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PEASANT RESISTANCE AND THE CHINESE STATE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of
The Ohio State University

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To the Memory of My Father
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Post-Mao rural China has been marked by notably problematic implementation of central policies. In many locations throughout the nation, grassroots rural cadres\textsuperscript{1} have been selectively executing many unpopular central policies (such as birth control and tax collection) while ignoring or violating many popular central policies (such as tax limits and increased cadre accountability). Despite the efforts by central officials to hold their underlings in line, widespread misimplementation continues.

And Chinese villagers do not always condone the distortion of central policies either. In response to heavy-handed and excessive extraction, mounting corruption, and the unlawful use of coercion, peasants increasingly frequently rise up to engage in various, spirited forms of resistance. By the late 1980s, cadre-mass relations had become so tense in some villages that even Chinese analysts began to warn that rural China was potentially facing its

\textsuperscript{1} In this research the term "rural cadre" refers to township officials and village cadres, who deal with villagers on an everyday basis. Village cadres, however, are not considered "state officials" since they are not formally included in the government bureaucracy.
most serious political crisis since 1949.² In the view of some, the prospects of significant rural unrest, even peasant rebellion, had begun to loom large, particularly after riots involving thousands of villagers broke out in Sichuan and other provinces.³

National leaders have observed local misimplementation of central policies and the deterioration of rural governance with growing dismay. In 1987, Peng Zhen warned that if rural cadres continued to rule like "local emperors," the masses would sooner or later attack them with their "shoulder poles."⁴ Half a century after Mao Zedong


⁴. See Peng Zhen, "Yao jianchi cunweihui zizhi zuzhi de xingzhi" [The autonomous nature of villagers' committees should be upheld], speech to the chairman meeting of the Standing Committee of the Six National People's Congress, April 9, 1987; and Peng Zhen, "Fandui qiangpo mingling, jianchi qunzhong zizhi" [Against coercion and commandism,
claimed to have found a way out of the historical cycle of "quick rise followed by rapid decline," the familiar scenario of local officials driving peasants to rebellion appeared to be playing itself out again in much of the Chinese countryside.5

Apart from "everyday forms of resistance" and individual or collective violence,6 which have been examined by many others,7 a new form of political contention is emerging and spreading, as more and more villagers turn to


what might be called "policy-based resistance" to defend their interests and assert their rights. Acting on their understanding of laws, central policies and other official communications, villagers increasingly reject unauthorized local impositions, disrupt rigged village elections, or lodge complaints at higher levels demanding removal of corrupt or despotic village cadres. So far, in a somewhat surprising development, this policy-based resistance has been tolerated by the current regime, and it is becoming a significant element in the rural "repertoire of contention."\(^8\)

When accounting for peasant conflict with rural cadres, Western scholars tend to emphasize peasant frustration over limited mobility, underdeveloped social welfare policies, growing inequality, and excessive extraction by a predatory Leninist state.\(^9\) At the same time, research on rural violence has identified financial


burdens, communal competition and exploitation by state representatives and wealthy villagers as major causes of peasant discontent. To this point, however, analysts have devoted only limited attention to changes in the content and form of peasant resistance -- particularly changes that have occurred since a) economic extraction and population control was stepped up in the mid-1980s, and b) a series of political-legal reforms, such as the drive for rule by law, cadre management reforms, and village political restructuring began to take hold.

Important questions remain to be addressed. What is new about policy-based resistance? What explains its rise in post-Mao China? Does policy-based resistance provides a middle way between everyday forms of resistance and outright rebellion?

A Preview of the Argument

In this synopsis, I first define policy-based resistance and begin to distinguish it from other forms of peasant resistance. Then I explain how it first became a lawful and accepted form of contention in Mao's China and how post-Mao reforms created the preconditions for it to


appear. Finally, I briefly discuss the political significance of policy-based resistance.

1. Defining Policy-based Resistance

I use the term "policy-based resistance" to refer to a family of contentious activities in which peasants, individually or collectively, cite central policies and seek central support to defy local powerholders who are perceived to have ignored or violated those policies. Policy-based resistance, so defined, does not readily fit in with patterns of peasant political behavior commonly identified by others. It is not an "everyday form of resistance" because it is conducted publicly and is often organized (at least at the local level); and it is not rebellion because it ceases to exist once violence appears. Neither is it simple petitioning, as has existed for time immemorial in China, because it involves angry protests and even delayed compliance with some central policies; nor can it be equated with mobilized political participation because it is decidedly self-directed. Finally, it goes far beyond the filing of an administrative lawsuit because the activities undertaken by policy-based resisters are by no means

12. For analysis on different kinds of political participation, see Samuel Huntington and Joan Nelson, No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).
restricted to the court room or normal legal procedures.  

Policy-based resistance is a form of defiance that straddles popular resistance and political participation. Like other forms of resistance, it is intended to "mitigate or deny" claims made on villagers by local officials and to advance villagers' claims over issues related to economic extraction and political control. Policy-based resisters reject illicit local impositions and defy rural cadres who have failed to behave according to official values and norms. Since their resistance typically involves sharp conflicts of interest, policy-based resistance is disruptive and destabilizing and may turn into rioting when its practitioners encounter state repression.

Policy-based resistance differs from other forms of peasant resistance, however, in that it is also a form of political participation based on central policies. Policy-


based resisters typically refer to relevant or at least arguably applicable central policies when identifying their targets and justifying their claims. They commonly reject "local policies" (tu zhengce)\textsuperscript{15} that are in conflict with central policies and defy local officials who make or enforce them, while demanding no more, and no less, than faithful implementation of central policies. Since they act largely within the current "rules of the game" rather than challenging them directly, policy-based resisters pursue their charges publicly rather than in clandestine ways. Whether acting alone or in organized groups, policy-based resisters act under the sufferance of, and energetically seek support from, powerful third parties, including officials as high as central policy makers, and as low as any local officials other than the ones the policy-based resisters are directly confronting.

To further clarify the meaning of "policy-based," some consideration of the word "policy" is called for. A remarkably ambiguous term in China, the word "policy" may refer to anything authoritative, including state laws and regulations, Party documents, leadership speeches, and other official communications, such as party propaganda. A

\textsuperscript{15} It bears noting that local policy is also a translation of difang zhengce, which refers to any policy made by local government. In this research, I use the term "local policy" in its narrow sense, referring to local policies or local leaders' decisions that are in conflict with central policies or laws.
"policy" thus can be as general as a Party guideline (fangzhen) that communist cadres should "serve the people," or as specific as a State Council regulation that forbids local government from levying fees on peasants which exceed 5% of their previous year's net income. It can be as formal as the nation's Constitution, or as informal as a top leader's casual remark.¹⁶

The vagueness and ambiguity of the term "policy," of course, is carried over into the word "policy-based," in that there may or may not be a clear and specific policy which resisters can use as their "base." That policy-based resisters may or may not fully understand the policies they exploit complicates the meaning of "policy-based" even further. More complications would arise if we took into account that resisters may base their defiance and claims on more than one policy, that they may learn about more relevant policies while pursuing their resistance, or that they may be truly believe in a policy or they may use it only strategically. For the purpose of this research, I divide acts of policy-based resistance into two main groups. I call an act of resistance "clearly" policy-based when there is a relevant, clear and specific policy and resisters

¹⁶. In 1958, Mao Zedong said to a Xinhua reporter that the "people's commune is good." His remark was later used as the title of a People's Daily editorial and local leaders responded enthusiastically to it as a central policy. For further discussion, see Li Rui, Lushan Huiyi Jishi [An On-the-spot Report of the Lushan Plenum Session] (Beijing: Chunqiu Chubanshe, 1989), p. 175.
demonstrate more or less accurate knowledge of it. And I
call an act of resistance "vaguely" policy-based when either
of the following situations obtain. First, there are no
clear and unambiguous policies concerning the issue under
contention. Second, resisters appear to poorly understand a
stated policy or "creatively misread" it.\textsuperscript{17}

This clear/vague distinction highlights an important
and distinctive feature of policy-based resistance. Though
it does not directly challenge an existing structure of
power, policy-based resistance does not simply make
reactive, purely defensive claims. The highest hopes of
most policy-based resisters may appear limited in comparison
to the expectations of full-fledged revolutionaries, but by
taking advantage of the ambiguity of policy in contemporary
China, policy-based resisters sometimes proactively make new
demands and assert rights they have not previously
exercised.\textsuperscript{18} Central policy, in other words, can provide a
basis for going beyond itself -- or at least the actions of
policy-based resisters may prompt policy makers, who might
be surprised to see towards what ends a vague or ambiguous
policy can be turned, to take further actions.

\textsuperscript{17} On peasants' "creatively misreading" of central policies, see
Daniel Kelliher, \textit{Peasant Power in China: The Era of Rural Reform,

\textsuperscript{18} On the distinction between "reactive" and "proactive," see Tilly,

Policy-based resistance presupposes a problematic zone of policy implementation, in which resisters a) find their target (misimplementation of policies meant to benefit the people), b) define their objective (faithful implementation of those policies), c) choose ammunition (central policies), and d) seek allies (leaders at higher levels). To explain the emergence of policy-based resistance, I will now examine some of the sources of peasant grievances and recent changes in the political opportunity structure.19 I propose two main arguments. First, certain institutional tensions inherent in the autocratic structure of the current regime have led to an inherently problematic zone of policy implementation, which generates grievances against local powerholders. Second, choices made by Chinese peasants of means for redressing such grievances have varied according to whether and how ordinary villagers are included in the zone of policy implementation.

It is well-known that Chinese leaders have long been

plagued by imperfect policy implementation. What I want to explore in this research is how the implementation of policies that can benefit ordinary citizens may be inherently problematic and how this problem may affect mass political behavior. By calling policy implementation inherently problematic, I mean that faithfully carrying out some popular, pro-peasant policies is virtually impossible because, given their own interests and the demands they face, local officials are strongly disposed to ignore or violate these policies. The crux of the problem is that strict hierarchical control, which pervades the cadre management system, may incline local officials to obey their immediate superiors rather than the center when the two disagree with each other. Another key cause is that ordinary citizens are practically precluded from choosing and holding local leaders accountable, which gives them de facto autonomy from social pressure.

The second argument I propose is that people's exclusion from or inclusion in the zone of policy implementation has a significant impact on peasant political

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behavior. The existence of a problematic zone makes it possible, perhaps tempting, for commoners to defend their interests by defying local powerholders for failing to implement central policies. In order to do so, however, they must have the right to act in the zone of policy implementation. In dynastic China, commoners did not have such a right. Peasants who were frustrated with mistreatment by local officials had no effective option other than engaging in everyday resistance or revolting, often in the name of the "Heavenly Way."

Despite the many changes brought on by the communist revolution, the current regime has preserved many institutional features of dynastic rule. For one, it has rebuilt an autocratic political system, not unlike that found in imperial China. Traditional political tensions among the central ruler, local officialdom, and the masses have been preserved, and the replacement of Confucianism by Marxism-Leninism as an ideological Weltanschauung has planted a fundamental inconsistency between what the center says and what local officials do. Despite the center's promotion of principles of people's democracy, local officials remain essentially unaccountable to the people, and ordinary citizens continue to be practically disenfranchised. The implementation of popular central policies, therefore, remains inherently problematic.
This structural continuity notwithstanding, important political changes have taken place since 1949. Ordinary Chinese are now said to be citizens rather than subjects, and popular sovereignty is constitutionally established. By law, common people now have the right to participate in political affairs, and in Mao's China this right was made partly enforceable through mass political campaigns against malfeasant local officials. Although such political campaigning has been officially terminated in post-Mao China, ordinary citizens' inclusion in the zone of policy implementation has not been revoked. What has changed is how they are included. Instead of mobilizing ordinary citizens to combat cadre malfeasance through political campaigns, the center now allows them to exercise their rights through somewhat more institutionalized channels, which have been opened by the center's promotion of rule by law.

As the structure of political opportunities for ordinary Chinese changes, Chinese peasants have accordingly changed their way of seeking redress for grievances related to policy misimplementation. The transition from near-complete exclusion from political life to inclusion through political campaigns led first to mobilized participation in Mao's China, in which peasants aggressively exposed cadre wrongdoings and demanded their punishment. After three
decades of prodding by Mao, peasants seem to have been convinced that citing central policies to defy rogue local cadres is lawful and politically acceptable. Now, after post-Mao leaders have ended mass campaigns and spent a decade promoting rule by law, many peasants have started to make use of this originally Maoist form of contention without the spur of central mobilization. Policy-based resistance has become part of the prevailing "repertoire of contention."

3. The Political Significance of Policy-based Resistance

So long as the current regime does not undergo fundamental structural change, policy-based resistance should continue to be a lawful and effective alternative to everyday resistance and rebellion. It is, first and foremost, a low-risk strategy because it is not subject to legal repression; at the same time, it can be effective because it poses real threats to local officials who interfere with the "legitimate rights and interests" (hefa quanyi) of aggrieved villagers. Acts of policy-based resistance, particularly collective ones, cannot be simply dismissed, ignored, or suppressed. For local officials, sending policy-based resisters away could become a political liability should the latter pursue their complaints to higher levels, while taking no action at all could easily
lead to failure to meet policy targets such as tax collection. Repression, though tempting and often used, can easily provoke social unrest.

In the hands of resourceful and imaginative peasants, policy-based resistance is not only an effective means of defending their rights and interests, it can also be employed to prompt institutional innovations that are not explicitly authorized by central policies. Considering the vagueness and ambiguity of the term "policy," as was discussed above, the proactive, transformative potential of policy-based resistance could be revolutionary in the long run. Employing this new form of contention, Chinese peasants may be able to incrementally turn their inclusion in the zone of policy implementation into institutionalized participation in local politics, and by doing so they may start a historic transition from subjects to citizens. It is true that policy-based resisters appear to be helping the current regime secure better policy execution currently, but by doing they may also be contributing to its ultimate transformation.

Method

This research relies mainly on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and extensive archival research, rather than quantitative measures to identify institutional
tensions and patterns of behavior of villagers, rural cadres, and higher level officials.

Data collection was done mostly in four rounds of field research in north China from 1993 to 1995. During two three-month long field trips in autumn 1993 and summer 1994, I spent considerable time interviewing peasants and cadres, as well as collecting books, articles, unpublished conference papers, and unclassified government circulars and leadership speeches. I also had helpful exchanges with a number of Chinese researchers, several of whom had been investigating rural reforms and peasant-cadre relations for many years. During two shorter field trips in the summer and winter of 1995, follow-up interviews were conducted and supplementary archival data was collected in Beijing and Hong Kong.

The most valuable and detailed data were collected through hundreds of hours of interviews. In the eight months I spent in the field, I interviewed several ministry, provincial and county officials, about twenty rural cadres, and dozens of villagers. My interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. Questions varied according to field site, and evolved as I constructed a mosaic of responses to rural reforms and peasant-cadre relations. Some interviews were formally arranged, especially those with officials. Most of my interviews with villagers, though, were conducted
informally. Many of them were done while I was chatting with acquaintances, eating in small restaurants, waiting in crowded railway stations, and traveling by train. Whenever it was possible, I tried to reinterview relatively knowledgeable and outspoken informants, both to get more details and to check the reliability of their stories. On several occasions, I spoke with particularly helpful interviewees over ten times, totaling dozens of hours.

It bears noting that interviewing cadres and interviewing villagers were quite different experiences. I found that individual interviews tended to work best with elites, while group interviews (with no cadres present) tended to be more productive when talking to peasants. The reason, I suspect, is that an adequate amount of privacy may make politically more suspicious elites feel safer, whereas for villagers individual contact with an overseas student may instead appear somewhat unusual (and will certainly inspire much gossip) and may increase their wariness and reluctance. Being in a group seemed to help villagers relax, and once one of my respondents started to touch upon interesting issues, others would often excitedly air their grievances and share their opinions. There was, however, one thing common to both elites and villagers: both seemed to have an endless list of things about which to complain. So the interviewing strategy of letting the interviewees
explain how hard their lives were always was fruitful, though at times I had to gently guide them to topics I was most interested in. In fact, it was when I noticed that virtually everyone I talked to complained about the many no-win situations they encountered that I decided to pay particular attention to institutional factors that might be responsible for their hardships.

In two of the four rounds of field research, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to conduct some participant observation on policy-based resistance. In 1993, I was at the scene when a township leader was told that he had been charged by a group of complainants with "harboring an evildoer," meaning the village party secretary whom the complainants wanted to depose. On another occasion, an official at a city bureau of civil affairs showed me a letter of complaint he had just received, which detailed how a township leader conducted a village election unlawfully and demanded that he be "seriously dealt with."

In 1994, I was able to interview some of the key activists of a collective complaint against a corrupt village party secretary. Also in 1994, I was interviewing an official at the Ministry of Civil Affairs in his office when we were interrupted by one of his staff members who came in to report a collective "capital complaint" about an irregular village election. Finally, during my last field trip in
1995, I was chatting with a villager when a deputy village party secretary walked by. The villager immediately turned to him and demanded repayment for his investment in a village enterprise, which had gone bankrupt as a result of cadre corruption. A quarrel ensued and the angry villager, in a matter of minutes, threatened to withhold his tax payment and to lodge a complaint.

A Note on Conceptual Underpinnings

My privileged access to usually inaccessible archival data and my good fortune with interviews allowed me to construct a near-insider view of usually elusive forms of peasant resistance and normally hidden tensions among officials at different levels of government. To make sense of these rich, detailed and complicated stories, however, has proven conceptually challenging. In order to explain why officials and villagers reacted so differently to cases of policy-based resistance, I found it necessary to "disaggregate" the concepts of "state" and "society."\(^2\) In this research it quickly became apparent that it was more useful to begin with a rough notion of the "center" and "higher levels" rather than the "state," and to conceive of

rural cadres and villagers as engaged in multiple dialogues with each other and higher levels. Similarly, rather than treating Chinese peasants as one, largely undifferentiated group, I identified three types of villagers. In this study, simply using aggregated concepts such as "state" and "society" would have concealed how policy-based resisters work the territory between rural cadres and officials at higher levels.

Along with this conceptual imperative to unpack the notions of "state" and "society" came a methodological need to examine historical changes in the relationships among central state, local officials, and ordinary citizens. In this regard, I found it necessary to identify elements of structural continuity among dynastic China, Maoist China and post-Mao China to show why peasants throughout history have tended to target primarily local powerholders in their resistance. I have also, at the same time, been driven to analyze how decades of political development under communist rule have changed certain patterns of interaction among villagers, local officials and the central government. In this respect, I found it fruitful to pay particular attention to how institutional reforms mesh with each other and with the prevailing institutional framework, and how this interplay affects beliefs, expectations, and actions of both villagers and local officials.
Chapter Description

Besides this introduction, the thesis has five additional chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 are extended definitions of policy-based resistance. In Chapter 2, I identify key members of the "family" of policy-based resistance and examine their "family resemblances." I first describe the upsurge of peasant resistance in post-Mao China; later, I explain how policy-based resistance differs from traditional peasant resistance in both substantive and procedural terms.

To further define policy-based resistance as it is conducted in rural China today, Chapter 3 shows how policy-based resisters are different from other villagers. Here I identify three types of peasants by reference to their resistance routines (or lack of resistance): compliant villagers, recalcitrant villagers, and policy-based resisters. I describe what these three groups of peasants typically do when facing excessive extraction and cadre domination, and explain why they behave in different ways by examining how they perceive the "political opportunity structure."

In chapters 4 and 5 I outline a historical and institutional explanation of the rise of policy-based resistance. In Chapter 4, I first analyze how certain
institutional tensions generated by the Chinese political system led to the creation of an inherently problematic zone of policy implementation. Then I discuss how the zone expanded in Mao's China, and how ordinary citizens came to be included in it. Finally I explore how decades of mobilized participation have convinced some peasants that it is acceptable to defy local cadres who fail to implement central policies and have thereby expanded the prevailing rural "repertoire of contention."

