The World Can Change!: Guangdong Peasants in Revolution

Robert B. Marks

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ROBERT B. MARKS
University of Wisconsin

Peasants, Marx once noted, are like a "sack of potatoes" and are "consequently incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name." Because of material conditions of existence, Marx argued, peasants as a class are weak and unable to exert their will over their oppressors; they need a representative who "protects them against other classes and sends the rain and the sunshine from above"[1] (Marx and Engels, 1968: 171). Although historically peasants have been at the mercy of the forces which confront them, as Marx noted, it is true that over the centuries peasants in nearly every agrarian society have attempted to exert their will against their overlords.

While peasants may be weak as a class, that weakness is no more an inherent quality of the peasant than frugality is of the capitalist. Class weakness is a social relationship which takes different forms at different times and is thus changeable. However, class weakness is a meaningful concept only when examined in relationship to peasant attempts to change the world by taking action against their lords. We can perhaps best understand the weakness of peasants as a class by examining those periods of struggle when they have attempted to change the world, a world which more often than not confronts them as a hostile and alien force controlled by others.

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Peasants, like all people, make their own history, but they only do so consciously in terms of their own perceptions and expectations. I would like to examine the problem of how peasants conceive of themselves when they try to make the world their own, and how this experience is manifested in social relations with both their overlords and their leaders. This article, therefore, does not examine the structural aspects of the peasantry as a class, but rather looks at the problem from an experiential perspective. For class, or the making of class, as Thompson (1963) put it, is best seen as a phenomenon "which in fact happens in human relationships" when "some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs" (Thompson, 1963: 9-10).

These themes will be dealt with through an examination of the peasant movement in Guangdong Province of South China during the 1920s,[2] a period when the "world was turned upside down." The leaders of this peasant movement—Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members Peng Pai, Lo Qi-yuan, and Ruan Xiao-xian—were quite conscious of the problem that peasants as a class were weak, but nevertheless firmly believed that the peasants could overcome their weaknesses in struggle. Their reports and analyses of the peasant movement, on which most of this article is based,[3] provide a sensitive account of both the problems experienced by the peasants and the difficulties faced by leaders of a peasant movement.

ORIGINS OF THE PEASANT MOVEMENT

With the destruction of the Chinese imperial state in the 1911 Revolution, the ruling landlord-gentry class lost one of the forces that maintained their rule in the countryside. As the landlord-gentry class turned more and more to local forces under their control after 1911 to guarantee the extraction of rent and

the maintenance of production, they became an increasingly parasitic class and were perceived as such by many peasants. With rent kept high by political controls over agricultural markets and land produce, landlords had little reason, even if they had the opportunity, to invest in urban industries. Instead, they accumulated more land and consumed the luxuries being offered in the cities. Others left the countryside altogether for the splendors of urban life, leaving behind them paid henchmen, or "dog legs," to extract the rent. Peasant resistance to this unbridled exploitation took many forms, from mixing sand with rice for rent payments, to actually fleeing from the land.

But even the last alternative was being closed off to peasants as landlords became better able to compel them to remain on the land. Peng Pai (1973: 12) observed that in Haifeng *xian* (county) in eastern Guangdong, "guards or police were always sent under arms to collect rent in the villages. When the few families of Yuanma village could not pay up because of a lean year, guards were sent to rake through each home: they seized women's hair ornaments . . . children's clothing, two pints of rice, and one peck of seed grain. After this the peasants of the village were about to quit their fields, but the landlord said, 'If you till it, good; if you don't, good. Either way I will collect the rent from you'." Peasant feeling of powerlessness in the face of the landlords was reflected in the popular saying in Haifeng that "in heaven is the Duke of Thunder; on earth are the Gui-feng landlords," a center for landlord socializing. Although tenants were by far the most numerous of Guangdong peasants,[4] and exploitation in the form of rent was the most common, landlord oppression took many other forms, including landlord control over credit (interest rates as high as 40% per month), over markets, and the exaction of forced gifts. Moreover, there were always local troops to enforce landlord privileges.

