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# **Getting Peasants Organised: Peasants, the Communist Party and Village Organisations in Northwest China, 1934-45**

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### **Abstract**

Organising peasants was a Chinese Communist strategy for 'democratising' rural China. In the view of most western historians, the Communists' grassroots organisations have been the means through which a hegemonising Party-state penetrated rural society to an extent that no state power in China has done before.

This paper argues that, if 'democracy' is understood as community activism arising from a measure of local autonomy, there is not necessarily a contradiction between the goals of democratisation and overall state control at the national level. The paper makes a close study of the Communists' rural organisational work in northwest China in the early 1940s for the purpose of demonstrating the dynamic interplay between the two goals. And it draws three broad conclusions: first, that getting peasants organised was very difficult, and many of the early grassroots organisations failed; second, that local conditions largely determined whether village democracy ever made it to the starter's block; and third, that farmer mutual-aid teams in districts close to Yan'an city serve as the best examples of the autonomy-control dynamic at work.

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### **Introduction**

The Chinese Communists' 'central' base area, Shaan Gan Ning, [1] gave birth to the Yan'an tradition, the 'Yan'an Way' myth and an entire field of studies dubbed by Gregor Benton as "Yan'anology". [2] Over the last 20 years or so, the basic premises underpinning 'Yan'anology' have been progressively undermined by research on the Chinese Communist Party's other base areas. The new studies show that Shaan Gan Ning was far from typical of the Party's wartime bases, that the 'Yan'an Way' is an idiosyncratic Maoist construction, and a construction that is highly contestable.

But it is not only the histories of the other base areas that are deconstructing the 'Yan'an Way' legend. The newly available archival materials that generate those histories also make possible a much closer, more critical study of the Shaan Gan Ning base itself. Such a study exposes differences, dualities, multiple meanings and paradoxes within an experience that only later became generalised as 'the way'. In other words, close study of the 'atypical' Shaan Gan Ning base can make important contributions to a project that is demonstrating the enormous variety, variability and range of social and political processes within the Communist revolution during its formative period. This paper aims to explore some of the different processes that impelled and shaped the Party's grassroots organisational work. And it will demonstrate variety and difference in social and political outcomes by focussing quite narrowly on just two subregions within the Shaan Gan Ning border region.

The centrality of organisation-building within the Communist movement is indisputable; it was fundamental to the mobilisation and reconstruction project of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in all places and in all periods. [3] That the Communists

succeeded organisationally where other rural reformers and state-strengtheners failed is also broadly conceded. Given the importance, therefore, of the Party's organisational initiatives, it is surprising that relatively little attention has been given to the actual processes and the chequered progress of grassroots organisation-building in the Communist bases. By demonstrating the experimental, fluid and incremental nature of the CCP's organisation work in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region during the resistance war, I aim to show that meanings also were fluid in this period, and that achievements were mixed.

Debates over the meaning of the Communists' organisational achievements tend to polarise around the 'statism' and 'populism' extremes. The CCP's organising has been seen either as a top-down and hegemonising process that achieved unprecedented state penetration of the villages, or as popular mobilisation premised on broad-based voluntary participation and the principle of democratic management.[4] In the argument here, statism and populism are not mutually exclusive; we find in the base areas' grassroots organisations a mix of the two that varies according to politico-military and ecological contexts. Furthermore, the statism-populism continuum does not accommodate the full range of meanings we can give to the new village organisations built by the Communists. Like most other areas of the CCP's rural reconstruction project, organisational work was restorative at least as much as it was innovative. While acknowledging, therefore, the importance of imported Leninist, anarchist and 'democratic' organisational models, the Communists' organisational initiatives need also to be understood in terms of continuities with China's own socio-political traditions, including the self-strengthening tradition that took root in the late imperial period.

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### Organisation and Nation-building

Many of China's pioneering nationalists saw social mobilisation and, by corollary, organisation as fundamental to the process of nation-building. Sun Yat-sen used his "loose sheet of sand" metaphor to lament a lack of cohesion within the Chinese body politic and to argue for a mobilisation that would bond local communities, cementing them into a nation-wide web of self-governing administrative units. Local self-government advocates such as Sun defended their argument for the priority of grassroots democratic construction, and against a centralising top-down approach, by pointing to established self-help organisations and self-governing traditions in the localities.[5] Even if their argument is somewhat undermined by reference to *baojia* and *lijia* organs – the traditional local security system – as evidence of the self-governing capacity of village China, their commitment to the idea that a democratic nation required a bedrock of thousands of "units of popular sovereignty" was genuine.[6] For most of his revolutionary career, Sun Yat-sen insisted that the establishment of a national parliament needed to await the development of democratic governments in the localities.

Of course, for all reformers in the self-strengthening tradition, grassroots democracy and local autonomy were means to the end of state-strengthening; any loosening of state control in the localities was for the immediate purpose of strengthening it. As Philip Kuhn has demonstrated, this puts the local self-government movement squarely within China's *fengjian* (or feudalist) tradition of statecraft,[7] a basic tenet of which was the "fundamental compatibility of particular interests and the general good".[8] In the arguments of feudalist reformers such as Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) and Feng Guifen (1809-1874), effective central government depended on effective local government, and that in turn depended on an accommodation of the enlightened self-interest of local activists.

As the Qing dynasty crumbled in the late nineteenth century and pressure for political and economic modernisation mounted, the need to channel local energies into national causes became particularly urgent. That need, and the manifest inadequacies of local governments in terms of both autonomy and control objectives, explains how popular mobilisation came to be injected into the autonomy-control dynamic. The proponents of local self-government in the late Qing and early Republican period were, says Kuhn, arguing for a mobilisation that would stimulate individuals and organisations "to higher levels of activity in their own spheres of life and yet be more amenable than before to the

interests of the larger society".[9] No longer was it good enough to have at the centre a minimalist state that let local people do some things for themselves. Mobilisation required that the state be more in touch with the localities and that local people be more concerned about national problems; it entailed the use of new techniques, including new technologies, that would both stimulate and discipline local energies to serve economic development and central state-strengthening.[10]

The mobilising focus of the local self-government theorists was local elites, not the common folk. That applied even to sometime populists such as Sun Yat-sen. As Robert Scalapino and George Yu aptly put it, the masses were treated by people such as Sun as "a chessboard on which the political game was played rather than as players of the game itself".[11] Elitism among reformers, and the essential political impotence of the local self-government programme in the context of dynastic collapse, half-baked or phoney republicanism and endemic warlordism, meant that there was never any kind of popular mobilisation for nation-building in the localities before 1937. Indeed, as Prasenjit Duara has so effectively demonstrated, the early twentieth century modernising reforms that were premised on community resourcefulness (that is, funding) actually had the effect of destroying the organisational integrity and self-governing capacities of local communities.[12] In the north China villages he studied, Duara found that state expansion, beginning with the New Policy reforms in 1901, set in motion the processes that quite quickly tore apart "the nexus of interests linking elites with the power structures of local communities", [13] leaving villages exposed and defenceless against a depredatory state and rendering the state illegitimate in the eyes of rural folk. The proliferation at sub-county level of "local bullies", a phenomenon noted in all close studies of this period, was both a cause and a consequence of the atomisation of local communities; and it probably constituted the single most important obstacle to a social mobilisation that could bring together the centre and the localities for nation-building.

State-making in the form of top-down and "involutionary" bureaucratisation,[14] deepening bureaucratic penetration of local communities, and increasingly extortionate revenue exactions by self-serving state-brokers, all served to fan the flames of an anti-bureaucratic 'populism' among social reformers of the May Fourth period.[15] This populism had solid roots in the traditional feudalist hostility to assertive centralism, but it was now also fed by new currents of thought that yeasted the May Fourth intellectual ferment, particularly anarchist ideas of mutual assistance within voluntary associations and a social reorganisation (revolution) premised on small groups. The May Fourth radicals who became Marxists were, in Arif Dirlik's argument, people who had despaired of effecting change through peaceful anarchist means but who carried with them into the Communist movement the anarchist vision of the good society — a radical democracy built from the bottom up through the agency of small groups and based on cooperative self-help.[16]

Its anarchist gloss notwithstanding, that vision was still, at base, constructed from a feudalist-type critique of the 'old society', a critique that had wide currency among New Culture radicals.[17] In other words, the vision was in the first place the product of a Chinese heritage and experience, and imported ideas played only a secondary role in its construction. Moreover, despite the disagreement over the means of realising the vision, it is fair to say that there was a broad commitment among May Fourth reformers (including the lapsed anarchists) to a 'national salvation' that required state-strengthening. For modernisers in the feudalist mould, the processes of modern state-building and of a mobilisational grassroots democratisation were, by definition, inextricably linked.

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### **The Communists and Organisation-building**

The Communists' organisational work in their rural bases during the 1930s and 1940s expressed in varying degrees the state-strengthening nationalism and anarcho-populist radicalism of the May Fourth period. That is, grassroots organisation-building constituted for the Communist reformers the essential foundation of nation-building. As did the local self-government advocates, they believed that local communities would be most effectively mobilised for the construction of a 'new China' when particular (local) interests

converged with common (national) interests. They understood that mobilisation would be most effective when 'the masses' had been organised into small groups, and that those groups would need to be solidified by habits of cooperative self-help and democratic management. Particularly important was the educational function of the small group. 'Mass education' was a central concern of most rural reformers in the Republican period, but it became a matter of urgency for nation-builders who needed to make 'self-interest' converge with the 'common good' in order to achieve a channelling of local energies into national projects. Only when the bond between localities and the centre was harmonious and very strong was it possible to nurture self-government capabilities in the localities.

The Communists' dream of reintegrating rural China's atomised populations into organic communities, constituted as federations of small groups, is in many ways similar to Liang Shuming's rural reconstruction vision. Liang made a reformed version of the eleventh century village covenant serve as the organisational basis of his programme. Liang's village covenant, says Guy Alitto, was to be formed "not by bureaucratic fiat but by moral suasion and local initiative. Through 'positive, activist' organisation of enthusiastic mass participation, it would 'build up the power of the peasantry'".<sup>[18]</sup> Communist Party organisers in the villages frequently made explicit use of village covenant-type rituals to solemnise and give moral meanings to Party-sponsored village or group projects. More important than that, however, was the implicit endorsement of basic village covenant values. Underlying much of the Party's community-building work was the original village covenant ideal of an autonomous, mutual-aid collectivity that had responsibility for community activities such as dispute mediation, local defence, famine insurance and poor relief, sanitation work and health care. Both the Communists and Liang Shuming expanded the range of community activities in which community members were morally bound to participate; the inclusion of popular education and economic initiatives in particular constituted a 'modernising' of the village covenant. But the traditional goal, that of nurturing a local autonomy that would give sustenance to the body politic as a whole, persisted in most twentieth century revivals of the village covenant idea.

