

**Academic Intellectuals and University Students in  
Socialist China: Class Struggle and Land Reform**

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## Abstract

The 1950 land reform was not only the first nationwide economic campaign but also the large-scale political campaign for the academic intellectuals and university students in the 1950. In this thesis, the intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*) are the academic intellectuals (scholars) in the university, who had no political/party preference, and intellectual youths (*zhishi qingnian*) that I want to study are the university students who entered the university in 1948 and 1949. Many academic intellectuals and university students followed the announcement from the central government to participate in this campaign to understand the rural poverty, issues, and their disconnection with Chinese reality. Throughout this process, as the significant performers of the land reform, they transformed their petty-bourgeois mindsets, lived, and worked with poor peasants, and learned the class struggle. This thesis will explore the academic intellectual and university students' participation in the land reform to understand how they learned the class struggle in rural China. The academic intellectuals and university students had different motivations in participating in the land reform. Moreover, they would encounter different problems in the land reform that would refresh or even challenge what they learned from the political study session before the land reform.

Keyword: *Land Reform in 1950, Academic Intellectuals, University students, Work team, Observation team, Rural village, Class struggle.*

## Introduction:

In 1950, the central government of PRC initiated nationwide land reform and enacted the Land Reform Law. This reform's main target was to guarantee the distribution of the lands and production materials to landless, poor, middle peasants. It also wanted to support the proceeding industrialization program by keeping some of the land properties and production materials of the landlords and rich peasants to increase the overall production. Beyond the production factor, it was essential to emphasize the program's influence on the early PRC's academic intellectuals and intellectual youths.<sup>1</sup> The reform helped them shape their comprehension of rural class struggle and understand the rural situation in early 1950s China. Given the direction from the central government, academic intellectuals and intellectual youths in the university actively participated in the land reform. They studied the politics of the "class"<sup>2</sup> and understood that land reform was the platform for class struggle. Such a reform resonated with Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideology on class struggle and accommodated rural area issues in China. Throughout this process, academic intellectuals and university students learned the concept of class struggle. To some extent, they recognized that the CCP government was helping the rural peasants improve their social and life status under the discourse of class struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> The intellectuals (*zhishi fenzi*) are the academic intellectuals(scholars) in the university, who had no political/party preference, and intellectual youths (*zhishi qingnian*) are the university students who entered the university in 1948 and 1949.

<sup>2</sup> In the early 1950s China, the entire society was put into four classes: workers, farmers, national capitalism, and urban petty capitalism. In the rural area, the class was defined as the landlord, rich peasants, middle peasants (rich middle peasants, middle peasants, poor middle peasants), poor peasants, and landless peasants (workers and hired laborers). This classification method was defined in "The Decision regarding the Classification in the Rural Village" on August 20th, 1950.

Simultaneously, they were educated throughout the land reform to fit in the PRC political environment.<sup>3</sup>

My thesis started with a question: how did the academic intellectuals and university students understand the Maoist ideology of class struggle in the early PRC? How did they view class struggle from the land reform? The 1950s land reform provided them with an ultimately and strikingly new experience to understand rural conditions and revolutionary ideology, such as class struggle. They understood this revolutionary idea through participating in and observing the land confiscation process, living with the impoverished peasants, and listening to the peasants who told the story of land exploitation in the speaking bitterness meeting.

I argue that throughout the land reform, they were aware, under the influence of party language and ideology, that the rural class struggle was a process to mobilize and organize the poor and hired peasants, fortified with the class consciousness, to fight against the feudal landlord to liberate their productivity and improve their lives. However, the academic intellectuals in the work team were more likely to have doubts and queries on way class struggle was carried out than those in the observation team. In contrast, university students, especially those were in the party system (i.e., the Communist Youth League member), were more likely to express their revolutionary enthusiasm to prove themselves as valuable talents to the nation and the party.

This thesis will categorize into three chapters. The first chapter is about the intellectual's participation in rural modernization. It will also further demonstrate how Mao viewed class struggle in China and how CCP learned from the rural modernization project. The second chapter will demonstrate the process of the academic intellectuals and university students

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<sup>3</sup> On March 18th, 1951, Chairman Mao sent a telegram to Rao Shushi, Deng Zihui, Deng Xiaoping, and Xi Zhongxun that let the democratic personages and university professors come and see the land reform. Let them see the good side of the reform and the disadvantage of the reform to educate them.

participating in the 1950 land reform in Huadong and Zhongnan District.<sup>4</sup> This process will show how these groups learned the class struggle throughout the land reform. The third chapter will compare their experience (i.e., newspaper articles, diaries, and memoirs) to understand the difference in the motivation for them to participate in the land reform and the significance they learned from the land reform.

### **Research Scholarship and Methodology:**

There was a variety of discussions among the Chinese and foreign scholars on intellectual participation in the land reform<sup>5</sup> (1950-1952). They argued mainly about the political aspect of intellectual's involvement in the reform and identity transformation into CCP ideology of class. In Wang Ying's article "the helpless performance," she described how the intellectuals had to participate in land reform in the 1950s for political purposes. Cui Xiaoling stated in her book, *Reform and Thoughts* (重塑与思考), that the purpose of the land reform for the intellectuals was to educate them. The active participation of the intellectuals also demonstrated their recognition of the new regime. Other Chinese scholars, such as Wu Xiaoni, argued that land reform was a political movement for the intellectuals who shaped and solidified the idea of class

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<sup>4</sup> Huadong District in 1950 included Shanghai, Jiangsu province, Zhejiang province, Anhui province, Fujian province, and Shandong province. Tan Qixiang went to Wuhe and Lingbi county in the Northern Anhui region to participate in the land reform. Zhongnan District in 1950 included Jiangxi province (becoming part of the Huadong District after 1954), Henan province, Hubei province, Hunan province, Guangxi province, Guangdong province, and Hainan province. Wan Huifen went to Xingguo county in Jiangxi province to work as the local land reform team member.

<sup>5</sup> For the discussion of the land reform, there existed three major types of scholarly discussions: the first type was the primary discovery by scholars who went to the village and participated in the land reform. Famous examples are Isabel and David Crook's *Ten Mile Inn*. The second type is the economic perspective of land reform. The notable examples are Shuji Cao and Shigu Liu's articles and books on land rights and land economics. Cao, Shuji, and Liu, Shigu. "The land rights structure of the traditional Chinese Village," *The land structure and its transformation in traditional China*. Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, Shanghai, 2014. The third type is the political-cultural aspects of the land reform, mainly discussing the issue like intellectual transformation, discourse changes, class struggle, etc. A famous example is Eddy U's work, *Creating the Intellectuals*.

and class struggle. She also discussed the relationship between the party and the intellectuals under the land reform: the party believed that intellectuals should have an ideological reform. These materials will provide a valuable background for me to analyze the perception of the class struggle by the intellectuals and intellectual youths.

Foreign scholars, such as Brian James DeMare, in "Casting (Off) Their Stinking Airs," stated that the intellectuals (i.e., famous academic scholars and cultural workers) adapted the revolutionary ideas differently from the young intellectuals (i.e., university students) through land reform. Eddy U showed in *Creating the Intellectual* how the CCP defined the intellectual class and incorporated them into the schema of CCP ideology as usable but untrustworthy petty bourgeois. The purpose of the intellectual involvement in the agrarian revolution, to some extent, was to build the administrative pools for the CCP government in the future. Kate Merkel-Hess elaborated on the rural construction program in Republican China in *The Rural Modern*. She pointed out that the intellectual participation in the rural construction program started from the May Fourth Movement to push a moderate reform in rural villages different from either KMT's rural construction policy or CCP's class struggle strategy. Her work will help me build the first chapter of this thesis, the origin of the intellectual's involvement in the rural community. His work also shows that the initial wave of intellectual movement in the countryside starting from the May Fourth Movement had some influence on CCP's rural revolution.

From their discussions, I think that although CCP's intellectual's involvement in the land revolution primarily followed the Marxian-Leninist ideology, the intellectual's participation in the rural reform was originated from the May Fourth Movement. Moreover, I deduce that the land reform in the 1950s was the continuation of incorporation of intellectuals

into the CCP revolutionary rhetoric and the class system started in the mid-1930s. It was also an ideological reform for the intellectuals who would eventually work for the new government. These scholars seldomly discussed the perspective of the intellectual youths who contributed to the promulgation of revolutionary ideas, such as the class struggle.

In my thesis, I will focus on the academic intellectuals and university students who participated in the land reform through the observation team and local work team. I want to compare how academic intellectuals and university students (mostly seniors and some juniors) understood the class struggle differently from the land reform. Although they had a common goal to understand the class struggle, their different processes in achieving such a goal depicted how they understood this revolutionary discourse from different perspectives and experiences. Comparing their motivations to participate in the land reform will also inform about their different transformation through the land reform. The comparison will establish a comprehensive view of the university intellectuals' perception of the class struggle in Socialist China.

### **Defining Intellectual Community in China:**

In the twentieth century, the intellectual community in China attempted to modernize China through different approaches, such as popularizing modern education among Chinese peasants, using Marxist-Leninist class struggle to mobilize peasants to fight against landlords, etc. Therefore, it was significant to understand how the intellectuals were defined under different scholars, how was it relevant to the CCP's terminology, and what was the composition of intellectual group in the 1950s?

Gramsci stated that the intellectuals were the socially distinctive category independent of class, having two categories: traditional intellectuals (i.e., professional intellectuals, literary, etc.) and organic intellectuals, which was the thinking and organizing

element of particular social class. The organic intellectuals often directed ideas and aspirations of particular class.<sup>6</sup> Eddy U pointed out that the Marxist-Leninist intellectuals<sup>7</sup> were the classification of people deployed by the CCP to create the Chinese class society under the guidance of Marxist-Leninist ideology.<sup>8</sup> In this case, Eddy U defined the intellectuals classified by the CCP as the organic intellectuals that satisfied Gramsci's definition.