The initial work of organizing the Guangdong peasants into a peasant union was begun in 1922 by Peng Pai in the county of Haifeng. The son of a large local landlord, Peng had joined the CCP in 1921 after returning from his studies in Japan. Over-

coming initial hostility by donning peasant clothing, playing a phonograph, and giving magic shows, Peng Pai was able to begin propaganda work among the peasants.

The most serious difficulty Peng Pai faced in organizing the peasants into a peasant union was conflict between two local organizations, the Red Flag and Black Flag Societies.[5] The Flag Societies were originally established as unions of weak villages for defense against the depradations of stronger villages, and as such were largely peasant organizations, with few large landlords in them. For several decades, many villages and some extended families in Haifeng had been split by loyalties to one Flag or the other. "Armed fights often broke out, killing a great number of people: if a man's father-in-law or his brothers were Black Flags and he himself was a Red Flag, he would kill even them without mercy." Although divisions caused by the Red Flag-Black Flag conflict appeared to split the peasants into two opposing camps, Peng Pai actually had little difficulty in resolving the problem. He merely raised another flag: "The flag of the peasant union combined four fields of red and black . . . to combine the brave fighting spirit of the old days toward the making of revolution; the peasants' loyalties to Red or Black disappeared, and they all used a single peasant flag" (Peng, 1973: 35).

But getting the peasants to rally under a single flag did not mean that a union of peasants had been achieved. Many peasants understood their lives in traditional concepts, seeing themselves as passive spectators who could not change the world. Many told Peng Pai that "until the Son of Heaven appears on earth there won't be peace in the world. Once the Son of Heaven appears all guns will be silenced and he will immediately become emperor." When Peng asked them why they were so poor, most peasants replied that "it's the will of Heaven" or that "we haven't found a lucky site to live on" (Peng, 1973: 18).

Although Peng Pai pointed out that "peasants work until their death without enough to eat while landlords did not work in the fields at all but still had more than enough," passivity could

only be overcome when peasants were convinced that the world could change. The peasant union under Peng Pai's leadership organized several mutual-aid societies, such as the Parents' Burial Club, the Credit Club, the Peasants' Clinic, and the Peasants' School. All of these organizations, which were led either by young intellectuals or peasants themselves, showed the peasants that they could begin to control some of the forces that put such heavy burdens on them. The Peasants' School, for example, emphasized teaching peasants how to keep accounts, write letters, and use an abacus "so as not to be cheated by the landlords." The skills which the peasants learned in all of these organizations were also applied to the running of the peasant union (Peng, 1973: 29).

Most important of all, however, was building solidarity among the peasants themselves and breaking the patron-client ties between the landlords and the peasants. Even after the establishment of the peasant union, peasants still contested farmland among themselves. "Our peasant union laid down regulations to the effect that no one might contest the land of another union member unless he had that member's consent and the union's approval." The peasant union was not only able to build unity among the peasants, but also showed the peasants that they could strike at the heart of landlord control over the land. "When a landlord raised rent and evicted a member, . . . no member whatsoever might farm the land in question unless the first member explicitly relinquished it and the union approved" (Peng, 1973: 29).

Because peasants felt that a case brought to the local magistrate for resolution had as much chance standing as a "sand cow entering the ocean," peasants had previously relied either on their landlord-patron or raw force to resolve disputes. When the peasant union recognized that the continuation of either of these practices would severely weaken peasant unity, it decided that all disputes between members must first be brought to the Union Arbitration Department. The Arbitration Department "was always a peace maker, but whenever we made peace, we

attacked the evils of private property" (Peng, 1973: 38). An examination of the cases handled by the department (see Table 1) reveals the kinds of conflict that the peasants were involved in at the time. The interesting aspect of these percentages is that conflicts between peasants themselves, rather than conflicts between peasants and landlords, constituted the large majority of cases. After the peasant union began to resolve disputes, interpeasant fighting and reliance on landlord-patrons began to diminish as factors dividing the peasantry of Haifeng.