The important differences between Liang Shuming's approach to rural reconstruction and that of the Communists are well documented; for our purposes the most important was the Communists' commitment to class warfare and Liang's vehement rejection of the entire Marxian theory of class.<sup>[19]</sup> His refusal to admit the necessity of bloody class struggle against "current power-holders" is, suggests Alitto, "the nub of the question of Liang's ultimate failure".<sup>[20]</sup> The Communists, for their part, eventually succeeded in breaking the power of the "local bullies and evil tyrants", that category of sub-county "entrepreneurial state-brokers" (Duara' term) that neither the Nationalist Party nor any of the warlord regimes were able to shackle and that confounded all non-Communist rural reformers. The imported class struggle strategy, therefore, lay at the heart of the CCP' state-making success; and, of course, organised class struggle was a major feature of its organisational work in the villages.

Liang Shuming made telling points when he deplored the destructiveness, the institutionalisation of violence and the social divisiveness that resulted from the fomentation of class conflict; rather than build communities it destroyed them.<sup>[21]</sup> Scholars who analyse the Communist movement have also noted the damaging legacies, both short and long term, of the class struggle phases of the Communists' revolution-making.<sup>[22]</sup> I will take up this issue when examining the Party's community-building work in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region. The key questions are whether or not the Party found ways of resolving the tension between class struggle and consensus-building, and how far the stoking of social conflict inhibited the progress of village reconstruction.

The class struggle issue illustrates a more general point: that the grassroots organisations built by the Communists were designed for a range of purposes, and that some of those purposes were potentially in conflict. Analytical light is, I suggest, brought to the problem by delineating three broad approaches to organisation-building within the Communist movement. One organisational mode was unambiguously 'Leninist'; to this category belongs the construction of the Party 'machine' and hierarchical monolith, the base of which was formed by CCP cells in the villages. A second type of organisation can be described as 'mobilisational'; I apply this term to the organisations that were established for specific, often temporary or one-off, tasks and for which a mass

concerted effort was usually needed. Third, there were the organisations that formed the infrastructure of reconstructed village communities and that combined the old village covenant ideal of self-help autonomy with the modernising ideals of economic growth and nation-building. These, in other words, were 'community development' organs and, as such, are the primary focus of this study.

There was, of course, a close relationship between the three approaches. In the Party's view, nothing was possible without first building a vanguard party; the success of all other organisational work was contingent on Party hegemony and effective Party leadership. And so the formation of CCP cells in the villages almost always constituted the first phase of reconstruction work in any one district (and often well before military control of the district had been secured). But because it was so important that Party activists at village level were trusted community leaders, the distinction between the Leninist Party and community organs could become blurred. This was particularly the case in places where, following Kuhn's reasoning, an autonomy-control dynamic worked to serve both local community and Party-state. Second, it is often difficult to distinguish in practice between the 'mobilisational' organs and those I call 'community development' organs. The former were invariably expected to perform the functions of the latter, particularly in guerilla zones and insecure areas where mobilisational alertness among all villagers was necessary for village security. Community organisations designed for local self-government and economic development were to a large extent confined to well consolidated, secure regions that were distant from the war zones. These organisations, however, were usually asked to maintain a mobilisational readiness for emergency or special government projects. That, and the need for tight leadership in tense situations, meant that the Leninist top-down approach infused almost all of the CCP's organisational work at one time or another.

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### Grassroots Organising in Shaan Gan Ning

The Shaan Gan Ning Border Region, because it was relatively secure and well consolidated by 1940, provides rich material for a study of the CCP's organisational project, and particularly the range of meanings embodied in that project. As a militarily secure region, the opportunities there for community building and development were better than in most of the rear-area bases. In fact, the opportunities were exceptional in the wasteland districts that surrounded the regional capital, Yan'an.[\[23\]](#)

The Communists repopulated these districts through a planned migration and migrant resettlement programme that largely entailed getting people in densely populated Suide districts to move south to Yanshu. (A tradition of migratory movement between north and south Shaanbei helped to smooth that passageway.) Southward migrations during the war years often resulted in the doubling or trebling of village populations in Yanshu. And while the managed programme under the Communists might sometimes have dismantled village communities in Suide, it was of its essence a community-building project in the wasteland districts. Wartime reconstruction work in Yanshu can be seen as rooted in the tradition of imperial restorations, a tradition that included elimination of the regime's opponents, the rehabilitation of family life, and a benevolent government's paternalistic concern for the 'people's livelihood'.[\[24\]](#) The Communists, of course, went much further than restoration. In particular, their attempt to infuse their reconstruction project with democratising and developmental meanings was a significant break with the past.

Shaan Gan Ning was exceptional both ecologically and in politico-military terms, and we cannot therefore draw from its history conclusions that are generally applicable to the Communist movement as a whole. In fact, from no one base area can such generalisations be drawn. This point becomes more and more self-evident as new research on the Party's base areas reveals the immense variety and geographical specificity of much of the Party's revolution-making in the 1930s and '40s.[\[25\]](#) Even within the Shaan Gan Ning boundaries there was considerable variety, ecological and socio-political. There is a striking contrast, for example, between rural social structures in the wasteland districts of the Yanshu subregion and those in the densely populated, land-scarce Suide subregion in the far north of Shaanxi province, and this significant

difference is reflected in the grassroots organisational work directed from Yan'an by the Party's Northwest Bureau.[26] By examining the organisational history of the Communist movement in the two subregions, Yanshu and Suide, I aim to demonstrate that the Party's grassroots organisations in the Yan'an period expressed a range of different meanings. More broadly, my point is that the Communist Party, in this period at least, was not a monolith, that within the still youthful Communist movement in the 1940s we find a range of different potentials. A hybrid, multi-layered vision enacted in different settings will, of necessity, produce different outcomes.

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### **The Early Period, 1934-1939**

Before the Nationalist government conceded the CCP's right to administer Shaan Gan Ning as a "special zone" in 1937, the Communists' hold on territory in the region was fairly tenuous.[27] Liu Zhidan's movement in the Yanshu bandit 'badlands' was largely military in nature. To the north, in the Suide area, educated youths did undertake grassroots Party-building but, as Joseph Esherick points out, the Suide movement was decimated by government forces in 1935 precisely because it lacked military muscle.[28] The convergence of Long March units in North Shaanxi (Shaanbei) in late 1935 certainly strengthened the northwest Communist movement, but it was now subjected to what Chiang Kaishek hoped would be a last and decisive extermination campaign. Communist victories during the 1936 northwest civil war enlarged the area in which land distributions could be effected, but the strengthening push within the Communist Party through 1936 for a United Front deal with the Nationalists was accompanied by a progressive pegging back of the land reform programme.[29] Confiscations were formally halted in January 1937.

The early history of organisation-building in the Shaan Gan Ning region was shaped by the manner in which the region was created, but also by local ecologies. Before Communist rule, the small population of the Yanshu wastelands consisted, in the main, of gangs of bandits, small clusters of farming and shepherd families, and a few "big landlords" who managed huge estates. There were vast tracts of land, much of it arable or semi-arable wasteland, to which absentee owners held title, and tiny hamlets were thinly scattered across a forbiddingly inhospitable hill country. Once the military opposition to the Communists in this area was destroyed, land reform in many places was a relatively simple matter of divvying up the property of absentee estate owners and "local tyrants" (most of whom had fled the area). If peasant associations were established to administer the land reform, they did not last long. Where there was plenty of land and no concerted "landlord class" opposition to redistributions, there was no need to keep peasant-class anger on the boil. And even where peasant associations did have a role to play (in, for example, more closely settled areas with sizeable tenant-farmer populations), the Party Centre's waning enthusiasm for land reform through 1936 resulted in a fairly quick withering of the organisations that had been formed to prepare for and administer land reform.

In the Suide counties, where landlordism was exceptionally strong, there was a voracious land hunger among large populations of extremely poor farmers. Here, therefore, the organisation of the poor to secure and defend land distributions was critical for the success of land reform. But the Communists failed to hold the Suide area after 1936, and it took three years of "tussles" with He Shaonan, the Nationalist Party's "special commissioner" in Suide city, before five Suide counties were, in early 1940, incorporated into Shaan Gan Ning as the region's fifth subregion. Most land reform implemented in the area before 1937 was overturned during the period of He Shaonan's three-year tenure; there is no evidence that peasant associations formed in the early period survived the 1937-1940 "counter-revolution". Moreover, because conciliation and co-option of Suide's influential elites was, in 1940, the Party Centre's first concern, all reconstruction emphasis was on "class unity"; there was hardly any mention of "class struggle" in the first couple of years of CCP rule in Suide. As in Yanshu in 1936-37, the building of class-based organisations was inappropriate when United Front needs had priority.

Official Party pronouncements during the late 1930s declared that the multi-class "mass association" was the grassroots organisational form that would best serve the United

Front and, therefore, the resistance. Essentially the same organisational formula was to be applied in all of the Party's bases. Within a broadly inclusive "national salvation movement" (only traitors and "collaborationist gangsters" were to be excluded), the masses were to be divided into groups according to criteria such as occupation, age, gender and specific activities. A 1938 report on the mass movement in Shaan Gan Ning discusses in some detail the four most commonly promoted categories of mass associations – groupings of workers, youth, self-defence units and women – but also lists categories such as "merchant salvation associations", peasant associations, and groupings of people with interests in education, theatre, "research", and the arts and literature.[30] Any one person, said the author, could belong to more than one association, and there were instances of people belonging to three or four. The "concrete tasks" of the mass associations included the healing of civil war antagonisms, energising the resistance effort, civilian defence training, anti-traitor work, the democratisation of organisational work (a result of which should have been an improvement in the quality of individual contributions),[31] educational work (including literacy education) that would raise the masses' "national consciousness", and a stepped-up production effort.[32] These tasks were all to serve the basic and overriding goal of "resistance mobilisation"; the better the masses were organised, the more powerful the mobilisation.