Furthermore, from their definitions of intellectuals, I argue that the academic intellectuals and university students who participated in the 1950s land reform were organic intellectuals because they promulgated the class struggle among Chinese peasants to help them develop class consciousness. They were supposed to work for the workers and peasants' class under the CCP official discourse. Moreover, In 1950, the intellectual community composed of three groups, in total of 2 million people: (1) the intellectuals who participated in the CCP's socialist revolution; (2) professional intellectuals who had prestige in the Republican era, including writers, scholars, professors, scientists, engineers, etc. (3) younger students who had received college education in the Republican era.<sup>9</sup> There were also between 200 thousand and 300 thousand people receiving junior college or university education in 1950.

## **I. Precursor of the Land Reform: Rural Modernization, Intellectuals, and CCP's Rural Reform:**

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<sup>6</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "The Intellectuals," Selections from Prison Notebook, (Lawrence & Wishart, 2005), p 22-23.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the intellectuals here were different from what I want to examine in my thesis. The intellectuals demonstrated here was the general definition of the intellectuals that did not have the class identity and existed in two types: one was the transmitter of ideas, education, and culture, and the other was the functional intellectuals. The intellectuals in the first chapter included the culture workers, academic intellectuals, artists, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Eddy U, "Reexamining the Intellectual and Chinese Communism," *Creating the Intellectual: Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification*, (University of California Press, 2019), p 12.

<sup>9</sup> Han Yaguang 韩亚光, "中国现代化进程中的知识分子问题研究 (Research on Intellectual Problem in Chinese Modernization) ," Ph.D. diss, Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao (中共中央党校), 2003, p 30; Zhang Kai 张凯, "Study on Intellectuals' Participation on Land Reform in the Early Days of New China," Master diss, East China Normal University, 2013, p 11.



In the early twentieth century, as the result of natural and political disasters, Chinese peasants, 80 to 90 percent of the Chinese population, suffered from hunger, disease, land exploitation, and constant warfare that hindered the Chinese modernization process. In 1919, Li Dazhao, the leading literary figure and the co-founder of the CCP, argued in an essay that “state of China’s rural millions would determine the nation’s future and called for young Chinese to “go to the countryside.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of Li Dazhao’s speech, starting from the 1920s, many prominent intellectuals, such as Liang Shuming, went to the countryside to implement various education programs in the village to help peasants modernize. In the 1920s, the Mass Education Movement (MEM) was one of the rural reform advocacies that facilitated literacy education in the countryside. MEM director, Yan Yangchu, believed that “literary was the foundation for all improvement, for with an illiterate people very little headway can be made.”<sup>11</sup>

MEM launched several educational programs in many rural communities (i.e., Dingxian). Liang Shuming also founded his Shandong Rural Construction Institute to focus on massive rural education in Zouping to facilitated rural education and foster the rural experts and public health members.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, other influential programs, such as Xiaozhuang School and the Chinese Vocational Education Society, also cultivated rural leaders with modern habits of thoughts and behaviors and the administrative education to govern the rural people.<sup>13</sup> These apolitical reform programs showed that the urban intellectuals realized the importance of education to modern the peasantry in China.

The CCP had learned from the Mass Education Movement, fostering party members from the local villages to govern themselves and providing ideological education for

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<sup>10</sup> Kate. Merkel-Hess, 2016. *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press) Accessed April 6, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central, p 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 56-57.

the peasants. In the late 1920s, Mao Zedong encouraged the party members to read *Farmer's Thousand Character Reader* to understand the peasants to educate and mobilize them. The MEM further influenced the CCP's Marxist-Leninist ideology promulgation process in the mid-1930s and the intellectual's involvement in the agrarian revolution, fortified with the ideology of class struggle.

Since the founding of the CCP in 1921, the party leadership, such as Xiang Jingyu, the female founder of the CCP, had organized several protests in Shanghai to pursue welfare for the workers, which, to some extent, resonated with Marxist notion of class struggle between the urban capitalists and proletariat. In *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels stated that class struggle led by Communism was to abolish the bourgeois' ownership to help the urban proletariat.<sup>14</sup> While the CCP leaderships organized urban proletariat revolution, Mao Zedong organized the rural movements to attempt solving Chinese problems.

In 1926, Mao Zedong analyzed the class in Chinese society in one of his articles. He categorized Chinese society into five classes: (1) Landlord and comprador class; (2) Middle Bourgeoisie; (3) Petty Bourgeoisie; (4) Semi-proletariat; (5) Proletariat.<sup>15</sup> Mao concluded that the fourth and fifth groups were the major components of the revolutionary power, and the third group was the potential ally to cooperate with. In 1927, Mao completed a survey report on rural areas in Hunan province. He summarized that "the agrarian revolution was to overthrow the feudal landlord and gentry politically and economically to build peasant authority in rural society

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848, p 42-44.

<sup>15</sup> Mao Zedong, "Analyses of the Classes in Chinese society," March 1926, [ANALYSIS OF THE CLASSES IN CHINESE SOCIETY \(marxists.org\)](http://marxists.org)

by organizing the peasant organizations. It was the most serious and pivotal struggle.”<sup>16</sup> It had shown how Mao understood the class struggle that accommodated with his rural experience in Hunan. He understood the class struggle was to mobilize peasants in group to fight against the local landlord and gentry politically and economically. Mao’s understandings on class struggle became one of the doctrines to train the academic intellectuals and university students in the 1950s land reform.

After the April 12<sup>th</sup> incident in 1927, the CCP moved its base to the rural mountainous areas. In order to continue the revolution, the party under the leadership of Mao carried out the land reform, demonstrating CCP attempts to solve rural problems with class struggle. The party members organized poor peasants, landless peasants, and the unemployed to fight against the local landlord in the Jinggangshan region and later in Soviet Area and confiscated all landlords’ properties, including lands and production instruments, with violence and without proper investigation. In response to the violent reform, Mao published an article in 1933 on how to differentiate the class in rural areas, in which he categorized rural society into five categories: (1) the landlord, (2) the rich peasant, (3) the middle peasant, (4) the poor peasant, (5) the worker.<sup>17</sup> It was a significant document for the work team members to standard the future land reform work (i.e., land reform in the late 1940s and early 1950s) in rural areas. It told work team members how to distinguish the class enemy in rural areas.

In the Yan’an period, many intellectuals moved into Yan’an to support war efforts against the Japanese invasion. The party leadership realized the importance of the

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<sup>16</sup> Mao Zedong, “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan,” March 1927, [REPORT ON AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PEASANT MOVEMENT IN HUNAN \(marxists.org\)](http://marxists.org)

<sup>17</sup> Mao Zedong, “How to differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas,” October 1933, [HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE THE CLASSES IN THE RURAL AREAS \(marxists.org\)](http://marxists.org)

intellectuals in propagating the revolutionary ideas among peasants. Therefore, the CCP leadership set up multiple institutions, such as Anti-Japanese Military and Political University, Shaanbei Public School, and Lu Xun Art Institute, to teach cadre and intellectuals revolutionary concepts, necessary military and administrative skills, and other disciplines like history and economy. Party Chairman Mao also announced in 1939 that “The party had recruited plenty of intellectuals in the past three years and absorbed many revolutionary intellectuals into the party system and the mass movement....There must be no repetition of the incorrect attitude towards intellectuals which Party organizations in many localities and army units adopted during the Agrarian Revolution; the proletariat cannot produce intellectuals of its own without the help of the existing intellectuals.”<sup>18</sup>

I consider that the CCP’s education institutions and Mao’s announcement, to some extent, demonstrated MEM influence on the CCP. The CCP leadership hired intellectuals to educate cadres and local people and propagated the CCP ideology through the mass movement. By training many revolutionary intellectuals, the CCP was able to implement the class struggle in rural areas to build local governance. The intellectuals who came to Yan’an composed of three groups: (1) the intellectuals who received old-style education (i.e., *Sishu*); (2) the intellectuals who went to France and the Soviet Union; (3) the intellectuals who received the new style education (western-style university) after the May Fourth Movement.<sup>19</sup> In these institutions, there were two types of intellectuals being fostered in the CCP: the research-based Marxist-

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<sup>18</sup> Mao Zedong, “Recruit Large Numbers of Intellectuals,” Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939. [RECRUIT LARGE NUMBERS OF INTELLECTUALS \[1\] \(marxists.org\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> Guo Deqin 郭德钦, *Study on Yanan Intellectuals and Popularization of Marxism* (延安知识分子与马克思主义大众化研究), (Zhongyang Wenxian Press. 2014), p 45.

Leninist intellectuals and grassroots advocacy intellectuals.<sup>20</sup>

The research-based intellectuals did the theoretical interpretation and research on the Marxist-Leninist ideology, such as Zhang Wentian (Luo fu), Ai Siqu, etc. The grassroots advocacy intellectuals were the propaganda specialists who were dispatched to different village to disseminate the CCP ideology and helped build the local party government. Many Shaanxi local intellectuals, such as Liu qing, Sun Li, etc., who came from poor families, received the Marxist-Leninist education in the institutions to understand the class struggle and became the propaganda specialists in local mass movement.<sup>21</sup>

Li Wanyi received education in Yan'an as the grassroots advocacy intellectuals (propaganda specialist) and went back to Wugong in Raoyao county, Hebei province to propagate the CCP's political ideas.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, Li was able to mobilize the local peasants to support the Anti-Japanese war; on the other hand, Li could disseminate the significance of Marxist-Leninist ideology to the countryside and created a consciousness among peasants that the Japanese invaders caused the rural poverties. It presented the consistency between the class struggle and national struggle in wartime, as Mao mentioned. As a result, many Wugong peasants were mobilized to join the party and guerilla teams to fight against the Japanese. The CCP also formed the local governance in Raoyang county.

In 1942, party chairman Mao made a speech in the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art that "Since the audience for our literature and art consists of workers, peasants, and soldiers and of their cadres, the problem arises of understanding them and knowing them well. A

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<sup>20</sup> Guo Deqin 郭德钦, *Study on Yanan Intellectuals and Popularization of Marxism* (延安知识分子与马克思主义大众化研究), (Zhongyang Wenxian Press. 2014), p 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> Guo Deqin 郭德钦, *Study on Yanan Intellectuals and Popularization of Marxism* (延安知识分子与马克思主义大众化研究), (Zhongyang Wenxian Press. 2014), p 52-54.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Mark Selden, "Bonds of War," *Chinese Village, Socialist State*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991), p 46.

great deal of work has to be done in order to understand them and know them well, to understand and know well all the different kinds of people and phenomena in the Party and government organizations, in the villages and factories and in the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies. Our writers and artists have their literary and art work to do, but their primary task is to understand people and know them well.”<sup>23</sup> This speech formed a foundational guideline for intellectuals to build the deep connection and cooperation between the intellectuals and rural peasants who suffered from class exploitation.