In chapter 5, I first discuss how post-Mao reforms on the one hand made the zone of policy implementation more problematic, and on the other hand reconfirmed peasants' inclusion in the zone. Then I analyze how resourceful peasants, drawing on both post-Mao reforms and the political legacies of Maoist China, have begun to engage in policy-based resistance without central mobilization.

Chapters 6 concludes the study. In it, I examine the effectiveness and the proactive, transformative potential of policy-based resistance.
CHAPTER II

THE CONTENT AND FORM OF POLICY-BASED RESISTANCE

The notion of policy-based resistance, like many other social science constructs, refers to a "family" of social events. Major members of this family of peasant resistance, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, include citing relevant, or at least arguably relevant, central policies to reject excessive local fees, to disrupt rigged village elections, and to demand the removal of corrupt and despotic village cadres. To further explore this new family of resistance, in this chapter I first describe the upsurge of traditional forms of peasant resistance in post-Mao China, and then examine how policy-based resistance differs from time-tested forms of resistance both substantively and procedurally.

The Upsurge of Peasant Resistance Since the mid-1980s

In the past decade, much of rural China has witnessed frequent outbreaks of peasant resistance. Among the non-violent incidents, many fall into the category of "everyday resistance." Throughout the country, individual villagers use all sorts of petty intrigues to frustrate
rural cadres's extraction of resources and enforcement of birth control, and to seek redress when subject to other kinds of perceived mistreatment. They may, for example, deliberately delay payment of their taxes or fees. Even in wealthy villages it is not uncommon for cadres to make up to 10 visits to a family before a fee is paid.\(^1\) Sometimes villagers even lock up township officials in their courtyard when they come to their homes to collect the grain tax. In Henan, a villager repeatedly refused to pay the grain tax, claiming that his wheat had gone moldy. When a suspicious official climbed up on his roof -- where the villager stored his grain -- to inspect, the villager immediately removed the ladder and walked away, leaving the embarrassed cadre out in the cold.\(^2\)

Everyday resistance to birth control is similarly widespread.\(^3\) Villagers have employed all sorts of "guerrilla tactics" to have unauthorized children. Pregnant women may try to fool township inspectors by asking their unmarried sisters to take pregnancy tests; or a couple may flee their village when a woman is found to be pregnant.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Interviewee 46, village cadre, October 1993.

\(^2\) See Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, "Nanyi huibi de redian: jinnian nongcun ganqun guanxi toushi" [Hot issues that are hard to avoid: perspectives on rural cadre-mass relations in recent years], unpublished report of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 1989, p. 2.

More aggressive villagers have also directly confronted village cadres who help enforce birth control policy. In many places, aggrieved peasants have taken retaliatory actions against rural cadres. They may place a mourning wreath in front of a cadre's house on New Year's Eve, destroy a cadre's ancestral graves, fell fruit trees, burn haystacks, destroy crops, poison livestock, and even pick quarrels and start fights with the family members of overly dutiful cadres.\textsuperscript{5}

In villages where peasant and clan organizations are reasonably well developed, collective, non-violent resistance also takes place. In some places, villagers employ a guerrilla tactic that was especially popular during the anti-Japanese war to evade tax collection. They take turns keeping a close lookout at all the roads entering and exiting the village. As soon as township officials are spotted, the watchman rings a big bell hanging on a tree and

\begin{itemize}
\item[4.] See Hong Renzhong, "Chaosheng youji shiba shu" [Eighteen guerrilla tactics to resist birth control], Xiangzhen Luntan [Township Forum], No. 7 (July 1992), p. 32.
\end{itemize}
the forewarned villagers flee the village. When tax collectors finally arrive, they find home after home locked tight and no adult to be found in the whole village. By employing this sort of everyday resistance, residents of a Hubei village paid no taxes nor fees for eight years, a feat they proudly compared to the "eight-year anti-Japanese war."  

Along with this furtive, non-violent opposition to tax collection and birth control policy, angry peasants, individually and collectively, also threaten to employ or actually resort to individual and collective violence. In 1987, a village cadre in Henan found a threatening note posted on his door, which simply said "Mind your children." In Hebei, one peasant who had seven daughters but no sons refused to be sterilized. When township birth control inspectors pressed him to submit to the operation, he organized clan members, armed with hoes, to besiege the township government and threatened the life of any official who dared to end his family line.

8. Tang Jinsu, "Nongcun zhong qianfu de weiji bu ke digu -- Tangyinxian cunji zuzhi xianzhuang diaocha yu sikao" [The latent crisis in the countryside ought not be underestimated -- investigation of and reflection on the current situation of village-level organizations in Tangyin county], unpublished report of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 1989, p. 5.  
9. See Yuan Ruiying, "Daozhi jinzita xia de huhan" [Cries from the bottom of an inverted pyramid], Hebei Nongcun Gongzuo, No. 8 (August
When neither rural cadres nor villagers are willing to back off in highly charged confrontations such as these, violence may break out. According to one government report, in 1993 alone over 8,000 township and county officials were injured or killed in violent clashes with angry villagers.10

In Sichuan, for instance, when two cadres came to a peasant's home to collect fees, the enraged villager assailed them with his shoulder pole, killing one man and seriously wounding the other. In another case, a villager in Anhui launched a suicide attack on four particularly zealous tax collectors. Just as the cadres were about to take away much of his meager harvest one year, the desperate villager rushed towards them and ignited a pack of dynamite peasants use for fishing, killing himself and wounding the four tax collectors.11

And, many peasants do not stop at isolated efforts to repel predatory cadres. In the past few years, incidents of collective violence have also been widely reported. In one widely reported case, several villagers used their hunting rifles to block township tax collectors from entering their village. During a ten-hour long

10. FBIS, August 8, 1994, p. 18.

11. See Chen Daolong, "Xiangcun zai huhan" [The crying countryside], Yu Hua [Rain Flower], Supplementary Issue of 1994, pp. 5, 7-9.
confrontation, they shot and wounded several officials.\textsuperscript{12} In a even more deadly attack, four peasants in Anhui firebombed the homes of a village cadre and three of his brothers, killing two people and injuring thirteen.\textsuperscript{13}

On issues that harm peasant interests throughout a wider area, organized violence on a much larger scale may appear. Skyrocketing peasant burdens, in particular, have provoked peasants riots in a number of provinces.\textsuperscript{14} In 1990-1991, at least three large-scale tax riots occurred in Jiangsu province, including one in which "several hundred peasants held meetings and decided to take 'united action' against communist cadres when they came for tax collection. Holding hoes, shovels, brooms and other things, the peasants ... pulled down loudspeakers, took away account boxes, and chanted slogans everywhere they went."\textsuperscript{15} In 1992, protesting yet another round of mandatory fund rising,


\textsuperscript{13} See Zhang Chenggong, "Cunzhang si yu chunjie" [Village heads die at spring festival], Landun [Blue Shield], No. 3 (March 1993), pp. 23-27.


\textsuperscript{15} FBIS, October 28, 1991, p. 55. For more discussion, see Elizabeth J. Perry, "'To Rebel is Justified': Maoist Influences on Popular Protest in Contemporary China," paper prepared for the colloquium series of the Program in Agrarian Studies (Yale University, November 17, 1995), pp. 17-18.
"thousands of peasants in Renshou County, Sichuan, besieged a township government, burned police vehicles, and temporarily paralyzed grassroots government." In the first six months of 1993, "another ten extremely serious incidents related to increasing peasant burdens took place" in several provinces.16

Most ominously, as cadre-mass conflict has escalated, anti-regime sentiment has begun to grow among peasants, and the prospects of massive rebellion seem to be increasing in some places.17 When asked what they needed most in one government-sponsored survey, some villagers said that they needed "a Li Zicheng" -- the leader of the rebellion that overthrew the Ming Dynasty.18

16. Fan Xiaojian and Li Xiangang, "Qieshi jiaqiang nongmin fudan de fazhihua guanli" [Earnestly strengthen the legal management of peasant burdens], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 11 (November 1993), p. 15.


18. See Ouyang Bin, "Haohao qingtian qi neng rong" [The vast blue sky cannot tolerate it], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 8 (August 1993), p. 11. Also interviewee 102, university professor, June 1994; and interviewee 60, Civil Affairs Ministry official, June, 1994.
to some officials, this may be much more than an idle threat: a central document confirmed that anti-government organizations had multiplied rapidly in the countryside of late.19 In Hunan, for example, the "Chinese Mass Democratic Party" (Zhongguo Dazhong Minzhu Dang) and the "Plum Blossom Party" (Meihua Dang) made overthrowing the current regime and building a new society their respective party programs. Their followers were instructed to "practice skills and wait for the chance to arise." In Yunnan, an underground religion that aimed to "found a righteous army to save China" recruited more than 10,000 members in ten years before it was finally dissolved by the government.20 In a similar case in Henan, leaders of a dissenting Christian sect have instructed their followers "to listen to the Lord, not to the Communist Party and the government" while awaiting their opportunities to rise up. They made plans to dispatch missionaries to Deng Xiaoping's home town "to spread the gospel and to shake up the people there." According to an official estimate, this "most reactionary Christian sect" spread into more than twenty provinces in


the 1980s, and "in Henan alone, nearly one million peasants are under its influence."21

The Content of Policy-based Resistance

In the incidents of popular resistance recounted above, peasant anger was directed at many different targets. Among a long list of challenges to their livelihood and their families, they rejected central policies such as birth control and taxation, opposed the imposition of local fees, and attacked rural cadres who zealously enforced unpopular policies. Policy-based resistance, however, as just one of many forms of resistance, is much more limited, targeting only a) local policies that contravene central policies, and b) local misimplementation of potentially beneficial central policies. Unlike other peasants, policy-based resisters typically isolate their target, justify their defiance, and promote their claims by referring to relevant central policies. They oppose any and all intrusions which seem to be a consequence of misimplementing popular central policies, and they demand little more than faithful enforcement of those policies. Up to this point, the most important issues peasants try to deal with via policy-based

resistance appear to be skyrocketing peasant economic burdens, widespread cadre corruption and the extensive use of coercion.

When combating undue economic appropriation, peasants who employ traditional forms of resistance typically condemn it as immoral or against the "Heavenly Way." In contrast, policy-based resisters tend to view the imposition of excessive fees to be a consequence of violating central policies. The levying of certain local fees, which constitute the bulk of peasant economic burdens, is indeed unlawful and contravenes existing central policies. Since the early 1980s, the central government has issued over a dozen documents, regulations and circulars, all forbidding local officials from imposing unauthorized levies. As early as 1985, the Central Party Committee and the State Council jointly issued the "Ten Policies Concerning the Further Invigoration of the Rural Economy" (Guanyu jin yi bu huoyue nongcun jingji de shi xiang zhengce), which stipulated that local levies on peasants must be approved by the relevant township local people's congress and that peasants have the right to reject unauthorized fees. After these rather general guidelines


23. See Cheng Tongshun, "Dangqian Zhongguo nongmin de zhengzhi canyu" [Political participation of current Chinese peasants], unpublished
failed to curb arbitrary local impositions, the central leadership enacted a still more specific policy. In December 1991, the State Council issued the "Regulations Concerning Peasants' Fees and Labor" (Nongmin chengdan feiyong he laowu guanli tiaoli), which stipulated that the total amount of fees levied on peasants must not exceed 5% of their previous year's net income. Two years later, the five percent limit was written into the national Agriculture Law (1993).

But the promulgation of these central policies alone did not solve the problem of increasing peasant burdens. Despite the center's efforts to limit them, local officials in many areas have continued to impose various excessive and unlawful fees. Local officials have found at least several ways to circumvent the five percent limit. They have, for instance, deliberately kept villagers uninformed of relevant central policies and have continued to collect illegal fees. One year after the 1991 State Council regulation concerning peasant burdens was issued, a survey of 1284 villagers showed that 39% of respondents were not aware of the 5% limit. "One major cause," a Chinese analyst noted, "is that a lot of local officials do not want to let peasants know

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24. For more analysis of these regulations and the Agriculture Law, see Bernstein, "In Quest of Voice," 1994.
about this regulation."25

Even more boldly, after the issue of peasant burdens gained national prominence in 1993, many local officials simply continued to covertly oppose the center's directives. Recalcitrant officials could, for instance, revoke an illicit fee when the pressure was still high, only awaiting the day they could reimpose it sometime later. Or they might exaggerate peasant per capita income to cover up excessive extraction.26 According to two researchers working for the Ministry of Agriculture, local officials' disguised resistance to central policies limiting peasant burdens was "universal."27

Since the problem of peasant burdens is largely caused by local officials' disregarding and violating central policies, from the vantage point of peasants, its solution lies in securing faithful implementation of those same policies. So far, however, national leaders have been fighting a mostly losing battle with local officials on this score. Despite the center's efforts to apply pressure on


26. See Chen Jianxin, "Jingti nongmin fudan de bianxiang huichao" [Guard against the disguised resurgence of peasant burdens], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 3 (March 1995), p. 17.

wayward local officials, including holding emergency meetings and issuing harsh warnings, many local officials have continued their long-standing practice of feigning compliance. Nevertheless, the center's efforts have not been completely in vain. By explicitly making it illegal to increase peasant burdens, and by granting peasants the right to defend themselves against illicit extraction, the center has made it possible for policy-based resistance to take place. As they have come to realize that central leaders seem sincere in protecting their "legitimate rights and interests," some peasants have started to act as if they indeed have a right to reject unlawful fees and to defy local officials for not complying with central policies. In one village in Henan's Sheqi county, for example, when 37 different fees were levied, villagers resolutely refused to pay because they far exceeded the 5% limit. In another case in Liaoning, when protesting yet another unexplained levy, one peasant refused to pay, saying "I don't know what kind of fee you are asking me to pay." So, although local


30. See "Shixin haiyao feili" [Not only breaking promises, but also using force], Hebei Nongcun Gongzuo, No. 6 (June 1993), p. 42.
officials continue to sabotage central policies with various illegal "local policies," and the center has so far been largely unable to stop them, villagers have begun to intervene in the battle over policy implementation -- nearly always on the side of central interests and against those of local leaders.

Once such peasant political activism begins, it often spreads. Policy-based resistance to excessive economic extraction has occurred not only over local fees, but also over other forms of hidden appropriation. Since the introduction of production responsibility systems, many acts of resistance have taken the form of contractual disputes. In Liaoning, when a township government failed to deliver state-priced production supplies in accord with a binding contract signed with all farm households, a villager invoked the contract and refused to turn over the grain he was obliged to provide. Adopting an impeccable contractual logic, the villager said: "Failing to carry out the 'three-linkage-policy' amounts to unilaterally breaking a contract. I have the "right" (quan) not to pay the grain tax. You [township officials] have broken the contract, how can you ask me to honor it?" Similarly, in Hubei province, when extra-contractual grain procurement was imposed in one county, many peasants steadfastly rejected demands placed on

them and challenged rural cadres with questions like "central policy says that after peasants fulfill their contractual obligation, we can sell our grain freely on the market, why don't you obey? If you don't listen to the center, then we won't listen to you. . . . Why do you always oppose the center? Why do you always oppose us? Are you cadres of the Communist Party?" 32

Along with citing central policies to reject excessive economic extraction, Chinese villagers have also employed policy-based strategies to combat cadre corruption and undue use of coercion. In this respect, peasants have so far targeted mostly village cadres who embezzle public funds or who rule like autocratic "local emperors." In one north China village, for example, some cadres were widely suspected of stealing money from public coffers. The evidence for this was that the party secretary was caught using public funds to frequent prostitutes, and he had filled his personal storeroom with expensive appliances and hundred of bottles of beer even though his sources of legitimate income were obviously limited. 33

Harsh, even cruel, behavior by rural cadres is also widespread. A village party secretary in Shanxi, for

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instance, ordered his "work team" -- a group of young toughs he rounded up -- to illegally detain 72 villagers and torture 21 of them simply because his bicycle bell was stolen. In the case of fire bombing I mentioned above, the attacked village party secretary was considered by many to be a "local emperor." He not only imposed illicit fees and arbitrary fines on villagers, but also, aided by his seven brothers, often beat up villagers. Indeed, they treated fellow villagers so poorly that none of them would assist the police investigation after the bombing. One hard-pressed peasant even said his only regret was that the culprits, whom he would not name, did not blow up the cadre's other four brothers' homes as well! In the past few years, similar cases have been reported in Shandong, Liaoning, Hunan, Henan, Hainan and other provinces.

34. See Li Xingzhong, "Nongcun fubai xianxiang de zhuangkuang ji duice" [The condition of rural cadre corruption and countermeasures], paper prepared for the National Conference on Rural Stability and Development, Songzi, Hubei, November 1995, p. 2.


36. For representative reports on despotic rural cadres, see Lu Fengjun, "Guxi yangjian bu ke qu, hengxing xiangli zao daji" [Evils should not have been tolerated, a village tyrant should have been punished earlier]. Mingzhu yu Xinfang [People's Condition and Letters and Visits], No. 3 (March 1995), pp. 11-13; Lu Fengjun, "Da eba Han Gang fufa ji" [Report on the execution of local bully Han Gang], unpublished paper, 1993; Guan Changbo, "Tu huangdi' yu 'jia tianxia'" [An "Local emperor" and his "family domination"], Minzhu yu Pazihi [Democracy and Legality], No. 13 (July 6 1995), pp. 7-10; Xu Yiping and He Hengfang, "Xiang nan 'nanbatian' de xiachang" [The end of a local bully in southern Hunan], Fazhi Yuekan [Legality Monthly], No. 8 (August 1995), pp. 31-37; and Li Xingzhong, "Nongcun fubai xianxiang," 1995, p. 3. Despotic behavior by a village cadre in Hainan has even attracted Jiang Zemin's attention, see Gao Zhongyi,
In order to fight cadre corruption and despotism, policy-based resisters act differently than peasants who only engage in everyday resistance or who resort to violence. They know that corruption has frequently been denounced by the center as a political crime, and that "commandism" and the use of coercion against ordinary citizens has long been a violation of the party policy of "mass line democracy." Policy-based resisters, by definition, do not employ unlawful means to combat cadre corruption and domination. Much as they do when they reject local impositions, they instead demand the faithful execution of central policies, which they hope will bring corrupt and tyrannical village cadres to justice.37

Until recently, however, this hope for justice has more often than not gone unmet. Unlike local fees whose illegality can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, corruption and despotic workstyle are much more difficult to document. Even if villagers manage to collect compelling

"Guanxi wang, baohu san, nanbatian" [Relationship network, protective umbrella, and a local bully], Landun [Blue Shield], No. 11 (November 1994), p. 7.

37. See Fang Guomin, "Dui dangqian nongcun jiti shangfang qingkuang de diaocha fenxi" [Analyzing an investigation of the current situation of groups seeking audiences at higher levels], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 12 (December 1993), pp. 36-37; Zhang Chenggong, "Cunzhang si yu chunjie," pp. 26-27. Also interviewee 5, township official, October-November 1993.
evidence, rural cadres may take advantage of the vagueness and ambiguity of central policies to defend themselves. They may, for example, argue that it is within their discretion to decide how to use village money. To defend village cadres' use of force against villagers, township officials may invoke the principle of "democratic centralism" and argue that since "persuasion and education do not always work," coercion is necessary to implement national policies such as birth control.38 To make a forceful and effective case against autocratic behavior by cadres, villagers usually have to locate clear and specific central policies to back up their charges. Again, the central leadership, probably unwittingly, has provided policies which can be so employed.

