

# Creating “Masses” from “People”: Institutions, Internal Conflict, and Cleavage Salience in Wartime

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## Abstract

Civil wars contain a *mélange* of salient issues, and the war’s main division often cuts across local cleavages that matter more to fighters and civilians alike. Research on the determinants of violence has often focused on the mismatch between a war’s macro-cleavage and patterns of killing. This advance has benefitted the literature, but obscures the important question of the conditions under which such a mismatch is likely. This article argues that in some cases, which can be predicted systematically, local-level conflict and violence does unfold according to the war’s master cleavage. I argue that the institutions belligerents establish over the course of the war are likely to determine the extent of this congruence. Specifically, when insurgents establish institutions that penetrate society and regulate civilian behavior, the war’s master cleavage becomes the basis for local-level violence. To provide empirical support for the argument, I provide an in-depth investigation of the Chinese Communist Party’s insurgency in Southern China during the 1930s. Prior to the CCP insurgency, conflict revolved around local. However, once the CCP established institutions that regulated practically all aspects of civilian life, local-level violence and political behavior changed to reflect the socio-economic cleavage that separated the CCP and the incumbent Chinese Nationalist government. Importantly, socio-economic cleavages remained salient only as long as the CCP’s institutions persisted at the local level. After the CCP was defeated and pre-conflict institutions were restored, political behavior returned to the *ante bellum* status quo: traditional local cleavages once again formed the locus of conflict. In articulating the conditions under which macro-cleavages structure local violence, this article adds to a body of work that emphasizes the contingency of politically-salient cleavages. The implications are profound for counterinsurgency. Analysts and practitioners tend to assume that local violence reflects the distribution of carrots and sticks meted out by incumbents and insurgents. In fact, as this article shows, the interaction between belligerents’ institutions and cleavages local cleavages is also a clear driver of violence.

**Zhang San (to the three landlords):** “Every day the three of you engage in the most wicked cruelties. You raped my wife and drove her to suicide, you stole my blankets and my clothing. You stole the meat my family and I were to have during the New Year and kidnapped my daughter. Today I ask, how will you repay your debts to me?”

**Li Si:** “You stole my wok! Today you will pay with your head!”

**Peasant 1 (Pointing and cursing at landlord Yang):** “Do you remember last year when I owed you money how you tied me up and stripped off my clothes?”

**Peasant 4:** “Enough! Let's kill them!”

**Zhang San (to the crowd):** “What should we do with these three landlords?”

**Crowd (in unison):** “Kill them! Kill them!”

**Wang Er:** “Confiscate their property!”

**Commander of the Young Pioneers:** “Kill these pigs and let us happily celebrate the New Year!”

*The crowd leads the three landlords off stage chanting “Long live the Communist Party! Overthrow the Kuomintang! Overthrow local bullies and evil gentry! Long live the revolution!”*

The play *Spring Struggle* depicts the revolution that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led in the 1930's in its largest base area in Southern China, the Chinese Soviet Republic.<sup>1</sup> The CCP's revolution is often taken as the archetype of peasant revolution, epitomized in the above scene: evil landlords oppress peasants and peasants rise up and violently overthrow landlords with the help of a band of revolutionaries. The characterization of the Chinese civil war as a peasant revolution is not a post-hoc narrative; in village after village, previously-docile peasants did rise up and violently overthrow the existing landlord-dominated order. As depicted in *Spring Struggle*, socio-economic status determined the distribution of violence at the micro level.

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<sup>1</sup> Wang Mulan 王木蘭 and Deng Jiaqi 鄧家琪, eds., “Nianguan Douzheng 年關鬪爭 [Spring Struggle],” in *Zhongyang Suqu Xiju Ji* 中央蘇區戲劇集 [Anthology of Plays from the Central Soviet Area] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe, 1992), 49–50.

This state of affairs is unusual for two important reasons. Firstly, in the context of Chinese history, political behavior in general and political violence in particular were determined by decidedly parochial concerns, such as membership of a particular village or kinship group, not socio-economic class. Secondly, comparative studies of civil wars have highlighted the disjunction between local cleavages and a conflict's master cleavage, but no such disjunction existed within the Chinese Soviet Republic and in the Chinese Revolution more generally.<sup>2</sup> What explains the salience of socio-economic cleavages within the Chinese Soviet Republic and what explains the overlap between micro- and macro-level violence in the Chinese Revolution?

In this paper, I argue the answer to these questions can be found in the structure of the political institutions established by belligerents during a civil war. Specifically, cleavage salience is a function of relationship between the insurgent state and society. The more insurgent's institutions penetrate local society, the greater the extent the overlap between local-level violence and the master cleavage of the civil war. I demonstrate the validity of this argument by utilizing a case study of the insurgency led by the CCP in Southern China between 1931 and 1935. Drawing on a wealth of qualitative evidence, I show that prior to the arrival of the CCP political behavior and violence were products of private and local concerns, specifically geographic and kinship relations. In 1931, the CCP established new political institutions that penetrated further into Chinese society than any before it and deployed inducements and sanctions according to individual's relationship to the means of production. After the defeat of the CCP in 1934 and the re-imposition of the old order, geographic and kinship cleavages regained their salience and political behavior ceased to be determined by socio-economic status.

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<sup>2</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Ontology of 'Political Violence': Action and Identity in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 2003): 475–494.

This article highlights the importance of considering the means by which insurgents govern civilian populations. In so doing, it adds considerable nuance to the examination of the etiology of internal conflict and suggests that no given cleavage should be seen as the inevitable basis of conflict. With regards to the conduct of belligerents in wartime, my findings indicate that the distribution of violence in wartime may be a product of rebels' own ideological inclinations as well as their desire to render salient previously-dormant social cleavages. Finally, this article suggests that the termination of internal conflicts requires incumbent authorities to be flexible and engage insurgents and populations along the cleavages selected by the insurgents.

This article proceeds as follows: in the first section, I examine the relationship between a conflict's master cleavage and local cleavages and argue that the extent to which the two overlap is a function of belligerents' institutions, and discuss the research design I adopt to demonstrate the validity of that argument. The second section introduces the social, political, and economic fabric of China's pre-conflict rural society and shows that political behavior was determined on relations of geography and kinship. In the third section, I examine the institutions established by the CCP and process by which those institutions transformed Chinese society. In the fourth section, I bring the story full circle and analyze how the re-imposition of the old order in areas under CCP control returned economic cleavages to their previously-dormant state. The fifth section concludes.

## I. Cleavages, Institutions, and Conflict

Work on cleavage salience and cleavage structures is most prominent in the study of electoral systems. In an early and influential work, Lipset and Rokkan argued that that cleavage

salience (reflected in the institutionalization of party systems in Western Europe) was produced by a host of factors that preceded the establishment of modern, democratic political systems, including land tenure relationships, the openness of education systems, and the extension of franchise.<sup>3</sup> Miller and Schofield advance a more agentic story of cleavage salience and they argue that political entrepreneurs within parties in the United States seek out “disaffected” voters in an effort to expand their electoral appeal. It was for this reason that American parties competed along economic cleavages up to the 1960’s and along social cleavages thereafter.<sup>4</sup> Posner adopts an institutional approach and argues that the relative salience of ethnic or linguistic cleavages in Zambia is a function of the structure of that country’s electoral system.<sup>5</sup>

In the study of conflict, social cleavages and their associated identities have often been deployed as an explanatory variable for explaining political behavior in conflicts as varied as the Russian Revolution and the Sudanese Civil War. Whether the cleavage in question is based on ideological, socio-economic, ethnic, or religious differentiation, a great deal of the scholarship on internal conflict locates the origins of the conflict among one or more competing identities.<sup>6</sup> Identity has also been deployed to explain levels of violence in internal conflicts, as well as the opportunities and challenges associated with conflict termination.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967)..