This speech further demonstrated the difference between CCP’s intellectuals and intellectuals in MEM, which focused on their traditional roles of providing modern education to peasants. The CCP not only noticed the importance of intellectuals as knowledge transmitters but also stressed that they should be educated physically and ideologically through interacting with peasants. In this case, the intellectuals under the CCP discourse had the dual character. It was also the reason for the Socialist China in 1950 to dispatch university students and academic intellectuals to participate in the land reform to understand the class struggle.

In the War of Liberation, the CCP initiated another wave of rural land reform; however, it became quite violent. Multiple landlords and rich peasants were beaten harshly by the work team members without comprehensive investigation and classification.<sup>24</sup> In response to

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<sup>23</sup> Mao Zedong, “Talks at The Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, Introduction,” May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1942. [TALKS AT THE YENAN FORUM ON LITERATURE AND ART \(marxists.org\)](http://marxists.org)

<sup>24</sup> Gao Wangling 高王凌, and Liu Yang 刘洋, “土改的极端化 (The extremization of the land reform),” *Twenty-First Century*, 2009, 39-40. In Chan Village located in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the rich peasants were ill-treated by the work team members: Dai Yuxiang, the rich peasants (could only be considered as the middle peasants by the standard of Chan village), was beaten harshly, as well as his wife. The action of beating the rich peasants or landlords was dominated by the extremely leftist emotions, thinking that beating, hanging, dragging were the only ways to fight the landlord; Liu Yang 刘洋, “阜平县土地改革研究 (1946年-1949年) (The Study of Land Reform in Fuping County (1946-1949)),” Master Thesis, Hebei Normal University, 2013. Liu Yang described the phenomenon of violent action to the landlords and rich peasants in the process of the May Review (五月

the violent reform, in early 1948, the Party Bureau work team went to Ten Mile Inn, Wu An, Hebei province to carry out land reform. The majority of the work team members came from intellectual community, including journalists, local propaganda specialists, etc. During this process, the work team helped peasants set up peasants' leagues, made classification in the village based on Mao's document in 1933, and struggled against class enemies based on their classification.<sup>25</sup> This land reform incorporated Mao's idea of class struggle, rural classification, and cooperation with local peasants. It formed a uniform standard procedure for intellectual group participating in the land reform. It further helped intellectuals understand peasants' hardship as well as the problems within the campaign.

## II. Academic Intellectuals and University students in the 1950 Land Reform:

The 1950s land reform was the part of the agrarian revolution starting from the mid-1930s to pursue the goal of "Land to the tiller." While in the war against Japan the CCP leadership emphasized the consistency of the class struggle and the national struggle, the party did not ignore the existing problems of rural exploitation. In the War of Liberation (1946-1949), the CCP published the May Fourth Directive<sup>26</sup> and Guidance of the Land Reform to guide the

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复查) in Fuping County, Hebei province, in 1947 that over-active population expressed their emotions through the movement under the extremely leftist ideology. Initially, the central committee for the land reform in the Jin-cha-Ji base recognized the implausibility of the rightist movement and discussed the plan to change. However, the county-level officials in Fuping did not have a well-designed structure to organize the movement, which led to the outbreak of violence in Fuping county. As a result, 300 people (landlords & rich peasants) were killed within half of the months.

<sup>25</sup> Isabel and David Crook, *Ten Mile Inn, Mass Movement in a Chinese Village*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1979.

<sup>26</sup> Ge Jiannan (葛建男), and Jiao Yishuang (焦以爽), "简评《五四指示》 (Brief Commentary on May-Fourth Directive)," *沧州师范专科学校学报 (Journal of Cangzhou Teachers' College)*, vol, 24, no, 1, 2008, 85. On May Fourth, 1946, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued a directive on the liquidation of rent reduction and land issues (May-Fourth Directive), deciding to change the policy of rent reduction and interest reduction into a land policy of confiscating landowners' land for distribution to peasants. The fundamental point of this directive was to stand along with people, supporting the massive rural population to launch the land reform for legitimate purposes.

land reform in the Liberated Area. These documents were the foundation for the PRC's Land Reform Law that enacted on June 30th, 1950.<sup>27</sup>

When the PRC was founded on October 1st, 1949, the PRC government initiated the national land reform. Liu Shaoqi stated in his conference report in 1950 that “since the land reform in the old Liberated Area had proceeded smoothly, the land reform teams in the New Liberated Area should closely work with the local party members and rural poor peasants and hired workers to proceed the land distribution process; the rich peasants’ economy should be protected to allow them to expand the production; the classification of rural society should be taken seriously that the shady landlord and gentry should be seriously criticized and their land properties should be confiscated and redistributed.”<sup>28</sup>

This speech summarized the past successful works and lessons and demonstrated new requirements for this continuing reform. In Southern China, the land reform was not initiated in early 1950 for two reasons: (1) these regions were just liberated from the KMT’s governance that many preparatory works were not done; (i.e., the construction of local party organization, the Reduction in Loan and Interest Campaign) (2) the winter in 1949 and 1950 was not suitable for immediate land reform in the Southern part of China due to the severe weather conditions and food shortage. In 1950, the land reform gradually shifted into the new Liberated

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<sup>27</sup> The Land Reform Law of the People’s Republic of China was published on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1950. It was adopted at the eighth meeting of the Central People's Government Committee on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1950. The draft of the Land Reform Law of the People's Republic of China proposed at the second meeting of the First National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference was discussed and approved at the eighth meeting of the Central People's Government Committee and should be promulgated and implemented as of June 30th, 1950. It consisted of six Chapters and forty Articles to demonstrate specific land reform policies to different classes and different land properties.

<sup>28</sup> Liu Shaoqi, “Report of the issue in the land reform (关于土地改革问题的报告),” (1950/6/14), *Jianguo Yilai Zhongyao Wenxian Xuanbian (The Compilation of the Important Document since the Founding of the PRC)*, Vol. 1., Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi ed., Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 2011.



Area that the many local villages had organized the local party government and conducted the Reduction in Loan and Interest campaign to prepare for the land reform.

In December 1949, the Deputy Minister of Education Department, Qian Ruijun, had mentioned the necessity for political education and ideological reform among the intellectuals. After this speech, many universities in Beijing set up political study groups to study Marxist-Leninist ideology, class idea, and land reform.<sup>29</sup> The Education Department and central government also encouraged the academic intellectuals and intellectual youths in universities to participate in the land reform in early 1950. In the winter of 1950, 800 professors and university students participated in the land reform in the countryside of Beijing.<sup>30</sup> The party leadership wanted these people who grew up in the urban centers to observe and understand the terrible rural conditions, presenting a contradictory shock for them to foster their self-consciousness on solving the rural problems. Cui Xiaoling also highlighted that CCP's ideological reform was beneficial for academic intellectuals to recognize this new regime, and the CCP wanted to foster current and future intellectuals with Marxist-Leninist ideology who fully understood Chinese problems.<sup>31</sup>

In this chapter, I want to investigate how the academic intellectuals and university students who lived in the urban centers participated in the land reform in the new Liberated Area (especially in Huadong and Zhongnan District) and how they understood the class struggle in

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<sup>29</sup> Cui Xiaoling 崔晓麟, *Reformation and Thoughts: The Research on Intellectual Thoughts Transformation Movements around 1951* (重塑与思考: 1951年前后高校知识分子思想改造运动研究), (Zhonggong Dangshi Press. 2005), p 104-105.

<sup>30</sup> Jin Fong 金峰. "Eight Hundred Professors and Students from Beijing Participate in Suburban Land Reform Enthusiastically Help Peasants Turn Over and Transform Themselves (首都 800 师生参加京郊土地改革热情帮助农民翻身和改造自己)." No 3. *People's Daily*, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1950.

<sup>31</sup> Cui Xiaoling 崔晓麟, *Reformation and Thoughts: The Research on Intellectual Thoughts Transformation Movements around 1951* (重塑与思考: 1951年前后高校知识分子思想改造运动研究), (Zhonggong Dangshi Press. 2005), p 2-6.

Chinese rural society throughout their involvement. Furthermore, I will compare the academic intellectuals and university students who enrolled in the university in 1948 and 1949 to understand their different processes of understanding the class struggle. It will include comparing the land reform observation team, which allowed intellectual groups to see the results of land reform, and the local work team and comparing the academic intellectuals and university students in the work team. I argue that although they had a similar goal in the land reform to transform themselves physically and ideologically, their different approaches will inform how they understood the class struggle differently from their experience in different villages.

### **Academic Intellectuals in the Land Reform: Observing Versus Participating:**

In 1950, a number of academic intellectuals and university students had participated in the land reform and shared their experience of ideological reform. The party leadership praised the academic intellectuals and university students for their participation in the land reform. The last wave of intellectual participation in the land reform happened between 1951 and mid-1952. In September 1951, Zhou Enlai shared his experience to demonstrate his viewpoint on intellectual transformation. “Most of our country’s intellectuals came from landlord or bourgeois families, so we can’t expect them to take the side of working class all at once...So to remold themselves, intellectuals too should go through tempering and engage in study and practice. The reason intellectuals should go down to the countryside and into factories is precisely to learn the thinking and standpoints of the working class and other laboring people.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Zhou Enlai, “Guanyu Zhishifenzi de Gaizao Wenti (On the Remolding of Intellectuals),” (1951/9/29 – 关于知识分子的改造问题) *Jianguoyilai Zhongyao Wenxian Xuanbian (The Compilation of the Important Document since the Founding of the PRC)*, Vol. 2., Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi ed., Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 2011, p 387-398; *Selected Works of Zhou Enlai*, Vol. II, p 71, 76. [output \(marxists.org\)](http://output.marxists.org)

There were two ways in participating in the land reform: one was to join the land reform observation team to visit several experimental/model regions to see how academic intellectuals and intellectual youths carried out the land reform. The second way was to join the local work teams to live with the local peasants and experience the entire process of land reform. In this process, the intellectuals could understand the class struggle in the rural community. Observing and participating in the process demonstrated different viewpoints on how these academic intellectuals understood the class struggle. Between April and June 1951, Professor Lin Yaohua and Zheng Linzhuang from Yanjing University<sup>33</sup> were in the Huadong land reform observation team. They went to Wujiang County in Southern Jiangsu province to observe the land reform process and shared their viewpoints on land reform.