In the past few years, the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees has supported resistance to cadre corruption and domination much as the 1991 State Council Regulation on peasant burdens has supported resistance to illicit economic extraction. First promulgated in 1987, the Organic Law empowers villagers to elect villagers' committees comprised of three to seven members who serve for three years, and it defines villagers' committees as basic-level mass organizations of self-government.39 Although the Law falls

38. Interviewee 5, township official, October 1993.

39. For discussions on the enactment and early implementation of the Organic Law, see Tyrene White, "Reforming the Countryside," Current History (September 1992), pp. 273-77; and Kevin J. O'Brien,
short of promoting full democratization of village politics, the principle of free election of grassroots leaders has provided villagers with a legal means to get rid of unpopular cadres. Resourceful peasants have been quick to realize the value of the Law. As a villager in Hebei said shortly after he first learned about the Law: "We didn't know that there was such a law that allows us to speak out and take charge. Had we known, we would have long ago voted out those cadres, who do nothing but wining and dining."  

Perhaps because they fear peasants will challenge them in exactly this fashion, rural cadres often ignore or violate the Organic Law. Unpopular village cadres who do not want to give up their lucrative positions commonly oppose any reform that threatens their position and demands increased accountability. For their part, township officials also often oppose democratic reforms because they fear that election may lead to the removal of their most


40. See Zhengdingxian Minzhengju [Zhengding County Division of Civil Affairs], "Shixing cunmin daibiao huiyi zhidu jiakuai nongcun jiiceng minzhu jincheng" [Implement the Villagers' Representative Council System, Quicken the Construction of Rural Grassroots Democracy], unpublished government report, p. 3.
reliable village cadres. Consequently, many rural cadres either refuse to implement the Law, or impose various restrictions on villagers' electoral freedom. Under the pretext of preventing social disorder, for instance, township leaders may monopolize nominations, ban unofficial candidates from campaigning, or conduct snap elections, in the hope of catching potential challengers unprepared.

In response, policy-based resisters often strongly demand free village elections and courageously oppose rigged ones. In a Shanxi county, when township officials refused to carry out village elections, peasants from two villages occupied the township government office building and did not end their "sit-ins" until officials would agree to make their villages a "special zone," where free election would be conducted and unpopular cadres could be voted out. In one, poor Hebei village, a group of farmers lodged numerous complaints against several village leaders requesting their

41. For further discussion, see O'Brien, "Implementing Political Reform," 1994.


43. See Shao Xingliang, Cui Suozhi, Meng Baolin, and Sun Xueliang, "Yimin wei tian" [Regard people as the Heaven], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 4 (April 1994), pp. 10-11.
removal. After the township rejected all their appeals, the villagers decided to station several rotating groups of petitioners in the township to press their complaint. One day, one of the villagers happened upon a copy of the *Organic Law of Villagers' Committees* lying on a desk in a township office. He read it, immediately realized its significance, and showed it to his fellow activists. The activists collectively studied the Law for a while and resolved to "lodge complaints against the township government for violating the *Organic Law* by not holding democratic elections." The complainants then hatched a scheme to increase their leverage and to ensure they would not be ignored. They divided themselves into three "teams," two of which went to the township government and the county civil affairs bureau, while a third consisting of village party members traveled to the county organization department. Facing mounting pressure from angry complainants demanding implementation of a law that had been blithely ignored throughout the region, the township government quickly relented and agreed to convene village elections. Here again, as soon as they won the right to vote, villagers immediately ousted several unpopular cadres.  

44. See Bao Yonghui, "Shenhua nongcun dierbu gaige de qiji" [The turning point in deepening the second stage of rural reform]. *Xiangzhen Luntan*, No. 5 (May, 1991), p. 17.
As more and more villagers learn about the *Organic Law*, it has become increasingly difficult for local officials to simply ignore it. But in many places, autocratic rural cadres have continued to manipulate elections to frustrate villagers' efforts to remove corrupt or domineering village cadres. In the past few years, numerous acts of resistance to manipulation of village elections have taken the form of spirited disputes over election procedures. In 1992, when residents of one Hunan village found themselves facing a snap election, two young men organized some fellow villagers to plaster 74 posters all around the village, calling on voters to reject hand-picked candidates and to "oppose dictatorial elections." The village's walls were literally covered with oversized, single characters, all written on white paper (a color that is associated with death and ill-fortune). This highly provocative protest immediately attracted "intense attention" from both township and county officials, who investigated their charges and ruled that the balloting should be rescheduled and nominations should be reopened. Although the policy-based resisters were ultimately ordered to cover their posters with new ones written on red paper, they successfully boycotted an election that violated the *Organic Law* and relevant local regulations.45

45. See Zhongguo Jiceng Zhengquan Jianshe Yanjiuhui, ed., *Zhongguo Nongcun Cunmin*, 1994, p. 80,
In a more dramatic case, a group of villagers in Hubei successfully disrupted a villagers' committee election in which nominations were not handled according to approved procedures. Just at the moment when ballots were being distributed, one villager leapt to the platform where the election committee was presiding, grabbed a microphone and shouted: "Xiong Dachao is a corrupt cadre. Don't vote for him!" Immediately several of his confederates stood up and started shouting words of support, seconding his charges. To further dramatize their defiance, the assembled protesters then tore up their own ballots as well as those of other villagers who were milling about waiting to vote. Again, policy-based resisters eventually succeeded in having the irregular election annulled.46

Just as policy-based resistance to economic extraction targets both overt and covert forms of appropriation, policy-based resistance has also been extended to far subtler form of cadre domination. A telling example can be found in a seven-year long dispute, in which villagers in Shanxi opposed an illegal administrative decision made by township and higher levels of government. In 1984, as township elections were being organized in Yangzhao township, three township leaders decided to rename

the township after another village, where the new government office building had recently been built. Without consulting either the cadres or residents of Yangzhao village, they filed a report with the county government on behalf of the township election committee. The report was soon approved by the county government and, later, in March 1986 by the provincial government. Since this decision would harm the interests of residents in Yangzhao village, and it was not made strictly according to relevant state regulations, its announcement triggered a marathon drama of policy-based resistance.

As soon as they learned about the decision to rename their township, residents of Yangzhao village immediately obtained copies of the "Provisional Regulations Concerning Place Naming and Renaming" (1979) (Guanyu diming mingming genggai de zhanxing guiding) and the "Regulations Concerning the Management of Place Names" (effective January 23, 1986) (Diming guanli tiaoli), both of which were issued by the State Council. They carefully studied these two documents,

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47. In China, a township is normally named after the village in which the township government office is located. Residents in such villages usually benefit considerably from the fact that the township government makes their village the center of political and economic activities. In this case, Yangzhao village has been such a center for quite a while. If the township government would keep its name, then residents of Yangzhao village could continue to enjoy at least some of those benefits by retaining its status as the center of economic activities, even though the township government office has been moved.
figured out that the proposal and approval of this decision was not fully legal, and then initiated a high-profile collective complaint to seek its reversal. They held mass protests in front of the county government office building, and they refused to take orders from the newly named township government. A group of villagers' representatives also traveled to the provincial capital to lodge a collective complaint, where they had a heated exchange with a provincial official over the legality of the decision. When the official tried to defend the decision, villager representatives made two arguments: a) the original proposal was illegal because the township election committee had no authority to make an administrative decision and the township leaders failed to consult with cadres and masses in the affected area, as required by the Provisional Regulation; and 2) even though the 1979 Provisional Regulation authorized local officials to name and rename townships according to the location of government offices, the newer 1984 Regulation deleted that article. Because the provincial government approved this decision in March 1986, two months after the new regulation went into effect, it failed to comply with the State Council's regulation.48

48. See Li Renhu and Yu Zhenhai, "Yangzhao xiang gengming fengbo" [Disturbances over the name changing of Yangzhao Township], Banyuetan (neibuban) [The Bimonthly] (Internal edition), No. 6 (March 1993), pp. 32-36. Unfortunately, no final settlement had appeared by the time this article was published. But villagers were reportedly winning the battle.
Policy-based Resistance as Three-party Contention

Since policy-based resistance always targets local officials who disregard or violate central policies, it is typically conducted in the context of policy implementation. In this sense, we can say that it straddles political participation and popular resistance: for central policy makers, villagers' defiance of local officials' misimplementation is usually considered legitimate participation; but for local officials, it is perceived to be resistance. The dual character of policy-based resistance gives it a form different than that both of everyday resistance and outright rebellion. Though policy-based resistance generally appears to rest on direct confrontation between villagers and rural cadres, it, in fact, nearly always involves three parties. As resistance, villagers confront and oppose local officials who ignore or violate central policies. But, as participation, resisters lawfully and actively seek support from officials other than their targets, who in the final analysis are central policy makers, but who in practice may be any ranking official at a higher level of government. Procedurally, therefore, we see, at the heart of policy-based resistance, villagers both denying their immediate opponent's claims, and petitioning and appealing to other parties at higher levels of government.
Drawing third parties into their contention is crucial for policy-based resisters. Like other forms of resistance, policy-based resistance involves confrontation and is often subject to repression. The interest conflicts between policy-based resisters and rural cadres are often remarkably intense. Villagers' refusal to pay local fees is a direct threat to rural cadres' political careers, as those fees are commonly assigned by their superiors. Illegal though they be in the center's eyes, most local fees come to rural cadres in official, "red-headed" documents issued by intermediary levels of government.49

As a consequence, when policy-based resisters reject local impositions, they may inadvertently force rural cadres to choose between disobeying their superiors and repressing peasant resisters. Moreover, since peasant resistance to cadre corruption and domination usually aims to depose a targeted village cadre,50 the level of conflict can escalate rapidly. In the normal course of affairs, pursuing policy-based resistance is thus by no means risk-free. Despite

49. See Yang Aimin, Cunji Zhengzhi de Gaige yu Fanzhan [The Reform and Development of Village Politics] (Hong Kong: Tianma Tushu Gongsi, 1993), p. 58; and Yang Wenliang, "Shuangchong fudan taizhong, wenti jidai jiejue" [Double burdens are too heavy, the problem must be solved promptly], Juece Cankao [References Materials for Decision-Making], No. 69 (1991), p. 5.

50. See Fang Guomin, "Dui dangqian nongcun," 1993, pp. 36-37.
recent political and legal reforms, the existing political structure still leaves rural cadres with many advantages, and without influential patrons, policy-based resisters would almost certainly be doomed to fail.

But as all villagers know, getting a third party involved in their contention is one thing, making this third party seriously work for them is another. Currently, there are few reliable institutionalized channels through which villagers can effectively exert pressure on any level of government. Even worse, the third party they first try to lobby may turn out to support their opponents. In their attempt to oust unpopular village cadres, for instance, policy-based resisters often turn to the township government as a prospective third party. But ties between village and township cadres are usually too close and, particularly in unstable areas which generate many complaints, township officials may believe it is difficult to recruit village cadres who will implement township-assigned tasks. Consequently, many township leaders tend to protect village cadres, even if they know villagers' policy-based charges are all true.51 In the words of one township leader: "Of course, I side with village cadres even if I'm not sure which side is right. As a township official I must protect the morale of village cadres. Many village cadres don't

51. Interviewees 5 and 15, township officials, September-October 1993; and interviewee 73, township official, May 1994.
want to be cadres; if I recalled a village leader as soon as some peasants rose up, who would I find to serve?"52

To protect autocratic village cadres against well-documented charges of corruption, township officials have developed many ways to frustrate policy-based resisters. They may agree to investigate a charge, then indefinitely delay their investigation in the hope of wearing down the complainants.53 They may leak confidential information so that the accused cadres can cover up their wrongdoings. They may even use cynical ploys and obvious pressure to stimulate other villagers' hostility towards policy-based resisters. In a north China township, for instance, officials have forced several women to abort their first pregnancies and then put the blame on a group of complainants, who exposed the village party secretary's illegal backdating of some young villagers' birth dates so that they could get married before the legal age.54

Sometimes township officials whom policy-based resisters appeal to may simply repress policy-based resistance. Though it is technically illegal to do so, only

52. Interviewee 5, township official, October 1993.


unimaginative officials cannot find some other pretext for harassing policy-based resisters. They may accuse them of hampering government work and causing social and political chaos, or they may mobilize local police to crack down on them. In a Hebei township, for example, the party secretary sent a policeman to handcuff and humiliate a complainant for a crime he had committed many years before. In some cases, policy-based resisters have been illegally detained, tortured, or even murdered. In a case widely publicized in early 1995, a policy-based resister who had been repeatedly frustrated by buck-passing bureaucrats was finally murdered by four village cadres he had sought to have removed on charges of corruption and levying illegal fees.

In order to pursue their policy-based claims effectively, villagers must exert strong pressure on their champions so that they will implement the central policy in


56. For representative reports, see “Shixin haiyao feili," 1993, p. 42; and Zeng Yesong, "Jingdong Zhongnanhai de yuanan" [A ten-year long unjust verdict that disturbs Zhongnanhai], Zhongguo Nongmin [Chinese Peasantry], No. 5 (May 1995), pp. 33-34.

57. See Ma Qingbin, "Ning si buqu de shangfangzhe" [A Complainant Who would rather die than submit], Fazhi Daokan [Legality and Guidance], No. 3 (March 1995), pp. 4-9; also Zhang Sutang and Xie Guoji, "Shahai shangfang cunmin guofa nanrong, Henan siming cun ganbu bei chujue" [National law does not tolerate murder of villagers who lodge complaints--Four village cadres in Henan are executed], Renmin Ribao - Haiwaiban [People's Daily, Overseas Edition], March 29, 1995, p. 4.
question or instruct their subordinates to do so. But available channels like government offices of letters and visits, election of deputies to township and county people's congress, and administrative litigation are still poorly developed and do not serve villagers' purpose particularly well. To attract their desired patrons' attention, policy-based resisters often have to conduct disruptive, though still arguably lawful, activities that local officials cannot afford to ignore, or even better, are afraid of seeing.58

So far, policy-based resisters have employed two major strategies to maximize their pressure on third parties. The first strategy is to lodge collective complaints. Known as jiti shangfang gaozhuang, a collective complaint may involve dozens or even hundreds of villagers, who proceed en masse to the township or higher level government to present a formal, co-signed letter of complaint.59 Combining elements of formal litigation and a mass demonstration, collective complaints are lawful but still potentially disruptive. In fact, in order to maximize the threat and embarrassment their collective complaint may cause to the local government, policy-based resisters may deliberately increase the level of disruptiveness of their


59. For further discussion, see O'Brien and Li, "The Politics of Lodging Complaints," 1995.
collective complaints. For one, they may conduct high-profile public protests, which are extremely disturbing to local leaders because "stability above all" has been the order of the day since 1989. In the case of opposing the illegal renaming of a township mentioned above, hundreds of villagers traveled on six trucks and two dozen tractors to the county town, where they marched down several of the main streets and chanted slogans. In these high-profile protests, highly disturbing political symbols may be employed. In this case, nearly a hundred elderly villagers carried lighted lanterns or held candles in broad daylight, demanding that county leaders come out and see them, implying that they could not "see" things under the township's dark rule.60

To generate the overwhelming political pressure they require, policy-based resisters may choose to lodge collective complaints during people's congress or party congress sessions--times when officials are busy announcing their achievements--or even on politically sensitive dates such as June 4.61 Or they may at times by-pass levels, sometimes traveling directly to Beijing. In 1994, over 50 peasants from a Hebei village went straight to the Central

60. See Li Renhu and Yu Zhenhai, "Yangzhao xiang gengming," 1993, p. 34.

Discipline Inspection Committee to lodge complaints over election irregularities. By bringing egregious policy violations to the attention of central policy makers themselves, villagers not only used central policies to oppose local ones, but also posed central leaders against local agents who had unmistakably violated their trust. So long as central leaders were willing to be true to their own commitments and were unwilling to condone loss of control over their own local officials, in this sort of situation, they had to do something to prevent local officials from continuing to violate central policies.

The second strategy policy-based resisters have employed to apply pressure on potential patrons is to link their policy-based claims with their obligations to comply with state policies, particularly their duty to pay taxes. When doing so, villagers do not simply deny their obligations to remit what they owe. They only withhold fulfilling their obligations, ostensibly temporarily. In one Hebei village where corrupt village cadres had squandered much collective property and even sold the village school house, peasants were extremely upset and wanted to remove the sitting cadres. Unable to make township officials accept their demands through

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institutionalized channels, villagers simply stopped paying all their taxes and fees. Alarmed township government officials first tried to compel the holdouts to turn over their grain and fees by sending the township police to the village. Faced with unyielding peasants, however, even the police could not collect the outstanding fees. The township government, then, was forced to remove several corrupt cadres, but they refused to remove all of the cadres responsible for wasting village resources. As a result, the newly appointed village cadres could not effectively investigate the corruption of even the dismissed cadres, and the discontented villagers continued their resistance. After two failed attempts at "fine-tuning" the village leadership, the township government finally gave in to the villagers' demands and allowed a free election, in which all the former cadres were voted out of office.63 By linking their political claims with their obligations to pay taxes and fees, peasants in this village successfully removed a group of corrupt village cadres, and they taught the township leaders that they must respect peasants' rights or face potentially ungovernable villages.

Conclusion

As mass-cadre conflicts have intensified in post-Mao China, some villagers have used assorted "weapons of the

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weak" or have resorted to violence, but more and more have begun to engage in policy-based resistance. These knowledgeable and savvy villagers cite central policies to pinpoint the source of their hardship, to justify their defiance, and to back up and frame their claims. Policy-based resistance, in this regard, differs from "everyday resistance" and violence in both content and form. Substantively, it demands no more and no less than faithful implementation of potentially beneficial central policies. Procedurally, the defining characteristic of policy-based resistance is that it is a three-party contention. In order to drag influential champions into their activities and to make sure that they remain on their side, villagers often apply all sorts of pressure on the level of government (usually township or county) to which they appeal. The conduct of policy-based resistance, therefore, often involves highly disruptive collective complaints and even delayed compliance with state-authorized revenue extraction.

In general, however, policy-based resistance is a rather measured form of political activism; it is a form of political contention that challenges "disloyal" cadres from within the political system rather than from outside. The conduct of policy-based resisters may be potentially disruptive or even destabilizing, but their objective does
not appear to be to overthrow the current political order. Policy-based resisters typically do not step beyond what is at least arguably permitted by law. Even when they temporarily withhold tax payments to press their political claims, they do not deny the government the right to extract resources. In sum, policy-based resistance is a form of lawful political contention rather than rebellion.
CHAPTER III
THREE TYPES OF CHINESE PEASANTS

"We don't depend on you [rural cadres] for food, since you can't denounce us we don't fear you. We go to see you when we have problems, we criticize you if you cannot solve them, and we lodge complaints when you use tough measures against us." --- a folk rhyme among Chinese villagers

Policy-based resistance, as we saw in the last chapter, requires a combination of legal awareness, political savvyiness, and measured political activism -- traits not commonly associated with peasants, Chinese or otherwise. By no means unquestionably obedient to all powerholders, rural policy-based resisters in China are clearly not quiescent "subjects" of a sort who might be considered the backbone of the Dengist regime. Nor are they exactly rebels or revolutionaries who challenge the current regime from the outside, something that many Chinese dissidents might hope to see. Policy-based resisters also do not precisely fit the description of citizens who are
capable of providing a foundation for a "civil society." Villagers who engage in policy-based resistance vigorously oppose unlawful "local policies" and strive to depose malfeasant village cadres, but, as we saw above, they work largely within the prevailing "rules of the game." Their acts of contention do not question the legitimacy of state laws and central policies and they seem largely uninterested in making higher level officials more accountable. These peasants, so it seems, are not quite "subjects," "rebels," or "citizens."