<sup>4</sup> Gary Miller and Norman Schofield, “Activists and Partisan Realignment in the United States,” *American Political Science Review*, no. 02 (May 2003): 245–260.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel N. Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> This is most readily observed in the literature on the origins of ethnic civil wars and the debate over whether there is a connection between greater amounts of ethno-linguistic fractionalization and civil war onset. See James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 75–90. Donald L Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)., Nicholas Sambanis, “Do Ethnic and Nonethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes? A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry (Part 1),” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (June 1, 2001): 259–82., and Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (December 1, 2004): 814–58.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart J Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001)., Stuart J. Kaufman, “Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence,” *International Security* 30, no. 4 (April 1, 2006): 45–86., Chaim Kaufmann, “Possible and Impossible Solutions to

Though many conflicts are understood in the context of a master cleavage (ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, nationality, etc.), research on civil wars shows that these macro-level narratives obscure considerable micro-level diversity. Kalyvas argues that this disjuncture takes two forms:

first, actions “on the ground” often seem more related to local or private issues than to the war’s driving (or “master”) cleavage; second, individual and local actors take advantage of the war to settle local or private conflicts often bearing little or no relation to the causes of the war or the goals of the belligerents.<sup>8</sup>

He marshals an impressive amount of evidence from civil wars all over the world and shows that local cleavages significantly affect both the distribution of allegiances and the distribution of violence. Kalyvas’ findings have been confirmed and expanded as the study of civil war has shifted from macro- to micro-level analyses of conflict dynamics.<sup>9</sup> Despite the well-documented importance of local cleavages, there are nevertheless instances, such as in the Chinese Soviet Republic, where local and master cleavages do indeed overlap. What explains this variation in local-master cleavage overlap?

This article adopts an institutional approach to the salience of cleavages in wartime to interrogate the conditions under which macro-cleavages determine violence at the micro-level. I define institutions as the “constitutive rules and practices prescribing appropriate behavior for specific actors in specific situations.”<sup>10</sup> Formal institutions establish criteria by which rewards

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Ethnic Civil Wars,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (April 1, 1996): 136–75. and Nicholas Sambanis, “Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature,” *World Politics* 52, no. 04 (July 2000): 437–483..

<sup>8</sup> Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” 475–76.

<sup>9</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Promises and Pitfalls of an Emerging Research Program: The Microdynamics of Civil War,” in *Order, Conflict, and Violence*, ed. Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 397–421; Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Micro-Level Studies of Violence in Civil War: Refining and Extending the Control-Collaboration Model,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 4 (September 1, 2012): 658–68.

<sup>10</sup> James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, “Elaborating the ‘New Institutionalism,’” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, ed. Rhodes, R.A.W, Binder, and Bert A. Rockman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

are distributed and sanctions enforced and in so doing “shape peoples’ incentives for selecting one of [a number of] potentially salient...identities rather than another, and then coordinate these choices across individuals so as to produce a society-level outcome.”<sup>11</sup> In peacetime, political institutions and the identities they render salient may be important or even decisive in determining distributions of patronage, electoral outcomes, and the provision of public goods.<sup>12</sup> In wartime, they form the primary means by which individuals and communities are recruited into armed movements and subject to violence. Literature on state-building has often regarded wartime as a particularly propitious time for incumbents to build strong states.<sup>13</sup> I argue the same is true for insurgents and that the decisions insurgents make as they establish new institutions affects patterns of political behavior and violence under the insurgent order.

Leaders of insurgent organizations lay out the political aims of the insurgency, the means by which those aims are to be achieved, and the shape that insurgent institutions will take in the form of a political ideology. I follow Sanín and Wood’s definition of ideology as

a more or less systematic set of ideas that includes the identification of a referent group (a class, ethnic, or other social group), an enunciation of the grievances or challenges that the group confronts, the identification of objectives on behalf of that group (political change - or defense against its threat), and a (perhaps vaguely defined) program of action.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> On patronage see Bruce J. Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism,” *African Affairs* 97, no. 388 (July 1, 1998): 305–41. On electoral outcomes see Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*. On the provision of public goods see James Habyarimana et al., “Why Does Ethnic Diversity Undermine Public Goods Provision?,” *American Political Science Review*, no. 04 (November 2007): 709–725., Mwangi S. Kimenyi, “Ethnicity, Governance and the Provision of Public Goods,” *Journal of African Economies* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 62–99. and Edward Miguel and Mary Kay Gugerty, “Ethnic Diversity, Social Sanctions, and Public Goods in Kenya,” *Journal of Public Economics* 89, no. 11–12 (December 2005): 2325–68.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Tilly and Gabriel Ardant, eds., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975). Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, Ad 990-1990* (Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Ideology in Civil War Instrumental Adoption and Beyond,” *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (March 1, 2014): 215.

I divide insurgent ideologies into two categories based on the relationship of their own desired political order and the existing one. Social revolutionary ideologies envision a destruction of existing institutions and the wholesale transformation of society; everything from the distribution of property to gender relations to personal hygiene. In the modern era, it is often communist insurgents who espouse these kinds of ideologies, but to this can also be added religious and millenarian insurgents such as the Taipings in 19<sup>th</sup> century China and the Islamic State today. By contrast, nationalist or secessionist ideologies seek a redistribution of political power among competing groups of elites or non-elites (such as ethnic or religious groups) while retaining most existing political and social structures. The Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and Irish Republican Army are two examples of such groups.

Although both social revolutionary and nationalist insurgents may have a commitment to institution-building writ large, the former prefer the establishment of institutions that penetrate civilian society and extend the authority of insurgents so as to fulfill their mission of transforming society from the ground-up. The social revolutionary aspirations of insurgents have a related and important implication for how they (and the institutions they establish) conceptualize local society. Rather than seeing a disconnect between local and national politics, these groups see the two not only as related, but see local conflicts as manifestations of national ones. As a result, the institutions they establish use policies at the local level intended to address problems at the national level. For example, if a group of insurgents is waging a religious war against all “deviant” sects at the national level, they will also search out “deviants” at the local level as well. This goes beyond a mere articulation of local grievances using the semantics of insurgent ideology. Rather, is a transposition of the war’s master cleavage to the local level actively enforced by insurgent organizations and institutions. This mismatch between local and



national cleavages does not exist for rebel institutions informed by nationalist ideologies in which a division exists between policies intended to address local grievances (such as the form of dispute adjudication) issues of national importance (such as greater autonomy or independence from a central government).

Armed groups with aspirations to state power do not emerge in a social vacuum and must contend with a social fabric shaped by incumbents' institutions. Incumbent institutions create a "stock" of social cleavages upon which oppositions can draw (and with which they need to contend) in their quest for state power. Prewar institutions are therefore important, but not decisive in determining the social basis for conflict. The cleavage that armed opposition groups ultimately choose is determined by their own ideological orientations. Once the choice is made, opposition groups will establish political institutions designed to benefit its selected constituency. It is this act of institution-building that polarizes society and renders certain forms of social differentiation politically-salient.

The mechanisms by which political institutions render cleavages salient are selectively-targeted inducements and sanctions. Inducements include not only the absence of violence against individuals or communities, but also patronage in the form of public goods (such as schools, roads, and sanitation) and/or private goods (such as money, land, food, or consumer goods). Inducements need not be strictly material and also include the awarding of medals, appointment to ceremonial positions, and honorary mentions in ceremonies or the press. Sanctions are any form of state action designed to punish individuals or communities that violate the rules and regulations laid down by a belligerent in wartime. Where sanctions take the form of

violence, I am interested in what Kalyvas calls coercive violence, that is, violence used as a resource to control rather than exterminate a population.<sup>15</sup>

The approach I adopt in this paper places a great deal of emphasis on the importance of insurgent ideology as a motivation for insurgent action. Existing works that examine the state-society relationship in areas controlled by insurgents stress the quality of local institutions (Arjona 2016) or the extent to which the incumbent state has penetrated society (Mampilly 2011) as important factors in determining the kinds of institutions that insurgents establish. Both my approach in general and the case study below in particular are intended to show that pre-existing institutions do not necessarily determine how insurgents govern civilians, especially those who are ideologically radical and, as a result, less concerned about the objective strategic costs of their behavior. The claim is *not* that such behavior will produce success for an insurgent organization (quite the contrary, in fact), but that the establishment of such an institutional infrastructure has a systematic and predictable effect on the relative salience of local and master cleavages at the local level.