#### **Academic intellectuals in the Observation Team: Shared Thoughts in the Newspaper**

Lin Yaohua mentioned in the People's Daily that "land reform was not just the economic reform and a vehement class struggle but also a comprehensive and real education process for the intellectuals to connect with the Chinese peasantry..... Throughout the observation, it was beneficial for the urban intellectuals to participate in the land reform to improve our understanding of multiple issues. From this land reform, I had a deeper understanding of Mao's idea of "awareness started from the practice." ..... Before I participated in the land reform, I believed it was possible to have a peaceful land distribution process. However, when I participated in this reform, I saw and understood the landlord's terrifying actions to the peasants. One of the landlords, named Ren Huitang, killed five people,

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<sup>33</sup> Lin Yaohua was a famous Chinese Sociologist and Anthropologist in the 1950s and the dean of Sociology department in Yanjing University in the early 1950s. Zheng Linzhuang was a professor teaching agricultural economy in Yanjing University in the 1950s.

including one of his hired workers. The peasants were only liberated from the terrifying exploitation throughout the class struggle to fight against the gentry landlord.”<sup>34</sup>

Zheng Linzhuang shared a similar idea in the People’s Daily about the necessity to understand the class struggle by observing the land reform process. Zheng mentioned two points: (1) Having a more profound understanding of serving the people; (2) to study the land problems in China, it was necessary to apply Marxist-Leninist theory. In his first point, he stated that “I used to equalize the concept of serving the society and of serving the people, which was dangerous and was without the class guidance. However, when I observed the landlord exploitation through the high-interest loan and illegal purchases and sales, I realized that what I used to believe of serving the society was serving the ruler class. To serve the people was to serve weak people (in this case, peasants who suffered from the landlord exploitation).

He further stated in his second point that “the land ownership in China needed a comprehensive reform to eliminate the landlord and gentry class to liberate the rural production force. The landlord used the higher interest loan to control the peasants politically and economically so that they could only subdue to the landlord class. The land reform facilitated rural liberation economically, politically, and ideologically. The class struggle satisfied the requirement of the social development in China and the profit of the majority.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Academic Intellectuals in the Local Work Team:**

Tan Qixiang, the history professor of Fudan University, was one of the university professors who joined the work teams in Wuhe and Lingbi county land reform in

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<sup>34</sup> Lin Yaohua 林耀华. “Agrarian reform is extensive and practical education - My experience of agrarian reform work (土改是广泛而实际的教育—参观土地改革的经验).” No 3. *People’s Daily*, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

<sup>35</sup> Zheng Linzhuang 郑林庄, “Two lessons learned from visiting the land reform (参观土地改革的两点体会),” No 3. *People’s Daily*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

Northern Anhui. According to his student, Ge Jianxiong, Tan Qixiang was born in a scholar and gentry family with fading fame. During Tan's time in Shanghai University, founded by the Communist, he was a Communist Youth League member and disseminated revolutionary posters in Zhabei district, Shanghai. In the April 12<sup>th</sup> incident in 1927, he was arrested by the secret police due to his association with CCP. He was quickly released when his family members paid for his release. After this incident, he spent most of his time doing academic research while being politically active about Chinese future.<sup>36</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, Tan became a geographer and historian that famous for his contribution to historical geography. In 1951, he was a professor in History Department at Fudan University. In the same year, he participated in the land reform work team in Anhui province. As a renowned scholar, how Tan Qixiang understood the class struggle in the land reform, how he revealed his doubt, and queries about class struggle during his interaction with peasants, and how he was shocked by his experience in the rural villages?

In April 1951, the Huadong Education Ministry announced that professors and students from the Liberal Arts College and Law College at Fudan University should participate in the land reform work team for half a year. In September 1951, the Liberal Arts College and Law College formed a land reform work team with 656 people. These two colleges suspended all courses in the autumn semester, meaning that all professors and students were required to participate, except for students who would study abroad in the Soviet Union or was assigned to work in important institutions.

The leader of this team was the history department chair, professor Zhou Yutong, and the deputy leaders were Economics department professors Zhu Bokang and Zong

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<sup>36</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, "Transient Revolution Experience and College Life; The rank first graduate student from the Yanjing University," *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传). (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press. 1997), p 13-24; 24-50.

Kaixiang.<sup>37</sup> Tan Qixiang went to Wuhe and Lingbi counties in Northern Anhui province to participate in the local land reform and live with the locals. Before Tan Qixiang went to the local work team, he spent ten days studying land reform summary reports in Shanghai, learning that the class struggle was to mobilize and organize peasants to fight against landlords. According to Tan Qixiang's diary, there were four stages in the land reform: (1) mobilizing the peasants and explaining the purpose of the work team function; (2) organizing the farmers' association and the speaking bitterness session; (3) measuring the land and determining the class in the village (4) confiscating the landlord's land and redistributing the land. Tan Qixiang was assigned to the first group of the work team consisting of fifteen students and local work team members from the Yangji Township, where Qiaoji village was located.

#### **Land Reform in Qiaoji Village, Wuhe County:**

In the first phase, Tan went to Wuhe county Qiao Ji village to participate in the land reform. He wrote his initial impression on Qiaoji village that "I went to the village by the trolley pulled by the cow. The village only consisted of 140 households. Neither family had a brick and tile house. Their houses had muddy walls and roofs full of straw."<sup>38</sup> He lived in a peasant house; whose owner was called Zhang Wenwu. On October 29th, 1951, he began his work by stating the purpose of the work teams and the central government's guidance. Then, his work teams made several investigations of the situation in this village to understand the rural problem, including the flooding and food issues.

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<sup>37</sup> Wu, Zhongjie 吴中杰. "The Clash of Spirit (灵魂的撞击)," *The Past of the Fudan University* (复旦往事), (Guangxi Normal University Press. 2017); Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, "Participating in the Land Reform Movement," *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传). (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press. 1997), p 165.

<sup>38</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. "Diary of the Land Reform," *Tan Qixiang's Diary* (谭其骧日记), (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press. 2014), p 1.

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1951, the work team held the village conference to propagate the land policies and the structure of the rural classification.<sup>39</sup> The PRC government had a general guideline for the classification in rural areas. The rural society was categorized into five classes: (1) landlord, (2) rich peasants, (3) middle peasants, (4) poor peasants, (5) workers (hired peasants).<sup>40</sup> The number of land acres and how much work each peasant had done in a year was considered the factor in deciding the class. For example, the difference between the landlord and rich peasant was that the landlord did not participate in the farm work and earned profit through high-interest loans and land rents. The bankrupt landlord was still considered the landlord class as long as he did not engage in the agricultural works.<sup>41</sup>

From October 31st to November 10th, 1951, Tan and his work team members talked to different poor and hired peasants and understood how poorly these peasants were in the name of landlord exploitation and food shortage due to terrible weather conditions. Tan also convened the poor peasants and hired workers to discuss the necessity to organize the farmers' association in the Qiaoji village: to organize the poor peasants and hired workers to struggle against the landlord. Meanwhile, Tan and his work teams organized several speaking bitterness meetings for poor peasants and hired workers to complain about their grievances.

However, Tan discovered throughout the meeting that few peasants came to the meeting, and peasants had little enthusiasm to hate and fight against the landlord. Instead, they

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 2.

<sup>40</sup> In the early 1950s China, the entire society was put into four classes: workers, farmers, national capitalism, and urban petty capitalism. In the rural area, the class was defined as the landlord, rich peasants, middle peasants (rich middle peasants, middle peasants, poor middle peasants), poor peasants, and landless peasants (workers and hired laborers). This classification method was defined in "The Decision regarding the Classification in the Rural Village" on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1950.

<sup>41</sup> "The Decision Made by the State Council regarding the Classification in the Rural Village (1950/08/20 – 政务院关于划分农村阶级成分的决定)," *Jianguoyilai Zhongyao Wenxian Xuanbian (The Compilation of the Important Document since the Founding of the PRC)*, Vol. 1., Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi ed., (Zhongyang Wenxian Press, 2011), p 332-353.

mostly hated the Erliuzi who was idle and good-for-nothing in the village, local despots (E'ba) who were rampant in the village. The middle and poor peasants had troubles among themselves.<sup>42</sup> Although Tan faced these problems, he continued talking to the poor peasants and hired workers, convening them to explain the usefulness of the land reform, trying to apply what he had been taught about the class struggle in the land reform study session to the real situation.

From November 10<sup>th</sup> to November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Tan and his work teams initiated the third stage of the land reform in Qiaoji village: measuring the land and determining the class. They measured the land and filled the form that determined the class status in the village. Meanwhile, Tan gathered five to six landlord representatives to talk with them to collect supplementary information to finalize the classification form. After talking to the landlord representatives, Tan also held multiple meetings to talk about the classification process for the middle and poor peasants in the village. These preparatory works were necessary before the class struggle meeting.<sup>43</sup>

Ge Jianxiong demonstrated some problems that Tan did not write in his diary in his biography of Tan Qixiang.<sup>44</sup> During this stage, although Tan Qixiang worked very hard to gather information of each class in the village and write indictments for peasants, many villagers were unwilling to talk more profound about the exploitation by their local landlords. Many villagers were somehow willing to cover up for the landlord. These issues were troublesome and

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<sup>42</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. "Diary of the Land Reform," *Tan Qixiang's Diary* (谭其骧日记), (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press. 2014), p 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. "Diary of the Land Reform," *Tan Qixiang's Diary*, (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press. 2014), p 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传), was published by Ge Jianxiong, one of the most famous students of Tan Qixiang, in 1997. The purpose to write this book was to commemorate Tan Qixiang and meanwhile provide a historical material for scholars and students to research on Tan Qixiang's life.



grueling for Tan to continue his work.<sup>45</sup> Even so, he still devoted himself to participating in the land reform in this village for the final stage.