There is little evidence to show that many of the United Front mass associations in Shaan Gan Ning, particularly those in the villages, developed much further than the listing of memberships and the convening of a few meetings during the early war years. Indeed, the Party's own rectification critiques in 1942 confirm that a lot of organisational work up to that time had been very hollow.[33] The mass associations, we are told, were all form and no content; they were top heavy,[34] membership rolls were bloated, most members were "inactive", bureaucratism suffused the associations, the organisers were regarded by the people as "state officials" and the associations, as a consequence, were unpopular.[35] Of course, there was less incentive in unoccupied Shaan Gan Ning than in the rear-area bases to mobilise for resistance to Japan, and that partly explains the lacklustre life of the mass associations there. But the organisational problems identified in the 1942 critiques of the associations characterised almost all mobilisation work in Shaanbei during the first five years of Party government in the region. Take, for example, the 1939 production movement.

The first purpose of the spring 1939 production drive was to speed up wasteland reclamation. A closely related aim was institutional self-sufficiency. In other words, soldiers garrisoned in the region and staff members of schools and government offices were to grow their own food; wasteland reclamation work gave each garrison and work unit its own farmland. Soldiers in 1939 usually did their own picking, clearing and ploughing work, but it is unlikely that the office workers and teachers did much, if any, of the heavy clearing and digging. In fact, the CCP press made an issue of the mass mobilisation that resulted in the reclamation of more than one million *mu* of land by the end of 1939.[36] In other words, county and district officials had the job of 'mobilising' local people to clear and plough the fields that were to serve as state-owned cropland, and one report claims that 249,163 men, women and children in 19 counties were organised for the task.[37]

The same report tries to suggest that the mobilisation was driven in large part by voluntary mutual-aid associations. We are told, for example, that 89,982 men joined mutual-aid teams in 1939, and the total membership of women's production groups and children's odd-job teams that year was 84,334.[38] These figures exceed those for 1944 when the farming cooperative movement was at its peak and when the large Suide population was included in the count;[39] they are, therefore, almost certainly false. So too is the suggestion that participation was voluntary. Some of the reclamation work was done by the so-called "public welfare farming teams" – labour gangs organised to tend the land of soldier-families, and corvée gangs by another name. Most of the work was done by "reclamation teams" – gangs specially formed by local government officials in 1939 for that year's main campaign. Organised at township level at the direction of county governments, these teams did not pretend to be other than corvée labour brigades. The mobilisation took the form of setting targets for each county by Yan'an officials, and the waging of inter-county reclamation "competitions". Ten out of the 19 counties reported that their targets had been exceeded. Five of these were in the Yanshu

subregion, and both Yan'an and Yanchuan counties claimed to have exceeded their targets by 200%.[\[40\]](#)

Inter-group "competitions" were a mobilisational device that came to be increasingly used by Communist organisers and, particularly during the big production drive of 1943-44, to useful effect. We cannot but be sceptical, however, about the rallying power of 'county pride' in the context of 1939 Shaanbei, particularly within a mobilisation that pulled farmers off their own land to clear land for other people's use. That the 1939 reclamation campaign was a military-type operation and made heavy demands on rural people is reflected in a growing and publicly expressed concern among Party strategists about the damage done to government authority and prestige when large numbers of people were press-ganged into labour brigades for the opening of public land, especially during the spring ploughing season when their labour was urgently needed at home.

The history of rural cooperatives in Shaan Gan Ning serves as another illustration of the incautious and false moves made by the Communists in the area of popular organisation during the early resistance period. The Party's cooperative movement embraced both cooperative societies [*hezuoshe*] and labour mutual-aid teams [*laodong huzhuzu*]. Ideally, the two were to be organisationally linked as comprehensive cooperatives [*zongxing hezuoshe*]. Even after rectification in 1942, however, the societies and teams remained quite separate organisations.

We have little detailed information about the region's cooperative farmwork teams before 1943. From what we know, however, of the big township-based mutual-aid brigades in the Jiangxi Soviet,[\[41\]](#) and the 1939 reclamation work musters, we can deduce that most labour teams organised by Shaan Gan Ning CCP mobilisers were pro-forma, large, regimented and not very popular. The CCP press, in May 1942, made a negative example of that year's springtime conscription of 5,000 labourers, organised into "mutual-aid teams", to open up 80,000 *mu* of wasteland.[\[42\]](#) The use of "shock troops" for reclamation work, said the *Liberation Daily* report, had given people "a distaste of collective labour"; furthermore, while farmers were working in teams to clear wasteland, their own land fell to waste.[\[43\]](#) Rectification strategists now demanded that there be no more mustering of farmers into large teams; popular teams, they said, could not be created by "administrative decree".[\[44</\]](#)

The Shaan Gan Ning organisations that called themselves cooperative societies were, for a wide range of reasons, under 'populist' attack as early as 1939. A very common complaint was that the bulk of the societies were not cooperatives at all but, rather, private businesses, "state shops", or worse – the "private temples" of government cadres.[\[45\]](#) 'Investment' in the district or township cooperative was very commonly collected from households as a compulsory levy and was resented, therefore, as a tax. Popular resentment was compounded by the failure of the so-called cooperatives to pay dividends to "shareholders", by cadre corruption (in the form, especially, of speculation and pilfering) and by the basic "bureaucratic stink" of the societies.[\[46\]](#)

The cooperative organisation of a farming community's various economic activities appealed to the Communist reformers as an ideal solution to a number of logistical problems, and also as a means of nurturing self-management capabilities among village folk. But this required a radical overhaul of the cooperative societies that had been established since the mid-1930s, and along lines that would devolve management downwards, reorient them towards production work and away from retailing, that would ruralise, democratise and popularise them. Such an overhaul was not attempted until 1942, and was never to be very successful.

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### The Middle Period, 1940-1942

1942 was a major turning point organisationally for the Communists, just as it was a turning point in other aspects of Party life. But the testing of new organisational forms began well before rectification. For the 1940-42 period, we have evidence of trials, errors and progress in some important areas of mobilisational work. I will focus here on two: the migration programme and tax collection.



### *The Migration Programme*

More than one quarter of a million people migrated into Shaan Gan Ning's four underpopulated subregions between 1937 and 1943; probably about 40,000 of that number were from the crowded Suide area, the great majority making the move while the area was still under Nationalist Party control;<sup>[47]</sup> the rest came from war and famine zones to the south and east of the Border Region. Apart from the resettlement of army veterans and their families, there was little formal government planning or supervision of the migrations in the early years. Anything that could be called a migration programme before 1940 seems to have been premised on the hope that kinsfolk and hometown contacts would provide resettlement aid to the newcomers; the government provided aid from welfare relief funds mainly to people who had nowhere else to turn. Then, in 1939-40, the region's rapidly escalating economic crisis began forcing the Yan'an government to slash its welfare budget.

In early 1940, five Suide counties were absorbed into Shaan Gan Ning, making feasible the organisation of controlled and planned migrations from Shaanbei's crowded north to the Yanshu and Guanzhong wasteland districts. The problem for the financially straitened Yan'an government was how to fund such an operation. Squeezing local residents to 'donate' food and equipment to immigrants was one strategy it used. More successful in the long run, however, were the measures taken to free up the labour and land-tenancy markets, enabling new settlers to find employment as labourers or tenant farmers. This strategy, combined with droplets of state aid, made it possible for migrant farmers to become independent owner-cultivators within two or three years.

The government's method of issuing farm loans was shrewd. To qualify for a loan with which to buy the necessary tools and draught animals for his farm, the borrower had to find guarantors who would form a "loan group" with him; the loan group had to consist of no less than five households (the minimum group size was dropped to three households in 1943).<sup>[48]</sup> This was more than a loan insurance system, because all members of the loan group were expected to coordinate their farming and to work cooperatively. In fact, mutual aid between the families became one of the loan conditions in 1943.<sup>[49]</sup> In any case, the loans issued were often so small that the borrowers had no choice but to enter into cooperative arrangements with their neighbours. By pooling their resources, new settlers had a much better chance of making a go of farming than if they worked alone. In Yanshu's wasteland districts, mutual-aid teamwork among migrant farmers constituted the backbone in those districts of the cooperative farming movement which took off region-wide in 1943.

The stoking of self-help resourcefulness proved to be a particularly effective migrant resettlement strategy, and it came to typify the CCP's migrant work in many of the Yanshu and Guanzhong wasteland districts. For our purposes, it serves as an example of an approach to grassroots organising that breaks with the top-down mustering approach that characterised much of the Communists' mobilisational work in Shaan Gan Ning's early years. Migrant mobilisations in Yanshu entailed steering newcomers towards villages in which they had kinsfolk or friends, the supervision from a distance of their employment and tenancy contracts, and the provision of financial aid that was so paltry that new settlers were forced to rely on each other. This kind of 'bottom up' community-building produced the most striking examples of new communities in Shaan Gan Ning. In the Yanshu wasteland districts during the resistance war, tiny, isolated and miserably poor hamlets progressively grew into prospering, diversified communities as a result of the arrival each year of two or three immigrant families, usually from Suide.<sup>[50]</sup>

Needless to say, a 'soft' approach did not characterise all of the Party's migrant resettlement work. Recent migrants were most likely to be conscripted into big land-clearing gangs; well over half of Yan'an county's 80,000 *mu* reclaimed land in 1942 was cleared by migrant labourers, for example.<sup>[51]</sup> Much of the boasted "public sector self-sufficiency" can be attributed to the hard work of migrant labourers. Government offices and schools, like private employers, were allowed to "exploit a little" the destitute newcomer who needed food and shelter while he dug his wasteland allotment; a sharecropping tenancy for a year or two could give him the leg-up he needed, but it also

meant that government cadres-cum-rentiers were relieved of the burden of farmwork, and at a cheap price.