In examining insurgent institutions, Arjona (2016) divides insurgent rule into two categories: rebelocracy or aliocracy. The latter refers to a political order in which armed groups intervene only minimally in civilian affairs by collecting taxes and regulating civilian behavior related to security. The former, meanwhile, refers to a political order in which insurgents intervene extensively in the lives of civilians.<sup>16</sup> It is in these rebelocracies in which an overlap between master and local cleavages will occur, but not necessarily in all rebelocracies as not all insurgents aspire to the same level of social transformation.

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<sup>15</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>16</sup> Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 26–29.

I show the relationship between insurgent institutions and cleavage salience by conducting a case study on the conflict between the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) the CCP in Southern China from 1931 to 1935. The within-case variation resulting from the wholesale destruction of the KMT's political institutions, the establishment of a new set of institutions by the KMT, and the re-establishment of the KMT's institutions after the collapse of the CCP's allow a unique opportunity to assess the effect of institutional change on civilians in wartime.

Insurgencies are generally information-rich, but data-poor settings. In wartime insurgents and incumbents may not even keep records, let alone make them available to outsiders during or after the conflict. The difficulty of data collection in general is further complicated by the need to gather local-level data to evaluate incumbent and insurgent rule and contestation in wartime. The CCP-KMT conflict stands out for the sheer volume of information produced during the conflict as well as the amount of data available to researchers today. The CCP was especially keen on producing internal reports on its activities and those reports, as well as other internal publications, provide an unprecedented level of detail of how insurgent institutions shape civilian life during conflict.<sup>17</sup> The KMT similarly produced enormous quantities of material and oversaw a political system that, while flawed, had a large press corps that avidly followed the KMT's counterinsurgency campaigns against the CCP. Finally, many of the men and women who fought in the conflict on both sides produced memoirs about their experiences. Taken together, this forms a particularly rich evidentiary base and one that allows for a full exploration of the dynamics of the conflict in Southern China.

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<sup>17</sup> The forces under KMT general Ch'en Ch'eng captured thousands of documents in the 1930's, most of which were subsequently reproduced on a 21-reel set of microfilm known as the *Shisou ziliaoshi Gongfei ziliao* [Materials on the Chinese Communists from the Shisou Archive, usually called the Ch'en Ch'eng Collection]. Even more materials were subsequently made available after the opening of central and local archives on the Chinese Mainland in the 1980's and 1990's.

## II. Social Order and Political Conflict in Southern China to 1931

A communist revolution both caters to and requires the participation of the “masses,” individuals of a low socio-economic class who together constitute the overwhelming majority of society and who exist “to be mobilized and organized by political activists,” specifically communist political activists.<sup>18</sup> To revolutionaries, the masses are unique among all social groups because only they can and should legitimately exercise political power. Those outside of this group (class enemies and other reactionaries) exist only as targets of mass violence. In contrast to the “masses,” “people” are individuals whose identification with others is based on other forms of social differentiation and who are mobilized by non-communist elites. The Chinese countryside into which the CCP descended in 1927 was a land of “people,” not “masses.”

The structure of the Imperial Chinese state and that of its successor, the Republic of China, differed in their details but had one important common thread: they never penetrated any lower than the county (*xian*). The implementation of imperial policy at the local level, that is, in townships (*xiang*) and villages (*cun*), was dependent on the ability of centrally-appointed bureaucrats to enlist the assistance of local elites.<sup>19</sup> The balance between local and central control broke down in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century after a series of internal conflicts in which the throne devolved power to local elites and permitted them to raise their own militias and fortify their

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<sup>18</sup> Tsou Tang, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: A Historical Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 272.

<sup>19</sup> Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960). Philip A Kuhn, “Local Self-Government Under the Republic: Problems of Control, Autonomy, and Mobilization,” in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, ed. Frederic E. Wakeman and Carolyn Grant (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975), 257–98. Bradley Ward Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

villages. External threats from bandits and peasant rebels reinforced geographic and kinship bonds in villages. It was for that reason that most local politics in Jiangxi and Fujian provinces (the future location of the CCP-led insurgency) were matters of geography or kinship. The general political environment and the specific political institutions in the countryside generally subsumed economic differences and muted or eliminated class conflict.

Chinese kinship organizations were corporate groups which celebrated ritual unity based on actual or perceived descent from a common ancestor. Kinship organizations are corporate because “members derive benefits from jointly-owned property and shared resources; they also join in corporate activities on a regular basis. Furthermore, members of a lineage are highly conscious of themselves as a *group* in relation to others.”<sup>20</sup> Kinship organizations were widespread in the areas of Southern China where the CCP would eventually undertake its rural revolution. One observer noted of one area that “every surname group has a clan hall and ancestral temple” and that in their profusion they “stood like a dense forest.”<sup>21</sup> Chen Qihan, a general in the Red Army observed of his birthplace in Southern Jiangxi that “traditional clan society was deeply ingrained” and that ancestral shrines had been “erected everywhere” in the area.<sup>22</sup> Mao Zedong himself noted that “the feudal family system prevails in every county, and all the families in a village or group of villages often have the same surname.”<sup>23</sup> Another

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<sup>20</sup> James L. Watson, “Chinese Kinship Reconsidered: Anthropological Perspectives on Historical Research,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 92 (December 1, 1982): 594.

<sup>21</sup> Chen Gengya 陳賡雅, *Gan-Wan-Xiang-E Shicha Ji 贛皖湘鄂視察記* [Record of an Inspection of Jiangxi, Anhui, Hunan, and Hubei] (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1968), 25.

<sup>22</sup> Chen Qihan 陳奇涵, “Gannan Dang de Lishi 贛南黨的歷史 [The History of the Chinese Communist Party in Southern Jiangxi],” in *Huiyi Zhongyang Suqu 回憶中央蘇區* [Recollections of the Central Soviet Base Area], ed. Chen Yi 陳毅 and Xiao Hua 肖華 (Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Ribao Chubanshe, 1981), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, eds., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949: Volume III: From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927-December 1930* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 103. Mao Tse-tung, “The Struggle in the Chingkang Mountains,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 88. One year later yet another Communist, Yang Kemin, similarly observed that social organization in the Hunan-Jiangxi Soviet Base Area (*Xiang-Gan Suqu*) was generally made up of settlements whose inhabitants all belonged to the same lineage. See Yang Kemin 楊克敏, “Yang Kemin

observer, writing in 1945, noted that in that within six miles of one city in Western Fujian province “there are no fewer than 200 lineage halls; the largest of which hold more than 1000 *dan* of ritual land, the smallest of which have about 10 *dan* of land.”<sup>24</sup>

This last observation illustrates an important aspect of lineage structure: common property. Mao Zedong’s rural surveys provide some information on common landholdings by kinship organizations. In Xunwu County, he found that prior to the CCP’s arrival corporate lands accounted for 40% of all holdings.<sup>25</sup> In Xingguo County the proportion was lower, at 10% of total landholdings.<sup>26</sup> Other sources indicate that these two figures constitute roughly the lower and upper bounds of corporate landownership in Jiangxi and Fujian.<sup>27</sup> Kinship associations used the profits from selling the crops produced by these lands to establish shrines and halls, to write lineage histories, put on ceremonies and celebrations, and to provide certain public goods such as lineage schools, funds for promising young students to study in the cities or abroad, funds, food, and/or land for poorer members of the lineage, and stipends for older members of the lineage.<sup>28</sup>

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Guanyu Xiang-Gan Bian Suqu Qingkuang de Zonghe Baogao 楊克敏關於想贛邊蘇區情況的綜合報告 [Report from Yang Kemin on the Social Situation in the Hunan-Jiangxi Border Soviet Base Area],” in *Zhongyang Geming Genjudi Shiliao Xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 [Selection of Historical Materials on the Central Revolutionary Base Area], ed. Jiangxi Sheng Dang’an Guan 江西省檔案館 [Jiangxi Provincial Archive] and Zhonggong Jiangxi Sheng Dangxiao Dangshi Jiaoyanshi 中共江西省黨校黨史教研室 [Chinese Communist Party Jiangxi Party School, Party History Department], vol. 1 (Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1982), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie: Zhongyang Suqu de geming (1933-1934)* [Tension and Limits: the Revolution in the Central Soviet Base Area] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2011), 49. One *dan* is equal to between three and four *mu* (one *mu* is, in turn, equal to one-sixth of an acre). *Dan* is a dry measure of volume equal to the area of field required to produce one *dan* of unhusked rice. Roger Thompson estimates that in Xunwu County in Jiangxi Province this would have been equivalent to 133 pounds (60.33 kilograms). Mao Zedong, *Report from Xunwu*, trans. Roger R Thompson (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 224–25.