From November 20<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup>, it was the last stage of the land reform in Qiaoji village: holding class struggle meetings, confiscating the landlord's land, and redistributing the land according to the investigation in the first three stages. In the class struggle meeting on November 20<sup>th</sup>, Tan and his team members led the poor peasants and hired workers to criticize and denounce three landlords, Wang Zhenguo, Wang Anguo, and Zhang Xueshen, in the morning and three other landlords, Luo Tailai, Zhang Xuelian, and wife of Wang Guoxing, in the afternoon. Zhang Xueshen's father, who was dead a year ago, was considered the local despot in the village. However, Xueshen himself was considered a good person in the village. Although he belonged to the landlord class, his living condition was even poorer than that of the poor peasants and hired workers so that everyone in that meeting laughed about his situation.<sup>46</sup>

After this meeting, Tan continued his classification work for the rich peasants and rich middle peasants and prepared for the redistribution of land in the village. Through the measurement, calculation, and debate process, Tan and work teams eventually decided that each peasant in Qiaoji village should receive 4.5 *mu* land.<sup>47</sup> Then, each peasant received the certificate to show that they were given lands in the reform. In the last few days (from December 3<sup>rd</sup> to December 5<sup>th</sup>), Tan and his team members held a meeting to summarize the results and the problems in the land reform process. Tan wrote that “we criticized one of our team members, Yu Jisong from local township, who covered up for the landlord, threatened the local peasants, and

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<sup>45</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, “Participating in the Land Reform Movement,” *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传). (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997), p 169-170.

<sup>46</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. “Diary of the Land Reform,” *Tan Qixiang's Diary* (谭其骧日记), (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press, 2014), p 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p 6-7.

fell into the bribery. He was considered the new local despots. The local peasants had announced this problem several times, but they got no reply from the party organization.”<sup>48</sup>

From his experience in Qiaoji village, Tan encountered several problems. He would face these problems again in his second land reform in Lingbi county Xiye village: (1) the peasants did not fully cooperate with the work team members even though the team members had propagated the land policies to the peasants, which made the land reform difficult to proceed; (2) since the village was poor enough that there was little or even no difference between the landlord and poor peasant class, the villagers did not want to be harsh toward their companions in the village. (3) there existed the workstyle problems among the team members that they threatened the local peasants not to speak about their bitterness.

#### **Land Reform in Xiye Village, Lingbi County:**

From December 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Tan Qixiang went to Lingbi county Weiji district in Northern Anhui to have a study session for the next phase of land reform. During this time, he encountered the problem that the local party members had workstyle problems even though they had participated in the land reform multiple times.<sup>49</sup> For the rest time, Tan individually studied land reform materials, such as the summary report of the land reform in Lingbi county, etc. He was assigned to the third group that primarily consisted of students from the sociology department. Tan was the deputy leader of the third group. On December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1951, Tan moved into Xiye village, lived with a hired worker called Du Chunren.

When Tan arrived, he quickly set up the working schedule for the land reform. He convened the village representatives to explain the purpose of coming to Xiye village and try

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p 7.

<sup>49</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, “Participating in the Land Reform Movement,” *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传). (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997), p 173.

to understand the class in the village. On December 20<sup>th</sup>, the work team held the collective meeting in Dongye village primary school about the general policy of the reform, treatments toward different classes, the policies for the tenacious, bandits, local despots, and Erliuzi. After this meeting, Tan attended another meeting for the poor and middle peasants to discuss the purpose of the farmers' association in the village and educate them on the concept of class. In this meeting, only one peasant commented on such an issue, which made Tan claim that it was quite challenging to mobilize the peasants.<sup>50</sup>

In the following days, Tan and his team members talked with different villagers to understand the situation. Meanwhile, the team held several meetings to explain the necessity of setting up the peasant association and the class struggle to mobilize the peasants to participate in the movement. From December 25<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>, the team held up the speaking bitterness meeting to listen to the peasants complain about their suffering. On December 27<sup>th</sup>, one of public security members, Ye Zhenghua, came to talk to Tan Qixiang and the work team to cover up and clear the charge of the local despot landlord, Ye Xingbang. Ye Zhenghua even threatened the local peasants not to speak aloud of their sufferings.<sup>51</sup> It was one of the reasons that Tan Qixiang thought that the land reform work was difficult to proceed with. The peasants were challenging to mobilize because they were afraid of being retaliated by the landlord or the local party members who had a close relationship with the landlord.

Through the hard work and frequent communication of Tan and the work team, the peasant association in Xiye village was formed on December 28<sup>th</sup> with initial 115 members. The next few days, the peasant association organized several meetings to mobilize peasants to

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<sup>50</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. "Diary of the Land Reform," *Tan Qixiang's Diary (谭其骧日记)*, (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press. 2014), p 10.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p 10-11.

speak aloud of their suffering. The result was not so satisfactory that only 35 peasants would tell the team members about their sufferings from the local despots, Erliuzi, and landlord. On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1952, the work team and farmer's association organized the class struggle meeting to criticize and denounce eight landlords. Meanwhile, they also filled out the classification form for each class in the village.

Then, starting from January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1952, Tan and the work team measured the land and finalized the class status in the village. The land that each peasant could receive was between 3 *mu* and 3.5 *mu*. The final stage was to redistribute the land and give the land certificate to the peasants who receive the land. However, on January 14<sup>th</sup>, Tan was infuriated by the incident that two local team members, Ye Fengling and Ye Yupin, bribed and forcibly occupied the lands that had distributed to peasants.<sup>52</sup> Because of this incident, the team members in the last few days held up the summary meeting to criticize such behavior and summarize the land reform result. In the last few days of the land reform in Xiye village, there was an interesting incident. When villagers knew Tan Qixiang would leave in few days, they wanted Tan to stay with them. Although the local party did not accept this request, Tan Qixiang and the villagers had a farewell party. On the next day, many villagers sent Tan to the county, in which both Tan and villagers cried.<sup>53</sup>

In his Xiye village land reform, Tan Qixiang faced a problem that peasants were not mobilized due to the fear of retaliation and unfamiliarity of the class struggle. Tan probably felt that one of the most serious problems was the workstyle problem among the local team and party members. It could be the fundamental reason that it was difficult to mobilize the local

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p 11-13.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p 14; Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, "Participating in the Land Reform Movement," *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传). (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press. 1997), p 177.

villagers to participate in the land reform process, especially speaking their bitterness. Despite these unsolvable problems, Tan Qixiang still devoted himself to participating in the land reform process without any hesitation. One of the reasons was that Tan Qixiang was affected by the impoverished living conditions of the peasants in these two regions.

For the scholars who had never lived in the countryside, it was striking for him to see that the rural area was in poverty and desperation. Ge Jianxiong summarized that the reason for Tan Qixiang to support the land reform was that he thought the land reform (a form of class struggle) would save the peasants.<sup>54</sup> The further reason was that he seemed to believe the peasants could be mobilized through large-scale political education about their class and their suffering. He was one of the activists to encourage the peasants to care about their interests, lives, and social status in the village.

### **University students in the Land Reform:**

The university students enrolled in the university in 1948 and 1949 were also the significant components in the land reform. Different from the academic intellectuals in the university who participated in the observation team, these students were required to join the work teams to live with the rural peasants, handle many troublesome jobs in the land reform, face unimaginable and unforeseen problems, and experience the psychological shocks. Moreover, their experience in the work team was also different from the academic intellectuals, such as Tan Qixiang, who participate in the work team. The university students who were Communist Youth League members were more enthusiastic in participating in the land reform to understand class struggle and demonstrate their revolutionary enthusiasm.

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<sup>54</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, "Participating in the Land Reform Movement," *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传). (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997), p 179.

**Wan Huifen's Land Reform in Jiangxi Province:**

Wan Huifen was a senior student at Beijing Normal University who went to Xingguo county Cha Yuan village in Jiangxi province to participate in the land reform in 1951. She was a Communist Youth League member. As Wan recalled, in October 1951, the Education Ministry announced that all senior students in Qinghua University, Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, and Beijing Agriculture University should participate in the land reform. It was mandatory for some junior and most senior students in these universities to participate in the land reform, except for senior students who would study in the Soviet Union or was assigned to work in important institutions. The Beijing Normal University formed the No. 13 Land Reform Work Group, consisting of the senior students from the Foreign Language, History, Chinese, Music, and Education Department, in total 100 people, to Jiangxi revolutionary old district Xingguo and Yudu county to participate in the land reform.<sup>55</sup>

Before Wan moved into Cha Yuan village, she spent several days in Nanchang, the provincial capital of Jiangxi province, with the Group studying the land reform report, including a speech made by Du Runsheng who was the deputy director of Land Reform Commission in Zhongnan district, Chairman Mao's Hunan Rural Survey Report, and the guideline of rural classification. In the study process, Wan Huifen recognized three critical points: (1) the purpose of the land reform was to mobilize the peasants to fight against the feudal landlord to improve their lives and liberate peasants' productivities. (2) Southern Jiangxi was a mountainous and rainy region and the environmental and geographical challenges were eminent for the urban university students who had never lived in the countryside. (3) Du Runsheng mentioned "Three With" in his report, which was the requirement for the college students in the

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<sup>55</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 10.

land reform: to eat with the peasants, to live with peasants, and to work with peasants.<sup>56</sup> Du Runsheng also mentioned that it was beneficial for the universities students to move into the village from urban areas and live with the peasants because students were able to mobilize the peasants to fight against the landlord and they would understand the hardship that peasants experienced.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Wan Huifen encountered several problems during her study process. She recalled in her diary that she had a strong individualistic mindset. As a study team leader, she did not pay full attention to her team members and did not frequently communicate with them, so that Wan Huifen had to deal with the relation with her team members. Wan said that it would be difficult to have a comprehensive discussion of land reform and the relevant importance without a friendly and cooperative study environment.<sup>58</sup> After the study session, she moved into the Cha Yuan village on November 30th, 1951 to start her land reform works with the local work team. Wan said that “she was the only member from No 13. Work Group that formed by Beijing Normal University who went to Cha Yuan village. In her work team, there were a female cadre from local township to help communicate with locals, some members from local public security bureau and courts to collect and compile materials.”<sup>59</sup>

Wan Huifen’s first work was to gather the villagers and explain the purpose of the land reform and the central government's land policies. Wan clearly stated that “the purpose of

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<sup>56</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 12, 13, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 13-14; Dun Runsheng 杜润生, “Continuing Mobilizing Peasants to finish the Land Reform (深入发动群众完成土地改革),” *The Land Reform Handbook of Zhongnan District*, Zhongnan Military and Political Committee Land Reform Committee compiled, 1951, p 26-29.