We see mobilisational heavy-handedness particularly at the Suide end, however. Organisers there typically drew from the Party's "mass mobilisation" repertoire when organising the outward migrations that began in 1942. In the new subregion, the target of 5,000 south-bound migrants per year was, like the grain tax targets, broken down into county, and then district, township and village quotas. In at least some instances, the district official appointed to migration work was head of the district's grain tax team.[52] A Jia County report in May 1943 ingenuously boasted that in districts where propaganda work was effective, up to half of the Jia people who travelled south that year did so willingly.[53] So strong was the popular resistance to the mobilisers that there was official sanction in some places for the rounding up of vagrants for deportation south, a practice that, needless to say, did not please resettlement officials in Yanshu.[1] There was criticism in 1944 of cadres who were concerned only "to get the job done" and who, by resorting to the mustering of riff-raff into the groups travelling south, were giving the migration programme a bad name.[55]

The Suide subregion, strife-riven and with large populations of extremely poor people, was a particularly difficult place to administer and was always to be subject to strong Party-government interventions. The official migration programme in Suide, begun after the spontaneous migrations had petered out,[56] was essentially a population culling project and inevitably provoked popular resistance; it is significant that the target of 5,000 migrants out of Suide per year was not once achieved in the 1942-45 period. In Yanshu, by contrast, inward migrations became what was, in large part, a community-building project; migrations into the subregion from the mid 1930s to 1944 came close to doubling its small population,[57<] with the new settlers making a very significant difference to the economies of the areas in which they built their farm businesses. The Party-government intervened in ways that speeded up farm building and turned migrants into owner-cultivators, enabling them to put down roots in new homes, but it also kept its distance when that served the same ends. At work here was the time-honoured restorationist approach to rural reconstruction, oiled by a close convergence of state and local interests. The restorationist Party was, in addition, laying a foundation for the big economic development mobilisation it launched across the Border region in early 1943. So the migration programme was, in the end, something more than a restoration. Tax Collection Mobilisations The levying and collection of taxes is an area in which we should expect to find least cooperation and harmony between the centre and the localities. But precisely because the heavy and multiplying tax levies in 1940 and 1941 created so much popular disaffection, the Party-government worked particularly hard after 1941 at devising ways of 'popularising' tax collections. By this I mean that methods were developed to devolve responsibility for the apportioning and collection of taxes to community organs in a way that conceded a degree of autonomy in this area to local communities; the Party's tax mobilisations came to be premised on, and tried to foster, community cohesion. At the same time, the CCP launched a production movement that, by increasing farm-family incomes, enabled the Party-government to collect as much tax as before, or even more taxes, while hurting farmers less. Here again, therefore, we see the old autonomy-control dynamic injected with the developmental values of state-strengthening nation-builders. The CCP's taxation reformers worked hard at designing a "uniform graduated agricultural tax", but that system was never to be ready for general implementation in Shaan Gan Ning. Throughout the Japanese War period, the Border Regional Government continued each year to decree for each county a National Salvation Grain target, and local authorities continued to rely, at least in part, on "mobilisation" (as opposed to "scientific") methods as the means of extracting "equitable tax" payments from farmers. While lamenting the lack of fixity, uneven application and the hit-and-miss nature of this collection method, the Communists defended it as a temporary wartime measure whose vagaries the people would forgive and tolerate for the sake of "national salvation". Popular tolerance was severely stretched in 1941. That was a year in which the Party-government resorted to some long-established taxing strategies of impecunious governments and in which, it was later admitted, farmers were taxed to "saturation point".[58] Rectification in 1942 dictated both a reduction of the tax take and changes in collection methods. The government announced at spring ploughing time that the 1942 tax target would be reduced from the 1941 figure of 200,000 dan to 160,000

dan (one dan is about 150 kg); in other words, almost all taxpayers would be asked to pay less tax, even if their harvests were bigger than the previous year's. As well as the assurance that there would be no additional grain collections in the spring and summer, this decree also announced that the sheep tax (introduced in 1941) was thereafter abolished and that grain loans would be issued to families who had been hit too hard in December-January.[59] Spring ploughing, more than before, took the form of a mass movement this year. A huge inspirational effort was needed to persuade peasants to keep all farmland in production, especially the newly-opened wastelands in the Yanshu counties, and heavy reliance was put on the emerging labour heroes to back this effort. Wu Manyou, labour hero of labour heroes (and alleged Nationalist Party collaborator in 1947), is said to have "redoubled his efforts at opening up new land" in April 1942, and by June a total of 225 mu of new cropland had been dug by Wu and the other Wujiazaoyuan villagers.[60] [Grain tax constituted more than 30% of Wu's income in 1941](#),[61] and when the villagers said to him, "Old Wu, you pay too much, cut down a bit!", he spoke of his indebtedness to the revolution and the 8th Route Army's selflessness. After this, it was said, "everyone respected his opinion and enthusiastically gave grain to the State".[62] When labour hero Shen Changlin's generous tax payments were marvelled at, Shen remonstrated, "Hey! the state's having difficulties! Come on everyone, pay your taxes!" And when other people were selling their oxen and donkeys and letting their farms run down in the winter of 1941, Shen ostentatiously bought livestock, hired labourers and set about expanding his farming business.[63] These "models" had salience only after the state had demonstrated its trustworthiness and presided over a production upturn in which the tardy and dull were penalised, and patriotic (tax-paying) entrepreneurs reaped tangible profits. The CCP's task was very much an uphill one in 1942, for it was not until that year's November grain tax collection that the peasants could be convinced that they might keep the profits from the bigger production effort asked of them. Did changes to tax collection methods in 1942 help improve public morale? I suspect that in that year at least the changes worked more to control damage than to repair it. A concerted effort was made to inject more fairness into the 1942 collection, and that began with the compiling of more accurate income registers. Survey work now took the form of much tighter and more rigorous organisational work at grassroots level. The township governments were to appoint to each administrative village a "work group" that was rigorously to investigate household incomes and submit a register of incomes to the village's "assessment committee" – a popularly elected group of about five or six "upright and esteemed" villagers. The committee was to verify the estimates by discussing them with household heads and then pass them back to the work group for submission to the township government committee, then the township assembly. Ratification by the assembly was to set the assessments in concrete.[64] Not surprisingly, it rarely worked like that in practice, and the authorities became resigned to the fact that, until the uniform graduated tax (based on land valuations and average, not actual, incomes) could be broadly implemented, collections of National Salvation Grain Tax would always need to rely on mass mobilisation and that would always entail assessment irregularities and inaccuracies. By the autumn of 1942, authorities were arguing that a mechanistic application of the rules and slavish reliance on surveys was counterproductive. The masses, collectively, had to be allowed to scrutinise income estimates in order that false income declarations be exposed.[65] 'Mass democracy', in the form of semi-contrived "struggles" against corrupt officials, had been used to purge local governments of unsatisfactory officials during the township election campaigns that year, and it was a populist strategy that the Communists were learning to wield with consummate skill. The village gatherings and crowd excitement, while clearly serving Party purposes, also politicised village folk and taught them political strategies that could be used to defend community interests. The CCP intended that politicisation would result in peasants paying taxes less grudgingly; through political education they would learn that they paid taxes in order "to drive back the Japanese, to defend the Border Region and to safeguard their own livelihoods".[66] Tax increases in three successive years, however, hardly helped to win farmers over to the state's way of seeing things. The Party leadership openly conceded in 1942 that the 1939-41 tax hikes had caused the peasants' "production morale" to plummet. The 1942 tax collection, therefore, signalled some key elements of an emerging new approach to mobilisation work. First, it conceded a good deal of decision-making autonomy to local communities – certainly more than a 'scientific' and centralising approach would usually make room for. By setting in train a process of community decision-making about the

distribution of tax levies, it facilitated the formation of community organs that had far more salience for villagers than, for example, the United Front "mass associations". It made a particular issue of the mediating function of grassroots officials, and of the importance of their being both upright and wise. Just as importantly, it brought forward the emerging 'rich peasant heroes' as the kind of community leaders best able to serve as the "bridges" between progressive villages and the new 'democratic centralist' party-state. Whether or not this approach to popular mobilisation actually worked to serve both Party and community interests in most (or any) parts of the border region, it did mark a shift away from the big top-down mobilisations of previous years. In this particular context, one final point, the relationship between the CCP's tax policies and the class struggle strategy, is worth noting. In the unreformed parts of the Suide subregion in 1943, tax rates were adjusted to give relief to the poor and to squeeze the "big families" harder than before. It was now an explicit government goal to get non-farming landlords to relinquish their landholdings by selling them cheaply to poor peasants. Constant crop failures and the progressive decline of Shaanbei's agricultural economy had long made land rental the least profitable of landlord businesses, yet the cultural importance of maintaining a rural base caused the big families to hold onto their farm properties. Now, however, the loss for many of these families of political 'face' (if not power) during the township elections, the added economic damage to land rental businesses resulting from high grain taxes and rent reduction, and the promise of new and more reliable profits from investment in urban industries favoured by the government (and, therefore, leniently taxed) made the selling up of rural properties within Shaan Gan Ning borders the most sensible option for big landlords. To the extent, therefore, that the Party-government's tax policies in Suide left the poor a bit better off and pushed landlords out of the villages, they contributed to a levelling and democratisation of rural society in the subregion, goals that were central to the Party's rural reconstruction project.

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Rent Reform in Suide, 1942-43 Popular mobilisations for rent reform were organised only in those parts of Shaan Gan Ning where there had been no land redistributions before 1937 or where counter-revolution had overturned the reform. It occurred, therefore, only in old elite strongholds of the Suide and Longdong subregions. Where landlordism had survived in Yanshu, rent reform was largely an administrative matter; in the Party's terminology, it was enforced by "legal" means. In Suide, also, it seems that a fairly vigorous attempt was made in the autumn of 1942 to effect rent reform by means of legislation and the vigilant policing of government regulations. Throughout 1942, beginning with the Politburo's January 1942 Decision on Land Policy,<sup>[67]</sup> the Party-centre issued a series of directives and rulings on rent and interest-rate reduction. And, at rent payment time in late autumn, rent inspectors went down to the villages to ensure that the payment and collection of rents accorded with the new regulations. Despite the strong cadre presence in the villages, there was a wholesale hoaxing of government cadres and widespread rent reduction evasions by landlords in late 1942. The failure of tenancy reform that year was later attributed to the reformers' attempt to enforce rent reductions by means of "administrative decrees" and in the manner of "bestowing gifts" on the masses.<sup>[68]</sup> There had been, it was said, little investigation work and the 25% rent reduction formula had been inflexibly applied to all land rents. Moreover, by trumpeting the campaign's slogans without taking measures to prevent landlord retaliations, cadres had given landlords the chance to develop strategies for dodging the new laws and to stifle tenant support for reform.<sup>[69]</sup> The struggle strategy had sometimes been used at rent collection time in 1942, but for staged performances only and with very few pre- or post-struggle attempts to achieve a durable tenant solidarity. The ease with which rentiers silenced their tenants and the fear that had grown among tenant farmers of provoking tenancy transfers made the Party realise that ensuring security of tenure was the key to successful rent reform.<sup>[70]</sup> The legislators worked over the 1942 regulations, tightening them and closing loopholes. The revised regulations were widely publicised, and violators were threatened with prosecution. The task in 1943, however, was not only to get land rentals reduced but also to repair the quite serious damage done by embattled landlords over the previous several years. Cadres were told that they had to agitate and get tenants organised to a level where the tenants themselves enforced both rent reduction and the terms of their rewritten tenancy contracts. The Rent Reform Mass Movement and Tenant Associations in 1943 Suide's rent reform movement in 1943 was organised as an elaborate ritual. The first stages were