The peasant union also moved to gain control over the local markets for yams, sugarcane, greens, and rice. These markets were controlled by the Gui-feng landlords and gentry, who received a large income from the markets; the annual income from the yam market alone was about 500 *yuan*.[6] Since the peasants of Haifeng relied mainly on yams for sustenance because of landlord demands for rent in rice, the peasant union decided to gain control of the yam market first. "The first step was to send a man with a standard scale produced by the union to supervise the yam market. The gentry were very opposed. The union then gave notice to the peasants of the county to take their yams to the office of a nearby local [of the union] and set up there; it

TABLE 1
Report on Cases of the Arbitration Department

TYPE	PERCENTAGE
Marriage cases	30
Debt cases	20
Landlord-tenant disputes	15
Contested division of property	15
Homicide	1
Violation of Union rules	1
Superstition	10
Others	8

SOURCE: Peng, 1973: 38-39. The total number of cases is not given.

was absolutely forbidden to set up at the old market place. As a result, we won the victory and applied the income of that market to the expenses of the Peasant Clinic" (Peng, 1973: 34-35).

The importance of this victory for the further development of the peasant movement in Haifeng should not be underestimated. First and foremost, it showed peasants that they could gain some control over the forces which continually threatened their existence. Furthermore, the victory prepared the way for the next stage of the movement. The emphasis on the market focused attention on the control of the distribution of the produce of the land rather than on the control of the land itself. The question of the control and ownership of the land had not yet arisen, even though Peng Pai had attacked "the evils of private property" in his propaganda work. However, any threat to peasant subsistence which arose after this victory would almost inevitably focus the struggle on rent and control of the land because some markets were already controlled by the peasants.

By January 1923, just three months after Peng Pai made his first contact with the peasants, the village unions already had achieved a total membership of 10,000. At that time, the Haifeng General Peasant Union was organized. During the first half of 1923, the peasant union continued to expand using slogans such as "rent reduction," "abolish the three blows" (landlords had the right to strike peasants), "abolish gifts to the landlords," and "do not bribe the police."

Although the activities of the peasant union were initially confined to mutual-aid societies, the peasant union soon came into conflict with the landlords. In early 1923, a landlord who lived in the city of Haifeng told his tenants that their rent was going to be raised. The peasants claimed that their fields had been tilled for centuries as "manure investment fields," on which the landlord did not have the right to raise the rent or reclaim the land unless the rent was in arrears. Thus, rather than pay the increase, the peasants asked the union for permission to quit the

field. The landlord "knew that if a union member gave up his field, no one in the neighborhood, no matter what kind of peasant, would dare to farm it." Demanding that they hand over the land, he filed a suit in the magistrate's office accusing the peasants of "tenant misappropriation of land." At the hearing peasants packed the office, so intimidating the magistrate that he dismissed the case with a decision that the landlord had no evidence to support his case (Peng, 1973: 42-43).

When the landlords and gentry heard of this unprecedented defeat at the hands of peasants, over 500 attended a meeting at which the decision was made to form the Society for Maintaining Grain Production (Liangyi Weichi Hui). Acting as the executive committee for local landlords, the leaders of the society included the xian magistrate, a brother who commanded the local armed forces, and relatives of Chen Jiong-ming, a Haifeng native who was one of the most powerful warlords in Guangdong (Zhong, 1957: 22-24). The society was organized with the status of a governmental body having the power to levy a tax of 100,000 yuan on surrounding villages for operating capital. When the society ordered a subsequent hearing, hired thugs prevented peasant union representatives from attending. Compelled to attend alone, the accused tenants were promptly thrown into jail (Peng, 1973: 45-47).

Peng Pai then called a mass meeting of the peasant union which over 6,000 peasants attended. He pointed out that the imprisonment was not merely the problem of those arrested, but rather concerned all members of the union: "Our peasant friends are innocent, they are being held by the court unjustly, and the magistrate has broken the law. We have to be clear that this is not a personal matter; we have to see it as a matter for our peasant class; if [the imprisoned peasants] lose, 100,000 peasants all lose; if [they] win, all peasants win" (Peng, 1973: 47).

The peasant meeting decided to send Peng Pai and 20 others to the magistrate's office to demand the release of the peasants arrested. The peasants were freed, but not necessarily because of the peasant union's show of force. During the meetings, the

magistrate told Peng Pai: "Brother Peng, you are a good friend of mine, please withdraw the petitioning peasants first, and tomorrow I'll free the others." Peng replied, "We can't talk of friendship today because I am here as a peasant representative" (Peng, 1973: 9).