This chapter will show how policy-based resisters differ from most Chinese villagers in their underlying political orientations. I will distinguish three types of peasants: compliant villagers (shunmin, literally obedient people), recalcitrant villagers (dingzihu, literally nail-like individuals), and policy-based resisters (diaomin, literally shrewd and unyielding people). To differentiate them from one another, I will focus on what each type of peasant does when facing either excessive extraction or cadre domination, and I will do this by explaining how

1. For representative views on the potential of Chinese peasants as a democratizing force in post-Mao China, see Chen Yizi, Zhongguo: Shinian Gaige yu Bajiu Minyun [China: Ten years of reform and the democratic movement in 1989] (Taipei: Linking Publishing Company, 1989); Ruan Ming, "Cong jijin zhuyi dao wenhua suminglun" [From radicalism to cultural determinism], China Times Weekly, No. 289 (September 8, 1990), pp. 54-56; No. 290, (September 14, 1990), pp. 55-56; Edward Friedman, "Deng versus the Peasantry: Recollectivization in the Countryside," Problems of Communism (September-October 1990), pp. 30-43.
individuals in each of the three categories appear to perceive their hardships and understand the existing "political opportunity structure."

Three types of villagers

Not all villagers engage in resistance, and not all those who do have turned to policy-based resistance. From their perspective as local leaders and policy implementers, rural cadres commonly identify two kinds of villagers. First, the great majority are "honest and reasonable folks" (laoshi baixing), people who resemble imperial shunmin -- obedient, tractable subjects who submit to any rulers. These individuals, by and large, listen to cadre instructions and are receptive to government demands. But there are also a small number of "nail-like households" (dingzihu) or "shrewd and recalcitrant people" (diaomin) who "reject the guidance of national policy, refuse to carry out national, township and village tasks," and who "brutally retaliate against village cadres."2 Making up an appreciable portion of the rural population in one estimate, these

2. He Weiliang, "Jiceng dang lingdao bixu zhongshi zuo nongcun 'dingzihu' de zhuhanhua gongzuo" [Grassroots party leaders must attach importance to transforming rural dingzihu into their opposite], unpublished paper, April 1992, p. 1.

3. See Yan Wenxue and Shao Qijiang, "Zhengzhi cunji zuzhi huansan de shier xiang duice" [Twelve countermeasures to overcome slack village organizations], paper prepared for the National Symposium on the Construction of Basic-Level Rural Government, Beijing, Summer 1990, p. 5.
villagers have become "tigers who block the road" for rural cadres.4

While many officials and analysts use the terms diaomin and dingzihu interchangeably, several township leaders and rural experts I have encountered make a further distinction. They point out that although many dingzihu or diaomin are lawless near-rebels, others are defiant yet law-abiding. These observers use the term dingzihu to refer to villagers who ignore and violate laws and policies and have little concern for public welfare, and they reserve the term diaomin for those who make use of laws, policies and other official communications to defend their interests.5 In this construction, diaomin are much more threatening than dingzihu. Dingzihu can usually be ostracized or dealt with through ordinary legal procedures: cadres can mobilize the township police or village militia to suppress or frighten dingzihu, they can prosecute them for criminal acts, and they can isolate them by framing their behavior as antisocial. Actions taken against dingzihu may win the applause of other villagers and are often held to be analogous to "yanking out nails" (ba dingzi), as if cadres were carpenters restoring old boards for reuse.6

Handling diaomin, however, is much more complicated. One township official in Hebei, for example, was skillful at outwitting and overpowering dingzihu. When a peasant's refusal to be sterilized emboldened other villagers to do the same, the party secretary visited him and goaded him to undergo the operation. But this official, who was known for his toughness, was later outmaneuvered by a group of wily diaomin, who lodged a collective complaint against one of his most conscientious village cadres. The village cadre was a model birth control implementer, but was vulnerable to charges of embezzling a few thousand yuan and organizing a retaliatory theft of another village's transformer. After the township secretary insisted on protecting the cadre, a group of villagers charged him with "suppressing the masses" and "harboring an evildoer," leaving him little choice but to sanction the cadre's removal, lest he risk his own career when the complainants went to higher levels. When asked what made his job difficult, the township official said: "Why is it hard? Because my township is full of diaomin! They are much harder to handle than dingzihu. They don't take orders, neither do they break any laws. In fact, they know laws and policies better than many cadres do. If I am

__gangun guanxi toushi" [Hot issues that are hard to avoid: perspectives on rural cadre-mass relations in recent years], unpublished report of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 1989, p. 4.
not tough, they don't listen to me; but if I am just a little bit too tough, they lodge complaints."7

The villagers who are identified as diaomin by these local officials and village cadres are the people I call policy-based resisters. In the eyes of local officials, they are a formidable presence insofar as they observe laws and policies while undermining rural cadres' authority. Unlike shunmin who usually shun politics, seek patronage from rural cadres, or, at most, engage in furtive "everyday forms of resistance," and unlike dingzihu who often act like near-rebels, diaomin commonly use central policies to justify their defiance and challenge rural cadres to act in accord with "the spirit of the center." At a time when rural cadres often find it necessary to ignore or bend some laws and policies to fulfill their work assignments, it is diaomin rather than dingzihu who pose the greatest challenge to them, especially those cadres who are vulnerable to charges of excessive economic extraction and political domination.

Compliant Villagers (Shunmin)

While many villagers are suffering from increasing economic extraction and intensified cadre domination, their

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7. Interviewee 5, township official, October-November, 1993; also see Yue Chao, "Diaomin yu diaoguan" [Shrewd and unyielding peasants and officials]. Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 8 (August 1993), p. 21.
response to pressure placed on them has varied. Compliant villagers may be well-aware that they have suffered mistreatment, and they may complain privately about staggering fees and cadre corruption and undue use of coercion, but in general they fail to engage in meaningful resistance. At times they may defy unpopular policies or rural cadres, but usually only for a fleeting moment and in an underground form. For instance, they may delay a fee payment or a couple may flee when a woman becomes visibly pregnant with an unauthorized child. These "everyday forms of resistance," however, can normally be defeated by cadres who are willing to impose heavy fines, to hold relatives hostage, or to employ other forms of coercion.

Aggrieved though they may be, many compliant villagers seem to regard all taxes or fees as unconditional obligations they must remit to the emperor (huangliang). They typically fear any powerholders, including village cadres. Some compliant villagers go further and are openly apathetic on matters involving politics. When dozens of villagers in a Hebei village sought to oust a particularly grasping village cadre, one self-proclaimed shunmin said:

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8. See Hong Renzhong, "Chaosheng youji shiba shu" [Eighteen guerrilla tactics to evade birth control], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 7 (July 1992), p. 32; interviewee 15, township official, October 1993; and interviewee 46, village cadre, October 1993.

"It's useless—even if the Guomindang comes back, it doesn't matter: I'll still eat three meals a day."10

In explaining their characteristic meekness, compliant villagers often emphasize their lack of organization and say that the costs of open resistance are likely to be high while the payoffs are uncertain.11 They may also rationalize their hardships and inactivism. If excessive exploitation has not affected them, they may hope to avoid cadres' attention; if they have been in fact mistreated they may accept it on grounds they are far from alone in their hardship. More fatalistic compliant villagers may claim that they are resigned to misrule and regard resistance to be pointless. Even if a cadre can be toppled, they may argue, resistance will have little long-term effect or may even backfire. In their view, when a cadre is replaced, village governance may not improve or may return to its former (or a worse!) state relatively quickly. As one compliant villager put it: "when a full tiger leaves, he will inevitably be replaced by a hungry wolf."12

For most of these politically passive villagers, deep and abiding quiescence seems to be attributable to the way in which they perceive the origins of their hardships


and the low probability they assign to successful resistance. In my observation, compliant villagers are often politically poorly-informed and hence fail to distinguish between legal and illegal cadres actions. Many villagers do not know laws and policies well enough to question the legality of local impositions or the way a village is governed. They may complain about enormous fees, but they may not have heard about the 5% limit set up by the central government. They may be angry at corrupt and despotic village cadres who were appointed by township government, yet they may not know that the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees has mandated the election of village cadres. In a Hebei village, for example, five years after the Organic Law went into effect, none of the villagers I encountered had even heard of the Law. When I visited this village in 1993, villagers were outraged at cadre corruption, yet they mistakenly claimed there was nothing they could do because, "after all, village cadres are appointed by the township government."

Even when they are aware that rural cadres have treated them in unlawful ways and that local fees have been

13. Interviewees 1, 21, 24, 99 and 103, villagers, September-October 1993; also see Zhang Xiujun, "Nongmin fudan xi you lu" [Good and bad news about peasant burdens], unpublished paper, 1995, p. 3.

14. Interviewee 1, September 1993; similar opinions were also expressed by interviewees 2, 3, 4, 19, 21, 23 and 24, September-October 1993.
levied in disregard of higher level instructions, compliant villagers may still fail to act because they see few access points for mass initiative. First of all, they may regard laws and policies primarily as means of controlling common people and so believe that rural cadres, in effect, are unconstrained by laws. A survey of 500 rural cadres and 500 villagers in a Ningxia county in 1990, for instance, showed that over 30 percent of the respondents thought that laws were made "solely to regulate the behavior of peasants,"15 For villagers who hold these views, all cadres may appear to be fearsome "local emperors," who are too mighty to challenge. The disparity in power and resources between local cadres and common people seems just too great to many villagers to chance resisting the powerful. In a Hebei villager's words: "It is hopeless. He is appointed by the township government, and he can spend 24 hours a day defending himself. I am only a commoner, and I have land to farm and side-line businesses to take care of."16 Indeed, in the eyes of compliant villagers, the fact that rural cadres are corrupt may in fact strengthen their position at a time when "power can make money" and "money can be exchanged for


power."17

Even more debilitating for compliant villagers is that they tend to regard officials at all levels of government as a unified group. Even when they are aware that what rural cadres do contravenes policies announced by higher levels, they may be doubtful as to whether those ranking officials mean what they say. Not a few compliant villagers I have encountered regard all officials to be "equally black crows." When explaining why rural cadres can get away with obvious violations of higher level policies, these villagers often invoked two well-known political adages: "lower beams slant because upper beams are not upright," and "officials always shield each other."18 Poor leaders, they may argue, can rarely be removed because they can always find powerful allies or "protective umbrellas" (baoju san) at higher levels. Peasants in a Hebei village, for example, pointed out that their party secretary, who was notoriously corrupt, must have bought off the township officials since they often drank and gambled together. In addition, they knew he had "sworn brothers" (meng xiongdi) at county government, who would defend him against any and all mass charges.19


18. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, 17, 19, 21, 56, and 104, villagers, September-October 1993.

Furthermore, even for those compliant villagers who would agree that the center is serious about its policies, they have reason to doubt its capability to reach down into their village. Suspicious compliant villagers commonly refer to the traditional folk saying "the heaven is high and the emperor is far away" and its contemporary equivalent that "the higher levels have policies, while lower levels have their counter-policies" to explain their inactivism.\(^{20}\) They may wish that higher levels would live up to their promises and punish malfeasant local cadres, but they seem to see few significant openings to assist the center in carrying out its announced policies.

A lack of relevant political information, a sense of lower political-legal status, and a suspicion that higher levels are either hypocritical or incapable characterizes compliant villagers and affects all their political calculations. On the one hand, compliant villagers may not know that their hardships are due to local cadres' violation of central policies, and hence they may fail to challenge them. On the other hand, based on their judgment of the relative resources of villagers and rural cadres, compliant villagers are usually frightened and risk averse. In their view, the costs of open defiance to unlawful local policies

\(^{20}\) Interviewees 2, 19 and 21, villagers, September 1993.
and malfeasant rural cadres are likely to be high while the payoffs are uncertain. Given their perception of the sources of their hardship and their assessment of the political opportunity structure, we should not be surprised that, when compliant villagers are cornered by rural cadres, they either engage in everyday resistance or may, in desperation, be driven toward acts of fierce resistance. In the latter case, they may become what rural cadres call "dingzihu."

Recalcitrants (Dingzihu)

Unlike compliant villagers, recalcitrants react vigorously to government extraction and other cadre demands. They boldly defy orders as well as policies and laws, and challenge village leaders who confront them. They show little deference to township officials and may threaten to use violence against village cadres who offend them. When cadres appear to collect taxes and fees, recalcitrants may refuse to pay, claiming: "[I] stand up to state taxes, [I] hold out against local fees, everything is mine." Or they may respond even more dramatically: "If you want my life, I have one. If you want my money or grain, I have none."


22. Interviewee 76, university rural researcher, May 1994; Shang Guizhong, "Nongcun shoufei nan wenti de tantao" [Exploration of why it is difficult to collect fees in the countryside], unpublished paper, 1992, p. 5.
Recalcitrants are willing to resort to force to defend their harvest and to employ individual (and sometimes clan-based) violence when cadres crowd them.

Recalcitrants typically direct their attacks against dishonest, incompetent and partial leaders, and they often respond to mistreatment (or perceived mistreatment) with threats to disrupt cadre assignments. Yet in disputes concerning family planning, for instance, what some villagers regard to be "mistreatment" may in fact be implementation of central policy, and their resistance is often against the law. In a Hunan county, as soon as a village party secretary appeared at the door of a birth control dingzihu, the recalcitrant swung an ax at him. The village cadre ducked just in time and the blade broke the door frame rather than his skull.24

To subdue recalcitrants, rural cadres oftentimes visit them and at least nominally try to gain cooperation through persuasion. If unsuccessful, however, "after three minutes, many [cadres] use force." They make it "impossible for dingzihu to breathe" and "let loose a hurricane." They may mobilize the township police or village militia to seize


their grain, confiscate their appliances and furniture, and even tear down their homes. For birth control resisters, dozens of rural cadres may surround a pregnant woman's home in the middle of the night and demand her "surrender." Violent confrontations often occur, and many recalcitrants strike back. In such clashes, many rural cadres have been injured or killed by angry villagers, and numerous recalcitrant villagers have been subject to state repression.

Recalcitrants are clearly prone to dramatic acts of defiance. Published reports and my interviews both suggest that they frequently act out of rage, spontaneously, without a careful calculation of costs and benefits. But this does not mean that recalcitrants are irrational or mainly motivated by unfathomable, bellicose passions. Behind their provocative moves, we can see their assessment of a changing political environment and their wish to discover precisely how far the reach of local authorities extends. Like compliant villagers, recalcitrants may be politically ill-informed, in that their knowledge about laws and policies may be too limited to allow them to precisely distinguish between what is legal and illegal in cadres' demands and demeanor. Or they may sense that some local fees were

imposed unlawfully but may not know which ones; or they may strongly believe that cadre action is not fully legal, but they may not know precisely where the illegality of the cadre's behavior lies. As a result of their limited knowledge, recalcitrants may courageously reject unlawful local fees, but in the mean time evade state-sanctioned revenue collection, refusing to pay state taxes and legal levies.

Recalcitrants typically agree with compliant villagers that laws and policies are made solely to regulate ordinary citizens's behavior. But unlike compliant villagers who almost habitually defer to rural cadres as unquestionable representatives of state authority, recalcitrants often appreciate at least some of the changes in the political opportunity structure implicit in the post-Mao reforms.

Village cadres, for one, have been structurally weakened since decollectivization and the dissolution of communes, particularly in largely agricultural villages. Nor can cadres still use class labels to stigmatize "backward elements;" nor do they control villagers' livelihood to the extent they did in the past. Indeed, the fact that village cadres depend on local levies to subsidize their salaries may have turned cadres, in the eyes of recalcitrants, into "parasites." Consequently,
recalcitrants often despise rural cadres either as "bandits in uniform" or "beggars." 26

Finally, recalcitrants often have noticed the unpredictable and frequent policy reversals emanating from the center. In the last fifteen years, rural residents have seen waves of strict policy implementation come and go: one year birth control is enforced strictly, the next year less so; one year all those who die in a village must be cremated, the next year burials are again winked at. Frequent policy flip-flops have discredited grassroots policy implementers and have emboldened (perhaps even enticed) some villagers to test cadre resolve. When facing a government imposition, recalcitrants understandably act as if it always pays to explore the limits of the permissible. 27

Despite their bravado and determination, recalcitrants usually lose. Since they typically oppose many different exactions almost indiscriminately, recalcitrants may be subject to legal punishment. When


villagers openly violate birth control regulations or use violence to combat tax and fee collection, they all too often attract the attention of law enforcement organs or the public security apparatus. Village cadres can easily label recalcitrants "disruptive troublemakers" and higher levels may ignore problems they identify. Defied cadres (or the township police) may rough up and detain a recalcitrant on charges of "hampering government work," or they may formally prosecute him. Unless villagers have atypically permissive or weak cadres governing their village and township, open defiance of economic extraction and cadre domination seldom succeeds.

At the same time, since recalcitrants often attack several levels of authority at once, they may inadvertently undermine themselves by pushing different levels of government to join forces against them. When this happens, actions by recalcitrants can easily backfire. Damaging the property of cadres who are corrupt, for example, also effectively amounts to defiance of the township leaders who appointed them. Such actions can easily invite punitive action from the township, which may harm a whole village. One village cadre in Hebei, for instance, deterred further resistance from a recalcitrant by announcing on the village loudspeaker: "You can't frighten me. You may burn one

hundred yuan worth of my hay, but I will receive two hundred yuan compensation. It's up to me to report the size of my loss [to the township leaders]. [Since you are a villager and the compensation will come from a village levy] you, the arsonist, will pay toward the compensation, and other villagers will curse you because you made them pay for what you did.”

Even when they are able to win their occasional victories, recalcitrants' actions are unlikely to improve village governance. Their pugnacious resistance may hound village cadres out of office and paralyze village administration, but their efforts infrequently reduce cadre demands for long. In fact, toppling a cadre may invite appointment of new, tougher leaders, possibly former criminals or "local bullies" (eba) who may be even more difficult to defy. It can also lead to punitive enforcement of unpopular policies. If township officials must personally collect taxes or oversee sterilizations, they typically impose heavy fines for evasion and refuse to listen to special pleading. "You can't let villagers [i.e., recalcitrants] take advantage of having no village head," said one township official, "I must make them realize that having no village leadership will have truly unpleasant repercussions." In general, recalcitrants' resistance to

29. Interviewee 9, villager, October 1993.

30. Interviewee 5, township official, October 1993.
a wide range of policies and a wide range of authorities does not succeed.

**Policy-based Resisters (Diaomin)**

Unlike both compliant villagers and recalcitrants, policy-based resisters pursue a path between quiescence, everyday resistance, and violence. They do not fear rural cadres, nor do they reject them out-of-hand as grasping agents of the state. They accept their duty to observe laws and policies, but also insist it is their right to observe only laws and policies. To defend their interests and to assert their rights, policy-based resisters challenge unlawful cadre behavior and work to ensure that beneficial policies are scrupulously implemented. In terms of their underlying political orientation, policy-based resisters seem to have two main defining characteristics.

First, policy-based resisters appear to be politically more informed than both compliant villagers and recalcitrants. Local officials I met in Hebei were astonished at the thorough knowledge of laws and policies which policy-based resisters demonstrated in their letters of complaint, and they concluded that those villagers must have studied policies very carefully.31 Individually,

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31. Interviewees 12 and 13, county officials, October 1993; interviewees 5 and 15, township officials, September-October 1993; interviewees 68, 69 and 70, city official, December 1993.
policy-based resisters seek to become knowledgeable by listening to radio broadcasts, watching television news, gathering information from villagers returning from cities, and reading newspapers and magazines. In one Hebei county, some families have even gone a step further: they have begun to form "policy watcher households" (zhengce jiance hu) which actively monitor implementation and guard against unauthorized "local policies."  