orchestrated entirely by work team cadres, but management of the reform was meant to devolve progressively to tenant farmers. The movement in any one district began with a calculation of the excess rents tenants had paid their landlords over the three years since rent reductions had been legislated by the Suidе Provisional Assembly in July 1940. This was followed by the retrieval of the excess payments, the destruction of landlord account books in which rent debts were recorded, the annulment of old contracts, and the restoration to farmers of rental land illegally repossessed by landlords. At some point along the way, usually after the first stages of struggle against the landlords, the work team cadres organised tenants into various kinds of association. The Communists put great store on the consciousness-raising effect among peasants of class struggle and the new political organisations that would result from struggle. The tenant associations organised in Suidе in 1943 were assigned the tasks of approving and registering all rent transactions, ratifying all land 'movements' (tenancies, mortgages, purchases and sales), and settling disputes over tenancies; in the CCP's argument, this was how tenants took charge of their own "fate".<sup>[71]</sup> For the most part, however, the associations were just not up to the tasks assigned to them. Supervision of reduced rent payments and of newly-contracted tenure arrangements became government work, and enforcements fell to official mediators and law courts. The first problem for the CCP workers who, in 1943, were sent down to Suidе villages to organise tenant-class solidarity, had been to forge durable tenant class solidarity among tenant farmers. The traditional bitter competition for rental land among tenants, a competitiveness that had always been expressed more openly and vociferously than resentment against landlords, was not easily muted while farmland remained desperately scarce. It is clear that one of the central functions of the tenant associations formed after the early struggle meetings was prevention of the "poaching" by tenants of each other's rental land and, in the absence of a "tenant-class solidarity", by severe sanctions against tenant cheats if necessary. The Communists could not presume a willingness to 'play fair' among people who, for decades, had been scrambling over each other to scratch the most pitiful livings out of exhausted scraps of farmland. Tenant associations fulfilled their mandate to "safeguard tenant rights" by registering all land movements, adjudicating competing claims, punishing rule violators and handing over to higher authorities the people who refused to cooperate. The enforcement of reduced rent payments was as much a matter of driving a wedge between tenant and landlord as of establishing a fair tenancy, and the tasks of tenants' associations, therefore, were to police and discipline tenants as well as to constrain landlords. To be effective, then, the associations needed the active involvement of authoritative administrators and arbitrators. They were by no means autonomous, self-determining 'mass associations'. CCP sources claim that, from 1942 onwards in the Suidе subregion, a large number of disputes brought to district and township mediators were over tenancies, that local courts were hearing more than 50 tenancy cases per day during the immediate aftermath of rent reform, and that the great majority of these cases were filed by tenants against landlords.<sup>[72]</sup> This was just at the time when the authorities, in the name of "simple administration" and community self-sufficiency, were trying to limit the number of local disputes submitted for formal adjudication. Tenants, nevertheless, were now explicitly encouraged to use the law courts,<sup>[73]</sup> and it seems that after 1942 they had a better chance than in the united front's hey-day of winning favourable judgements. In fact, cases to do with rental land repossessions and loss by tenants before 1942 were now reconsidered and decided in the tenants' favour.<sup>[74]</sup> It was hoped that tenant (or peasant) associations could at least solve the smaller squabbles (particularly those between tenants),<sup>[75]</sup> and they were sometimes called on to submit to township and district courts any evidence pertaining to the more serious disputes.<sup>[76]</sup> They could take measures to prevent rental land repossessions by, for example, raising a loan to enable one of their members to pay the mortgage price being asked by the landlord.<sup>[77]</sup> Nevertheless, by far the larger part of the burden of forestalling landlord sabotage and protecting tenant gains fell to township and district governments; it was expecting far too much of tenant associations, where they existed, to be effective. Any tenant associations that took seriously the job of policing tenancies and mediating tenancy disputes were likely to turn into quasi-official organs directly superintended by township government committees. That this commonly occurred is evidenced in the repeated admonitions against it. The authorities insisted that the "work modes" of popular organisations be distinguished from those of government organs, and that the "mass association nature" of the former be preserved. Conversely, the administrative organs of government were not "to usurp the work of the peasant

associations".<sup>[78]</sup> CCP direction and control of the associations, however, effectively denied them the political and functional autonomy promised them. Local CCP branch members served as the backbone of functioning associations; this accorded with upper-level government instructions,<sup>[79]</sup> and they were often led by the township headmen. The Party Centre made much of the potential of "local activists" and said that, if properly trained, they could reduce both the mobilisation workloads of government officials and give the government easy access to the hearts and minds of villagers. But reliable, competent and biddable local leaders did not, to any significant extent, emerge from the rent reduction struggles. A poverty-stricken farmer who has been cowed and subservient for a whole lifetime does not learn to be ambitious and assertive in a matter of months. That much rent reform enforcement work was police work is evidenced in the merging of tenant associations with self-defence militia units in some villages.<sup>[80]</sup> In fact, a Party directive in late 1943 recommended that, at a certain point, the rent reduction movement should link up with self-defence mobilisation and the anti-traitor movement (another prong of the CCP's assault on old elite power).<sup>[81]</sup> The associations would also, of course, cooperate with the investigators who now regularly turned up to collect data for land tenancy records and tax registers, and to inspect production work. CCP strategists sometimes expressed the hope that tenant associations would grow into multi-purpose associations that could serve and defend the interests of all members of a village community. So, as well as being responsible for village self-defence surveillance, the broad-based associations might have mobilised local people for tasks such as well-digging, road repair, crop-watching, the farming of communal and army-family farmland and the management of village granaries. The reports from model districts and townships offer examples of tenant associations that had broadened to accept a range of responsibilities.<sup>[82]</sup> The indications are, however, that the general run of village associations almost certainly did not make the transition from class to community organisation. Tenant associations fall from view in 1944. Some reports tell us that the 1943 peasant organisations for rent reduction turned into mutual-aid teams the next year,<sup>[83]</sup> but I doubt that that often happened. Certainly, a CCP motive for the urgent promotion of rent reduction work in 1943 was to enable tenant farmers to contribute to the big production effort, and we have numerous reports arguing the rise in "production morale" of tenants who were "liberated" as a result of rent reform. By the same token, it was also said that the 1944 preoccupation with the production campaign resulted in slackened tenancy inspections and unrelenting landlord assaults on the new laws.<sup>[84]</sup> This was a criticism of local governments for failing to maintain strict surveillance, and was not aimed at tenant associations. The authorities more or less took for granted that those groups were no longer functioning. As in the days of land revolution, they had served as a battering ram during the struggle against landlords but were never embraced by poor peasants as a means of further improving their livelihoods and of building better villages. In 1944, any surveillance of the surviving landlords and their tenant cohorts was being done by township law-enforcement officials, and any collective action by farmers to make farming prosperous was within mutual-aid teams. The two enterprises were, by this stage, organisationally quite separate.

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The Cooperative Movement, 1943-44 <sup>[85]</sup> Farmwork mutual-aid teams constituted the organisational foundation of Shaan Gan Ning's big production drive of 1943-44. CCP strategists were convinced that cooperative farming was the best way of achieving the productivity increases needed to solve problems in areas of "people's livelihood" and "government finances".<sup>[86]</sup> But by 1943 the Communists were investing farming cooperatives with other meanings as well. After years of experimenting with a variety of grassroots organisational forms, and in the context of rectification's emphasis on "simplified administration" and "people-run" organisations, the CCP now entrusted the village production cooperative with the task of realising the ideals of community self-help and self-sufficiency, rural democracy and a first-step modernisation of the agrarian economy. Shaan Gan Ning's mutual-aid teamwork movement usefully demonstrates, therefore, a number of the lessons that Communist organisers had learned over the previous half-decade and more; for example, the damage done to grassroots organs by top-down 'commandism' and 'formalism'. There had always been, within the CCP, a recognition of the need to find an appropriate balance between top-down interventions and a bottom-up organisational push. But now, in preparation for the 1943 movement, the CCP's Northwest Bureau commissioned an intensive investigation into Shaanbei's

traditional teamwork customs, and mobilisers were instructed to prod into action labour teams based on traditional mutual-aid arrangements; they were not to impose strange organisational forms if customary arrangements could be made to work effectively. The CCP's deference to Shaanbei peasant preferences in 1943 was quite unprecedented.<sup>[87]</sup> Second, and in tune with the strong emphasis on traditional practices, farmer organisations were to be kept relatively small at first. And even when the mobilisers in 1944 made vigorous attempts to broaden the movement, they recognised that both work efficiency and democratic management were more easily achieved within small groups. Teams were often federated as brigades when all of a village's able-bodied menfolk were mobilised for teamwork, but the small team remained the basic accounting unit. To simplify accounting and minimise quarrels, labourers of roughly equal strength, skill and resources were teamed together; and so in any one village there were likely to be both strong and weak teams. In many Yanshu hamlets, for example, newly-arrived migrants usually formed separate teams, and they invariably did less well than the better-resourced teams in which rich peasants participated. However, the class differences were not great, and the upward mobility of most farmers in the context of an expanding economy meant that economic differences posed a less serious obstacle to economic cooperation than they had once done. The mobilisers were expected to nudge all teams, weak and strong, in the direction of year-round cooperation and to encourage them to broaden their activities to include not only all agricultural tasks and sidelines but also healthcare, education and other services related to general community welfare. But the nudgings seem to have been soft; a large number of teams remained small, seasonal and undertook only a narrow range of tasks; sometimes they worked together only for ploughing and weeding work. The major difference between this approach and earlier approaches to village reconstruction was that now, in 1943, the basic organisational unit was a production unit. Not only that, under Party leadership these production units became the pace-setters of an economic development project that was beginning to transform what had very recently been a hopelessly depressed region. Although the collectivist directions in which the Party prodded the teams to expand were strange, peasants accepted the mutual-aid teams as more meaningful than most of the other organisations they had been pressed to join. They were not unwilling, therefore, to follow the Party's lead, the strangeness notwithstanding. The same had not applied to groupings like the United Front "mass associations", nor even to the class-based peasant associations formed for land reform. The latter, although very meaningful for a time, lost their salience for farmers once the reform was consolidated. The Communists often lamented the hollowness of the grassroots organisations they had formed, and many farmers resisted joining mutual-aid teams as much as they resisted other CCP attempts to organise them. In general, however, because the mutual-aid teams that worked were rooted in the economic life of a farming community, they were more likely to attract active participation than most of the CCP's other organisations had done. The full-blown cooperative ideal was that a village mutual-aid team would grow into a "comprehensive cooperative" that, as well as coordinating all production work in the village, both farmwork and sidelines, would also constitute the village government; it would have responsibility, therefore, for education, hygiene and medical care, village defence, taxation, dispute mediation, famine insurance, cultural activities, social welfare, and so on. But nowhere in Shaan Gan Ning do we see the full realisation of the 'cooperative village' ideal during the resistance war period. As noted earlier, the farmwork mutual-aid movement did not ever successfully link up with the cooperative society movement. Rectification after 1943 did go some way towards 'popularising' the cooperative societies but did not, for the most part, root them in the villages. The most successful "comprehensive cooperatives" were, following the South District (Nanqu) model,<sup>[88]</sup> based at district headquarters. And although they provided valuable services to farming communities, particularly the provision of cheap credit and farm equipment and the coordination of supply and marketing work, they usually had little direct involvement in the village-based mutual-aid teams. The mutual-aid team and cooperative movements were organisationally separate in most of Shaan Gan Ning through the entire resistance period. The only exceptions, as far as we can judge, were in the Suide subregion. In Suide, according to CCP reports, there were some spectacular examples of cooperative villages that, by means of cooperative management of all aspects of the villages' economic, political, social and cultural life, were models of local self-government and "national salvation" patriotism. Take, for example, the subregion's two most prominent model villages, Haojiaqiao and Wangjiaping. As well as village-wide mutual-aid farming