At the welcoming celebration for the released peasants, Peng Pai explained why he thought the peasants were freed from jail: "For hundreds and thousands of years peasants have been taking injustice and oppression from the landlords, gentry, and officials, never daring to make a sound. Today we were able to free six peasants from jail—whose power is this?" Most said that it was Peng Pai's, some said that it was the peasant union's, while others said that it was the peasants'. Peng replied, "Those who said the power of the peasant union and peasant comrades aren't 100% correct, but they aren't far from wrong. Those who said that it was the power of one man, Peng Pai, are as wrong as can be. If Peng Pai had the power, what would he need six or seven thousand people for? I think that Peng Pai alone, even if he were as smart as God, couldn't have gotten those men out. However, the peasant union is just a peasant assembly; the officials weren't frightened by it, much less by the peasant comrades. The power that won today's victory comes from the fact that the Peasant Union could show six or seven thousand peasants how to unite in one place and act together. We concentrated our power . . . so that the officials had to be afraid" (Peng, 1973: 50-51).

While the release of the peasants demonstrated that the old order was assailable, it did not necessarily show that the peasants themselves could change the world. There are indications that the peasants continued to feel that the victory had not been won by themselves, but by Peng Pai. After the celebration, 6,000 peasants "marched into the main street; the rain fell harder, and the peasants cheered with more delight at the response from Heaven" (Peng, 1973: 49).

Nevertheless, the peasants now saw the possibility of change, and the peasant union expanded even faster. "The applicants

were coming in crowds, but there were only 24 hours in a day." Within a short time the union was reorganized into the Huizhou [Prefecture] Associated Union, covering much of eastern Guangdong. "In less than two months it expanded into Puning, Huilai, and Chaozhou, and again reorganized as the Guangdong Provincial Peasant Union" (Peng, 1973: 50-51). By mid-1923, Peng Pai was known throughout eastern Guangdong as Prince Peng, King of the Haifeng peasants (Vishnaykova-Akimova, 1971: 163).

The victories of 1923, however, were not long lived. In August 1923, a violent typhoon hit the South China coast, causing widespread damage and destroying nearly all of the rice crop. According to local custom, the peasants asked the landlords to inspect the fields and take a share of the remaining crop, rather than the whole amount of the fixed rent in grain. When the landlords refused even to inspect the fields, the peasant union openly raised the slogan "25% rent at most," signaling the beginning of a rent reduction movement. With the very basis of landlord power being called into question, the Society for Maintaining Grain Production turned to local troops to suppress the peasant union "bandits." When the peasant union was forcibly dissolved, Peng Pai fled to Canton.

The early months of the existence of the Haifeng Peasant Union marked the beginning of a social movement, as yet hardly revolutionary, in which tens of thousands of peasants began to see the possibility that the world could change. The peasant union represented the beginning of peasant unity, while landlord opposition to that unity only served to draw the line between landlords and peasants ever clearer. Union members resolved conflicts among themselves, accepted the authority of the union, and also engaged in collective work, such as the restoration of eroded hills. Nevertheless, the movement exhibited several potential weaknesses which were to characterize the later development of the peasant movement throughout Guangdong. Peasants tended to think of Peng Pai as the source of their strength, seeing him either as Prince Peng or Peng Pu-sa, a

Buddhist Bodhisatva who is ready for Nirvana but remains on earth to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. Both the existence and strength of the peasant union was largely dependent on his leadership. Moreover, the Haifeng peasant movement developed within the dynamics of the local society, a framework which provided neither the organizational nor the social basis for the movement to expand to other areas of Guangdong. Without the support of other classes, the peasants of Haifeng were no match for the landlords and their troops. The peasant unions were crushed as soon as the struggle began to focus on land—the source of landlord wealth and power in the countryside.