Since they know which policies and laws are potentially beneficial and which of them have been "stolen" (tanwu) or poorly implemented, policy-based resisters are fully cognizant that many of their hardships are caused by local officials' disregard and violation of relevant central policies. In rural China, where withholding political information is a common method of domination, villagers who have actively learned about policies are formidable adversaries for rural cadres. Even when acting alone, without help from other families, they can struggle to curb cadre abuses or, at a minimum, to ensure that local leaders learn that their misdeeds have been observed. In their

32. See Ma Yongyao, "Yuanshi xian 'nongcun zhengce jiance hu' tanxi" [An Investigation of "policy-watcher households" in Yuanshi county], Hebei Nongcun Gongzuo, No. 4 (April 1991), p. 28.

disputes with rural cadres over taxes and fees, for instance, policy-based resisters may effectively use their knowledge of state directives and guidelines to gauge the legality of local impositions and to identify policy violations by local cadres. They may find out what their "economic burdens" should be and then remit what is required but no more. If the fee is unauthorized or excessive, they may refuse to pay--claiming the fee contravenes this or that regulation, or contradicts a recent speech made by a national leader.

Second, unlike compliant villagers and recalcitrants, policy-based resisters seem to have a different understanding of their political status. They do not either fear or simply despise rural cadres; instead, they regard cadres to be political equals. Unlike compliant villagers who seem to assume that laws and policies only bind commoners, policy-based resisters seem to believe that they also bind officials. In their evaluation of post-Mao reforms and their implications for the relative strength of villagers versus rural cadres, policy-based resisters seem both more perceptive than compliant villagers and more

realistic than recalcitrants. As the folk rhyme I noted at the beginning of this chapter suggests, policy-based resisters, unlike compliant villagers, are well aware that major structural changes such as the dissolution of communes, the abolition of class struggle, and recent political-legal reforms have reduced cadre resources while enhancing villagers' economic independence and legal protection. Like recalcitrants, policy-based resisters see no compelling reason to be afraid of rural cadres or to remain submissive. A participant in one collective complaint in a north China village was quite sure that even if the activists in his village failed to topple the party secretary, their lives would not worsen: "What can he do? Can he expunge us from planet earth (kaichu qiuji)?"35

But policy-based resisters do not imagine, as some recalcitrants appear to do, that reforms have brought them full economic autonomy or freedom from all government extraction appropriation.36 Rights-minded policy-based resisters do not consider themselves simple subjects; neither do they regard cadres to be pure parasites. They recognize rural cadres' authority, but insist that their authority is ultimately institutional rather than personal


36. The folk rhyme has two slightly different variants, which may highlight how differently dingzihu and diaomin perceive their relative strength to rural cadres. Instead of "we lodge complaints," the two dingzihu versions say "we curse you" and "we beat you up!"
in nature. They regard rural cadres as political equals before the center and its policies, and seem confident that they themselves can do something about cadres' non-compliance with policies and laws. Unlike compliant villagers and recalcitrants, policy-based resisters do not perceive all powerholders to be one and the same: members of a group of unified adversaries. They are indeed well aware that local officials tend to protect each other, but also seem to attach more significance to the distinction between higher level authorities and grassroots rural cadres. Compliant villagers may agree that higher levels differ but they typically wish only that higher levels would somehow make rural cadres comply with their policies. In contrast, policy-based resisters take this difference very seriously and actively work to exploit it. To them, higher levels and their policies are political resources that villagers can mobilize. Rather than simply complaining that beneficial central policies are always undercut by illegal local policies, policy-based resisters play an active role in prompting higher levels to ensure faithful implementation of all beneficial central policies.

More political knowledge, a sense of equality before the center and its policies, and a perceptive yet realistic estimate of their resources versus rural cadres seem to have enabled policy-based resisters to reject illegal fees and
defy malfeasant rural cadres in a way that increases the costs of repression for those they challenge. Policy-based resisters always frame their grievances against corruption, unlawful fees, and undue cadre coercion in the context of policy implementation, and they pursue their resistance in this same context. They expose problems to higher levels, often through disruptive collective protests, and they challenge ranking officials to either solve the problems or face even more disturbing protests.

Conclusion

This chapter has distinguished three types of Chinese villagers based on whether they perceive their hardships as related to local cadres’ misimplementation of central policies and whether they seek redress for these grievances in the context of policy implementation. Compliant villagers, I have argued, are typically quiescent or engage in "everyday forms of resistance" largely because they fail to recognize openings that policy-based resisters exploit. Recalcitrants, on the other hand, react strongly to cadre demands and respond to perceived mistreatment with threats to disrupt rural governance. Although recalcitrants may simply wish to be left alone, when confronted, many engage in violent acts that test whether impassioned defiance will provoke repression or remain unpunished.
Recalcitrants are by no means obedient, but their resistance to both central policies and unlawful local policies is nearly indiscriminate. When justifying their occasional "everyday acts of resistance," compliant villagers may appeal to "heavenly principles;" when facing down rural cadres recalcitrants more commonly rely on run-of-the-mill power calculations. Neither compliant villagers nor recalcitrants root their resistance in a belief that villagers enjoy legal protection from even the most arbitrary cadre behavior.

Policy-based resisters, by contrast, are aware that state laws and central policies have granted them certain political rights and legal protections, and they act on this awareness. Policy-based resisters thus resemble recalcitrants in their politically assertiveness, but not in most other respects. Policy-based resisters challenge malfeasant cadres but use laws and policies to do so. Rather than treating rural cadres as simple agents of the central state, who must be obeyed as if they were dispatched from Beijing, policy-based resisters treat them as if they were bound by policies and laws to respect villagers' legitimate interests and legal prerogatives. Rather than regarding policies, laws and leadership speeches as essentially instruments of domination which facilitate control and promote the exercise of political power, policy-
based resisters see them as political ammunition to be deployed in disputes with rural cadres. This distinctive approach to state authority enables policy-based resisters to carve out a way of dealing with local bureaucrats that lies between the obedience of compliant villagers and the often lawless defiance of recalcitrants.
CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF POLICY-BASED RESISTANCE

"The center is our benefactor (enren), the province is our relative, the county is a good person, the township is an evil person, and the village is our enemy."1

For policy-based resistance to occur, the center must make policies that villagers can use to protect their "legitimate rights and interests," local officials must ignore or violate those policies, and the central leadership must somehow convince villagers that it is acceptable to defy such officials. In other words, policy-based resistance presupposes two pre-conditions. On the one hand, there must be problematic policy implementation that generates popular grievances; on the other hand, there must be a central mandate that even ordinary citizens can lawfully reject local officials' misimplementation of central policies. To explain how policy-based resistance takes place, three questions must be addressed: 1) why does

the center make policies that local officials do not implement? 2) what makes local officials ignore or violate these central policies? and 3) how do villagers become convinced that they have the right to defy local powerholders when they fail to implement central policies?

These questions are each closely related to the problem of implementation of popular central policies. The term "policy," in this context, refers to the subset of central policies which villagers find beneficial and are eager to see faithfully executed. In the normal course of events, the special character of such policies is most clearly demonstrated in the way the central state deals with local officials. In the implementation of most policies, central policy makers tend to align with local officials vis-a-vis villagers. In contrast, when they seriously champion mass-regarding policies, the central state is more likely to form a kind of political alliance with ordinary citizens. For the sake of simplicity, I use the term "the zone of policy implementation" to refer to the arena in which the three involved parties may interact with each other, and I use "exclusion" and "inclusion" to describe whether or not villagers possess a mandate to fight for their interests in that arena.

In this chapter, I first analyze how certain institutional tensions generated by the autocratic structure of the Chinese political system may lead to the creation of
an inherently problematic zone of policy implementation. Then I discuss how the zone was perpetuated in Mao's China as the autocratic political structure was largely rebuilt, and how it expanded as the central state attempted to establish near totalist control over society. Finally I explore how Mao's revolutionary approach to cadre management, particularly his mass campaigns against malfeasant local officials, convinced some Chinese peasants that it was their right to defy local leaders who ignored or violated central policies. Finally I discuss why peasants in the Maoist era largely failed to cite central policies to defend their interests against malfeasant local officials at times when there was no central mobilization.

An Inherently Problematic Zone of Policy Implementation

While it is well-known that Chinese leaders have long been plagued by imperfect policy implementation, I want to highlight how the implementation of mass-regarding central policies is inherently problematic. By calling policy implementation inherently problematic, I mean that

faithfully carrying out some popular, pro-peasant policies is virtually impossible because, given their own interests and the demands they face, local officials are strongly disposed to ignore or violate these policies.

This inherently problematic zone of policy implementation is rooted in the autocratic three-tier structure that characterizes both imperial and contemporary China. Featuring a would-be absolute ruler on the top, a highly unaccountable officialdom in the middle, and practically disenfranchised commoners at the bottom, the three-tier structure generates two knotty political tensions. For one, the ruler faces threats from commoners, who may rebel and overthrow the regime. For another, the ruler faces threats from local officials, who may attempt to restrain the imperial power, or challenge the central authority by developing strong local power bases. To cope with tensions with commoners, the aspiring, absolutist ruler may feel it necessary to disenfranchise them while making some pro-commoner policies to prevent them from rebelling. To cope with the structural conflict with local officials,

the ruler may feel it necessary to free himself from any effective political constraints, by subjecting local officials to strict hierarchical control. When these institutional arrangements interact, however, local officials are strongly disposed to ignore or violate the ruler's pro-commoner policies. This structural problem is most clearly demonstrated in the political dynamics of imperial China.

Chinese emperors commonly sought both absolute power and long-term stability. Commoners in dynastic China had hardly any political rights. But in order to forestall peasant rebellion, the emperor also made policies that could benefit the commoner people. For instance, local officials were often instructed to "reduce taxes and corvees" (qing yao bo fu), to be clean and just, and even to "love the commoners as parents love their children." To make sure that they did not endanger the dynasty by mistreating commoners and driving them toward rebellion, imperial envoys were regularly sent down to conduct inspections.4 Sometimes the emperor even personally ordered notoriously rapacious officials to be demoted, jailed, or executed.5


In spite of the emperor's apparently serious efforts to enforce some commoner-friendly "policies," such policies were rarely executed in full by local officials. Many local officials were predatory, unfair and corrupt. Instead of "loving the commoners," they often zealously extracted resources from peasants and harshly suppressed any opposition. Throughout history, local officials provoked so many peasant rebellions that one of the best known political sayings in traditional China came to be: "officials drive people to rebel" (guan bi min fan).\(^6\) In the language I have used in this dissertation, a problematic zone of policy implementation was thereby created. On the one hand, emperors announced all sorts of policies that forbid harsh mistreatment of the common people, insofar as they realized that "water which floats the boat can overturn it as well."\(^7\) On the other hand, local officials almost invariably ignored these imperial policies, and in doing so they often endangered the long-term stability of the regime.

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In imperial China, the zone of policy implementation was not only problematic, it was also inherently so in that local officials were institutionally constrained to ignore and violate commoner-friendly imperial policies. Emperors who sought absolute power also faced strong and often more immediate threats from ambitious local officials, who could restrain their power or even challenge them by establishing their own "independent kingdoms." Wary emperors, therefore, were not only concerned with the possibility of peasant revolts, but they also kept a jealous eye on local officials who could usurp or undermine their power. In order to counteract this danger, a highly centralized and strictly hierarchical system of personnel management was established, under which superiors had effective control over the careers of their underlings. In addition, local officials were also rotated regularly so that they could not develop strong local power bases.8

This kind of strict hierarchical control over local officials was generally effective in preventing local officials from challenging the emperor's monopoly of power, but it often worked against the emperor's interest in forestalling peasant rebellion. Under strict hierarchical control, local officials were institutionally constrained to

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be mainly responsive to their immediate superiors. Since the only way to advance their careers was to impress their immediate superiors with notable achievements, ambitious local officials were sorely tempted to curry favors by zealously extracting resources to contribute impressive tax revenues to the emperor's treasury or their superiors' private coffers. Extremely ambitious local officials also undertook costly projects such as building luxurious villas for the emperor or high officials. Moreover, since they were regularly transferred from place to place, local officials also had to make such achievements within a fixed and short period of time. This time constraint aided in making local extractions even more demanding. When ambitious local officials pursued short-term success to promote their careers, they could easily be induced to ignore the emperor's other "policies," most notably those that instructed them to "cut taxes and reduce corvees."

Of course, the strict hierarchical system that made officials mainly responsive to their immediate superiors did not in itself necessarily cause misimplementation of commoner-friendly, imperial policies. The most pressing problems arose from its interaction with the prevailing political structure. If the emperor could resist the temptations of self-indulgence and self-aggrandizement, while at the same time effectively preventing his immediate
underlings from doing so, then a responsive officialdom could approach an ideal Weberian bureaucracy. In a political system that featured an absolute emperor, however, the three-tier structure almost guaranteed the breaching of these two requirements. Once the emperor failed to meet either of the two extremely challenging demands (i.e., staying away from self-indulgence and being capable of effectively managing local officials), then misimplementation of his commoner-friendly policies almost inevitably occurred at one level or another of local government. As soon as this break in reliable implementation occurred, then the strict hierarchical system paradoxically became a most effective means of continuing and escalating policy misimplementation, because lower-ranking officials were institutionally constrained to obey their immediate superiors. When lower-ranking officials were ordered to exact resources from commoners, they had to do so even if they were aware that doing so violated the emperor's policies. For most of the time, therefore, the same institutional arrangements that helped the emperor secure his monopoly of power also worked against his interest in maintaining long-term stability. An officialdom that was responsive to its superiors ironically constituted a perennial threat to the regime, because it often provoked popular revolts through excessive economic appropriation and
subjugation of the common people.\(^9\)

The fact that commoners were essentially disenfranchised in dynastic China also contributed to the rise of policy misimplementation. Since commoners had no institutionalized influence on the recruitment and promotion of local officials, popular opposition counted for little in local officials' political calculations. For the same reason, once it occurred at some high level of government, commoners had no effective means of preventing lower-ranking officials from continuing or even aggravating the misimplementation of commoner-friendly imperial policies.

In traditional China, the existence of a problematic zone of policy implementation had a lasting impact on peasant political orientation and behavior. For one, it cultivated strong beliefs among many peasants that the emperor was largely benign, and that their hardships were mainly caused by disloyal local officials, who betrayed the emperor and bullied commoners. Acting on these beliefs, Chinese peasants tended to hold high expectations for "wise emperors" (mingjun) who could see through local officials' lies, and for "blue-sky officials" (qingtian daren) who could frankly remonstrate to the emperor and help him

enforce beneficial policies. In order to overturn unjust decisions made by local officials, commoners sometimes petitioned and appealed to higher-ranking officials. Yet, even when they rebelled, most peasants targeted corrupt and tyrannical local officials rather than the regime. Some peasants rebels even claimed that they revolted in the name of the "Heavenly Way," which was often an idealized version of the imperial policies that could benefit them.\textsuperscript{10}

To the extent that it served an emperor's own interests to make and champion policies that would benefit the common people, there was a common interest between the center and commoners in securing implementation of those policies. In this sense, commoners could have, at least in theory, tried to defend their interests by helping to ensure better policy execution. But in dynastic China, ordinary people did not have a right to participate in the zone of policy implementation. Essentially disenfranchised, commoners could not lawfully challenge local officials' interpretation of the emperor's "policy," nor could they defy local officials for failing to reflect the emperor's benevolence. In certain dynasties, commoners were allowed to appeal up to the imperial court if they disagreed with a local official's ruling.\textsuperscript{11} But this was hardly a full-

\textsuperscript{10} For a summary of the discussions on whether peasant rebellions in China were essentially anti-regime, see Xie Tianyou and Jian Xiuwei, \textit{Zhongguo Nongmin Zhanzheng Jianshi} [A brief history of Chinese peasant wars] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1981), Preface.
fledged inclusion in the zone of policy implementation. The right to appeal was essentially limited to civil and criminal lawsuits, and appealing itself was often deemed to be a kind of defiance against the authorities, punishable by law. In officials' yamen, appellants were routinely caned before a hearing was granted. In order to receive a hearing at the capital court, appellants in the Qing Dynasty had to roll over a wooden board, on which nails were placed with their sharp ends pointing up.13

With the "heaven high and the emperor far away," local officials were practically "local emperors," largely immune to popular resistance short of rebellion. And, as long as they had their immediate superiors' protection, local officials were politically invulnerable even if they ignored and violated the emperor's laws and decrees. Being excluded from the zone of policy implementation, peasants in

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12. In imperial China, government office (yamen) performed all the three key governmental functions distinguished by Gabriel Almond, practicing simultaneously rule-making (at local level), rule application, and rule adjudication.

traditional China rarely engaged in contention that could be even remotely considered policy-based. Their awareness of the existence of a zone which would facilitate the articulation of their demands may have had an influence on the way peasants perceived their hardships and framed their grievances, but when they actually tried to seek redress, they had few other choices beyond everyday resistance and outright rebellion.

Due to these institutional tensions, imperial China witnessed numerous peasant rebellions, which helped bring down one dynasty after another. Political tensions among the emperor, the officialdom, and the common people led to institutional arrangements which served none of the parties interests particularly well. Hierarchical control over local officials and the essential disenfranchisement of the common people, when interacting with the emperor's freedom from meaningful political constraints, almost inevitably led to local officials' misimplementation of imperial policies that could benefit the commoners, which sooner or later led to peasant rebellion.

The Perpetuation and Expansion of the Zone of Policy Implementation in Mao's China

Born out of a peasant revolution, the current regime has made it a high priority to prevent any rumblings of
peasant rebellion. As early as 1945, four years before the People's Republic was founded, Mao Zedong explained how the Communist Party would try to break the historical cycle of "rapid rise followed by quick decline." In a talk with the well-known historian Huang Yanpei in Yan'an, Mao claimed that he had found a way out of that cycle, and his new way was "democracy." Government would not be negligent in its work, according to Mao, if it was under the people's supervision; and governance would not die with the governor, if everyone took responsibility.14

Dramatic political restructuring was indeed attempted in the People's Republic under Mao's leadership. As Marxist-Leninist ideology replaced Confucianism as the prevailing political orthodoxy, a series of new political precepts were established. Among them, peasants, who had been subjects for thousands of years, were pronounced citizens of a people's republic, and popular sovereignty replaced the "Heavenly Mandate." At the same time, the emperor was replaced by a putative people's leader, and officialdom was replaced by a corps of communist cadres, who according to the Party constitution possessed no interests other than those of the people. The traditional system featuring an absolute emperor, an unaccountable officialdom,

and an essentially disenfranchised common people was replaced by a people's democratic dictatorship, with the people as the ruler and people's enemies as the ruled. Within the category of the people, distinctions between the powerful and powerless were reversed; former commoners were now said to be the masters of the nation, and central leaders as well as local officials were to be the people's servants.¹⁵

If these abstract ideological principles had been turned into concrete political reality, then the problematic zone of policy implementation would have disappeared. Within the new, reformed political structure, central leaders would make policies that benefit the ordinary people. Indeed, all central policies would be, by definition, meant to serve the people's interests. But their implementation would no longer be problematic, because selfless servants of the people would faithfully implement mass-regarding central policies. In fact, however, the problematic zone of policy implementation was perpetuated in the Maoist era and has continued to generate popular grievances. For much of the period since 1949, political corruption has continued, and cadre use of coercion against ordinary citizens has been anything but rare.