brigades, either one or both villages had textile, transport, credit and consumer cooperatives; grain-grinding, wood-chopping and childrens' shepherd teams; and cooperatively organised educational, hygiene, welfare and self-defence units. In the case of both villages, the people who coordinated and led 'comprehensive cooperation' were also important cogs in the wheel of local government in their districts.[89] The cooperative village models promoted in the Yanshu subregion were different. There was, for example, much less emphasis on the cooperativisation of sideline work at village level. In labour hero Wu Manyou's village, Wujiazaoyuan, fewer than half of the 20 village women could use a spindle, and there seems to have been no cooperative cloth-making in the village even after skills training for non-spinners in 1944.[90] Very little spinning and weaving was done in hero Shen Changlin's village in 1943 because none of the women knew how to. And after a couple of them took the trouble to learn, they had difficulty finding supplies of cotton lint.[91] Hero Tian Erhong's 1944 production plan for his village entailed mobilising 67 village women to do agricultural work in the form of melon and vegetable growing, feeding livestock, threshing and milling grain, and the delivery of meals to labourers in the hill-fields.[92] There was no mention of cloth-making. The situation was similar in the subregion's other model villages. The preoccupation in all of the wasteland districts was with opening up new farmland and with mobilising all available labourers to keep it under cultivation.[93] The important differences between Yanshu and Suide should now be clear. In the land-scarce Suide counties, CCP organisers needed to mount an all-out effort to reinvigorate and develop sideline industries if there was to be any kind of efficient organisation of the labour-force. In 'backward' but land-abundant Yanshu, cottage industries were slow to develop because of a lack of skills and equipment, and because wasteland reclamation work took precedence; on that issue the CCP and the peasants easily agreed. There was, it is true, a vigorous attempt to cooperativise transport work in Yanshu, but the more vigorous the organising, the more transport co-operatives moved out of the villages and became based at district, or even county, level.[94] At village level in Yanshu, therefore, most organising energy went into farmwork, and CCP organisers were able to ride a wave of farmer enthusiasm for farm-building and expansion. In Suide, a much tighter, more interventionist organising hand was needed if teamwork on tiny farms was to be in any way viable and if alternative employment was to be found for farmers made redundant by teamwork. There was another critically important reason why the organisation of cooperative farming was more regimented and coercive in the Suide subregion, and a reason that is concealed in the official accounts of the Haojiaqiao and Wangjiaping models. The rent reform movement was still on the boil in important parts of the subregion in 1943, and the class conflicts deliberately stoked by that movement seriously impeded the organisation of mutual-aid exchanges. The teams that were organised were typically composed of the poorest villagers; in contrast to Yanshu, "rich peasants" almost never participated in teamwork. Many years of bitter rivalries among tenant populations meant that any cooperation between the poor was usually quite fragile. It required the very firm organising hand of Party mobilisers. The bigger and more extensive the organising, the firmer that hand needed to be. It is significant that the spectacular "models" of extensive and complex cooperation in "self-governing" villages came from Suide. The scope of farmer cooperation in Yanshu, even in its model villages, was a good deal more modest, but also less managed and manipulated by outsiders.

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Conclusion The cooperative movement's mutual-aid teams serve as the best example the Shan Gan Ning base has to offer of 'community development' organisations which could serve as the foundation of new communities. In the Yanshu wastelands we most certainly see the beginnings of new communities and their rapid progress. The infrastructural decrepitude of that area, however, and the corresponding very low levels of literacy among the population, meant that the achievement of the 'self-governing self-sufficient community' ideal would take a good deal of time. The Yanshu case study does show us how, in a context where local and state interests closely accord, community autonomy could serve state-strengthening. The Suide case study demonstrates, among other things, that where CCP control was incomplete or insecure, central control was asserted forcefully; the localities could not be allowed the autonomy that was conceded to local communities in places where CCP hegemony was uncontested. Once we recognise that autonomy and control were two sides of the same coin in CCP thinking, we gain a much better understanding of, for example, the "mass line" strategy, the policy of "people-run"



organisation, and how democratisation was meant to work in the localities. When reassessing approaches to grassroots organisational work in 1942, rectification strategists insisted that the organisers' starting point had to be the "individual interest" and "special interests" of the people being organised: "only when the people's special interests are guaranteed will their activism be mobilised, and only then will the task of mobilising support for the war effort and support for the government be successful". By working from the bottom up, by rooting new organisations in local customs, and by "safeguarding the people's special interests", the organisers would avoid creating organisations "out of thin air". Conversely, by means of sound organisational work, they would be able to ensure that local and special interest served "collective interests"; the people would come to understand that their special interests could be safeguarded only if "Japan is defeated and if the Anti-Japanese Democratic Government is stable".<sup>[95]</sup> Here we see the feudalist conviction that the "common good" could be advanced by "enlightened self-interest".<sup>[96]</sup> The task for the Communist nation-builders was to remove the obstacles to local activism, stoke it, and then mobilise it to ensure that it served national interests and the CCP's state-strengthening goals. In the CCP's analysis, the biggest obstacle to local activism in the villages was class oppression – the oppression of the poor by a feudal landlord class (a category that was applied to all who impeded the CCP's hegemonising progress in the countryside). Organised class struggle was designed, most importantly, to purge peasants of their passivity and to remove the people who blocked the CCP's access to the villages. The class struggle strategy, therefore, was critical to the achievement of basic CCP goals – active peasant participation in nation-building and elimination of powerful or power-seeking rivals. Furthermore, by achieving a degree of economic and social levelling, the land (or tenancy) reform class struggles perhaps helped realise a degree of community solidarity not possible when class differences were sharp. On the other hand, the struggles, as we know, also ripped communities apart, and the CCP could never entrust strife-torn communities with autonomous management rights. The case of Shaan Gan Ning provides the contrast between Yanshu, where community-building was based on a high degree of community consensus, and Suide, where communities were much more diversified and conflict-ridden. The CCP made impressive progress in Suide after 1939; but that special community ingenuity and activism that it expected to grow from 'autonomy' was found only in a few exceptional places where, for one reason or another, a levelling process had removed old elites and had achieved an exceptional degree of social harmony and cooperation. In two important respects, the Communist Party's approach to local self-government differed from earlier approaches. First, when looking for local initiative and activist energy in the localities, the CCP identified working farmers, and specifically "middle peasants", as the backbone of the communities that could best be mobilised for nation-building. By contrast, local self-government advocates in the 1900s and 1910s were speaking of rural elites when they argued that within local communities there were "activists" capable of managing local affairs. The second difference, of course, was that the very people on whom reformers like Sun Yat-sen depended to assume local leadership were, for the most part, the people targeted by the Communists for elimination. The CCP's successful destruction of old elite power in the countryside underpinned all of its reconstruction success. The paradox is that the class struggle strategy, so useful for generating poor peasant activism and for the destruction of old elite power, also radically reduced, at least in the short term, the self-governing capacities of rural communities. Mobilisation for class struggle was only one area of the Communists' grassroots organising work. Mobilisations for village self-defence or for farmwork emergencies, for example, could be separate from the class issue. The United Front mass associations, promoted from 1937, were explicitly designed to heal the conflicts that had flared and festered during the 1927-1937 civil war. In Shaan Gan Ning, however, those mass associations did not ever serve as community development organs. When the Communists began to give serious attention to the nurturing of community consensus and solidarity, they had to learn organisational methods that were different from the top-down musterings that had become habitual during the early war years. They also had first to heal the divisions that the struggles had engendered. Everywhere in Shaan Gan Ning, the progress of organisational community-building was halting and very uneven during the resistance war years. But it proved to be much easier to cultivate organisational autonomy in Yanshu villages that were largely free of class conflict and had been steadily, over four or five years, rebuilt by migrant families. The autonomy promised by rectification's devolutionary policy was much weaker in Suide villages in

large part because old class structures were not completely dismantled and because CCP control there was weaker than in Yanshu.

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### Endnotes

1 That is, the base area in the three provinces of Shaansi, Gansu and Ningxia. See map on page iii.

2 Gregor Benton (1996) 'Comparative perspectives on the Communists at war, North and Central China, 1937-1945', Leeds East Asia Paper 39, University of Leeds, p. 5.

3 By 'organisation-building' I mean a mobilisation much broader than is conveyed by the term 'organisational weapon'. For a useful overview of the debates about the Leninist 'organisational weapon' and its contribution to CCP 'success', see Kathleen Hartford and Steven M. Goldstein (eds) (1989) *Single Sparks: China's Rural Revolution*, Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, pp. 9-13.