<sup>25</sup> Schram and Hodes, *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949: Volume III: From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927-December 1930*, 351.

<sup>26</sup> Schram and Hodes, 610.

<sup>27</sup> See the discussion in Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie*, 41–42.

<sup>28</sup> See Mao’s discussion in Schram and Hodes, *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949: Volume III: From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927-December 1930*, 352–58. On the lineage and education, see Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: The Athlone Press, 1958), 11–13, 51–52, 56–58. On the role of common property, see Hu Hsien Chin, *The Common Descent Group in China and Its Functions*. (New York: The Viking Fund, 1948), 64–90.

Geography was the other defining characteristic of Southern Chinese society. As Fei Xiaotong observed, “people in rural China know no other life than that dictated by their own parochialism. It is a society where people live from birth to death in the same place, and where people think that it is the normal way of life. Because everyone in a village lives like that, distinctive patterns of human relationships form... This is a society without strangers, a society based totally on the familiar.”<sup>29</sup> This divide between “locals” and “outsiders” separated the peasants of one community from the peasants of other communities. In times of peace, the peasant was a member of the community, but politically inactive. Political behavior, to the extent that it existed, usually manifested itself in armed defense of the village. However, peasants’ horizons and aims and were geographically-limited; once outside invaders had been fought off or rapacious officials removed, the peasants returned to their fields.<sup>30</sup>

During the rebellions of the mid-19<sup>th</sup>, century geographic and kinship relations worked in tandem to defend villages against outside threats. The local militias that grew out of that period not only defeated rebels on the battlefield, but also ensured local security after the bandit armies had been driven from the area through a vigorous enforcement of the neighborhood system of mutual surveillance system (*baojia*). In that period and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, violence against the village, whether in the form of anti-dynastic rebels, rival lineages, or mountain bandits, reinforced internal solidarity and the external defenses of many communities.<sup>31</sup> Those dynamics added to pre-existing geographic cleavages in the form of inter-village feuds, which

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<sup>29</sup> Fei Xiaotong, *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society a Translation of Fei Xiaotong's Xiangtu Zhongguo, with an Introduction and Epilogue*, trans. Gary G Hamilton and Zheng Wang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 42.

<sup>30</sup> Lucien Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-Roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2001), 175–230.

<sup>31</sup> Philip A Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 77–82.

ranged in size from small-scale skirmishes to large-scale fighting encompassing dozens of villages and hundreds of people.<sup>32</sup>

Economic stratification in the Chinese countryside represented an important cross-cutting cleavage that affected every village and every kinship organization throughout China. Patterns of wealth and landownership were the primary means of economic differentiation in the Chinese countryside. While landlords held a majority of land, landholdings were generally small, a fact that had important implications for both peasant survival and, as will be demonstrated below, the fate of peasants under CCP rule. According to one of Mao Zedong's rural investigations, a self-sufficient middle peasant household of eight that owed no debts had a total of 64 *dan* of land, or 8 *dan* per member of the household.<sup>33</sup> The vast majority of the population in the Chinese countryside possessed landholdings not exceeding 20 *dan*. In the case of Fujian Province, landlords on average held about 15 *dan* of land per member of the household. Above the subsistence level of 7.8 *dan* to be sure, but far removed from a vast feudal manor.<sup>34</sup>

There were certainly instances of peasant jacqueries prior to the arrival of the CCP, but these were usually spontaneous peasant-led movements that rose quickly and targeted those perceived as being particularly egregious in their exploitation of the peasants. After demands for

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<sup>32</sup> Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-Roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China*, 175–213.. As Kuhn notes, “in wide areas of [Southern China], villages were nearly all walled by the mid-1850’s.” Kuhn also notes the diverse terminology applied to the defensive structures around villages and that “the name of the defensive wall was commonly part of the name of the settlement itself.” Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*, 66. In the area the CCP would eventually control it was not uncommon to find village names ending in *wei* or *zhai*, both forms of defensive fortification. Defensive walls were found even where village names ended in “village” (*cun*) and others were surrounded by earthen or stone walls and were known as “fortified villages” (*tuwei* or *tuweizi*).

<sup>33</sup> Schram and Hodes, *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949: Volume III: From the Jinggangshan to the Establishment of the Jiangxi Soviets, July 1927-December 1930*, 692.

<sup>34</sup> Mao's findings on landownership patterns in Jiangxi countryside (specifically in Xunwu and Xingguo) can be found in Schram and Hodes, 351, 610. More general data for landownership patterns in Jiangxi and Fujian provinces can be found in Huang Daoxuan, *Zhangli yu xianjie*, 29–30.. Data on per capita landholdings in Jiangxi can be found in Huang Daoxuan 黃道炫, 30.. Data on per capita landholdings in Fujian can be found in Huadong junzheng weiyuanhui tudi gaige weiyuanhui 華東軍政委員會土地改革委員會 [Land Reform Committee of the East China Military and Administrative Committee], *Huadong Qu Tudi Gaige Chengguo Tongji* 華東土地改革成果統計 [Statistics on the Results of Land Reform in Eastern China] (s.l.: s.n., 1952), 4.



the forgiveness of debts and the surrendering of excess grain were met, peasants returned to their fields.<sup>35</sup> These instances of violence were far away from a class revolution in their content and were, in the event, not representative of broader forms of contention in rural China. Bianco's comprehensive quantitative study of rural violence in China finds 2,467 incidents between 1900 and 1949. Of those, a mere 203 (8.2%) were incidents in which the poor mobilized against and targeted the rich.<sup>36</sup>

### III. Creating 'Masses' From 'People'

The CCP ultimately created the "masses" it sought by establishing a political system under which the nature of an individual's interaction with the CCP state and with other individuals was determined not by where he or she lived or which family he or she was from, but by his or her relationship to the means of production.

The CCP regime, named the Chinese Soviet Republic, undertook an ambitious political program informed by a Marxist-Leninist analysis of Chinese politics and society. When surveying the social fabric of rural China, Mao and the CCP generally saw five socio-economic classes: (1) landlords, (2) rich peasants, (3) middle peasants, (4) poor peasants, and (5) workers.<sup>37</sup> The CCP was clear about the nature of the Chinese Soviet Republic: it was to be "a regime of all of China's workers, peasants, Red Army soldiers, and the toiling masses."<sup>38</sup> For the

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<sup>35</sup> In his study of such forms of peasant resistance, Bianco states that "the demands of the peasants in revolt were concrete and local, not abstract and universal" and that once those demands had been fulfilled, peasant riots or revolts came to a quick end. Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-Roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China*, xiii and passim.

<sup>36</sup> Bianco, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Mao Tse-tung, "How to Differentiate Classes in Rural Areas," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 137–39.

<sup>38</sup> "Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo linshi zhongyang zhengfu duiwai xuanyan 中華蘇維埃共和國臨時中央政府對外宣言 [Proclamation of the Provisional Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic on Foreign Affairs]," in

CCP, political preferences were a direct function of an individual's relationship to the means of production. Landlords and rich peasants derived their income from exploitation and would therefore be irreconcilably opposed to the revolution. Middle peasants, poor peasants, and workers supported the revolution to varying degrees because they stood to gain from the removal of landlords and rich peasants and the establishment of a socialist regime.



Map 1: The Chinese Soviet Republic<sup>39</sup>

*Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 [Selection of Historical Materials on the Central Revolutionary Base Area], vol. 3 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 119–20.