That the implementation of mass-regarding policies has continued to be problematic is hardly surprising because the autocratic political structure, promises to the contrary notwithstanding, was largely rebuilt rather than destroyed in socialist China. All the key structural factors that constrained local officials to ignore or violate commoner-friendly policies in dynastic China were preserved in the Maoist era. For one, Mao, the people's leader, was as absolute as past emperors. Although Mao claimed that he unfailingly represented the people's interests, he made few serious efforts to establish institutionalized channels through which individual citizens could freely express and aggregate their interests. By reserving the right to determine who should be counted as a member of the "people," Mao made himself the only judge of what people's interests really were.16

Secondly, local officials in the Maoist era faced institutional arrangements not unlike those found in dynastic China. On the one hand, they were subject to highly centralized, strict hierarchical control. As the founder of a new regime, Mao was keenly aware of the danger

of losing control over local officials. Like past emperors, he was extremely watchful of ambitious local officials. Throughout his career as the supreme leader of the People's Republic, Mao followed an ancient Chinese political dictate closely: "Wise rulers discipline their officials - not the people" (*ming zhu zhi li bu zhi min*). He strictly enforced the Leninist principle of democratic centralism to secure the center's organizational control over local officials. To weaken the power of local government, the separation of power between a vertical hierarchy and a horizontal authority (*tiaokuai fengge*) was strengthened; and local leaders were kept rotating from place to place, so that they could not build "independent kingdoms." Much as it had in the past, this kind of strict hierarchical control strongly constrained local officials to be responsive mainly to their immediate superiors.


On the other hand, local officials in much of the Maoist era, particularly in the first decade after 1949, remained effectively unaccountable to ordinary people and largely autonomous from popular pressure. Despite the regime's democratic rhetoric, ordinary citizens lacked viable channels to influence the recruitment and promotion of local officials. For local officials, public support or opposition counted nearly as little as it did in traditional China.19

Similar institutional arrangements, unsurprisingly, led to similar political outcomes. As in traditional China, the implementation of central policies that could benefit ordinary citizens has emerged as inherently problematic in the People's Republic. Acting under strict hierarchical control, local officials in the Maoist era were institutionally disposed to pursue notable achievements to impress their immediate superiors, even if doing so would victimize ordinary people. Whenever Mao's whims led him to make central policies that harmed ordinary people's interests, they quickly ballooned into political disasters.

via the highly responsive local officialdom. The "wind of exaggeration" in the Great Leap Forward that contributed to the loss of millions of lives provides an excellent example of how strict hierarchical control over local officials could produce ill-fated policy outcomes and cost the regime considerable legitimacy.20 Moreover, even when the center did not make obviously ill-advised policies, the implementation of beneficial central policies, just as it was in traditional China, was still largely imperfect.

What is more, the problematic zone of policy implementation was not only preserved in Mao's China, but also dramatically expanded, due in part to the center's efforts to improve policy implementation. The party leadership in the early post-1949 years attempted to revolutionize all aspects of Chinese society. To ensure the enforcement of near totalistic control, the central state in Mao's China considerably deepened its penetration into society.21 In the countryside, the government hierarchy was extended down to the village level in the 1950s. Later, with the establishment of the commune system, virtually all


walks of rural life were enclosed in the zone of policy implementation. Central policies were to address each and every major issue with which ordinary citizens might be concerned. If there was no specifically relevant policy concerning a particular issue, there were always some general "party guidelines" to which local officials could refer. As all aspects of social life became highly politicized, ordinary citizens found themselves engulfed in a zone of policy implementation over which they had to effective impact. Now that local officials controlled almost all resources, the powerless had to depend on minimally fair policy implementation for the necessities of life. The all-around expansion of the zone had thereby enormously increased peasants' stake in policy implementation.

With the perpetuation of institutional features that systematically constrained local officials to misimplement central policies which could benefit ordinary citizens, the expansion of the zone of policy implementation also generated grievances and at a faster rate. Peasants in Mao's China not only had to continue to fulfill their traditional obligations to the state, such as paying taxes and providing mandatory, unpaid labor, they now also had

22. For reports on how rural cadres' misimplementation of central policies threatened peasant subsistence in the Maoist era, see He Li, Beijing Gaozhuangqun [Complainants to Beijing] (Hong Kong: Jingbao Wenhua Qiye Youxian Gongs, 1991).
more "local emperors" above them, who could easily make their lives miserable by unfairly enforcing one policy or another. Due to this kind of policy misimplementation, intense cadre-peasant conflicts arose shortly after 1949 and became a serious political problem which drew Mao's attention. In the mid-1950s, he begun to warn that peasants would attack bureaucratic and "commandist" local cadres with their shoulder poles.23 By the early 1960s, as cadre-mass relations further deteriorated, Mao concluded that 30 percent of local cadres were either class enemies themselves or had been bought off by class enemies. The new regime, in his view, was in real danger of degenerating into another feudal dynasty, in which local officials continued to behave as "lords and masters of the people."24 Notwithstanding the revolution and the manifold political changes attempted since 1949, the People's Republic had not escaped the cycle of "rapid rise followed by quick decline."

Mobilized Inclusion of Peasants in the Zone of Policy Implementation

Even though the potential of peasant rebellion had


always existed throughout the Maoist era, it did not loom large in much of the countryside. Among other things, the most important reason -- and this is the key difference between Mao's China and dynastic China -- was that peasants were no longer excluded from the zone of policy implementation. With Mao's support, they could now lawfully challenge local officials who failed to carry out central policies and seek redress of implementation-related grievances without resorting to outright rebellion.

Despite the structural continuities discussed above, Mao's China was not simply another feudal dynasty. The three-tier political structure continued to exist, but it was no longer well aligned with the mass-regarding values in the new, official ideology. The replacement of Confucianism by Marxism-Leninism as the political orthodoxy did not produce replacement of autocratic rule by people's democracy, but it did represent a fundamental change in the regime's values and commitments. The regime's ideological commitment to popular sovereignty fully enfranchised ordinary people, at least in the sense that it formally included commoners into the zone policy implementation. For the first time in Chinese history, ordinary citizens obtained the constitutional right to supervise state organs.25 Local officials' misimplementation of central

policies, in other words, might continue to generate popular grievances, but since peasants were included in the zone, they could now cite central policies to defend their interests.

Under Mao, the central state pursued two strategies to include ordinary people in the zone of policy implementation: strategies that could help prevent local officials' from ignoring or violating mass-regarding central policies. First, the central leadership prohibited "bureaucratism" and "commandism" and demanded that local officials conscientiously practice the mass line and accept the people's supervision. But, as mentioned above, the center in the Maoist era still did not seriously attempt to establish institutionalized channels of popular participation through which ordinary citizens could effectively hold local officials accountable. Instead, it tried to ensure local compliance with these central policies by subjecting cadres to strict hierarchical control, which strongly constrained local officials to be mainly responsive to their immediate superiors. In this sense, the central state under Mao, in effect, tried to ensure that local officials were responsible to ordinary people by making them responsive to their superiors. Given the prevailing autocratic political structure and the lack of perfectly corresponding interests between masses and elites, this strategy was almost guaranteed to be self-defeating.
When dangerous levels of policy misimplementation appeared in spite of the central state's harsh prohibition against "bureaucratism" and "commandism" and its enthusiastic promotion of mass line democracy, Mao adopted a revolutionary approach to cadre management, which broke with not only the Chinese political tradition, but also with Leninist political doctrine.\textsuperscript{26} In order to halt local officials' misimplementation of central policies, he launched mass campaigns against local officials, in which ordinary citizens were mobilized to expose and attack local cadres whom Mao believed failed to faithfully execute central policies and betrayed the regime's values.

When a typical Maoist campaign began, local officials were usually suspended and replaced by work teams sent from above, aided by mass activists.\textsuperscript{27} Temporarily empowered, mobilized masses now effectively played the role of policy implementers, who helped the center enforce its policies against local officials. With the center's blessing, defying local cadres who had misimplemented


central policies was not only a lawful act, it was also virtually risk-free inasmuch as it was called for by the central leadership. For ordinary citizens who were displeased with local cadres' misimplementation of central policies, such mass campaigns provided an unprecedented opportunity to exercise their right to supervise government work and to redress their implementation-related grievances.28 During campaigns, ordinary people's right to participate in the zone of policy implementation was not only predicated on central policies, but also personally backed up by a charismatic leader who was also the founder of the new nation-state. Through mobilization, peasants for the first time acted out their inclusion in the zone, an experience some former mass activists will tell you was both exhilarating and enlightening.29

Equally important for convincing ordinary citizens that they really had the right to act in the zone of policy implementation was that Mao's mass campaigns, over time, became routinized. For Mao, launching the "four clean-ups" (1962-1964) and the various waves of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was more than a simple political convenience; he

28. See Elizabeth J. Perry, "'To Rebel is Justified': Maoist Influences on Popular Protest in Contemporary China," paper prepared for the colloquium series of the Program in Agrarian Studies (Yale University, November 17, 1995), pp. 31-32.

regarded campaigns to be an indispensable component of socialist political construction. In an effort to "institutionalize" political campaigns, Mao deemed the Cultural Revolution one of his two major achievements in his life, and he announced that such campaigns would be launched "every seven or eight years."30 His followers even attributed to him a theory of "continuing the revolution," which argued for the necessity of mobilizing the masses to prevent revisionism and to struggle with capitalist roaders within the Communist Party.31

In retrospect, twenty years after Mao's death, it is clear that routinized mass campaigns directed against local cadres exerted a profound influence on the political orientations and the expectations of Chinese peasants. For many peasants, campaigns against malfeasant cadres reinforced their long-standing belief in the benevolence of the center and the malevolence of local officials.32 Though peasants in post-Mao China no longer have the same emotional attachment to individual central leaders as they did to


Mao, many of them still strongly believe that central policies are generally designed to serve the people's interests. And they continue to blame their hardships on local officials' misimplementation of central policies. In words commonly heard in the countryside and recounted at the beginning of this chapter, "the center is our benefactor (enren), the province is our relative, the county is a good person, the township is an evil person, and the village is our enemy." 

Of even greater significance for China's long-term political development, mass campaigns against malfeasant cadres have also helped peasants develop a new understanding of what ordinary citizens can accomplish in the zone of policy implementation. In the eyes of many peasants, Mao's campaigns against disloyal local officials were the most convincing piece of evidence that the emperor was no longer a distant ruler to whom commoners had little access. Equally important, since the center was willing to mobilize ordinary citizens to "rebel" against local officials, local

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34. See Sang Xiutong, "Jiwei nongmin he xiangcun ganbu de xinlihua" [Honest words of a few peasants and rural cadres], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 7 (July 1993), p. 17. Also Interviewees 1, 16, 17, 18, 24, 41, 49 and 80, villagers, September-October 1993; interviewees 101 and 105, August 1995.

officials were no longer seen to be immune to non-violent, yet powerful popular challenges. If in dynastic China peasants' awareness of the zone of policy implementation led them to rebel against local officials rather than to challenge the regime, Mao's campaigns taught them to defy local officials by seeking support from the central state. This new appreciation of their political potential was most clearly articulated by several policy-based resisters in Hubei: "If you [rural cadres] don't listen to the center, then we won't listen to you. ... Why do you always oppose the center? Why do you always oppose us? Are you cadres of the Communist Party?"

Finally, as mass campaigns under Mao became routinized expressions of people's democracy, using central policies to defy malfeasant local officials became a legitimate form of popular political contention. The

36. Several of my interviewees observed that participants in collective complaints in the Dengist era acted like "zaofanpai" (rebels) during the Cultural Revolution. Interviewees 5 and 15, township officials, September-October 1993; interviewee 61, journal editor, November 1993.

37. See Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, "Nanyi huibi de redian: jinnian nongcun gangun guanxi toushi" [Hot issues that are hard to avoid: perspectives on rural cadre-mass relations in recent years], unpublished report of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 1989, pp. 4-5.

38. Interviewees 24, 74 and 75, villagers, May-August 1994; Interviewees 109 and 110, villagers, December 1995. Recently, two Chinese analysts observed that "at present, a considerable number of people, including many scholars, insist that the problem of corruption must be dealt with through 'mass campaigns.'" See Liu Zuoxiang and Xiao Zhoulu, "Tiaochu 'zhouqi lu,' yao kao minzhu, geng yao kao fazhi" [It depends on democracy, and even more on rule of law, to escape the "historical cycle"], Zhongguo Faxue [Chinese Legal
availability of this new form of contention appears to have affected expectations of some peasants, and not only while Mao lived. Even now, villagers appear to believe that they sooner or later will have a chance to redress their grievances against local cadres. Due in part to these beliefs, some villagers in the Dengist era have continued to collect evidence against rural cadres even when mass campaigns were formally ended. In a Shandong village, for instance, when a party secretary gave a village wheat processor to his brother-in-law, a villager immediately recorded this wrongdoing on his door, just waiting for an opportunity to use this information to incriminate the cadre. In another north China village, this kind of endeavor was more organized and was conducted collectively. One year before a group of villagers started their policy-based resistance to depose a corrupt village cadre, they began circulating stories concerning his various wrongdoings. As one villager observed: "There are some sensible people (mingbai ren) in our village. They have kept careful accounts for several years. They are waiting for their time to come."
In sum, decades of mobilized participation in the zone of policy implementation seem to have changed the way many Chinese peasants perceive their relations to the central state and local officials. Peasants' temporary but effective inclusion in the zone of policy implementation during Maoist campaigns provided them with new political strategies and led to new expectations. If we take repertoires of contention to be "learned cultural creations that emerge in political struggle,"41 Mao's campaigns seem to have helped Chinese peasants expand their repertoire inasmuch as they provided an alternative to everyday forms of resistance and rebellion for peasants who wanted to redress grievances related to policy implementation.

As imperfect policy implementation continued to generate grievances against local officials throughout the entire post-1949 period, and as mass campaigns made it perfectly lawful to cite central policies to defy malfeasant local officials, one would expect that peasants might have frequently and energetically engaged in self-directed, policy-based resistance even when there were no on-going campaigns. Throughout the Maoist era, however, peasants rarely used central policies as a political weapon to defend their interests against grasping and coercive local officials, unless they were mobilized by the center. Two

aspects of Mao's leadership style, which combined elements of arbitrary autocratic rule, strict Leninist organizational control, and continuous spurts of populist mobilization, seem to have worked together to discourage policy-based resistance during Maoist rule.42

First, largely due to Mao's revolutionary approach to cadre management and his use of mass campaigns, the level of grievances related to policy misimplementation was kept relatively low from 1949 to 1976. Except for the brief period of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), most rural cadres were not notably rapacious and coercive. Since Mao placed emphasis on cadres' revolutionary consciousness over their economic performance, local officials were less tempted to overtax peasants and conduct grandiose projects to impress their superiors. Besides the combination of strict hierarchical control and the center's preoccupation with ideological integrity rather than measurable achievements, recurring political campaigns also helped keep the level of rural grievances comparatively low. Political campaigns gave peasants relatively frequent opportunities to redress their grievances, and at the same time deterred many rural cadres from engaging in blatantly corrupt or predatory...
acts. During mass campaigns, cadres convicted of wrongdoings such as corruption were not only demoted or dismissed, they were also subject to severe social humiliation. In the words of a long-time village party secretary in reference to the Maoist era: "Cadres like me dare not be corrupt. We know it [a political campaign] is not a joke. We are very fearful. Yes, you may take bribes or embezzle public money. But when another campaign begins, you must give back what you've taken and suffer greatly. It [corruption] really is not worth it."43

The second reason why peasants in the Maoist era rarely engaged in self-directed, policy-based resistance is that their inclusion in the zone of policy-implementation was, in the final analysis, temporary and precarious. Under Mao, peasant inclusion was realized primarily through mobilized campaigns. Between campaigns, peasants at most times and in most places were subject to tight political and economic control. Rural cadres could threaten unruly villagers with the prospect of being singled out as a target of class struggle; even villagers with good class backgrounds could be labeled "bad elements" and denounced at struggle sessions.44 In the commune era, rural cadres, of

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43. Interviewee 64, village cadre, November 1993. Similar observation was made by interviewee 30, county official, October 1993.

course, also effectively controlled the livelihood of peasants.45

Equally important, Mao's arbitrary rule also made peasants' inclusion in the zone of policy implementation highly uncertain. Mao frequently switched between populist mobilization and Leninist control, stressing people's democracy at one time, and emphasizing party leadership at another. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, for instance, Mao proclaimed that "to rebel is justified." But this announcement was quickly qualified as "to rebel against anti-revolutionaries is justified."46 Ordinary citizens, of course, were not in a position to judge whether a cadre was revolutionary or not. Not only, therefore, were central policies concerning peasants' inclusion in the zone uncertain, other policies that peasants might have used as a base for defying local officials appeared and disappeared frequently and were open to interpretation. The lack of stable and specific central policies also strengthened rural cadres position vis-a-vis peasants, who could then "take a


chicken feather for a valid warrant to give commands."47

Given the formidable power rural cadres had when no campaigns were underway, it was highly risky for peasants to act on their own and to defy rural cadres, because if they failed, they would suffer not only economic punishment, but political denunciation and social ostracism as well. Moreover, rarely able to establish a clear policy base for any potential resistance, peasants could never be sure if their defiance would be applauded as a revolutionary deed or repressed as an anti-revolutionary act.

Conclusion

In both dynastic and Mao's China, there was an inherently problematic zone of policy implementation that generated grievances against local officials. The ways in which peasants sought redress of their grievances, however, were significantly different in these two periods. In traditional China, commoners were aware that much of their hardship arose from local officials' ignoring and violating benign "policies" of the emperor. But since they were essentially excluded from the zone of policy implementation,

they had few lawful and effective means to resist excessive appropriation and harsh repression. Even when they only sought to redress comparatively minor implementation-related grievances against local officials, they had few appealing choices other than everyday resistance or rebellion.

By reinstating autocratic rule on a new ideological base, Mao's China preserved and expanded the problematic zone of policy implementation. As a result of the regime's commitment to allow the people to supervise government work and Mao's frequent mass campaigns against "disloyal" local officials, ordinary citizens came to be included in the zone of policy implementation in a way they had never been before. At the center's behest, Chinese peasants were able to redress many of their grievances when campaigns were underway, during which citing central policies to combat cadre misbehavior became a lawful and effective alternative to other forms of resistance. In Mao's China, although peasants continued to engage in everyday forms of resistance and occasional violent defiance, they also conducted resistance that bore some resemblance to policy-based resistance. In this sense, they had begun to innovate at the "perimeter"\textsuperscript{48} of their repertoire of contention and to expand their ways to protect their legitimate rights and interests.

CHAPTER V

POST-MAO REFORMS AND THE RISE OF POLICY-BASED RESISTANCE

"What can he do? Can he expunge us from planet earth?" ¹

As long as local officials continue to misimplement central policies and ordinary citizens remain included in the zone of policy implementation, citing central policies to defy local officials will remain a legitimate form of political contention. In Mao's China, as we saw in Chapter 4, peasants did not commonly engage in self-directed, policy-based resistance, largely because a) their grievances were kept in check to a significant extent; and b) their inclusion in the zone of policy implementation (through campaigns) was temporary and uncertain. In Dengist China, as we will see in this chapter, significant economic and political-legal reforms have on the one hand led to even more problematic policy implementation, which generates more grievances against local officials, while largely removing the hurdles that helped discourage self-directed, policy-based resistance in the past.

¹. Interviewee 24, villager, June 1994.
In this chapter, I first discuss how the cadre responsibility system has led to more problematic policy implementation in rural China. Then I analyze how the central leadership’s drive for the rule by law has kept peasants within the zone of policy implementation while simultaneously changing the mode of inclusion. Finally, I analyze how post-Mao reforms have meshed with each other and with the political legacy of the Maoist era to make it relatively low-risk and potentially effective for peasants to engage in policy-based resistance, even without central mobilization.