4 An emphasis by scholars on popular participation and grassroots democracy in the CCP base areas was a reaction against the 'cold war scholarship' of the 1950s and '60s. Maurice Meisner and Mark Selden were among the first to probe the populist dimensions of the Communist movement, and of Maoism in particular. Maurice Meisner (1970) 'Yenan Communism and the rise of the Chinese People's Republic', in James B. Crowley (ed.) *Modern East Asia: Essays in Interpretation*, New York: Harcourts, Brace and World, pp. 265-96; Mark Selden (1971) *The Yen'an Way in Revolutionary China*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, and (January 1995) 'Yan'an Communism reconsidered', *Modern China*, 21 (1), pp. 8-44. More recent scholarship has emphasised the state strengthening, hegemonies and totalitarian ambitions of the Communist Party. See, for example, Tetsuya Kataoka (1974) *Resistance and Revolution: The Communists and the Second United Front*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Yung-fa Chen (1986) *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press; Steven Levine (1987) *The Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria*, New York: Columbia University Press.

5 See, for example, Sun Yatsen (1994) 'A refutation of an article in Paohuang Pao' ['Protect the Emperor Newspaper'], Honolulu, December 1903, in Julia Lee Wei, Ramon Myers and Donald Gillin (eds) *Prescriptions for Saving China: Selected Writings of Sun Yatsen*, Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, p. 32.

6 Sun Yatsen (1953) 'Self-government as the basis of reconstruction', Shanghai, July 1916, in Sun Yat-sen *Fundamentals of National Reconstruction*, Taipei: Sino-American Publishing Company, p. 145.

7 Fengjian is usually translated as 'feudalism' and means, essentially, the feudal system of decentralised power. China's fengjian advocates deplored centrist absolutism and, in particular, the avoidance rule that put outsiders in charge of local governments. For a useful discussion of fengjian thinking in the early and late Qing, see Philip Kuhn (1975) 'Local self-government under the Republic: problems of control, autonomy, and mobilisation', in Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Carolyn Grant (eds) *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 261-80. See, also, Min Tu-ki (1989) in Philip A. Kuhn and Timothy Brook (eds), *National Polity and Local Power: The Transformation of Late Imperial China*, Cambridge, Mass.: CEAS/Harvard University Press, chapter 4.

8 Kuhn, op. cit., p. 275.

9 Op. cit., p. 269.

10 Ibid.

11 Robert Scalapino and George T. Yu (1985) *Modern China and its Revolutionary Process: Recurrent Challenges to the Traditional Order*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 340.

12 Prasenjit Duara (1988) *Culture Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

13 Op. cit., p. 226.

14 In Duara's definition, 'state involution' describes a process of state (bureaucratic) expansion without growth.

15 I use the term 'populism' in the loose fashion partly endorsed by Catherine Lynch in her discussion of 'populism in China' and 'Chinese populism'. Populism among China's radical intellectuals in the 1910s and '20s was by no means a coherent and cohesive ideology but, rather, an ideological and/or activist orientation that included at least some of the following: anti-urbanism, the celebration of 'backwardness', voluntarism, anti-elitism, elevation of 'the people', intellectuals 'going down' to the people and bonding with them, egalitarian anti-bureaucratism, collectivism, organic community and communalism, distrust of centralisation and occupational specialisation. Catherine Lynch (1989) *Liang Shuming and the Populist Alternative in China*, PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, chapter 1.

16 Arif Dirlik (1989) *The Origins of Chinese Communism*, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 93-4, 195-96.

17 This interpretation gives less importance to the 'foreignness' of May Fourth culture than is usual in standard treatments of the May Fourth period. It does not deny the inspirational role played by western ideas, but finds strong influences from China's past in the May Fourthers' interpretations of those ideas – influences that, needless to say, were not recognised at the time. Indeed, rather than acknowledge their indebtedness to China's fengjian tradition, the New Culture radicals condemned the entire Confucian system as 'feudal' (fengjian). For a discussion of the new intellectuals' "alienation in terms of vocabulary", see John Schrecker (1991) *The Chinese Revolution in Historical Perspective*, New York: Praeger, p. 143.

18 Guy Alitto (1979) *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 207.

19 For a discussion of Liang Shuming's critiques of the Communists, and particularly of the class struggle strategy, see Alitto, op. cit., pp. 215-25.

20 Op. cit., p. 225.

21 The CCP, said Liang, "first applies a kind of divisive effort to rural society, and creates a situation of disassociation and mutual antagonism within the village [so that] struggle comes about". Cited by Alitto, op. cit., p. 216.

22 See, in particular, Philip C.C. Huang (January 1995) 'Rural class struggle in the Chinese Revolution', *Modern China* 21 (1), pp. 105-43; Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, with Kaye Ann Johnston (1991) *Chinese Village, Socialist State*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

23 For a discussion of the special ecological features of the Yan'an area in the late 1930s, see Pauline Keating (July 1994) 'The ecological origins of the Yan'an Way', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 32, pp. 126-40.

24 In the case of Shaanbei's Yanshu area, the CCP was confronted with the task of 'restoring' a region that had been bypassed by the Tongzhi Restoration (1861-1875). The great northwest Muslim rebellion of the 1860s was not finally put down until 1873, and was followed by a pacification that forced Muslim communities to relocate to Gansu province. No attempt was made by either the central Qing or local administrations to reconstruct the economic infrastructure of the areas laid waste by the 1861-73 civil war and further depopulated by the outward migrations. For more detailed discussion of the 'restoration' phase of the CCP's reconstruction project in Shaanbei, see Pauline B. Keating (1997) *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1934-1945*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 4-7, 245-46.

25 Tony Saich elaborates this point in 'Introduction: The Chinese Communist Party and the Anti-Japanese war base areas', *The China Quarterly*, 140, pp. 1000-6.

26 See Keating, op. cit., July 1994, pp. 126-40.

27 For an account of the early history of the Communist movement in Shaanxi province, and the creation of the Shaan Gan Ning border region, see Selden, op. cit., chapters 1-3; Joseph Esherick (1990) 'Chinese kaleidoscope: looking at revolution from the bottom up', unpublished manuscript, pp. 14-18.

28 Esherick, op. cit., p.17

29 Selden, op. cit., pp. 94-100.

30 Lu Mang (1938) *Shaananning bianqude minzhong yundong* [The Mass Movement in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region], Hankou: Dazhong Chubanshe, pp. 7-8.

31 The argument here was that, "by means of democratic elections, the work systems of the various mass organisations are put in place and made healthy. In this way, the abilities and strong points of each individual group members will be brought into play, making them strong members of the group", Lu Mang, op. cit., p. 5.

32 .Op. cit., pp. 4-6.

33 The 1942 rectification movement was, of course, much more than a drive to "rectify workstyles", and we know that critiques of past practices were designed to discredit "leading cadres" and Party factions as much as to identify "erroneous practices". Even so, whatever their main purpose, the rectification critiques do provide useful evidence about organisational practices and problems in the 1937-42 period

34 Literally, "with big heads, thin waists and extremely small feet", 'Qunzhong tuanti zenyang gaizao' [The way to reform the mass associations'], *Jiefang ribao* [Liberation Daily] [JFRB], 28 June 1942.

35 'Minzhong tuantide xingzhi he renwu' ['The nature and tasks of the mass associations'], JFRB, 29 September 1942.

36 Party sources claimed that 1,002,744 mu of land was reclaimed in 1939. This was almost three times the acreage reclaimed in 1938. 'Bianqu nongye tongji biao (1940-1943)' ['A table of agricultural statistics for the Border Region'], Shaanganning bianqu caizheng jingjishi bianxiezhu, Shaanxisheng dang'anguan [The Editorial and Writing Group of the History of the Finances and Economy of the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region and the Shaanxi Provincial Archives] (1982) Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Shaanganning bianqu caizheng jingji shiliao zhaibian [A Collection of Historical Materials on the Finances and Economy of the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region During the Resistance War Period] [CZJJS], Xi'an: Shaanxi Renmin Chubanshe, vol. 2, pp. 573-74; Shaanganning bianqu canyihui wenxuan [Collected Documents of the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region Assemblies] (1958) compiled by Zhongguo kexueyuan lishi yanjiusuo [History Research Unit, Chinese Academy of Sciences] [CYHWX], Peking: Kexue Chubanshe, p. 21.

37 Shaanganning bianqu jiansheting nongmuke [The agriculture and livestock section of the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region's Construction Department], '1939 nongye shengchan zongjie baogao' ['Summary report of 1939 agricultural production'], CZJJS, 2, p. 63.

38 Ibid.

39 Lin Boqu (8 February 1944) 'Shaanganning bianqu zhengfu yinian gongzuo zongjie' ['A summary of the year's work of the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region Government'], JFRB.

40 Shaanganning bianqu jiansheting nongmuke, op. cit., p. 63.

41 'Zhongyang suweite gongheguo linshi zhongyang zhengfu banbude laodong huzhushe zuzhi gangyao' ['The announcement by the Provisional Central Government of the Central Soviet Republic of an organisational programme for labour mutual-aid societies'] (1933) Shi Jingtang (ed.) (1957) Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong shiliao [Historical Materials on the Agricultural Cooperativisation Movement in China], Peking: Sanlian Shudian, 1, pp. 85-87.

42 Mao Zedong (December 1942), 'Economic and financial problems', translated by Andrew Watson (1980), Mao Zedong and the Political Economy of the Border Region, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 77-78.

43 'Dui "jiti" kaihuang yijian' ['Some opinions about the "collective" reclamation of wasteland'], JFRB, 9 May 1942.

44 Zhongguo gongchandang xibei zhongyangju diaocha yanjiushi [CCP Northwest Bureau's Investigation and Research Department] 'Shaanganning bianqu laodong huzhu' ['Labour mutual-aid in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region'] (Yan'an, 1944), in Shi Jingtang (ed.), op cit., p. 213.

45 See, for example, 'Fuxian hezuoshe yinianlai guangda gujin baisanshiyubei' ['Investment in the Fu county cooperative has expanded more than three hundred per cent in a year'], JFRB, 19 August 1944, CZJJS, 7, pp. 117-19; Shaanganning bianqu gonghe bangongshi [Shaan Gan Ning Border Region Government's Industrial Cooperative Office] 'Bianqu hezuoshe gongzuo zongjie' ['A summary of the Border Region's cooperative work'], CZJJS, 7, December 1948, pp. 82-3.

46 'Jingji jianshe baogaoshu' ['A report on economic construction'], CZJJS, 7, 1942, pp. 134-36.

