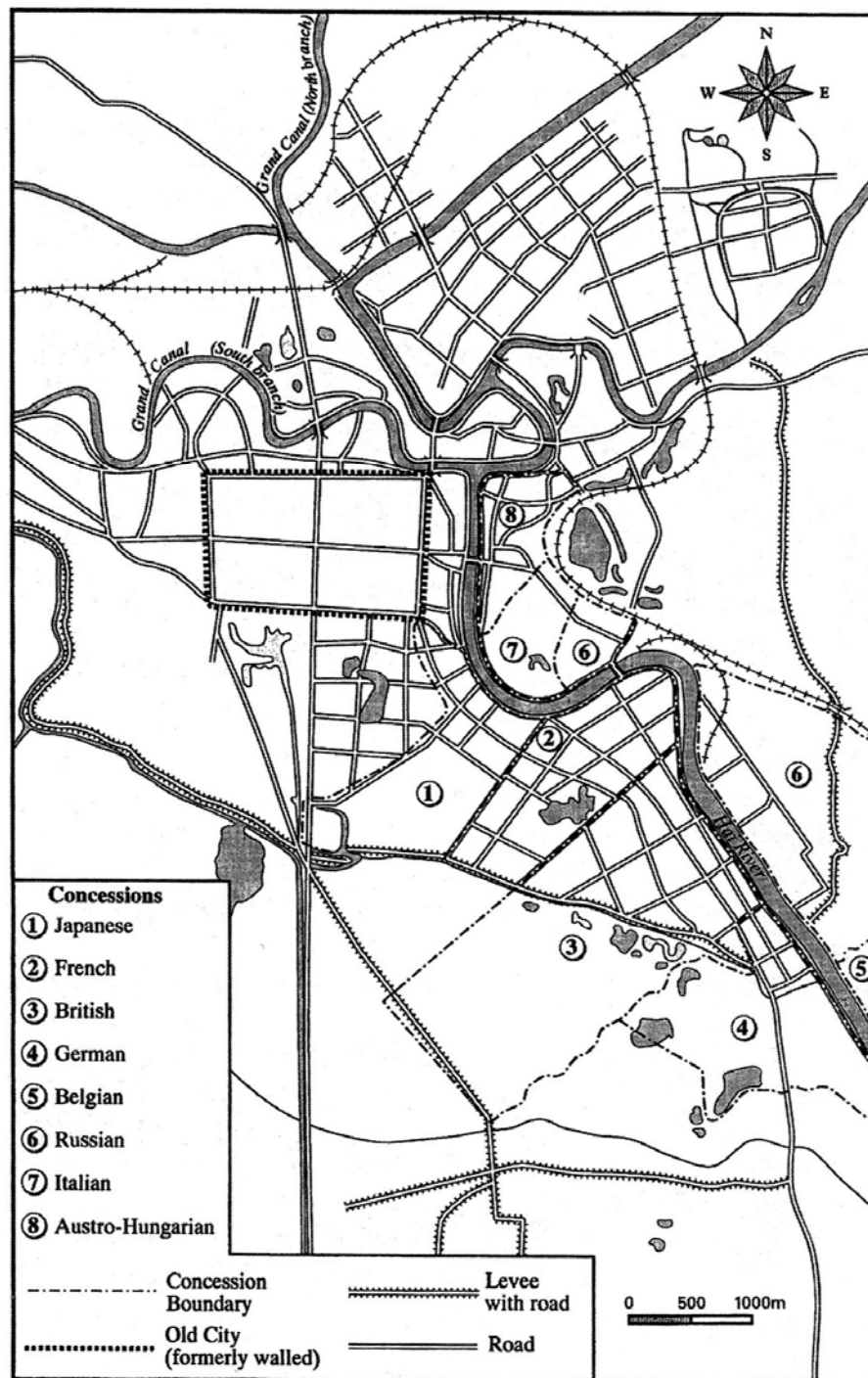
rural areas.<sup>3</sup> But villagers still lack access to health care and education.<sup>4</sup> There are new winners and losers in today's society, but the disadvantages of being born in rural China are still difficult to overcome.

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<sup>3</sup> Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 134.