The Increasingly Problematic Zone of Policy Implementation

Post-Mao reforms have included the reversal of many of Mao's policies; some of these changes have been welcomed by peasants, others were not. While decollectivization has been very popular with most peasants, the imposition of birth control, for instance, has not. Since the death of Mao, contemporary China has been experiencing a notable resurgence of serious political and social problems that were once reasonably under control. Many peasants these days complain about various hardships, starting with excessive economic appropriation, rampant corruption, and heavy-handed enforcement of birth control. In general,

2. See Tang Jinsu and Wang Jianjun, "Nanyi huibi de redian: jinnian nongcun gangun guanxi toushi" [Hot issues that are hard to avoid: perspectives on rural cadre-mass relations in recent years].
however, most peasants I have encountered seem to retain considerable confidence in the beneficial nature of central policies as a whole. When asked what causes their frustrations and hardships, most peasants continue to place the blame mostly on local cadres rather than on central policies. In the words of one Hebei villager: "Central policies are indeed good, but they are easily distorted at the lower levels. ... What higher levels say has always been good, but what they say never gets enforced at lower levels. Like some people say: the higher levels have policies (zhengce), and lower levels have counter-policies (duice)."

As we saw in Chapter 2, remarks such as these are not far off in diagnosing one of the more pressing problems peasants face. In many places, central policies have indeed been frequently ignored or misimplemented by rural cadres. More than a few local officials I have interviewed pay little attention to central policies that could benefit peasants. Policies that demand that local officials be clean and reduce peasant burdens, for example, have been


3. See Sang Xiutong, "Jiwei nongmin he xiangcun ganbu de xinlihua" [Honest words of a few peasants and rural cadres], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 7 (July 1993), p. 17. Also Interviewees 1, 16, 17, 18, 24, 41, 49 and 80, villagers, September-October 1993; interviewees 101 and 105, August 1995.
blithely ignored in many places. Furthermore, even if they choose to enforce a central policy, local officials often ignore precisely those aspects which best address peasant concerns. For instance, a national policy demands that local officials carry out birth control primarily through persuasion. Yet in practice, many rural cadres frequently use coercive means to wring compliance from villagers.

Even more frustrating to peasants, potentially beneficial central policies are often turned into exploitative "local policies" in the hands of local officials. The central policy of making economic development a top priority, for instance, has often become a pretext for imposing enormous fees, which are often wasted on ill-conceived or poorly managed projects, squandered by cadres on lavish entertainment, or simply pocketed. Moreover, many local officials have also either openly or secretly violated widely publicized central policies that

4. See Xi Ling, "Nongmin fudan wei shenmo chengwei lao da nan wenti" [Why peasant burdens becomes a long-standing, big and difficult problem], Jiage Yuekan [Price Monthly], No. 8 (August 1993), pp. 9-10; and Fan Xiaojian and Li Xiangang, "Qieshi jiaqiang nongmin fudan de fazhihua guanli" [Earnestly strengthen the legal management of peasant burdens], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 11 (November 1993), pp. 15-16.

5. See Gao Zuoming, "Duixian xianxiang fansi" [Reflections on meeting hard targets], unpublished paper, 1993; Li Xingzhong, "Nongcun fubai xianxiang de zhuangkuang ji duice" [The condition of rural cadre corruption and countermeasures], paper prepared for the National Conference on Rural Stability and Development, Songzi, Hubei, November 1995, p. 1. Also interviewees 5 and 15, township officials, September-October 1993; and interviewees, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9 and 59, villagers, September-October 1993.
protect peasants' interests and rights. In one location, for instance, when officials from a county Agriculture Department were dispatched to the countryside to publicize the 1991 State Council Regulation concerning peasant burdens, local leaders would not allow them to enter any of the villages in their jurisdiction. It is no wonder that aggrieved villagers often complain that central policies are either "stolen" or "distorted" by rural cadres. In fact, even some local officials have admitted that many central policies, particularly those which could benefit peasants, were "hot in the center, warm in the provinces, lukewarm in the cities, cool in the counties, cold in the townships, and frozen in villages."

There are, of course, many factors contributing to imperfect policy implementation. In the post-Mao era,


7. See Ouyang Bin, "Haohao qingtian qi neng rong" [The vast blue sky cannot tolerate it], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 8 (August 1993), pp. 10-11; Lu Fenghua, "'Zhengjing' wei he hui nian wai le?" [Why good scriptures are distorted by their preachers?], Xiangzhen Luntan, No. 9 (September 1993), pp. 11-12. Also interviewee 49, village cadre, October 1993.


frequent policy reversals, for example, have led to incomplete implementation of central policies that are no longer current. Indeed, central policies concerning pressing issues in the countryside changed so frequently in the 1980s that some peasants sarcastically began to say that "party policies are like the moon -- different on the 1st and the 15th of the same month;" while rural cadres have been heard to complain that "'It was a 'yes' yesterday and is a 'no' today, life is hard for us who are caught in between."10

When the center fumbles about like this, local officials may be instructed to do things that contradict each other within a short period of time. This, quite understandably, can lead affected villagers to believe that local policy implementers must have ignored central intent. In the case of birth control, for instance, prevailing central policy in the early 1980s stipulated that each couple could have only one child. Yet in 1984, one child per couple was changed from a "must" to a "should." When the birth rate quickly escalated as a result of this relaxation, birth control was again tightened up and was

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made a "basic national policy" (jiben guoce), which local officials were told they must strictly carry out or face immediate failure in their performance appraisal. Central policies concerning grain procurement and cremation have seen similar rapid and unexpected reversals.\textsuperscript{11}

Though obviously relevant, such policy flip-flops do not explain why local officials also misimplement stable central policies, many of which have been enthusiastically received by peasants. In my observation, a much more important cause of policy misimplementation lies in the institutional framework surrounding cadre management. On the one hand, cadre management is still characterized by strict hierarchical control, which motivates local officials to be mainly responsive to their immediate superiors. Yet at the same time, beyond this underlying structural continuity, three major changes have occurred. For one, unlike in much of the Maoist era, the central leadership in Dengist China places more emphasis on the ability of local cadres to develop the economy and to carry out other measurable tasks, such as birth control. Although "being revolutionary" (geminghua) is still ostensibly at the top of Deng's "four criteria" (sihua) guiding cadre recruitment, it

has meant little in actual performance appraisal. At a time when the center has made economic development the Party's "central task" (zhongxin renwu), and when targets of economic development have been disaggregated down to the townships, achieving these measurable targets becomes what really matters in cadre performance evaluation. An obsession with meeting numerical goals, when combined with continuing strict hierarchical control, strongly disposes local officials to promote their careers by pushing their underlings to pursue immediate success. Since each level of local government can apply virtually unchecked pressure on ordinary people, local officials' zealous pursuit of various measurable targets may easily lead to misimplementation of popular central policies.

The second significant change in the cadre management system arises from the center's repudiation of Maoist mass campaigns. In the Maoist era, recurrent campaigns provided effective means and opportunities for peasants to hold rural cadres accountable for their misconduct. Under the essentially autocratic political

structure that continues to characterize Deng's China, the termination of peasants' right to check cadre malfeasance through campaigns appears to have restored rural cadres' de facto freedom from social pressure. As one villager in Hebei observed: "Now that there are no more political campaigns, cadres have nothing to be afraid of." The end of mass campaigns and continuing strict hierarchical controls, in other words, have combined to produce a local political structure that shares many similarities with that of imperial China. It is accordingly no wonder that many rural cadres have begun to act more and more like "gentry-mandarins" as they go about fulfilling their tasks in the 1990s.

Finally, the current party leadership has not only retained strict hierarchical control over local officials, it has also considerably strengthened it. To ensure that local officials faithfully implement central policies, the "cadre target management responsibility system" (ganbu...
mubiao guanli zerenzhī) was introduced in the mid-1980s. Under this new system of personnel management, higher level governments assign their underlings specific policy targets in the form of a detailed responsibility contract. Periodic cadre performance evaluation is then solely based on the execution of these targets, and performance appraisals strongly determine a cadre's income and career prospects. Many policy targets are carefully quantified, and particularly important ones are granted "veto power" (yípiao fǒujiào quán) over cadres' careers. If a cadre fails to meet the assigned birth control quota, for instance, he or she will fail the job performance appraisal no matter how well any other policy target has been met.  

As a single institutional reform, the cadre responsibility system reasonably equitably quantifies policy targets and makes it possible to equalize work loads and secure impartial performance evaluation. It is also performance-enhancing in that it creates incentives to do a better job by establishing a clear and sure link between performance and rewards. But this institutional reform also

strengthens the hierarchical control experienced by local officials, which further encourages them to be responsive primarily to their immediate superiors. Strict hierarchical control over local officials, as we saw in earlier chapters, paradoxically led to misimplementation of mass-regarding central policies at lower levels in both dynastic and Mao's China. By further strengthening this control at a time when local officials have become even less accountable to the villagers who are the ultimate victims of any "wind of exaggeration," the cadre responsibility system has only further aggravated the problem of misimplementation of beneficial policies.

At the very least, the introduction of the cadre responsibility system has contributed to highly selective policy implementation. In principle, local officials must fulfill all policy targets assigned from above, but in practice they often pay attention exclusively to unpopular policies such as tax and fee collection and birth control. The source of this selectivity lies in the fact that while these unpopular policies can be meaningfully quantified, popular policies like practicing mass line democracy and respecting people's rights tend to be non-quantifiable, general guidelines. Whether a cadre has met the birth control target, for instance, can be determined by counting new-born babies, whereas whether he has respected peasants'
rights is usually open to interpretation. As a result, even though each and every policy target is given a numerical value on a cadre's responsibility contract, the numbers attached to popular policies may mean little to an actual performance appraisal, while those attached to unpopular policy targets are usually real and difficult to manipulate.

Consequently, many local officials distinguish between so-called "hard" and "soft" policy targets, and they invariably put central policies that require them to respect villagers' "legitimate rights and interests" in the soft, non-binding category and regard birth control and tax and fee collection to be hard targets (ying zhibiao) that must be met.\textsuperscript{16} Since executing unpopular policy targets alone can easily take up all their energy and time, local officials then often implement policies in highly selective manner, paying attention to unpopular, career determining, hard policies only.

When it comes to a particularly hard policy target that has veto power over their performance evaluation, local officials often further distinguish between its hard and soft dimensions. The policy of birth control is a good example. It stipulates that each couple can have only one child,\textsuperscript{17} but it also stipulates that local officials should

\textsuperscript{16} Interviewees 5 and 15, township officials, September-October 1993; interviewees 12, 13, 14 and 107, county officials, October 1993.

\textsuperscript{17} In much of the countryside, it has in fact been changed to two children per couple.
patiently persuade peasants to comply with this national policy. But since its execution literally determines a local official's career, and given that the policy is so unpopular that it would take forever to persuade all peasants to go along willingly, the "patient persuasion" aspect of the policy is commonly considered soft and ignored by local officials.

As a consequence, many local officials enforce only hard policy targets, and they pay attention only to the hard aspect of policies that have veto power over their careers. In their efforts to collect taxes and enforce birth control, for instance, local officials often energetically mobilize all available human and political resources to ensure implementation: "All five teams [the party committee, government, people's congress, people's political consultative committee, and party disciplinary inspection committee] join forces, and behind them follow the police, procuratorate and court" (wu da banzi yiqi zhua, houmian gen zhe gong jian fa). With all "legal means" (hefa shouduan) at their disposal, many local officials do whatever is necessary to induce peasants to comply with birth control

measures and to pay their taxes and fees, while at the same time ignoring other central policies that peasants may truly wish they would implement.¹⁹

Partly because the cadre responsibility system makes respecting peasants' rights a non-binding policy target, and partly because the end of campaigns gives them virtual freedom from social pressure, many rural cadres do not even bother to hide the fact that they implement central policies in a highly selective manner. Some cadres I met claimed that they did not care about villagers's opinions of them, because insofar as they were able to fulfill hard policy targets, they had complete job security. Echoing Deng's famous remark on cats and mice, these cadres say things like: "Whether by persuasion or coercion, those who can fulfill their assigned tasks are good cadres."²⁰ It is no wonder that even cadres who simply want to hold on to the positions they have, in the eyes of peasants, have become "three-want cadres" (san yao ganbu), who want peasants' grain, their money, and their (aborted) children.²¹


²⁰. See Ma Jinlin,"Jianchi qunzhong luxian, migie danggun guanxi" [Uphold the mass line, improve party-mass relations], unpublished paper, 1992, p. 7. Also see Fan Xiaojian and Li Xiangang, "qieshi jiaqiang nongmin," 1993, p. 16.

For more ambitious local officials, the cadre responsibility system may lead to even worse policy implementation. These officials not only zealously enforce unpopular policies, but also may transform potentially beneficial central policies into predatory "local policies." The central policy that makes economic development the Party's "central task" is a good example. In order to promote their careers, ambitious local officials at any level of government may goad their underlings into doing whatever they believe necessary to achieve immediate and impressive economic success. They may concoct grandiose programs and order their subordinates to extract resources from peasants to finance them. As this kind of unremitting pursuit of economic growth snowballs, numerous local levies and mandatory fund-raising may be imposed by various levels of local government, leading to skyrocketing peasant burdens. As one Chinese analyst observed: "Some local leaders and heads of governmental departments crave greatness and success. In order to showcase their political achievements, they want to do many visible projects during their tenure of office. But since they do not have adequate financial resources, they then stretch out their hands to

peasants to collect money.”

Even more devastating for peasants, since these ambitious local leaders only wish to impress their superiors before they finish their term of office in one locality, many of their development programs are empty and do not truly benefit the local economy. One county leader in Henan, for example, ordered township officials to establish at least one collective enterprise in each village within the township jurisdiction in one year. At his behest, over a hundred small paper mills were built throughout the county, all of which later went bankrupt, incurring a huge waste of resources and causing serious environmental pollution. In the midst of this economic disaster, while peasants were losing money and township officials were harvesting hatred and condemnation, the county leader who was most responsible for the losses won a promotion for his impressive achievement in eliminating "empty shell villages" (kong ke cun, meaning villages without collective enterprises). By the time the dire consequences of this deception surfaced, he had left the county and could no longer be held accountable. Township officials knew from the very beginning that what they were ordered to do was

nothing but "killing the hen to get eggs" or "drying the lake to catch fish," but they could not stop it because the county leader could take away their "black gauze caps" (i.e., their positions).  

As this case demonstrates, the introduction of the cadre responsibility system can easily induce grassroots, rural cadres to treat peasants poorly. Having no underlings to whom they can simply reassign various policy targets, rural cadres (unlike county officials above them) have to fulfill them by themselves. They may understand that they should faithfully implement central policies, but when "local policies" contradict central ones, they have little choice but to obey their immediate superiors because they are the people who control their careers. In a telling case, when one villager cited central policies to reject illegal local fees, a village cadre asked him if he listened to his "grandpa" (meaning the central leadership) or to his "daddy" (meaning local officials). When the peasant said he listened to both, the village cadre insisted on collecting these fees: "Very good! Now the grandpa has given his orders.

23. Interviewee 77, university rural researcher, May 1994. Similar stories were told by interviewee 57, journal editor, interviewee 97, government rural researcher, August 1995; and interviewee 30 and 32, county officials, October 1993.

[i.e., has forbidden imposing such fees], but the daddy has not made his position known [i.e., has not revoked the fees that had already been levied before the center announced its new policy]. We depend on the daddy for a living, so we must carry out his orders [and collect the fees]."\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{Continuity and Changes in Peasants' Inclusion in the Zone of Policy Implementation}

Widespread misimplementation of mass-regarding central policies inevitably generates grievances against local officials, particularly against grassroots rural cadres. By the late 1980s, Chinese analysts had begun to warn that massive peasant-cadre conflicts were on the verge of breaking out in many places, and that rural China was facing its most serious political crisis since 1949.\textsuperscript{26} As violent clashes increased rapidly in many regions, the

\textsuperscript{25} See Shen Hengjun, "Ting 'diedie' de yu ting 'laozi' de" [Listening to grandpa and listening to daddy], \textit{Xiangzhen Luntan}, No. 1 (January 1994), p. 26.

prospects of peasant rebellion appeared to be growing. In 1987, Peng Zhen, then chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, deplored the dangerous deterioration of cadre-mass relations in the countryside. He admitted that some rural cadres were "local emperors" (tu huangdi), who "illegally detain and arbitrarily curse and beat up the masses," and warned that if this situation continued, the masses would sooner or later strike out at rural cadres with their "shoulder poles."

Four years later, party elder Bo Yibo expressed similar concerns. Recalling Mao's comment concerning ending the historical cycle of "rapid rise followed by quick decline," Bo wrote: "More than forty years have passed. The objective process of historical development makes us feel deeply that it is impossible to open up 'the new democratic way' and overcome this 'historical cycle' at one strike, nor is it possible to complete it once and for all. Today we cannot say we have completely escaped this 'cycle;' in my opinion, neither should we claim to have done this in the future. The task remains undone; the whole Party must work hard!"

27. See Peng Zhen, "Yao jianchi cunweihui zizhi zuzhi de xingzhi" [The autonomous nature of villagers' committee should be upheld], speech to the chairmen meeting of the Standing Committee of the Six National People's Congress, April 9, 1987; and Peng Zhen, "Fandui qiangpo mingling, jianchi qunzhong zizhi" [Against coercion and commandism, uphold mass autonomy], speech to the fifth joint meeting of delegation leaders and members of the Law Committee at the Six National People's Congress, April 6, 1987.

28. Bo Yibo, Ruogan Zhongda Juece yu Shijian de Huigu [Memoirs of some important decisions and events] (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang
It is clear that post-Mao leaders have not simply become complacent about the danger that local officials might drive peasants toward rebellion. Like Mao, they continue to attempt to resolve this problem by including ordinary citizens in the zone of policy implementation. As it did in the Maoist era, the central state in post-Mao China continues to advocate the realization of people's democracy. Deng himself made people's democratic dictatorship one of the four cardinal principles that must be upheld. The revised Chinese Constitution (1982), moreover, has reaffirmed citizens' right to supervise government organs (Article 41); and a recent People's Daily article repeated that Chinese citizens have the democratic right to dissent and pursue their complaints up the chain of command from lower to higher levels of government.

What is different in Dengist China is that the mode of inclusion has been altered. Rather than including ordinary citizens into the zone of policy implementation primarily through campaigns, post-Mao leaders have attempted

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30. See Zhang Sutang and Xie Guoji, "Shahai shangfang cunmin guofa nanrong, Henan siming cun ganbu bei chujue " [National law does not tolerate murder of villagers who lodge complaints--Four village cadres in Henan are executed], *Renmin Ribao* (Haiwaiban), 29 March 1995, p. 4.
to achieve this objective by establishing socialist rule by law. Instead of mobilizing ordinary people to combat policy misimplementation and defy malfeasant cadres at unpredictable intervals, current leaders have sanctioned individual citizens to exercise their democratic rights continuously through limited but significant institutionalized channels.

As the center continues its efforts to establish rule by law, the principle of equality before the law has been reestablished, and hundreds of specific laws have been made to stand alongside general party policies. To further facilitate citizen efforts to redress their grievances related to local officials' misimplementation of policies, the Administrative Litigation Law (1989), for instance, has granted ordinary citizens the right to sue officials for illegally conducted administrative actions.


Accordingly, ordinary citizens can, at least in principle, seek legal punishment for malfeasant cadres by going through legal procedures.