URBAN FORCES AND THE PEASANT MOVEMENT

Although the peasant movement was suppressed in eastern Guangdong, other social forces, largely urban in origin and centered in Canton, were developing which would make it possible for the peasant movement to spread throughout Guangdong by 1925, and into Central China by 1926. From 1924 on, urban forces determined the conditions under which the peasant movement developed, changing the possibilities and setting the limits.

In 1923, when Sun Yat-sen established a government in Canton with the help of warlord-mercenary forces from neighboring provinces, he also started to reorganize his political party, the Guomindang [Kuomintang], into a force which he felt would be able to unify China and regain China's sovereignty from imperialist powers. With the help of Comintern advisor Michael Borodin,[7] Sun was holding discussions with the CCP on the conditions under which the two parties could form a united front to unify China. At the insistence of the Comintern, CCP members joined the Guomindang, taking up leading positions in several departments, including the Peasant Department. Among Guomindang departments, the Peasant Department was the

most completely under the control of the CCP. Except for the head of the department, nearly all positions were staffed by CCP members; the important post of secretary was held initially by Peng Pai and later by Lo Qi-yuan and Ruan Xiao-xian in turn. While serving as secretary, Peng Pai made sure that he, rather than the department chief, was in effective control of the department—he is said to have claimed once that "whatever is not under my jurisdiction is not within the realm of this department" (Zou, 1938: 161).

While the ultimate aim of Sun's government was to unify China by military means, the first step was to unify Guangdong. Control of Guangdong at that time was divided among a score of different warlords who milked the regions they occupied for revenues to maintain their armies. Even in the areas around Canton, which were under the nominal control of the Guomindang, various warlord armies expropriated taxes as the price for their allegiance to Sun Yat-sen, a situation prompting Liao Zhong-kai to exclaim that "the taxes of the whole province are carved up like a melon, without a piece left over!" (Liao, 1963: 188). Since the military forces at Sun's disposal were neither politically nor financially trustworthy, the Guomindang established a military academy as the first step in the formation of its own army. To establish the academy, large amounts of money were required. Because existing sources of revenue had been farmed out to the allied warlord armies, the Guomindang attempted to raise the money by selling government properties and placing new taxes on Canton's merchants. For the merchants, the most odious government policy was the land sale, which they characterized as a "land inquisition"; "This inquisition simply means that the officials now in the saddle in Canton have sent down an order that all property owners must bring forth their title deed to their lands, and if there be any titles not dating back to the Ming Dynasty (ended 600 years ago), the property is seized by the 'government' and sold to the highest bidders" (South China Morning Post, September 30, 1923).

While this did not constitute a principled attack on property relations, the merchants nonetheless were convinced that a "Bolshevic" government had been formed in Canton. The merchants of Canton and surrounding towns such as Jiangmen (Koong-moon) and Foshan (Fatshan) had previously formed self-defense organizations to maintain local law and order during periods of political turmoil when one warlord seized the government from another. They now prepared to defend their class interests against the Guomindang by merging to form a 100,000 member Merchants' Volunteer Corps, which purchased 10,000 guns overseas.[8] When the gun shipment arrived in Canton in August 1924, the Guomindang seized the weapons, prompting a great outcry of anger from the merchants. The Merchants' Volunteer Corps demanded that the weapons be returned, taxes abolished, and city elections held. After negotiations broke down, the merchants went on strike, completely stopping city activities. Adding to the crisis, the Guomindang received several threatening notes from British imperialists in Hong Kong who were worried about the "red menace" in Canton.

Because the government did not have a reliable military force, the Guomindang organized city workers into the armed Workers' Corps, and Peasant Movement Training Institute students into a peasants' army. Most of the members of the peasant army were rickshaw pullers, many of whom were once peasants in Haifeng. While the city was divided into two armed camps, the Merchants' Corps appeared to be the stronger: "the streets were filled with 'Down with Sun' slogans. Anti-Sun propaganda entered the city itself; the Merchants' Corps was everywhere, even in the vicinity of the provincial government" (Guangdong, 1926: 56). With the saber-rattling of the British, the strength of the Merchants' Corps, and the paralysis of the city, the government agreed to the demands of the merchants, returned the weapons, and promised to hold city elections.