<sup>39</sup> This map was created using version 5 of the China Historical GIS data. Province boundaries correspond with the 1926 province-level data and counties with the 1911 county-level data. “CHGIS Version 5.” (c) Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies and the Institute for Chinese Historical Geography at Fudan University, Jan 2012.

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~chgis/index.html>. Counties shaded are those in which the CCP established political administrations based on descriptions in *Hongse Zhonghua* [Red China] (hereafter *HSZH*) and in Tsao Po-i [Cao Boyi] 曹伯一, *Jiangxi Suweiai Zhi Jianli Jiqi Bengkui (1931-1934)* 江西蘇維埃之建立及其崩潰 [The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Soviet in Kiangsi] (Taipei: Guoli zhengzhi daxue Dongya yanjiusuo, 1969), 173–76. *HSZH* was the internal organ of the Central Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic. The paper can be found on reels 16 and 17 of the Ch'en Ch'eng Collection referenced in footnote 17 above.

Prior to the establishment of the Soviet, the government institutions penetrated no lower than the county (*xian*) level. That changed in the Soviet for two reasons. Firstly, the CCP completely destroyed all formal and information government institutions in areas it controlled. Secondly, policy was carried out by mass organizations recruited from the ground-up such as the Poor Peasant League. This and other mass organizations recruited at the village (*cun*) level and functioned at the township (*xiang*) level, creating the first political system in Chinese history that could ensure implantation of its policies at the village level.<sup>40</sup> The CCP sought to lead a revolution that fundamentally altered not rural political institutions, but the entire economic and social structure of the Chinese countryside. The CCP, for example, sought to achieve complete equality of men and women in areas under its control, promulgating the most liberal marriage and divorce laws up to that point in Chinese history.<sup>41</sup> The Soviet government and mass organizations implemented and enforced these centrally-promulgated policies at the local level that ultimately touched nearly every aspect of peasant life from land ownership and distribution to civic life to education.<sup>42</sup>

The CCP's 1931 *Land Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic* captured the general orientation of the CCP's economic policies. Landlords were the first target of the regime and the first article of the *Land Law* mandated that

All lands belonging feudal landlords, local bullies and evil gentry, warlords, bureaucrats, and other large private landlords, irrespective of whether they work the lands themselves

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<sup>40</sup> “Jiangxi sheng zengfu duiyu moshou he fenpei tudi de tiaoli (linshi zhongyang zhengfu pizhun) 江西省政府對於沒收和分配土地條例（臨時中央政府批准） [Regulations of the Jiangxi Provincial Government on the Confiscation and Redistribution of Land (Approved by the Provisional Central Government)],” in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 [Selection of Historical Materials on the Central Revolutionary Base Area], vol. 3 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 191–98..

<sup>41</sup> Hu Chi-Hsi 胡繼熙, “The Sexual Revolution in the Kiangsi Soviet,” *The China Quarterly* 59 (September 1974): 477–90.

<sup>42</sup> For a survey of education in the Chinese Soviet Republic, see Luo Di, “Villagers into Comrades: Literacy Education in the Jiangxi Soviet,” *Twentieth-Century China* 41, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 81–101.

or rent them out, shall be confiscated without compensation. The confiscated lands shall be redistributed to the poor and middle peasants through the Soviets. The former owners of the confiscated lands shall not be entitled to receive any land allotments.<sup>43</sup>

The lands of rich peasants were to be confiscated as well, though they were entitled to receive land of poorer quality provided they tilled the land themselves. It was further mandated that these groups were to be dispossessed of their assets, and their movable and immovable properties redistributed to poor and middle peasants.

The laws of the Chinese Soviet Republic more generally were designed to “guarantee the democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants” and to “harshly suppress” any attempts by landlords, rich peasants (or any other “native or foreign capitalist elements”) to defend their interests.<sup>44</sup> The institutions of the Soviet were designed to reflect the class base of the regime not only in name, but in composition. Recruitment was based solely on economic class, with no regard for geographic origin or kinship relations. Poor peasants were most favored, with at least 10 (and sometimes as many as 100) recruited for every one middle peasant in CCP/Soviet organs; rich peasants were extremely few in number and landlords wholly barred. Data on the state of the youth wing of the Party in August 1932 indicates that 81.7% of its members were poor peasants against 9.1% that were middle peasants; rich peasants and landlords are notable only for their absence.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hsiao Tso-liang, *The Land Revolution in China, 1930-1934: A Study of Documents*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 186–91.. “Zhonghua suweiai gongheguo tudi fa 中華蘇維埃共和國土地法 [Land Law of the Chinese Soviet Republic],” in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 [Selection of Historical Materials on the Central Revolutionary Base Area], vol. 3 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 459–63.

<sup>44</sup> “Zhonghua Suweiai Gongheguo Xianfa Dagang 中華蘇維埃共和國憲法大綱 [Outline of the Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic],” *Hongqi Zhoubao* 紅旗週報 [Red Flag Weekly], December 4, 1931, 2–7.

<sup>45</sup> Zhongyang dang’an guan 中央檔案館 [Central Archives of the Chinese Communist Party] and Jiangxi sheng dang’an guan 江西省檔案館 [Jiangxi Provincial Archive], eds., *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji* 江西革命歷史文件彙集 [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Revolution in Jiangxi], vol. 1932 (Vol. 1) (Beijing: Zhongyang dang’an guan, 1992), 441. Examples of the consistent discrimination against non-poor peasant elements abound in

The initial period of the land revolution from 1931 to 1932 saw the implementation of a policy of equal redistribution of land that was carried out in much of the Soviet. By 1932 the CCP had overseen a vast equalization in landholdings in the countryside in which per capita land holdings were sufficient for subsistence.<sup>46</sup> In spite of its manifest success, the CCP leadership saw lingering inequality in wealth and landholding as evidence that the revolution was being obstructed by hidden landlord and rich peasant elements. For that reason the CCP decided to undertake a “Land Investigation Movement” (*chaitian yundong*) to uncover and destroy all remnants of landlord and rich peasant influence. The goal of the Movement was

to involve the majority of the masses in the struggle against the remnants of feudalism. First of all, by means of widespread propaganda and agitation, an investigation should be conducted on the class status of all landlords and rich peasants. On the basis of this class status, the land and property of the landlords and rich peasants should be confiscated. All this should be done with approval from, and with the involvement of, as many of the masses as possible. It is advisable that everything collected through confiscation, except cash, should be allocated to the poorest among the masses and in particular to impoverished dependents of Red Army soldiers. It is also advisable that the greater part of the property should be distributed to the masses from whose villages these things were taken.<sup>47</sup>

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archival materials. Data for 1932 is most abundant and given that CCP policy radicalized considerably following that year, the ratio of 10:1 is almost certainly a conservative estimate. See Zhongyang dang'an guan 中央檔案館 [Central Archives of the Chinese Communist Party] and Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan 江西省檔案館 [Jiangxi Provincial Archive], 1932 (Vol. 1):237–39, 289–90, 338, 340–41, 369, 383–84, 392, 404–6, 420–21, 434. See also Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan 江西省檔案館 [Jiangxi Provincial Archive] and Zhonggong Jiangxi sheng dangxiao dangshi jiaoyanshi 中共江西省黨校黨史教研室 [Chinese Communist Party Jiangxi Party School, Party History Department], eds., “CY Jiangxi quansheng zuzhi tongjibiao CY 江西全省組織統計表 [Statistical Tables on the Communist Youth Organization in Jiangxi Province],” in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 [A Selection of Historical Materials on the Central Revolutionary Base Area], vol. 3 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 737.

<sup>46</sup> Zhongyang dang'an guan 中央檔案館 [Central Archives of the Chinese Communist Party] and Jiangxi sheng dang'an guan 江西省檔案館 [Jiangxi Provincial Archive], *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji* 江西革命歷史文件彙集 [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Revolution in Jiangxi], 1932 (Vol. 1):198, 205.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart R. Schram and Nancy J. Hodes, eds., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949: Volume IV: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Soviet Republic, 1931-1934* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 396.