If rule by law were to become fully institutionalized, it could considerably improve local officials' implementation of central policies and reduce cadre-mass conflicts in the countryside. But to realize the potential of these reforms, the central policies that promote rule by law must first be enforced by local officials. Yet, much like what happens with many other central policies that theoretically benefit ordinary citizens, these policies that were designed to improve local officials' accountability and to deprive them of the privileges of unchecked power are just as frequently ignored or violated by policy implementers. Despite the promulgation of various central policies and laws, many local officials continue to make and enforce unlawful "local policies," and refuse to conduct their administrative work according to law (yifa xingzheng). In order to fulfill various hard policy targets, rural cadres may even illegally detain and torture noncompliant villagers.34 In one Hunan

34. See Zeng Yesong, "Jingdong Zhongnanhai de shinian yuanan" [A ten-year long unjust verdict that disturbs Zhongnanhai]. Zhongguo Nongmin [Chinese Peasantry], No. 5 (May 1995), pp. 34-37; and Li Xingzhong, "Nongcun fubai xianxiang de zhuangkuang ji duice" [The condition of rural cadre corruption and countermeasures], paper prepared for the National Conference on Rural Stability and Development, Songzi.
county, for instance, a township leader charged a villager with opposing the government and ordered him paraded through the town's streets, simply because he refused to adopt the method of sowing recommended by the township government.35

In the final analysis, although they remain officially included in the zone of policy implementation, in many places peasants are often practically excluded from it. As we saw in Chapter 4, the de facto exclusion of ordinary citizens from the zone was partially overcome through reliance on periodic mass campaigns in Mao's China. In Dengist China, the end of mass campaigns has occurred, and law-based mode of inclusion has been proposed. But no matter how serious the center may be about enacting policies that will benefit ordinary Chinese in one way or another, it seems that by itself the center can hardly prevent local officials from ignoring or violating such policies.

The Rise of Policy-based Resistance

It is when the center cannot by itself secure accurate policy implementation, and when it insists on but

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is incapable of including ordinary people in the zone of policy implementation through rule by law, that Chinese peasants begin to assert their right to participate in the zone by conducting policy-based resistance. For villagers who are aggrieved over local officials' misimplementation of beneficial central policies, Dengist China has created appropriate conditions under which they can cite central policies to defy these malfeasant local cadres.

For the first time in Chinese history, both people's democracy and rule by law appear to be receiving serious attention from the central state. Although this innovation on the mode of inclusion has remained largely unrealized, it has nonetheless considerably improved the environment in which Chinese peasants may assert a right to be permanently included in the zone of policy implementation. The reestablishment of the equality before law, among other factors, reduces the likelihood of being labeled a class enemy and then being denied all legal protection. Equally important, the on-going replacement of party policies by state laws has also made it more feasible for villagers to secure a solid policy base for their

defiance. Unlike party policies that are transmitted primarily through secretive documents or pronounced in general party propaganda, laws are more specific about procedures, less equivocal in substance, and more accessible to the general public.

The significance of the improved availability of laws is hard to overestimate. As more and more policies are replaced by laws, it has become easier for ordinary citizens to get necessary political information, to find out exactly how local officials have failed to implement or even violated one or more central policies, and to frame their policy-based claims.

The promulgation of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees is a good example of how the replacement of party policy by law may help peasants. The Organic Law is based on the Party's long-standing tradition of mass line democracy, but it offers much handier political ammunition for aggrieved villagers. While it is quite a feat for peasants to convince township leaders that the appointment of a village cadre does not accord with mass line democracy, it is easy for them to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a village election was not fair. Likewise, it is almost always difficult for villagers to pressure township leaders into dismissing a corrupt or domineering village cadre, but it is much more feasible for them to demand free elections,
with which they can vote such cadres out of office. The end of mass mobilization may have increased the start-up costs of conducting policy-based resistance, but the drive for rule by law has considerably improved its feasibility.

These changes in the mode of inclusion are particularly convenient for resourceful and politically knowledgeable villagers who are beginning to appear in greater numbers in recent years. Many of these peasants seem to have been convinced by Maoist campaigns that they can take advantage of their inclusion in the zone of policy implementation to actively and vigorously defend their interests. These perceptive villagers seem to take the drive as rule by law to be an unmistakable reaffirmation of their inclusion in the zone, and regard citing central policies and appealing to central authorities to defy local officials as a legitimate form of political contention.37

At the same time, astute villagers also seem well-aware that decollectivization and the end to system-wide class struggle have significantly improved their position vis-a-vis rural cadres.38 It is true that rural cadres


still control valuable resources such as birth control quotas and land for house-building, but they no longer can impose subsistence-threatening economic sanctions against peasants. Likewise, rural cadres may continue to threaten villagers with political persecution and even social ostracism, but at least they can no longer lawfully subject peasants to struggle sessions. When the resourceful peasants I identified in Chapter 3 struggle to redress grievances, they are no longer limited to everyday forms of resistance and violence, nor must they wait until the center has fully established well-recognized channels of inclusion.


instead, they engage in policy-based resistance to speed the process of inclusion along.

Conclusion

If Mao's mass campaigns made it a politically acceptable form of popular contention to defy local officials who failed to implement central policies, then post-Mao reforms, interacting with each other and with the prevailing political structure, have created sufficient conditions for villagers to employ this new form of contention without the impetus of central mobilization. First, by strengthening hierarchical control over local officials and at the same time effectively increasing their autonomy from social pressure, Dengist reforms of the cadre management system made the zone of policy implementation more problematic, generating an increasing number of popular grievances against local officials. Second, the center's drive to include ordinary citizens in the zone through rule by law made it less risky and more feasible for villagers to employ central policies as political weapons to defend their "legitimate rights and interests." In the mean time, decollectivization and the end of system-wide class struggle increased the ability of resourceful villagers to defy rural cadres on their own initiative. It is under these circumstances that savvy, strict-constructionist peasants,
drawing on both post-Mao reforms and Maoist political legacies, began to engage in self-directed policy-based resistance since ten or fifteen years ago.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE EFFECTIVENESS AND PROACTIVE POTENTIAL OF POLICY-BASED RESISTANCE

Since 1949, one of the many ways Chinese leaders have attempted to prevent social unrest is to include peasants in the zone of policy implementation. In Dengist China, the center's efforts to include peasants in the zone through the drive for rule by law has led to the rise of policy based resistance, in which peasants themselves cite central policies and apply pressure on higher level government to defend their "legitimate rights and interests." To what extent does policy-based resistance constitute an alternative to conventional forms of contention? Can it lead to long-term political changes of the sort that may contribute to future structural change? To address these questions, in this concluding chapter, I will examine the effectiveness and proactive potential of policy-based resistance.

As a lawful and politically acceptable form of contention, policy-based resistance is less risky than outright rebellion. Being only partly institutionalized and partly legitimate, policy-based resistance may also be more
effective than both everyday forms of resistance and other available means of non-violent political contention, insofar as it may enable peasants to mobilize their political resources to maximum advantage. Unlike participants in mass demonstrations, who require government approval, policy-based resisters can petition and visit any level of government without forewarning. Unlike those who file administrative lawsuits and leave it at that, policy-based resisters can stage public protests and pursue legal battles at one or more levels of government to increase the pressure they apply.1

By simultaneously conducting angry protests, filing formal administrative lawsuits, aggressively seeking audiences at higher levels of government, and even temporarily withholding tax payments or delaying their compliance with other state policies, policy-based resisters at times are successful in defending their interests. As a result of their opposition, local impositions have been rescinded, rigged elections annulled, and corrupt or despotic rural cadres removed.2 In one Hebei county, for

1. Interviewees 5 and 15, township officials, September-October, 1993; interviewees 12 and 13, county officials, October 1993; interviewees 60 and 79, Civil Affairs Ministry officials; interviewee 95, reporter, July 1994.

2. For representative reports of successful acts of policy-based resistance, see Bao Yonghui, "Shenhua nongcun dierbu gaige de qiji" [The turning point in deepening the second stage of rural reform], Xiangzhen Luntan [Township Forum], No. 5 (1991), pp. 17-18; Zhongguo Jiceng Zhengquan Jianshe Yanjiuhui, ed., Zhongguo Nongcun Cunmin Weiyuanhui Huanjie Xuanju Zhidu -- Study on the Election of Villagers
example, lodging collective complaints -- a primary form of policy-based resistance -- has been so effective that the county organization department has criticized township officials for being terrified of complainants. In their own words: "some township leaders have developed a 'collective complaints syndrome (shangfang kongjuzheng); they scratch their head whenever they see the masses come, . . . and appease them by recalling a village party secretary as soon as a complaint is lodged."3

And peasant victories have not all been the result of reactive, defensive struggles to hold on to what they already have. Even though policy-based resistance is indeed inherently reactive in that it takes place only after misimplementation of central policies has occurred, it can also, potentially, be proactive in that it reaches for something new. This is particularly true of those acts of resistance in which villagers employ a) general and vague party guidelines as a policy base, b) recycle outdated central policies, or c) "creatively misread" central

3. Zhonggong Cixian Xianwei Zuzhibu, "You zhuanggao zhibu shuji yinchu de sikao [Thoughts on lodging complaints against party secretaries], Ganbu yu Rencai, No. 12, (December 1993), p. 36.
policies to justify their claims. In the past few years, these kinds of vaguely policy-based resistance have led to a series of important institutional changes in many Chinese villages, changes which were not explicitly authorized by any central policy.

The first major institutional change concerns village election procedures. The *Organic Law of Villagers' Committees* stipulates that villagers' committee members and directors are to be directly elected (Article 9), but fails to specify exactly how direct elections are to be conducted. While this lack of specificity leaves room for rural cadres to tamper with candidate selection, it has also enabled villagers to cite the general principle of mass line democracy to demand "sea elections" (*haixuan*), i.e., elections characterized by free nomination of candidates and fully competitive campaigning. In one Fujian village, for example, when the nomination of candidates for the villagers' committee was about to begin, over thirty villagers wrote an open letter to the village election committee, in which they charged the incumbent cadres with having an "intolerable work style" and demanded open nomination procedures and competitive elections. To apply pressure on the incumbent village cadres, five villagers who

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were nominated by the co-signers of the open letter volunteered to pay handsome "risk deposits." In the end, the petitioners won the county government's support for their complaint because their action was considered "fully in accord with the spirit of the Organic Law." As a result of the villagers' contention, free nomination and competitive elections were ultimately instituted over the express opposition of leading officials in the township government.5

A second institutional change associated with villagers' proactive, policy-based resistance concerns oversight of elected village cadres. The Organic Law stipulates that villagers' committees must accept the supervision of the Villagers' Assembly, which includes all adult villagers (Article 9). But this kind of supervision is often not possible because it is nearly impossible to convene meetings of so many people at one time and place.6 As a result, villagers' autonomy in theory often becomes village cadres' autonomy in practice. In order to improve village cadres' responsiveness to voters after they are elected, policy-based resisters in some provinces have


6. Except in remote mountainous areas, most Chinese villages have a population of about one thousand. Several villages I visited in Shandong and Hebei have over 6,000 residents. In addition, many villagers are often on business trips or work in cities.
successfully cited the people's congress system as a model to establish smaller villagers' representative assemblies, which can meet on a regular basis to discuss and decide upon village affairs.  

Thirdly, policy-based resisters have begun to demand institutional changes that will considerably increase the accountability of even village party committees to ordinary villagers. In places where the majority of village party members no longer enjoy popular support, for example, villagers have begun to challenge the authority of village party committees in several different ways. For one, villagers may question the village party committees' right to nominate candidates for villagers' committees, an issue not explicitly dealt with in the *Organic Law*. In one case, nearly a hundred Hebei villagers went directly to the Central Disciplinary Inspection Commission in Beijing to lodge complaints over perceived election irregularities. Their township party committee had insisted that the village party branch nominate candidates, while the complainants claimed a party branch had no right to nominate village representatives. Since the party was the "leader," they argued, the election would be pointless if the Party branch

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selected candidates -- "wouldn't voting for other candidates amount to defying party leadership?"^8

Acting even more proactively on a yet vaguer policy base, villagers have used electoral legitimacy to restrict village party committees' role in village management. In a Hebei village, for example, as soon as a non-party villager was elected chairman of the villagers' representative assembly, he made the following announcement over the village loudspeaker: "I was elected by the whole village, the party secretary was elected by party members only. From now on, I am the number one leader of the village. You should come to see me when you have problems."^9 In another similar case, a group of policy-based resisters in a north China village decided on their own to set up a village "discipline inspection committee" on which only ordinary villagers would be allowed to serve.^10

Finally, by referring to high-sounding party principles such as "the Communist Party has no interests of

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8. Interviewees 60, Civil Affairs Ministry official, June 1994.


its own other than those of the people," ordinary villagers in some places have begun to demand (and win) the right to participate in the election of village party committees. In one Hebei village, for instance, a group of villagers openly demanded that the village party secretary be elected by all villagers rather than only by party members, basing their argument on the fact that the party secretary rules over all villagers, not only over party members.\footnote{11} In some places, such demands were accepted -- at least in part. In a Shanxi county, for instance, a "double-balloting system" (liang piao zhi) has been established, under which all villagers now have the right to participate in primaries for their village party committee, and party members who fail to win over 50 percent of the primary ballots are automatically disqualified from candidacy to the party committee.\footnote{12} Partly due to the obvious decline of village level party organizations in much of the countryside, this unprecedented concession has even won modest support from the Central Organization Department in Beijing, which has recommended that all provinces experiment with this remarkable and largely unreported reform.\footnote{13}

\footnote{11. See Li Jingyi, "Nongcun 'zhiluan' qishi lu" [Reflections on overcoming disorder in the countryside], unpublished paper, 1992.}

\footnote{12. See Zhou Ziqing and Zhao Zhenji, "liangpiao zhi---nongcun dangzuzhi jianshe de youyi changshi" [Two-ballot system --- a useful experiment on construction of rural party organization]. Xianzhen Luntan, No. 6 (June 1992), pp. 6-7.}

\footnote{13. Interviewee 106, Civil Affairs Ministry official, December 1995.}
While these demands for what amounts to expanded political rights are all policy-based in that they fall within the broad rubric of people's democracy and spring from an arguably plausible reading of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees, the Party Constitution, and Electoral Law of the National People's Congress and Local People's Congresses (1979, revised 1986), they are nonetheless proactive in that villagers have never exercised these rights previously, nor has the center explicitly granted such rights to ordinary citizens.

As wide-ranging as these grassroots institutional changes are, it would be wrong to conclude that anything approaching regime change is already within sight. Up to this point, policy-based resistance has been largely limited to the lower reaches of government and especially village cadres, and few policy-based resisters have questioned central policies, not to mention their patrons at higher levels.

This said, it would nonetheless be mistaken to conclude that nothing significant is happening as a result of the rise of policy-based resistance. The seeds of institutional change have started to sprout, and may continue to grow in coming years. Borrowing party elder Peng Zhen's language, who in 1987 said that village
political reform would become "a democratic training class" or the "greatest democratic exercise" for peasants,\textsuperscript{14} I would say that policy-based resistance may constitute a training class for increased rights consciousness. By conducting policy-based resistance, peasants may become more appreciative of the rights granted by (or implicit in) certain central policies, and their actions may then affect how they see themselves by giving rise to new understandings, new commitments, and new aspirations. In other words, even though policy-based resisters generally frame their challenges in terms of policy implementation and eschew revolutionary goals, their resistance invariably depends on imaginative reformulations of existing "rights talk" and may lead to new identities and heightened expectations.\textsuperscript{15}

In the longer run, this growing rights consciousness may eventually help make rights real. Although impressive

\textsuperscript{14} See Peng Zhen, "Cunmin weiyuanhui zuzhi fa shi guojia zhongyao falu zhi yi" [The Organic Law of Villagers' Committee is one of the nation's important basic laws], speech to the 20th joint-groups (lianzu) meeting of the Standing Committee of the Seventh National People's Congress, March 16, 1987; "Qunzhong zizhi shi fazhan shehui zhuyi minzhu de zhongyao yi huan" [Mass autonomy is an important link in the development of socialist democracy], speech to the chairmen meeting of the Standing Committee of the Six National People's Congress, November 23, 1987.

lists of political and civil rights are enumerated in fine-sounding constitutions nearly everywhere, history shows they are more often won, one by one, through gritty political struggles and painstaking extraction of concessions. To the extent that rural cadres in some places have learned that they must respect villagers' rights or face ungovernable villages, policy-based resisters have made the first step towards gaining full-fledged, enforceable political rights.

As the transformation of rights consciousness into recognized rights begins, villagers may incrementally turn their inclusion in the zone of policy implementation into all-around participation in the "local polity." After overcoming their "enemies" in the village, empowered peasants may pursue their struggle for rights at the township and county levels. They may, for instance, try to make township and county leaders more accountable by pressing for more competitive direct election of deputies to township and county people's congresses or by demanding greater say over the performance appraisal of township officials.

Inasmuch as policy-based resisters typically support central policies and fail to challenge the central leadership, their actions may continue, expand, and avoid repression. Even though current central leaders appear to have at best a limited commitment to thorough
democratization, it may be in their interest to continue ongoing political-legal reforms and to prevent local officials from provoking social unrest. Since many of these reforms are likely to deprive local officials of some of the privileges associated with freedom from social pressure, the central state may also need the cooperation of popular forces to secure the execution of its reform program. Given significant common interests in securing faithful implementation of mass-regarding central policies, rights-minded Chinese peasants and reformist central leaders may thus continue their undeclared and perhaps unintended cooperation. So long as this confluence of interests exists, continuing, incremental structural change appears likely, while another peasant revolution remains at best a remote possibility.

16. The enactment of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees is a good example. When pushing it through the reluctant legislature, Peng Zhen argued that the Law would greatly improve people's supervision of rural cadres, whom central leaders could not effectively oversee even if they "had 48 hours a day." See Peng Zhen, "Fandui qiangpo mingling, jianchi qunzhong zizhi" [Against coercion and commandism, uphold mass autonomy], speech to the fifth joint meeting of delegation leaders and members of the Law Committee at the Six National People's Congress, April 6, 1987.
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APPENDIX

INTERVIEWEE LIST

2. villager, September 1993.
7. village cadre, October 1993.
8. villagers, October 1993.
10. villager, October 1993.
11. villager, October 1993.
12. county official, October 1993.
15. township official, October 1993.
16. villager, October 1993; December 1995.
17. villager, October 1993
18. villager, October 1993.

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20. village cadre, October 1993.
22. villager, October 1993.
23. villager, October 1993.
24. villager, October-December 1993; May-August 1994; July-August, November-December 1995
25. villager, October 1993.
27. villager, October 1993.
29. provincial official, October 1993.
30. county official, October 1993.
31. county official, October 1993.
32. county official, October 1993.
33. villager, October 1993.
34. village cadre, October 1993.
35. village cadre, October 1993.
36. village cadre, October 1993.
37. county official, October 1993.
38. county official, October 1993.
40. villager, village, October 1993.
41. villager, October 1993.
42. village cadre, October 1993.
43. villager, October 1993.
44. county official, October 1993.
45. village cadre, October 1993.
46. village cadre, October 1993.
47. county official, October 1993.
48. county official, October 1993.
49. village cadre, October 1993.
50. villager, October 1993.
51. township official, October 1993.
52. township official, October 1993.
53. village cadre, October 1993.
54. township official, October 1993.
55. county official, October 1993.
56. village cadre, October 1993.
57. journal editor, October 1993; August, 1995.
58. journal editor, October 1993.
59. villager, October 1993.
61. journal editor, November 1993.
63. villager, November 1993.
64. village cadre, November 1993.
65. villager, November 1993.
66. village cadre, November 1993.
67. villager, November 1993.
68. city official, December 1993.
69. city official, December 1993.
70. city official, December 1993.
71. provincial official, December 1993.
72. university rural researcher, December 1993.
73. township official, May 1994.
74. village cadre, May 1994.
75. villager, June 1994.
76. university rural researcher, May 1994.
78. government rural researcher, June 1994.
80. villager, June 1994.
81. villager, June 1994.
82. provincial official, July 1994.
84. government rural researcher, July 1994.
86. village cadre, July 1994.
89. village cadre, July 1994.
96. university rural researcher, July 1994.
98. villager, July 1994; July-August, 1995
100. villager, July 1995.
101. villager, October 1993.
102. university professor, June 1994.
104. villager, September 1993.
105. villager, August 1995.
107. county official, October 1993
108. government rural researcher, October 1993.
110. villager, December 1995.