<sup>58</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, “Selection of Dairy of Land Reform (土地改革日记选载),” *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 77.

<sup>59</sup> Wan Huifen, *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 34-35.

the land reform was to eliminate the feudal landlord and gentry class completely, to liberate peasants' productivity, and to improve peasants' lives."<sup>60</sup> After that, Wan and local team members convened the middle peasants and rich peasants to explain the party policies toward them and talked to different landlords to reveal their problems. With the assistance of the female cadre, Wan could communicate with local peasants, listened to peasants' complaints about their suffering, and collect information about this village, including class information.

Still, Wan found some problems in her work. One of the most common problems was to convince the peasants to support the land reform fully. Peasants sometimes were unwilling to complain about their suffering because they believed that the landlord provided them with production means to grow food, even though the landlord took plenty of their products.<sup>61</sup> Wan Huifen and her local team members needed to propagate the necessity for the peasants to take over their production means through posters and songs. On the other hand, Wan and her team members continue talking to different villagers to find local activists to mobilize the peasants.

The other problem that Wan Huifen encountered was that she mistakenly classified one of the villagers because of her mis-consideration. Wan recalled that "there was a villager called Mrs. Deng, who was the middle peasant before the land reform. She was an activist to support the land reform and hated the landlord because she was raped by one of the landlords in the village. Wan Huifen placed her in the peasant association to foster her as a rural activist. However, the villagers announced that Mrs. Deng lived with the landlord for three years and held a certain amount of land that did not belong to her. After her investigation and

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<sup>60</sup> Wan Huifen, *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p 39.



conversation with several villagers, Wan placed her into the small landlord class and removed her from the farmer's association but still considered the activist."<sup>62</sup> Wan Huifen summarized this experience to understand that class struggle was not a simple task to categorize the class from the perspective of what she had suffered or what she had gained but to classify the class status based on various conversations with villagers and close investigation based on the conversation.

The solution to mobilize the peasants was to work with them to build connections with the peasants. The peasants would possibly feel the authenticity of the urban college students to help peasants live a better life. Through working and living with the poor peasants, the college students would know the hardship of peasants. Moreover, the study guideline requested the college students to live with, eat, and work with the peasants. Wan Huifen lived with a poor and hired female peasant in Cha Yuan village. During her stay, Wan talked to that peasant, worked with her, and became a good friend. Wan heard a lot of information that she could not hear in the meeting. The information helped Wan visit and talk with other villagers who suffered from poverty and exploitation.<sup>63</sup>

The third problem that Wan Huifen encountered in the Cha Yuan village was environmental: Cha Yuan village was located in a mountainous region in Jiangxi that there were many steep mountain paths. The houses in Cha Yuan village were dispersed in the mountainous region, so that the team member needed to walk for a longer time. Wan Huifen was the only member of the No 13 Group in the Cha Yuan village. She had to move back to the peasant house that was usually a thirty to forty-minute walk from the poor families she visited. She had two considerations: (1) in the night or rainy day or snowy day, the steep mountainous road was

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p 40.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p 44.

difficult to walk through; (2) She supposed the landlord had weapons to fight back. However, she thought that since she was the Communist Youth League member and decided to help peasants, she should overcome these difficulties to demonstrate herself as a potentially genuine CCP member..... Although Wan had these considerations, she still visited multiple different poor and hired peasants to know their poor situation every day and returned to her living space through a mountainous path in the night. The locals praised her bravery.<sup>64</sup>

The next stage was the classification in the village to determine the class status. Wan summarized the requirement of the classification. The difference between the landlord and rich peasants was whether the peasants participated in the farm works or exploited the rest peasants. According to Jiangxi province criterion, peasants were middle landlords if they owned above 50 *mu* land and the big landlord if they owned more than 100 *mu* land; The peasants were classified as the rich peasants if they took more than 25% of other peasants' gain, and as the rich middle peasants if less than 25% of the gain.<sup>65</sup>

Based on the standard and investigation in the village, Wan Huifen and the local team members met with peasants from different classes and made the classification form for the peasants. The most important meeting in this stage was to criticize and denounce the landlord. There were several notorious landlords in the Cha Yuan village. The local despot landlord Wang had exploited the peasants for a long time and killed many party members with cruel methods. Other landlords had exploited the peasants with high-interest loans. For example, the landlord lent 100 *jīn* tea oil to a peasant and got 300 *jīn* tea oil with the annual interest.<sup>66</sup> Wan Huifen understood how cruel and avaricious the landlords were from the meeting and believed that the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p 48.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p 52.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p 54.

land reform was the solution for the peasants to liberate from the suppression and exploitation and live a better life. After that, Wan and local work teams redistributed the land to the peasants and distributed the land certificate.

### **III. Motivation and Lessons of the Land Reform: Academic Intellectual vs. University**

#### **Students:**

The academic intellectuals and university students had experienced a thoroughly new experience and understood how class struggle was carried out. It was difficult for those who had never lived in the rural village to imagine the impoverished rural life and feel about the suppression and exploitation from the landlord. For the academic intellectuals who had prestige or received university education in the Republican era, the land reform was to have the ideological reform to accommodate the CCP's revolutionary rhetoric and present their recognition to the new regime.<sup>67</sup>

However, professors and university students had different motivations in participating in the land reform. They had different views about the class struggle throughout the land reform. In this chapter, I want to compare their land reform processes to analyze their different motivations in participating in the land reform. Furthermore, I will compare the academic intellectuals in the land reform observation team and those who participated in the local work team. I will further compare the academic intellectuals and university students in the work teams to tell how differently they learned lessons from the land reform.

#### **Motivations of Participating in the Land Reform:**

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<sup>67</sup> Cui Xiaoling 崔晓麟, "Land Reform and the Ideological Reform of Intellectuals (土地改革与知识分子思想改造)," *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, Vol. 27, no. 4., 2005, p 102-103.

For the academic intellectuals who had prestige in the Republican era, their motivations to participate in the land reform were various, from the “gold-plated” thinking (i.e., to enrich the revolutionary experience and learn official language) to altruism (i.e., helping peasants). To some extent, it was also possible to tell that their motivations to participate in the land reform was to complete a political mission to help them accommodate into the new regime. Many scholars had no experience with rural lifestyle and no opinion about rural hardship. These factors possibly formed the “gold-plated” thinking among the academic professors.

Professor Lin Yaohua and Zheng Linzhuang commented that they became more familiar with Mao’s concepts throughout the land reform and could use them to discuss and analyze rural problems.<sup>68</sup> Due to the lack of additional materials about both professors, it was not easy to know that whether both professors participated voluntarily or not. I speculate from Tan Qixiang’s case in chapter II that professors Lin and Zheng were required to participate in the land reform observation team to enrich their revolutionary experiences as well as learn the official language to demonstrate their ideological reform from this reform. From their shared thoughts, it was confirmed that the motivations of both professors were to learn the revolutionary experience and language to demonstrate their concerns on Chinese rural problems.

DeMare demonstrated that although scholars, such as Feng Youlan, had told that they had the altruistic motives to participate in the land reform, many scholars had dubious motivations, such as the “gold-plated” thinking.<sup>69</sup> This idea resonated with researcher Wang

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<sup>68</sup> Zheng Linzhuang 郑林庄. “Two lessons learned from visiting the land reform (参观土地改革的两点体会).” No 3. *People’s Daily*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1951; Lin Yaohua 林耀华, “Agrarian reform is extensive and practical education - My experience of agrarian reform work (土改是广泛而实际的教育—参观土地改革的经验).” No 3. *People’s Daily*, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

<sup>69</sup> Brian James DeMare, "Casting (Off) Their Stinking Airs: Chinese Intellectuals and Land Reform, 1946–52." *The China Journal*, no. 67 (2012): 109-30. (Accessed April 6, 2021) doi:10.1086/665742. p 289.

Ying's idea that scholars, such as Tan Qixiang, participated in the land reform to complete a political mission.<sup>70</sup> (i.e., political promotion in the university) Wang Ying's point probably came from Tan Qixiang's summary report in 1952 to demonstrate Tan's motivation as his political mission. However, I disagreed with Wang's point because Tan's report was to prepare for the Rectification and Three-Antis Campaign, even though Tan reported some of his motivations, such as to complete a political mission etc.<sup>71</sup> Many academic intellectuals in 1952, who were afraid of being criticized due to their family backgrounds, used the official language to express their backwardness in their petty bourgeoisie mindsets. Since Tan Qixiang was required to participate in the land reform work team, his motivations were probably to demonstrate his recognition to the new regime and enrich himself with revolutionary experience and language.

While the academic intellectuals had some dubious motivations in participating in the land reform, university students had a less dubious motivation to participate in the land reform to prove their revolutionary enthusiasm and understand the class struggle. In other words, it was difficult to use the "gold-plated" thinking to summarize the university students' motivation. University students were more flexible in accepting the revolutionary ideas than those elderly academic scholars who stuck to their expertise. Cui stated that the university students who received certain amounts of political education were the major components in the

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<sup>70</sup> Wang Ying 王英, "A Helpless Performance: The Intellectuals in the Land Reform," *Twenty-First Century*, p 53-55.