47 For details and a discussion of the migration data in Party sources, see Keating, op. cit., 1997, pp. 93-6, 118.

48 'Nongye shengchan huzhu xiaozu zhexing zuzhi tiaoli' ['Provisional organisational rules for agricultural production mutual-aid small groups'], CZJJS, 2, 1941, p. 425; 'Shaanganning bianqu sanshierniandu nongdai shishi banfa' ['Methods for providing agricultural loans in 1943 in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region'], CZJJS, 5, 1943, p. 408

49 Clause 8 of the 'Provisional organisation methods for agricultural loan groups (or production groups)' reads as follows: "For production work, each group member has the duty to engage in labour exchanges and other mutual-aid cooperation", 'Shaanganning bianqu sanshierniandu nongdai', 1943, p. 411.

50 People from Suide were much more easily assimilated than were refugees from war and famine zones. For one thing, a long established Suide tradition of migrations southward to the wasteland districts meant that many Suide people had kinsfolk and contacts in southern Shaanbei. Communist mobilisers put 'go south' pressure on these people when the Yan'an government began, in 1942, to set migration targets and to organise migrations from Suide to Yanshu.

51 Mao Zedong, op. cit., pp. 77-8.

52 'Jingqu pinmin yiken neidi fengshou liangshi huixiang maldi' ['Poor people from the garrison district move to the reclamation areas and after bumper grain harvests come back home to buy land'], JFRB, 20 January 1943.

53 'Jiaxian shixing jianzu baodian' ['Jiaxian implements rent reduction and the protection of tenants'], JFRB, 29 May 1943.

54 'Jingqu pinmin yiken neidi fengshou liangshi huixiang maldi'.

- 55 Northwest Bureau Investigation and Research Office (1944) *Bianqude yimin gongzuo* [The Work of Resettling People in the Border Region], Yan'an, p. 22.
- 56 One source claims that 27,740 people migrated from Suide into Shaan Gan Ning between the years 1937 and 1940. 'Huading yiminqu, songbu youdai banfa, sheli yiminzhan' ['Designate immigrant districts, announce special treatment methods, set up migrant depots'], JFRB, 2 December 1942. That figure is feasible given that civil war still festered in Suide until 1940 and radical tax relief was being offered to poor farmers in the four Shaan Gan Ning subregions in the 1939-39 period.
- 57 The area that became Yanshu had a population of about 223,000 in 1930, and 410,000 in 1944. Hsü Yung-ying (1945) *A Survey of the Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia Border Region*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1, p. 21; CYHWX, p. 378.
- 58 'Bianqu qingkuang gaishu – liangshi gongzuo bufen' ['An overview of conditions in the Border Region – the grain work sector'], CZJJSJL, 6, 1948, p. 96. For details of the 1941 tax take, see Keating, op. cit., 1997.
- 59 'Shaanganning bianqu zhengfu guanyu queding sanshiyiniandu zhengliangcaoshu he peichu yangzishui mingling', pp. 398-99. 'Shaanganning bianqu zhengfu guanyu queding sanshiyiniandu zhengliangcaoshu he peichu yangzishui mingling' ['Shaan Gan Ning Border Region government decree concerning the grain and hay tax quotas fixed for the end of 1942 and the abolition of the sheep tax'], 3 April 1942, in Gansusheng shehui kexueyuan lishi yanjiushi [Gansu Social Science Academy, History Research Department] (ed.) (1982) *Shaanganning geming genjudi shiliao xuan* [A Collection of Historical Materials on the Shaanganning Revolutionary Base Area], Lanzhou: Gansu Renmin Chubanshe, vol. 2, Clauses 19 to 24, pp. 190-91.
- 60 Liberation Daily reports of 30 April 1942 and 2 June 1942, translated in Mao, op. cit., pp. 229-32.
- 61 According to the figures given in the 30 April 1942 report, Wu's tax payment constituted 36% of his grain crop. We are not, however, given details here of his income from farm sidelines. Mao, op. cit., p. 231.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 'Mofan dangyuan he laodong yingxiong Shen Changlin tongzhi', 1944.
- 64 'Caiting Nan tingzhang tanhua shuoming zhengliang gongzuo fangzhen' ['A talk by Finance Department head, Nan (Hanchen), explaining tax collection work directives'], JFRB, 26 October 1942.
- 65 Zhao Yiwen (12 September 1942) 'Jieshao qunian zhengshou gongliangde jizhong fangshi' ['An explanation of the different ways in which grain tax was collected last year'], JFRB.
- 66 *Zhengliang yihou* ['After the grain tax collection'], JFRB, 14 February 1942.
- 67 'Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kangri genjudi tudi zhengcede jueding ji qi fujian' ['CCP Central Committee decision on land policy in the anti-Japanese base areas and supplements to that decision'], 28 January 1942, translated in C. Brandt et al (1952) *A Documentary History of Chinese Communism*, London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 276-85
- 68 Jia Tuofu (15 March 1945) 'Guanyu bianqu tudi zhengce wentide baogao' ['A report concerning Border Region land policy problems'], CZJJSJL, 2, p. 221.
- 69 'Guanyu jianzu jianxi yu jiaozu jiaoxi wenti' ['Concerning problems of reducing land rents and interest rates and the payment of rents and interest'], CZJJSJL, 2, February 1944, p. 306.
- 70 Chai Shufan (27 October 1947) 'Jianzuzhongde dianquan wenti' ['The issue of tenants' rights during rent reduction'], JFRB.
- 71 'Suide Xindianqu nongmin chuzu jiao zhong' ['The rents paid by peasants in Suide county's Xindian district are relatively heavy'], JFRB, 10 November 1942; 'Bianqu lianggeyue jianzu shuping' ['A review of two months' rent reduction work in the Border Region'], JFRB, 30 September 1946.
- 72 'Suide fenqu tudi wenti' ['The land problem in the Suide subregion'], JFRB, 15 May 1945. See also 'Qunzhong fenfen jihui; Suide jianzu jiaozu shenru xiangcun' ['Mass gatherings occur one after another; the rent reduction movement goes down to the villages'], JFRB, 7 November 1942.
- 73 'Suide fenqu tudi wenti' ['The land problem in the Suide subregion'], JFRB, 15 May 1945. See also 'Qunzhong fenfen jihui; Suide jianzu jiaozu shenru xiangcun' ['Mass gatherings occur one after another; the rent reduction movement goes down to the villages'], JFRB, 7 November 1942.
- 74 Yuan Renyuan and Yang Heting (May 1943) 'Suide fenqu jianzu gongzuo baogao' ['A report on rent and interest-rate reduction work in the Suide subregion'], CZJJSJL, 2, pp. 388, 395.
- 75 'Yaoqiu jianzude ren' ['People who want rent reduction'], JFRB, 30 October 1942; 'Baohu dianhu quanyi' ['Protecting tenants' rights and interests'], JFRB, 28 November 1942.
- 76 Yuan Renyuan and Yang Heting (1943) 'Suide fenqu jianzu'.
- 77 'Baijiayin jianzu yundong' ['The rent reduction movement in Baijiayin village'], JFRB, 4 December 1943.

78 'Guanyu jianzu jianxi yu jiaozu jiaoxide wenti', 1944, p. 333.

79 'Xibeiju guanyu jinyibu lingdao nongmin qunzhong kaizhan douzhengde jue ding' ['Northwest Bureau decision on taking further steps to lead the peasant masses for the development of the struggle for rent reduction'], CZJJSJL, 2, 10 October 1943, pp. 278-83.

80 'Guanyu jianzu jianxi yu jiaozu jiaoxide wenti', 1944, p. 332; 'Guanche jianzu' ['Implement rent reduction'], JFRB, 9 February 1945.

81 'Xibeiju guanyu jinyibu', 1943; 'Qingjian zhengfu sanshierniandu jianzu gongzuo zongjie baogao' ['Qingjian county government report on rent reduction work to the end of 1943'] nd, CZJJSJL, 2, p. 347. See Peter Seybolt's discussion of the "counterespionage campaigns" in Shaan Gan Ning: Peter Seybolt (January 1986) 'Terror and conformity: counterespionage campaigns, rectification and mass movements, 1942-43', *Modern China*, 12 (1). To the extent that the campaigns reached into the villages, they were extensions of the class struggles initiated by the election and rent reduction movements.

82 Diuniugou and Majiaqu villages, places developed by the Party as models of rent reform, are examples of tenant associations which broadened their activities into production and social welfare work. 'Guangyu jianzu jianxide wenti', 1944, p. 317.

83 'Guanyu jianzu jianxi yu jiaozu jiaoxide wenti', 1944, pp. 212, 327; 'Jianzu yu shengchan' ['Rent reduction and production'], JFRB, 6 November 1945; Northwest Bureau Investigation and Research Office 'Shaanganning bianqu laodong huzhu' ['Labour mutual-aid in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region'] (Yan'an, 1944), in Shi Jingtang (ed.), op. cit.

84 'Shaanganning bianqu tudi wenti' ['The land problem in the Shaan Gan Ning border region'], 1946.

85 Shaan Gan Ning's cooperative movement is discussed in detail in Pauline Keating (December 1994) 'The Yan'an Way of cooperativization', *The China Quarterly*, 140, pp. 1025-51. The following discussion draws on material in that article.

86 'Zhonggong gongyang zhengzhiju, guanyu Shaanganning bianqu gongzuo fangzhende jue ding' ['A CCP Central Politburo decision concerning principles guiding [our] work in the Shaan Gan Ning Border Region'], 13 August 1942, in Zhongyang dang'anguan [Central Party archives] (1990) *Shaanganning bianqu kangri minzhu genjudi: wenxian juan* [The Shaan Gan Ning Border Region – An Anti-Japanese Democratic Base Area: Collected Documents], Beijing: Zhonggong Dang'an Chubanshe, vol. 3.

87 The investigators uncovered some customary differences between teamwork in Yanshu and Suide that derived essentially from the two subregions' demographic differences. They were, however, not so different as to make Yanshu customs 'strange' to migrant settlers from Suide.

88 The South District cooperative, based in Liulin village just south of Yan'an, was promoted by the Party as the example that all of the region's cooperatives should follow.

89 For a detailed discussion of these two model villages, see Keating, op. cit., 1997, pp. 353-57, 359-61.

90 'Wu Manyou he Wujiazaoyuan', 1944.

91 'Mofan dangyuan he laodong yingxiong Shen Changlin tongzhi', 1944. 92 'Tian Erhong chuangzao mofan xiang' ['Tian Erhong creates a model township'], JFRB, 2 February 1944.

93 'Wu Manyou he Wujiazaoyuan', 1944.

94 Keating, op. cit., December 1994, pp. 1033-34. 95 'Minzhong tuantide xingzhi he renwu', 1942.

96 Kuhn, referring to Gu Yanwu's idea, op. cit., p. 264