The merchants, on the other hand, having tasted victory, pressed on for the total defeat of the Guomindang by continuing the strike. In October, Sun warned that if the strike

continued, martial law would be declared and the shops would be occupied by workers and peasants. The Merchants' Corps, now armed, refused to end the strike. During the October Tenth National Day celebrations, several workers were killed in a battle which the workers eventually won. In fierce fighting over the next few days, the full force of the Guomindang was used against the Merchants' Corps, including massive bombardment of the Western City, the merchants' stronghold. After the Merchants' Volunteer Corps was completely defeated in Canton, the Guomindang had seemingly won a victory.

After their defeat, however, many of the leaders of the Merchants' Corps joined forces with Chen Jiong-ming, the most powerful warlord in eastern Guangdong. The merchants established a rival government at Swatow, making preparations to attack Canton with Chen's forces. They began moving on Canton in February 1925. The Guomindang counterattacked, smashed Chen's forces, and proceeded to unify all of Guangdong in two campaigns called the Eastern Expeditions.

Although the First Eastern Expedition of February and March 1925 was generated by the class struggle in Canton, the Guomindang Army had the sympathy of large numbers of peasants, who demonstrated their support when the army marched through the countryside toward Swatow (Liu, 1928: 192, 197, 203). Peasant Department propaganda teams accompanying the troops established peasant unions throughout the East River districts. In Huiyang xian, for example, Ruan Xiaoxian and graduates of the Peasant Movement Training Institute (see Berkeley, 1975) organized unions in several areas (Ruan, 1926: 20).

The assistance of a peasant army organized by Peng Pai was crucial for the advancement of the Guomindang Army into Haifeng and on to Swatow. Haifeng occupied a strategic position on the land route from Canton to Swatow, since the major pass through the mountains on the western border of the xian was occupied by Chen's troops. The Guomindang Army under Chiang Kai-shek was unable to take the passes and advance on

Haifeng. Peng Pai, accompanying the army as a member of a propaganda team, was given command of the attack on Haifeng. With the help of local peasants, Peng slipped into Haifeng with 100 guns.

Making radical proposals to the peasants which included the expropriation of the land owned by Chen and his followers, the equitable distribution of land owned by large landlords, and the reduction of rent, Peng Pai organized a peasant army and mobilized peasants to spread rumors that Sun's troops would attack from the land and the sea, to cause disturbances, and to cut telegraph wires. When the wires were severed, "Chen's troops on the front thought that the rear lines had already been defeated, and the rear thought that the front lines had been defeated. Both decided to retreat in order to avoid being surrounded by enemy troops" (Huazi ribao, March 4, 1925). The next day, Peng Pai led over 200 peasants through mountain trails and entered Haifeng.[9] When Chen's troops saw the troops who had "dropped out of the sky," they retreated to a neighboring xian. Without any assistance from the Guomindang Army, peasants occupied the city of Haifeng, arrested several landlords and gentry, and mandated a 70% rent reduction. "The world," noted the Huazi Newspaper (March 4, 1925) "was turned upside down."

After the capture of Swatow in March, the warlord armies which had participated in the Eastern Expedition (but without doing any fighting) revolted and allied with Chen Jiong-ming, forcing the Guomindang Army to withdraw. With the help of railway workers who went on strike to break the communications of the warlord armies, the Guomindang Army returned to protect Canton. However, when the Guomindang finally retreated from Swatow, Chen Jiong-ming returned to crush the peasant unions which had been established in several eastern Guangdong xian, including Haifeng.

While the First Eastern Expedition was an extension of the class struggle in Canton, the Second was very clearly linked with the massive anti-imperialist movement ignited in June 1925 when several striking Shanghai workers were killed by

foreign troops. In Canton, demonstrations in support of the Shanghai workers culminated on June 23 when British troops fired on a demonstration parade, killing some of the marchers. An anti-British strike and boycott was immediately declared, with nearly 100,000 Hong Kong workers returning to Canton to form strike committees. With British trade grinding to a halt, the British lost no sight of the fact that warlord forces in Guangdong could be used to their advantage. The Hong Kong South China Morning Post cried for military intervention, and when that was not forthcoming, rather cryptically noted (August 29, 1925): "It seems impossible that any local combination of Chinese Anti-Red forces without . . . assistance from our side will be strong enough to expel the present Red Government in Canton." Although there is no documentary proof that the British supported warlords with guns and money, Chen Jiong-ming changed the name of his army to the Chinese Anti-Red Army, disbanded trade unions, and lifted the anti-British boycott at Swatow. "The direct benefits enjoyed by Swatow under [Chen Jiong-ming's] regime will be shared in some degree by Hong Kong, for it will enable shipping companies to resume operations, and open up a large part of the province for trade" (China Illustrated Review, September 26, 1925).