<sup>71</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, "Participating in the Land Reform Movement," *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传), (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997), p 183.

land reform. College students were more easily to have the ideological reform and strengthen their study of revolutionary rhetoric from the land reform.<sup>72</sup>

Wan Huifen was an ideal example to fit in such an idea. Wan recalled that she was enthusiastic about this land reform, which would strengthen her political fervor and respond to the support of the people. She also wrote in her diary that “it was my great honor to participate in the land reform to transform myself to have a staunchly political enthusiasm to work for China.”<sup>73</sup> From Wan’s comment, I argue that her motivation to participate in the land reform was to reinforce her political enthusiasm toward the revolutionary discourse. As a Communist Youth League member, Wan Huifen was more likely to believe in ideas of self-transformation through the land reform. Researcher Huang Bolin also mentioned that the intellectual youths, primarily the university students, had the motivation to express their political and revolutionary fervor through the political campaign.<sup>74</sup>

Although DeMare and Huang also noticed that some young intellectuals were initially unclear or confused about their motives for the land reform,<sup>75</sup> many university students who received the political education kept a minimum level of the political fervor to demonstrate themselves through the land reform. University students who were associated with the party

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<sup>72</sup> Cui Xiaoling 崔晓麟, *Reformation and Thoughts: The Research on Intellectual Thoughts Transformation Movements around 1951* (重塑与思考: 1951年前后高校知识分子思想改造运动研究), (Zhonggong Dangshi Press. 2005), p 106-109.

<sup>73</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform* (亲历土地改革), (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 74, 83.

<sup>74</sup> Huang Bolin 黄波麟, “The Spiritual World of the “Small Intellectuals” in the Land Reform in Newly Liberated Area – The Research based on Diaries of Three Land Reform Team Members (新区土改中“小知识分子”的精神世界—以三本土改工作队员日记为中心的研究),” *Shilin*, (2017), p 182.

<sup>75</sup> Huang Bolin 黄波麟, “The Spiritual World of the “Small Intellectuals” in the Land Reform in Newly Liberated Area – The Research based on Diaries of Three Land Reform Team Members (新区土改中“小知识分子”的精神世界—以三本土改工作队员日记为中心的研究),” *Shilin*, (2017), p 176; Brian James DeMare, "Casting (Off) Their Stinking Airs: Chinese Intellectuals and Land Reform, 1946–52." *The China Journal*, no. 67 (2012): 109-30. (Accessed April 6, 2021) doi:10.1086/665742. P 291-292.

would have a higher enthusiasm toward the party language about the land reform and ideological reform. More importantly, many official documents, such as Zhou Enlai's speech in 1951 on intellectuals, had announced that the intellectual community should work for the worker and peasants' class. Many university students also wanted to prove themselves as a part of the workers and peasants' class through this land reform. Eddy U pointed out that the central government politically categorized the intellectuals as usable revolutionary assets to help build the nation.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the university students were more likely to have a higher revolutionary enthusiasm than the academic intellectuals.

### **Learning from the Land Reform:**

Through participation in the land reform, academic intellectuals and university students learned the class struggle. During this process, they propagated the party's land policy to help peasants and had ideological reform following the party guideline on land reform. Zhang Ruilan described this process as a pathway for the intellectuals and intellectual youths to understand the ideology of the workers and peasants' class and to become part of the workers and peasants' class.<sup>77</sup> Wu Xiaoni also summarized that the land reform from 1949 to 1952 was the most successful mindset transformation campaign for the intellectuals in Socialist China. At the same time, these people understood the class struggle and knew about the conditions in Chinese villages.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Eddy U, *Creating the Intellectual: Chinese Communism and the Rise of a Classification*, (University of California Press, 2019), p 13.

<sup>77</sup> Zhang Ruilan 张瑞兰, "The identity construction of the Intellectuals: A Study of Mao's Thought of Cooperating Intellectuals with Workers and Peasants (知识分子“身份的塑造”—毛泽东知识分子与工农相结合思想研究)," Ph.D. diss, Fudan University, p 53.

<sup>78</sup> Wu Xiaoni 吴小妮, "A Successful Ideological Reform Movement in the early period of the PRC: The Commentary of the Intellectual Participation in the Land Reform (建国初期一场颇有成效的思想改造运动—知识分子参加土地改革述评)," *Journal of Jinzhou Teachers College*, Vol.24, no. 2., Mar. 2002, p 94.

The central government recognized that the academic intellectuals and university students could understand the hardship of peasants through going to the village and participating in the land reform. Chairman Mao had mentioned in his telegram that let the democratic people and intellectuals see the rural area and participate in the land reform to educate them.<sup>79</sup> Phillip Huang stated a similar idea that “many intellectuals became the active participant in the systematic effort to apply revolutionary theory to social engineering and mold social reality to fit ideological construction.”<sup>80</sup> These comments on intellectual’s participation in the land reform informed that the intellectual community in Socialist China should be educated with the party ideology and learn to implement the party language to address Chinese issues. However, academic intellectuals in the work team found out the problems about the class struggle that those in observation teams might ignore. In contrast, university students were politically enthusiastic about the class struggle and strived for achieving such a goal in villages they worked in.

### **Experience in the Observation Team and Work team:**

For the academic intellectuals who were prestigious in the Republican era, the significance of the land reform was to fit their mindsets into the PRC ideological construction. Professor Zheng Linzhuang acknowledged that he did not have class consciousness and did not think about the Chinese problem from the class's perspective before this land reform. The land reform helped him believe that understanding the Chinese issues in rural areas required a class

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<sup>79</sup> Mao Zedong, “Telegram regarding the Democratic People Participating in the Land Reform (1951/3/18--关于民主人士参观土改问题的电报),” *Jianguoyilai Maozedong Wengao (1951.1.-1952.12.)*, p 177.

<sup>80</sup> Phillips C C. Huang, “Rural class struggle in the Chinese revolution: representational and objective realities from the Land Reform to the Cultural Revolution.” *Modern China* 21, No. 1 (1995), p 125.



perspective.<sup>81</sup> Professor Lin Yaohua was sympathetic to the landlord before knowing about the landlord's atrocities to the peasants. He thought that China did not require a vehement or even violent land distribution process. The land reform helped him understand that since the landlord had troubled Chinese peasants for long, it was necessary to apply the revolutionary land distribution to distribute lands to peasants.<sup>82</sup> Since these two professors only participated in the observation team, it was more likely that what they had observed could be part of the exemplar performance that demonstrated by the local party government to facilitate them learning the party language and using these languages to demonstrate their ideological reform. Or they could not write the problems publicly, which could cause waves of public doubts that eventually challenged the legitimacy of the land reform.

Since Tan Qixiang did not publish his diary<sup>83</sup> soon after the land reform, he could write some doubts and queries about how the class struggle was carried out in his land reform. As a work team member, he encountered several problems, which made him raise doubts about the class struggle, such as cadres' workstyle problems, peasants' unwillingness to support the land reform fully, etc. The most eminent problem was that peasants did not hate landlords as much as they hated local despots and Erliuzi (who was idle and good-for-nothing in the village). Tan also demonstrated that peasants lived in a similarly impoverished condition. It showed a causal relationship that peasants were too impoverished to have a class difference. Since there

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<sup>81</sup> Zheng Linzhuang 郑林庄, "Two lessons learned from visiting the land reform (参观土地改革的两点体会)." No 3. *People's Daily*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

<sup>82</sup> Lin Yaohua 林耀华, "Agrarian reform is extensive and practical education - My experience of agrarian reform work (土改是广泛而实际的教育—参观土地改革的经验)." No 3. *People's Daily*, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1951.

<sup>83</sup> Tan Qixiang's diary was collected by Ge Jianxiong, Tan Qixiang's student, and published in 1997, five years after Tan Qixiang's death in 1992. The purpose of the publication was to provide his diary as a historical material to study his life and his academic and political experience in Socialist China and to commemorate Tan Qixiang, a famous historian and geographer.

was no class difference between landlords and poor peasants, it was unnecessary to hate landlords and struggle against them.

Besides this problem, Tan emphasized that the cadres' workstyle problem was another significant reason for peasants not fully cooperate with land reform work team members. Ye Zhenghua and Yu Jisong's cases strengthened Tan's doubt on the class struggle. If the party member or local work team member did not fully help peasants but instead threatening them and forcibly occupying their lands without being punished, it would be heartbreaking for local peasants to fully trust the work team members, further discouraging them from supporting the land reform. It was also why Tan Qixiang thought peasants were reluctant to join the association and criticize landlords publicly. Therefore, if peasants did not support the reform, the class struggle that propagated by the CCP would become meaningless. The party would not be able to form strong governance in the rural community. As a work team member, Tan Qixiang observed and reported their doubts and queries in their diaries, while the observation team member might ignore such a reality because they were supposed to write their ideological reform followed the party guideline.

From the comparison, it was clear to find the difference between the observation team and the work team in understanding the class struggle. The observation team members could merely share the ideological reform that implemented official language. In contrast, the work team members believed that although the class struggle was probably the solution to solve peasants' problems under the official/party discourse, it was an arduous and challenging process to struggle against the class enemy (i.e., landlord) because they would find out that peasants were less active and supportive toward the land reform than work team

members had learned from the study session, in which peasants should be easily mobilized through propagating land reform policies.

### **Work Team Experience: Professor vs. University Student:**

In Tan Qixiang and Wan Huifen's diaries, they shared some common challenges in land reform. Peasants were difficult or hesitated to be mobilized to join in the peasant association. Peasants were reluctant to criticize landlords in the speaking bitterness meeting. They experienced rural hardships. From their descriptions on the above three challenges, Tan focused more on raising doubts about the class struggle, while Wan had shown her revolutionary enthusiasm to deal with these challenges.

Tan Qixiang wrote these doubts in his diary without providing an answer (or because he did not have an answer at that time). For example, Tan said that "On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1951, the peasant association only had 50 new members to join, which was far less than the required number, 293 people in the association."<sup>84</sup> This scenario had shown an initial impression to Tan Qixiang that peasants were less active and supportive to this massive land campaign. The purpose for organizing the peasant association was to mobilize poor peasants, hired workers, and rural activists to fight against landlords. If peasants were reluctant to join such an organization, it would be challenging to proceed land reform because the peasant association was the core in the land reform. To some extent, the peasant association would reduce the workload of the land reform work team, because the team members would be able to precisely know the difference in the village (i.e., who supported the reform and who did not). Although Tan Qixiang wrote this query, he did not show the solution to this problem and even left him in doubt throughout his land reform process.