In its search for landlords and rich peasants, the Poor Peasants' League found them in spades. The average middle peasant (one who rented out no land and owed no debt) possessed roughly eight *dan* of land per member of household. Even the smallest households in Soviet areas had at least four members, meaning that for subsistence they would require roughly 28 *dan* of land.<sup>48</sup> The results of the Movement speak for themselves: those classified as landlords and rich peasants targeted during the movement were in possession of between 40 *dan* and 13 *dan* per *household*.<sup>49</sup> Landlords and rich peasants emerged everywhere because subsistence (or “middle peasant”) levels of wealth were sufficient to be classified as a “rich peasant” or “landlord.”

During the Land Investigation Movement, mass organizations went house-to-house searching out landlords and rich peasants. At this time, local violence and political behavior corresponded to socio-economic status. The pervasiveness of Soviet institutions and the destruction of previous forms of organization (such as kinship organizations) meant that the only form of redress for those targeted by state violence were state institutions.

One of the most interesting examples of these individuals acting in accordance with their class status occurred in the winter of 1933-1934 after the first phase of the Land Investigation Movement. A brief moderation in the movement led by Mao Zedong encouraged the correction of mistakes made during the early period of the Movement.<sup>50</sup> Those classified as landlords and rich peasants all over the Chinese Soviet Republic were permitted to go to their local governments and request that their class statuses be carefully “calculated” (*suan*) instead of

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<sup>48</sup> *HSZH* no. 106, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Based on *HSZH* nos. 76, 95, 96, 104, 106, 107, 111, 113, 118, 123, 125, 127, 144, 181, 185 and *Douzheng* no. 72, 16. *Douzheng* [Struggle] was the official organ of the CCP's Central Bureau in the Chinese Soviet Republic. The paper can be found on reel 18 of the Ch'en Ch'eng Collection referenced in footnote 16 above.

<sup>50</sup> Schram and Hodes, *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949: Volume IV: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Soviet Republic, 1931-1934*, 550-67.

“investigated” (*cha*). Landlords and rich peasants worked within the Soviet system, carefully filling out forms regarding their assets, sources of their income, and family histories and presenting evidence to the Soviet government. In some instances meetings with bureaucrats were replaced with village-wide meetings in which those classified as landlords and rich peasants discussed and debated their class designation with the masses. It was reported the verdicts of more than 3,600 households were overturned using these procedures.<sup>51</sup>

Civic life also changed drastically under the Soviet government. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, entertainment in the Chinese countryside consisted mostly of travelling music and drama troupes. The epigraph of this article was taken from one of the many plays and dramas that did away with traditional stories of local heroes or folk gods and instead depicted class struggle, celebrated the achievements of the Soviet government or Red Army, or called on civilians to participate in production drives or help the Soviet government fight against internal and external enemies.<sup>52</sup>

Membership in class-based organizations replaced civic and religious organizations. The “Anti-Imperialist League” and the “Soviet Protection League” were two of the most prominent mass organizations in the Chinese Soviet Republic. Membership in these organizations was entirely dependent on socio-economic class; landlords and rich peasants were prohibited from joining, middle peasants dissuaded from doing so, and poor peasants eagerly recruited. These organizations were designed to “inform the masses of imperialism’s atrocities and crimes, heighten the masses’ anti-imperialist zeal, and should lead all anti-imperialist struggles.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *HSZH* no. 175, 3.

<sup>52</sup> See Wang Mulan 王木蘭 and Deng Jiaqi 鄧家琪, eds., *Zhongyang Suqu Xiju Ji* 中央蘇區戲劇集 [Anthology of Plays from the Central Soviet Area] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Wenyi Chubanshe, 1992). for a collection of plays and songs from the period.

<sup>53</sup> “Fandi datongmeng zhangcheng 反帝大同盟章程 [Regulations on the Organization of the Anti-Imperialist League],” in *Zhongyang geming genjudi shiliao xuanbian* 中央革命根據地史料選編 [Selection of Historical Materials on the Central Revolutionary Base Area], vol. 3 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 734–35.

An expansion of civic engagement in the form of commemoration ceremonies for Socialist holidays replaced “feudal” traditions such as Buddhist holidays and traditional Chinese festivals. Many such ceremonies attracted a considerable number of people. For example, attendance at ceremonies held in the various districts of Yongfeng County in 1932 for the commemoration of the 1917 Russian October Revolution attracted roughly 50% of the population. More than 30% of the population of Xingguo County attended ceremonies commemorating the 1927 Guangzhou Uprising.<sup>54</sup>

The analysis thus far has focused on how socio-economic cleavages determined political behavior, but has yet to use the term “class consciousness.” For class consciousness to be said to exist, behavior and the motivation for that behavior must *both* be determined by class status. In the context of a Marxist revolution, class consciousness would lead poorer members of society to participate in the revolution even if doing so was highly risky and costly. However, even among “the masses,” the Party found that truly selfless individuals were few and far between. But the question remains: did peasants achieve class consciousness under the Chinese Soviet Republic? Evidence provides good reason to believe that class consciousness did emerge, albeit among two very specific groups: children and poor peasants.

Formal education changed drastically under the new regime and is here that we see some of the most unambiguous successes in the CCP’s drive to create class consciousness. Old textbooks were discarded and replaced with textbooks and curricula focused on the elimination of “feudal” ideas and the encouragement of class consciousness.<sup>55</sup> The influence of the CCP’s

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<sup>54</sup> Zhongyang dang’an guan 中央檔案館 [Central Archives of the Chinese Communist Party] and Jiangxi sheng dang’an guan 江西省檔案館 [Jiangxi Provincial Archive], eds., *Jiangxi Geming Lishi Wenjian Huiji* 江西革命歷史文件彙集 [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Revolution in Jiangxi], vol. 1932 (Vol. 2) (Beijing: Zhongyang dang’an guan, 1992), 336, 349, 423.

<sup>55</sup> Gannan Shifan Xueyuan 贛南師範學院 [Southern Jiangxi Normal University] and Jiangxi Sheng Jiaoyu Kexue Yanjiusuo 江西省教育科學研究所 [Jiangxi Provincial Educational Sciences Research Institute], eds., *Jiangxi Suqu*



class analysis was evident not long after it shifted into the countryside. One observer recalled that children in some areas would not play “cops and robbers,” but “communists and landlords,” in which a group of children playing the communists would chase after one playing a landlord shouting “Down with the Kuomintang! Down with local bullies and evil gentry!”<sup>56</sup> After the formal establishment of the Chinese Soviet Republic, the CCP released handbooks that contained variations on traditional children’s games that sought to imbue children with both class consciousness and military discipline.<sup>57</sup>

Available data suggest that the plays, games, and education children received were effective in creating a genuine class consciousness. Children volunteered to carry supplies to Red Army soldiers,<sup>58</sup> encouraged parents to return public debt,<sup>59</sup> helped gather grain for the government,<sup>60</sup> searched for metal that could be used for the war effort,<sup>61</sup> helped find recruits for the Red Army,<sup>62</sup> and helped uncover “counterrevolutionaries,”<sup>63</sup> even those to whom they were related.<sup>64</sup> It may be objected that children are more amenable to propagandizing than adults and

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*Jiaoyu Ziliao Huibian* 江西蘇區教育資料彙編 [Compendium of Educational Materials from the Jiangxi Soviet Areas] (s.l.: s.n., 1985), vol. 7.

<sup>56</sup> Zhang Shixi 張世熙, “Wan’an Gongnong Douzheng Ji 1927 Nian 10 Yue Dao 1928 Nian 3 Yue Dabaodong Jingguo Qingxing 萬安工農鬪爭及 1927 年 10 月到 1928 年 3 月大暴動經過情形 [The Wan’an Workers’ and Peasants Struggle and Report on the Major Uprising Between October 1927 and March 1928],” in *Jiangxi Dangshi Ziliao* 江西黨史資料 [Materials on Jiangxi Party History], ed. Zhonggong Jiangxi Shengwei Dangshi Ziliao Zhengji Weiyuanhui 中共江西省委黨史資料徵集委員會 [Chinese Communist Party Jiangxi Provincial Committee Party History Compilation Committee] and Zhonggong Jiangxi shengwei dangshi yanjiushi 中共江西省委黨史研究室 [Chinese Communist Party Jiangxi Provincial Committee Party History Research Division], vol. 5 (Nanchang: “Jiangxi Dangshi Ziliao” Bianji shi, 1988), 82.