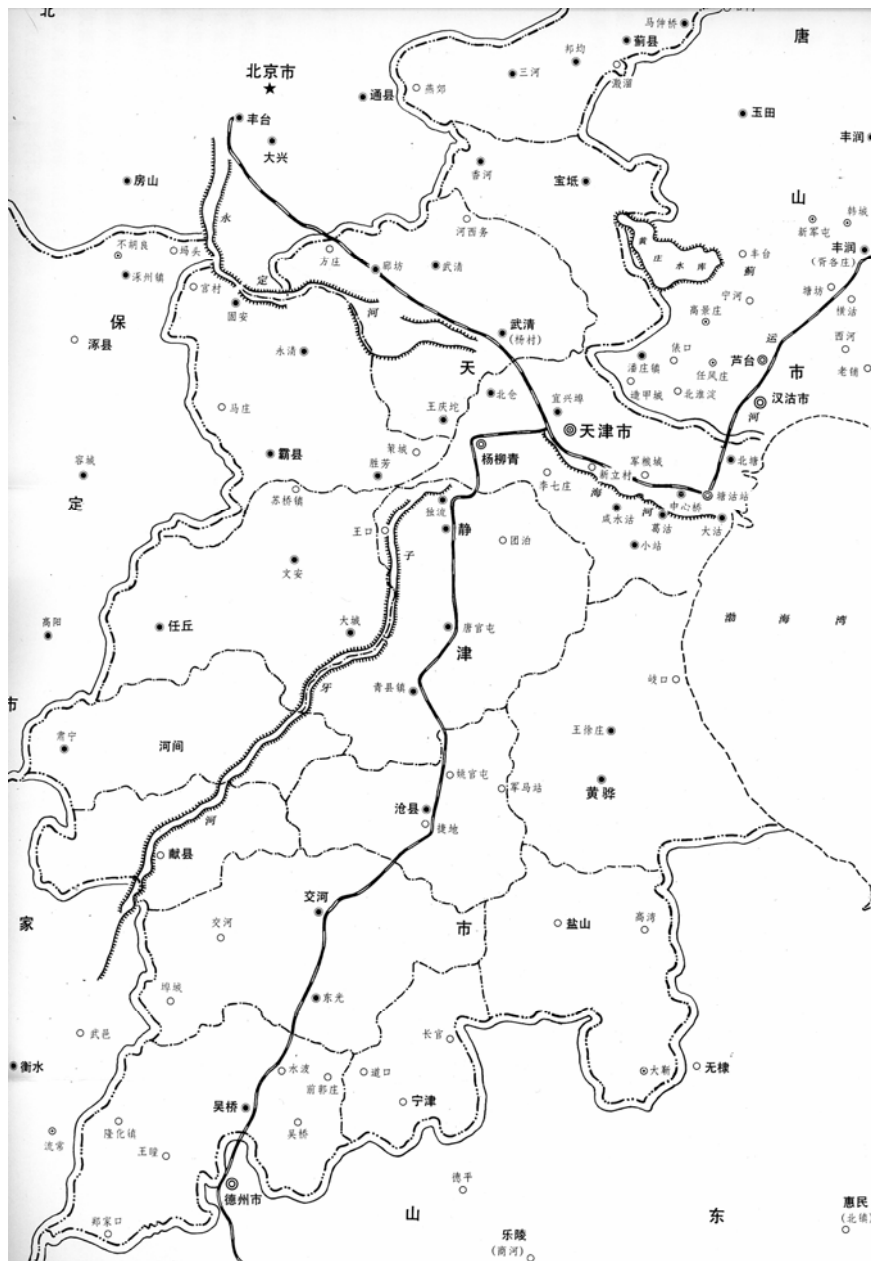
<sup>4</sup> Howard W. French, "Wealth Grows, but Health Care Withers in China," *New York Times*, January 14, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/14/international/asia/14health.html>.

Map 1. Tianjin, circa 1915, indicating foreign concessions.