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<sup>84</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. "Diary of the Land Reform (土改日记)," *Tan Qixiang's Diary* (谭其骥日记), (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press. 2014), p 3.

On the contrary, Wan Huifen noticed the same problem that Tan Qixiang encountered. She recalled that “one of the peasants who did not join the association said that he was afraid of retaliation by the landlord, Erliuzi, and local despots.”<sup>85</sup> She recognized that these peasants were too afraid to join the association. With help of local cadre, Wan herself spoke to different poor peasants and propagated the land policies to the peasants through songs and posters. Her strategy was quite successful that more peasants were willing to publicly denounce the landlord and join the peasant association. Her attempts to mobilize peasants proved that on the one hand, she could follow the party guideline to organize peasants; on the other hand, it could justify her revolutionary enthusiasm as a Communist Youth League member. Compared to Tan Qixiang, Wan Huifen was more likely to believe that peasants were able to be mobilized with revolutionary ideas, songs, posters, etc. to fight against the landlord.

Their descriptions of the speaking bitterness meeting also illustrated what Tan Qixiang and Wan Huifen had learned from the land reform. According to Li Lifeng, this type of meeting was one of the techniques to mobilize peasants. This meeting was to develop a consciousness among peasants that the peasants were exploited and they should hate the landlords who conducted the exploitation process.<sup>86</sup> However, in Tan Qixiang’s case, this type of meeting had a limited effect on the peasants. In both Qiaoji and Xiye village, many peasants were reluctant to blame landlords in the speaking bitterness meeting.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform* (亲历土地改革), (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 39.

<sup>86</sup> Li Lifeng 李里峰, “Speaking Bitterness in the Land Reform: Microscopic Analysis of the People Mobilization Technique (土改中的诉苦:一种民众动员技术的微观分析),” *Journal of Nanjing University (Philosophy, Humanities and Social Sciences)*, No. 5., 2007, p 99.

<sup>87</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. “Diary of the Land Reform,” *Tan Qixiang’s Diary* (谭其骧日记), (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Press. 2014), p 3, 11.

Tan Qixiang had a second query from his experience in the speaking bitterness meeting: why peasants did not criticize and denounce landlords? Since peasants did not criticize landlords, Tan could question about whether the class struggle he learned from the land reform study session was a mistake or did not fit in the village he worked in. Tan Qixiang probably formed an objective view on class struggle from his query. The class struggle was a process to mobilize the peasants to fight against the landlord class, but the theoretical study of the class struggle was largely different from the land reform process because it was challenging to mobilize peasants to blame landlords publicly.

Wan Huifen described the speaking bitterness meeting as a success in mobilizing peasants. She recalled that university students followed the “Three With” guideline to live with the poor peasants so that students could make friends with them. Thus, the meeting went on successfully, that many poor and hired peasants were mobilized to criticize the landlord.<sup>88</sup> In many cases, poor and hired peasants would not speak about their suffers in public but instead to their friends. It was because they were afraid of retaliation from the landlord, Erliuzi, and local despots. Wan Huifen lived with a with one of the hired female peasants and became her good friends so that she could know much hidden information about the village and mobilize more (female) peasants to fight against the landlords in the village.<sup>89</sup>

When university students became friends with the poor peasants and hired workers, they could feel that they were here to help them get rid of exploitation, suppression, and poverty. Only when peasants completely trusted the work team members would they be motivated to tell theirs suffering in public, especially in the speaking bitterness meeting.

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<sup>88</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 43, 45.

<sup>89</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform (亲历土地改革)*, (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 44.

Therefore, I think that the “Three With” guideline was the foundation for the university students to mobilize the peasants successfully. Although Tan Qixiang also worked in the local work team, he mostly wrote down his daily experience as a team member and some of his thoughts toward the land reform. He seldomly wrote his detailed conversation with local peasants, which could be a helpful text resource to understand how Tan Qixiang built friendship with locals. Moreover, he did not mention anything about “Three With” or similarly relevant policy. From that, I speculate that “Three With” guideline might have been the requirement for the university students but not the requirement for academic professors who participated in the work team. Thus, it could be a potential reason that Tan Qixiang saw the mobilization process as challenging to proceed.

Wan Huifen’s description about speaking bitterness meetings illustrated that peasants were successfully mobilized to join the peasant association and willing to denounce landlords publicly. Because of the successful mobilization, she had fewer queries than Tan Qixiang had about class struggle. The successful mobilization also strengthened Wan Huifen’s confidence to express her political fervor in the land reform. Her understanding of the class struggle in this process resonated with what she learned from the official document in the study session. Although Tan Qixiang and Wan Huifen devoted themselves to the land reform to understand class struggle and transform themselves that fitted the ideological construction, Tan had more queries and doubts in understanding the class struggle. Wan focused more on how to express her revolutionary enthusiasm and how to transform herself through understanding the class struggle in rural China.

Finally, Tan Qixiang and Wan Huifen’s working environments also affected how they understand the class struggle from the land reform. Tan Qixiang and Wan Huifen described the terrible living conditions in the village they worked in. Tan Qixiang wrote about

his terrible living conditions in the village, such as the lack of life necessities, lack of food, terrible road conditions, and severe weather. On November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1951, during the back trip to the living place, it suddenly rained, and the living space was not big enough for the work teams to live in. Then, they had to find another house in the village. They found it and could lay down to rest. However, it snowed in the night, and the work team only had a thin blanket to cover them.<sup>90</sup> Through his time in village, he strived to accommodate himself into the village life.

Wan Huifen also mentioned the terrible road conditions and severe weather in the winter. Different from Tan, who just described the village conditions, Wan went on demonstrating her psychological activities. She recalled that she had to walk thirty to the forty-minute mountainous road after work to return to her home. She was afraid of walking alone in these dark and mountainous roads, but she encouraged herself to overcome her fear and consider this experience as a lesson to demonstrate revolutionary enthusiasm.<sup>91</sup>

Both Tan Qixiang and Wan Huifen had never lived in rural villages before the land reform. The land reform provided them with a completely new and striking experience to become more concerned about peasants' problems and devote themselves to helping peasants solve problems. The party wanted academic intellectuals and university students to become humble through living and working with the peasants. In this case, the intellectuals would gradually develop a conscious of walking into and serving the workers and peasants.<sup>92</sup> It was

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<sup>90</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄. "Diary of the Land Reform (土改日记)," *Tan Qixiang's Diary* (谭其骧日记), (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press, 2014), p 6.

<sup>91</sup> Wan Huifen 万惠芬, *Experiencing the Land Reform* (亲历土地改革), (Zhongyang Dangshi Press, 2014), p 48.

<sup>92</sup> Zhou Bing 周兵, "Social Practice and Education and Ideological Reform of the Intellectuals: The Example of Intellectual Participation in the Land Reform in the early PRC (社会实践与知识分子教育和改造—以建国初期知识分子参加土地改革为例)," *Modern Philosophy*, No. 3, 2012, p 53.

also why researcher Wu Xiaoni described the 1950 land reform as the most successful intellectual reform in Socialist China.

In the land reform, Tan Qixiang became active to help the peasants in the village because he was aware that they lived in an impoverished condition that required immediate help from the government and all members in China, which was somehow inconsistent with his initial motivation to participate in the land reform. It was how the environment could shape and transform a person's thoughts and even behavior. It was also probably why Tan Qixiang doubted the class struggle when he knew that cadres threatened local peasants and peasants did not cooperate with team members. These problems, to some extent, contradicted Tan Qixiang's devotion to peasants, and he did not have answers to the issues. Wan Huifen also developed a similar consciousness of serving Chinese peasants from experiencing the challenging environment. She further requested herself as a potential party member to serve the peasants to help and mobilize them to conduct the class struggle. In this case, the environment became the catalyst to strengthen Wan's enthusiasm to help peasants through the land reform. Only when they had developed the consciousness of serving peasants through experiencing rural hardships could they devote themselves to land reform work.

**Conclusion:**

In 1952, Tan Qixiang summarized his motivation in participating in the land reform from the perspective of the advance and backwardness of the petty-bourgeoisie class. It was necessary to transform our petty-bourgeoisie mindset through reform. It was an honor to work as a work team member to participate in such a political campaign. He further criticized himself that he had "gold-plated" thinking in participating in the reform and thought it was right



to follow the order from the superior.<sup>93</sup> It was Tan Qixiang's personal view on his motivation. However, China experienced the Three-Antis Campaign and Ideological Reform in 1952, and Tan Qixiang's summary report was produced based on the questionnaire guidance. To some degree, it was susceptible about some of his motivation, as Ge Jianxiong mentioned in his book. However, from this stance, it was clear that the intellectuals had various motivations to join this political campaign. If connecting Tan's summary and his land reform experience, he transformed himself through the land reform ideologically and physically.

From Wan Huifen's experience in the work team, she had experienced a thorough ideological reform and learned more about party language to shape herself as a useful talent working for the party and the nation. Wan expressed her revolutionary enthusiasm in the reform so that she largely agreed with the official discourse on revolutionary practice in the village, while academic intellectuals, such as Tan Qixiang, had troubles with these ideologies. Moreover, the academic intellectuals in the work team learned more from the land reform than the observation team because the work team member could encounter problems and had doubts and queries about the revolutionary concept. In contrast, the observation team shared experience of self-transformation using the party language learned from the land reform.

The academic intellectuals and university students were significant agents in the 1950 land reform because they were the recipient and the participant of this massive political campaign. On the one hand, they propagated the land policies and the class ideas to the massive peasants through political meetings, Speak Bitterness meetings, criticizing meetings, posters, and revolutionary songs. On the other hand, they developed the consciousness of walking into and

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<sup>93</sup> Ge Jianxiong 葛剑雄, "Participating in the Land Reform Movement," *Youyou Changshui, Biography of Tan Qixiang* (悠悠长水: 谭其骧前传) (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1997), p 182.

serving peasants through observing the impoverished life in rural areas. They also learned about the class struggle in rural China, no matter they participated in the observation team or work team, as a process to mobilize and organize peasants to fight against the landlord. The party expected them to eventually become part of the workers and peasants' class to serve them and the new regime. It further resonated with Eddy U's viewpoint that the intellectuals went through several political campaigns that become suitable to assist and work for the government.

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