<sup>57</sup> Three such texts published by organs of the Soviet government include *Jingzheng youxi* [Competitive Games], *Shaodui youxi* [Young Pioneers’ Game Book], and *Ertong youxi* [Children’s Games]. See Gannan Shifan Xueyuan 贛南師範學院 [Southern Jiangxi Normal University] and Jiangxi Sheng Jiaoyu Kexue Yanjiusuo 江西省教育科學研究所 [Jiangxi Provincial Educational Sciences Research Institute], *Jiangxi Suqu Jiaoyu Ziliao Huibian* 江西蘇區教育資料彙編 [Compendium of Educational Materials from the Jiangxi Soviet Areas], 58–78.

<sup>58</sup> *HSZH* no. 225, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *HSZH* no. 75, 2.

<sup>60</sup> *HSZH* no. 155, 2.

<sup>61</sup> *HSZH* no. 204, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *HSZH* no. 208, 3.

<sup>63</sup> *HSZH* no. 91, 4 and no. 113, 5.

<sup>64</sup> *HSZH* no. 215, 3.

that Soviet education represented little more than brainwashing. Quite so, but normative judgments aside, the political behavior of these children was indeed a reflection of their beliefs: the Soviet government and Red Army were unambiguously good because they defended the poor peasantry and should be given every measure of support; landlords and rich peasants were bad and should be the object of ruthless struggle regardless of their personal relationships to the children.

Turning our focus from children to adults, whereas the CCP often had to force landlords and rich peasants to obey its laws or calls to action, a subset of people classified as poor peasants and rural laborers at times provided money, food, and labor to the regime far in excess of the minimum required. The purchase and subsequent surrender of public debt notes without request for repayment of the principal was the primary means by which peasants could contribute money to the Soviet. While the purchase of public bonds was spread over the entire population, those who surrendered their bonds were almost always poor peasants or laborers.<sup>65</sup> From March to July a total of 321,500 *yuan* in bonds was voluntarily returned.<sup>66</sup> Unlike in the sale of public debt, there was only one report from this period of any coercion to get individuals to return public debt.<sup>67</sup> The question of how many people actually did this still stands. The bonds were issued in notes in the amount of 0.50 *yuan*, one *yuan*, and five *yuan*.<sup>68</sup> Evidence suggests that bonds returned (or monetary contributions other than bonds) were usually in the amount of one or two

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<sup>65</sup> *HSZH* nos. 58, 60, 62-82, 84-85, 91, and 96.

<sup>66</sup> Calculated based on figures in *HSZH* nos. 58, 60, 62-82, 84-85, 91, and 96.

<sup>67</sup> The one report is contained in *HSZH* no. 76, 5. It may be objected that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but these materials served, first and foremost, as a means to convey information to members of the CCP and Soviet government personnel and it is for this reason that they are often remarkably forthcoming. When “errors” or “excesses” were committed by the government or Party, they were publicized as a means of instruction to ensure that others avoided the same mistakes.

<sup>68</sup> *HSZH* no. 38, 1.

*yuan*.<sup>69</sup> This being the case, it is likely that the number of people voluntarily contributing to the CCP was at or below 300,000, which represented roughly 8% of the population of the Chinese Soviet Republic.<sup>70</sup> Assuming all of this support came from poor peasants and that they in turn made up 60% of the population, it amounted to roughly 13% of all poor peasants.

The image that emerges of rural society under the Soviet regime is one that is drastically different than the old order. Kinship, geographic, and religious bonds did not disappear, but the structure of Soviet institutions and the enforcement of Soviet law meant that political behavior was determined exclusively by an individual's relationship to the means of production. Throughout the entire Soviet period there are only a few token instances of individual political behavior being determined by something other than class cleavages. Attempts by those classified as landlords or rich peasants to act in their capacities as local elites or family members were resolutely resisted and punished by the Soviet regime.<sup>71</sup> The "masses" therefore emerged not spontaneously, but as a product of deliberate and sometimes violent construction. However, just as the "masses" could be created, so too could they be destroyed.

#### IV. The Defeat of the Soviet and the Restoration of the Old Order

The CCP was keen on the elimination of familial and geographic bonds as the driving force of political behavior and while it achieved that goal in the Soviet itself, the world outside of the Soviet remained a land of "people," not a land of "masses." Radical CCP policy and

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<sup>69</sup> Individuals and the amounts of bonds they surrendered (or funds otherwise given to the government) were honored in a section of *HSZH* titled "The Red Board of Honor" (*hongbian*). See *HSZH* nos. 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, and 85.

<sup>70</sup> This ratio is based on the 1932 population of 3.4 million. Yu Boliu 余伯流 and He Youliang 何友良, *Zhongguo suqu shi* 中國蘇區史 [A History of China's Soviet Areas], vol. 1 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2011), 509–10.

<sup>71</sup> See *HSZH* no. 48, 8 and no. 87, 2.

inattention to local realities meant that CCP raids on villages were perceived by civilians in areas outside of the Soviet not as liberation from the forces of feudal oppression, but as an attack on the village and family by bandits. One CCP leader summarized the situation succinctly:

[We] cannot label middle peasants as rich peasants and rich peasants as landlords. When our guerilla forces enter [areas under KMT control] we must resolutely correct our past tendency of not differentiating between classes. [The result of these tendencies was to] undermine the class line and hand the masses over to the enemy and, in so doing, creating an impregnable wall between Red and White areas. This is self-suffocation; it is a simply suicidal policy.”<sup>72</sup>

There is confirmation of this in reports from local CCP units that reported that civilians in non-Soviet areas referred to the guerrillas as “Sword Squads” (*daozi dui*), a name peasants used to refer to brigands.<sup>73</sup> CCP violence against non-Soviet areas also led to retaliation as local elites mobilized civilians using traditional kinship and village relationships to launch counter-raids against Soviet areas.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to making the expansion of Soviet influence more difficult, radical CCP policy also strengthened counterinsurgent forces. Elites and civilians who fled the Soviet and shared geographic and kinship bonds often formed paramilitary organizations known as “Refugee Corps.” When these forces returned to the Soviet with advancing KMT forces, they repossessed corporate lands, rebuilt temples and shrines, and created local militia based on kinship ties. In their endeavor, they were helped by the KMT, which tasked them with, among

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<sup>72</sup> *HSZH* no. 47, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Zhongyang dang’an guan and Jiangxi sheng dang’an guan, *Jiangxi geming lishi wenjian huiji* [Compilation of Historical Materials on the Revolution in Jiangxi], 1992, 1932 (Vol. 1):111.

<sup>74</sup> Huang Daoxuan 黃道炫, *Zhangli yu xianjie: zhongyang suqu de geming (1933-1934)* 張力與限界：中央蘇區的革命 [Tension and Limits: the Revolution in the Central Soviet Base Area], 349.

other things, establishing schools, providing for the defense of villages, and managing internal village disputes.<sup>75</sup>

The KMT's political strategy was to restore and reinforce the pre-conflict status quo. The Chinese Soviet Republic was the target of five massive counterinsurgency operations conducted by the KMT that combined the forces of a large centrally-controlled and modern-equipped military and a profusion of local militias. These militias composed of elite and civilian refugees from Soviet areas formed the core of the local government once the Red Army was defeated.<sup>76</sup> These forces reclaimed their property, re-established traditional local government, and killed those who led the CCP's redistribution drives.<sup>77</sup>

The restoration of pre-conflict institutions brought about a shift of cleavage salience as the CCP's totalitarian state disappeared and was replaced by the traditional and less interventionist KMT state. Under the CCP nearly every aspect of life was ordered along class cleavages. After the collapse of the Soviet political behavior was, once again, almost exclusively limited to participation in village defense. Able-bodied men were drafted into militias which defended the village against outside attack.<sup>78</sup> Inter-village disputes (*xiedou*), all but eliminated during the Soviet period, returned and became a source of concern for the local KMT administration.<sup>79</sup> In times of peace, as in times before, peasants tended to their fields, took part in

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<sup>75</sup> *Jun zheng xunkan* no. 19-20, 1291-1299. *Jun zheng xunkan* [The Journal of Military and Administrative Affairs] was the internal organ of the KMT military's Nanchang Field Headquarters, out of which the primary counterinsurgency operations against the CCP were based.