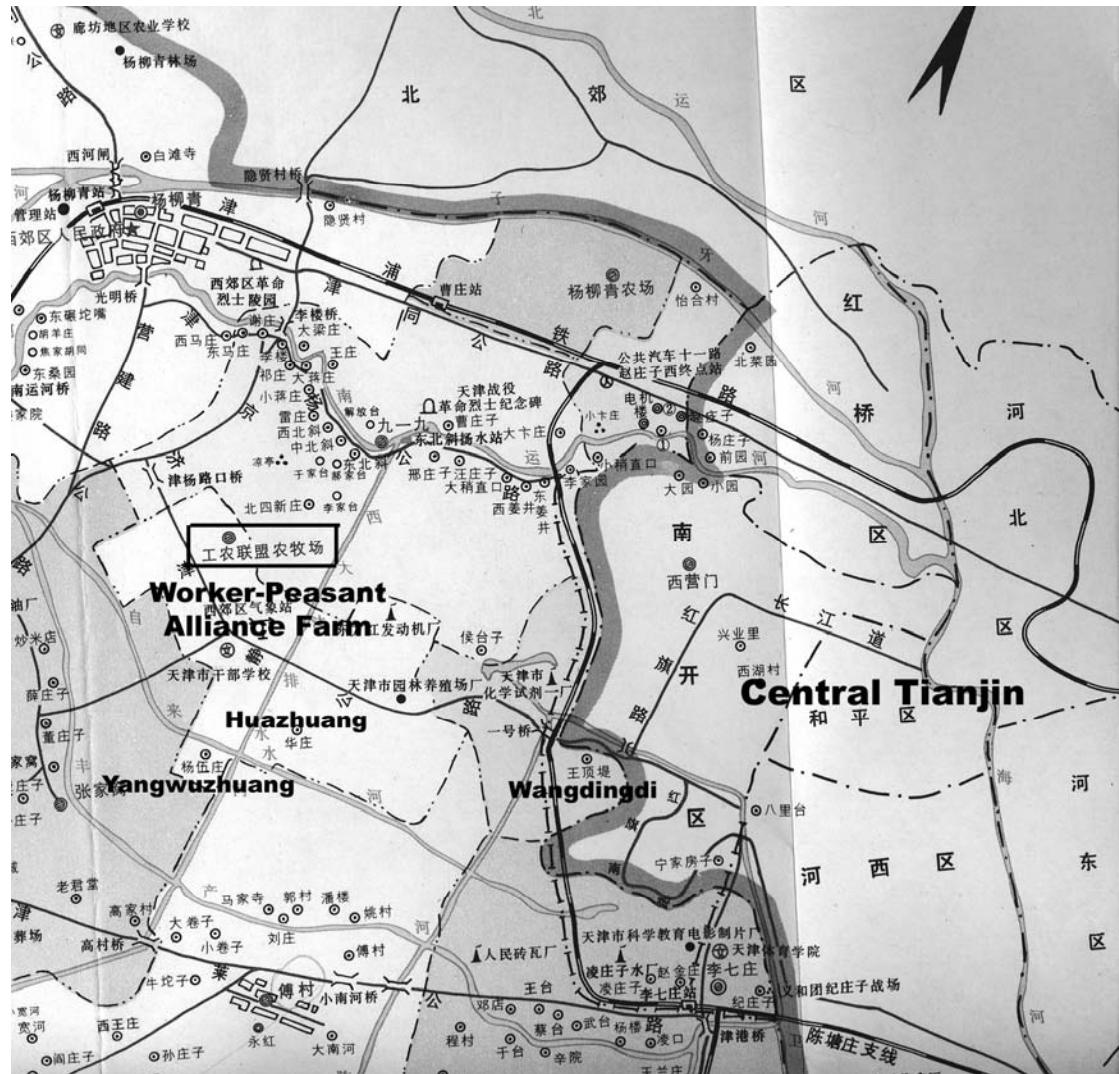
Source: Joseph Esherick, ed., *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 35.

Map 2. Tianjin municipality, 1960.



Source: Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei zuzhibu 中共天津市委组织部, Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei dangshi ziliao zhengji weiyuanhui, Tianjin shi dang'anguan, eds., *Zhongguo gongchandang Tianjin shi zuzhi shi ziliao, 1920-1987* 中国共产党天津市组织史资料 [Materials on the history of the Tianjin CCP organization, 1920-1987] (Beijing: Zhongguo chengshi chubanshe, 1991), 300-301.

Map 3. Tianjin's western suburbs, including the Worker-Peasant Alliance State Farm.



Source: Xijiao qu renmin zhengfu 西郊区人民政府, ed., *Tianjin shi Xijiaoqu diminglu* 天津市西郊区地名录 [Tianjin west suburbs directory] (Tianjin: Tianjin shi Xijiao qu renmin zhengfu, 1986).

Map 4. Part of Hebei province, including Gengle and Shexian, 1976.



Source: Hebei sheng minzheng ting 河北省民政厅, *Hebei sheng xingzheng quhua biangeng ziliao, 1949-1984* 河北省行政区划变更资料 [Changes in the administrative divisions of Hebei province, 1949-1984] (N.p., 1985), 180.

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