<sup>76</sup> Beginning in late 1933 the Red Army adopted conventional warfare tactics and threw its peasant army against the numerically- and technologically-superior KMT forces. After its defeat, the CCP undertook the Long March which took the remnants of the Party and leadership to Northern China.

<sup>77</sup> Huang Daoxuan 黃道炫, *Zhangli yu xianjie: zhongyang suqu de geming (1933-1934)* 張力與限界：中央蘇區的革命 [Tension and Limits: the Revolution in the Central Soviet Base Area], 341.

<sup>78</sup> Reports of such militia abound in CCP reports from and memoirs about the "Three Year Guerrilla War in the South" from 1934 to 1937, as well as local KMT publications such as the *Journal of County Administration* [*Xian Xun*], published by the Jiangxi Provincial Government County Administration Personnel Training Center.

<sup>79</sup> Cheng Qiheng 程其恆, "Ruhe Mizhi Minjian Zhi Xiedou 如何弭止民間之械鬪 [How to Quell Armed Disputes Among the People]," *Xian Xun* 縣訓 [Journal of County Administration], 1937.

religious ceremonies, and joined family and lineage members in the compilation of lineage genealogies and ancestor veneration.<sup>80</sup>

There is no better illustration of the effect of the transition from “masses” to “people” than in the capital of the Soviet itself. Throughout the Soviet period, Ruijin was a “model county” that consistently outperformed others in Red Army recruitment, gathering grain for the Red Army, and implementing CCP policy. Zhong Min, a leader of a band of CCP guerrillas that remained in the area after the Long March, described the difficulties presented to the CCP after the restoration of geographic and kinship cleavages. The influence of kinship groups returned with the KMT and it was for that reason that Zhong concluded that there was no realistic prospect of re-establishing a Soviet government in Ruijin.<sup>81</sup> After the collapse of the Soviet, political behavior was no longer based on an individual’s relationship to the means of production, but to their locality and family.

The few CCP guerrillas that remained behind after the collapse of the Soviet found voluntary support forthcoming only from a very small number of poor peasants. In virtually every example of support rendered to the CCP by civilians, it was poor peasants who were in the vanguard. They would “lose” things as they worked, they would put rice into hollowed-out bamboo carrying-poles or into the handles of umbrellas, and they would relay intelligence by writing notes on scraps of paper and leaving them under statues in temples, or sew the notes into

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<sup>80</sup> You Haihua 游海華, *Chonggou yu zhenghe: 1934-1937 nian Gannan Minxi shehui chongjian yanjiu* 重構與整合：1934-1937年贛南閩西重建研究 [Reconstruction and Reintegration: Social Reconstruction in Southern Jiangxi and Western Fujian, 1934-1937] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 2008), 86–97.

<sup>81</sup> Zhong Min 鍾民, “Guanyu Zhongyang Suqu Ruijin Diqu Sannian Youji Zhanzheng de Baogao 關於中央蘇區瑞金地區三年游擊戰爭的報告 [Report on the Ruijin Area of the Central Soviet During the Three Year Guerrilla War in the South],” in *Nanfang Sannian Youji Zhanzheng: Zonghe Pian* 南方三年游擊戰爭：綜合篇 [The Three-Year Guerrilla War: Comprehensive Volume], ed. Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Lishi Ziliao Congshu Bianshen Weiyuanhui 中國人民解放軍歷史資料叢書編審委員會 [Historical Materials Editorial Committee of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army], *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Lishi Ziliao Congshu* 中國人民解放軍歷史資料叢書 (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chubanshe, 1995), 361.

clothing.<sup>82</sup> But the number of people who actually assisted the CCP at this time was miniscule. Though this small group may well have achieved some kind of class consciousness, the vast majority of civilians refused to provide any assistance to the CCP whatsoever.

## V. Conclusion

The early-20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese countryside was not primed for violent class struggle with its dense web of highly-localized personal and family relationships. Socio-economic cleavages existed prior to the CCP revolution and geographic and kinship cleavages existed even within the Soviet. However, the salience of these cleavages was a function of institutions that governed rural Chinese society. The decentralized structure of the Imperial and Republican Chinese states gave prominence to local cleavages. In the Chinese Soviet Republic, by contrast, the CCP established a highly centralized rebelocracy that governed the social, economic, and political lives of Chinese civilians. As a result, class cleavages were rendered salient and corresponded to the master cleavage of the conflict between the CCP and the KMT.

It has been argued that violence in internal conflicts is less about the “master cleavage” of the conflict than about simple criminal behavior.<sup>83</sup> More recently, it has also been argued that violence in civil wars are products of local conflicts in which civilians use the terminology of the master cleavage to justify the application of violence.<sup>84</sup> The experience of the CCP suggests that insurgent institutions are important in determining the extent to which violence at the local level corresponds to the broader master cleavage of the war. If local conflicts are forced by the

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<sup>82</sup> Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China, 1934-1938* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 73–74, 98. See also *Jun zheng xunkan* no. 18, 1069.

<sup>83</sup> John Mueller, “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War,’” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (July 1, 2000): 42–70.

<sup>84</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 2003): 475–494.

institutional environment to conform to the master cleavage then local conflicts and the master cleavage will overlap. Just as we should not go too far in attributing all violence in wartime to the master cleavage, so too should we not go too far in dismissing it.

The study of insurgent's institutions has done a great deal to enrich our understanding of civil war processes and this paper adds to that body of scholarship by showing how insurgent's institutions shape civilian behavior in conflict zones. It also confirms the insights of constructivist work on identity and shows how malleable cleavage structures operate in wartime. The presence of a cleavage or the salience of a cleavage at a given point in time is no guarantee that it will serve as the basis of conflict. Likewise, that a cleavage is dormant does not rule out the possibility that it will become the basis of conflict in future.

The relationship between social cleavages and individual behavior has long been of interest to scholars of conflict. That people are located somewhere along a given social dimension is no guarantee that their social behavior will reflect that location. Indeed, this paper suggests that in the context of an internal conflict, most civilians will act opportunistically; they will take rewards associated with or refrain from actions associated with their social location. If the institutional environment changes their actions will change accordingly. The exceptions are individuals who possess consciousness of their specific social location and act in accordance with it regardless of the institutional environment. However, these individuals form a very small proportion of civilians.

The analysis presented in this article suggests that both ideology and institutions are important determinates of levels of violence in civil wars. The case study presented in this paper represents an outlier for both studies of insurgent institutions and the distribution of violence in wartime. Neither Arjona (2010) nor Mampilly (2011) would predict the establishment of such a



powerful, centralized insurgent state in an area with high quality local institutions and where state penetration was low. Kalyvas (2006) argues that violence is a function of territorial control and that in areas under full incumbent or rebel control will see low levels of violence.<sup>85</sup> Weinstein (2007) argues that rebel movements that draw upon social endowments such as ideology and shared values will be less violent than groups that draw upon economic endowments.<sup>86</sup> The CCP enjoyed complete territorial control within the Chinese Soviet Republic and, preaching a Marxist ideology of class struggle, mobilized civilians against economic exploitation. Nevertheless, the widespread violence that occurred within the Chinese Soviet Republic, especially during the Land Investigation Movement, is an outlier for both of these influential studies of violence in civil wars. This paper suggests that ideology plays a crucial role in such deviant cases and future work should look at other ideologically-extreme insurgent organizations to see if the same holds true across time and space.

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<sup>85</sup> Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

<sup>86</sup> Jeremy M Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).