Guomindang leaders vehemently accused the British of aiding every attempt during recent years to topple the Canton government. Chiang Kai-shek declared that "our government sees British imperialism as the number one enemy" (Lo, 1955: 17-19). Fired by anti-imperialism, the immediate objective of the Second Eastern Expedition in October was to retake Swatow and enforce the anti-British boycott. Zhou En-lai [Chou En-lai], head of the Political Department of the army, later explained (China Illustrated Review, December 4, 1925) to Swatow workers the purpose of the campaign: "The Nationalist Government realizes that the best means to bring about a real unification of China is to overthrow all forms of imperialism, among which the foremost is the Hong Kong government. We firmly believe that unless Imperialism is overthrown completely, it is absolutely

futile to attempt any crusade against native militarism.... As the present strike should be a general strike all over China ... there must be close connection between the movement in Swatow and that in Canton. When these two points are firmly linked up, Amoy will be the only place in South China where Hong Kong imperialism can find an open space to pop up for its life breathe."

Like the First Eastern Expedition, the Second was victorious partly because of peasant assistance. Peasants not only helped the army, but also manned picked lines in many of the small harbors which dot the coast of Guangdong. In addition to receiving help from peasants in the East River districts, the Guomindang Army also acquired a number of peasant recruits. A contemporary source noted that "after the conclusion of the Eastern Expeditions, the numerical strength of the Party's army had increased" (Lo, 1955: 1671). Peasant unions were also reestablished wherever the Guomindang was victorious.

MILITARY FORCE AND THE PEASANTS

Peasants throughout Guangdong learned that the Guomindang Army was an army they could trust and depend on. Unlike other armies, which ravaged the countryside, the Guomindang Army was under strict orders to "show love to the common people" (laobaixing). Among the army's marching and camping orders, soldiers were required to obey the political teachings of the Huang-pu (Whampoa) Military Academy, to pay for supplies at a fair price, and to pay for porter services. When the army camped, meetings were held to discuss ways to win the support of the peasants. Peasants often "expressed feelings of solidarity with the party's army" (Liu, 1928: 196-197). Nevertheless, peasant leaders such as Peng Pai, Lo Qi-yuan, and Ruan Xiaoxian saw this trust of the Guomindang Army as one of the weaknesses of the peasant movement—dependence on outside military force. Just as the Eastern Expedition had made developments of the peasant movement in the East River districts

possible, it also contributed to a defeat for the peasants of Guangning xian, northwest of Canton.

The organization of the Guangning Peasant Union began in early 1924 as the Guomindang attempted to extend its control beyond the Canton city limits. As part of the policy for unifying Guangdong, Peasant Department cadre began to establish peasant unions at the xian level, foregoing the more important but tedious task of gaining peasant support at the village level. Few peasants were willing to join a union which was advocating "rent reduction" when they had no means to stand up to the armed forces (*mintuan*) of their landlords. For the first half of 1924, organizational efforts were largely fruitless. Even what little gains had been made in winning peasant support were wiped out in September and October as landlords spread rumors through the villages that the Canton government was about to be overthrown by the Merchants' Volunteer Corps, implying that whatever restraint the Guomindang exercised would soon be removed. Few peasants were eager to join a union which might be swept away in the ashes of urban fires (Renmin, 1953: 139).

With the defeat of the Merchants' Corps, however, workers and students returned to their home villages to spread the news among friends and relatives, thereby depriving the landlords of one of their propaganda lines (Nongmin, 1927: 87). With the harvest approaching, peasants now spontaneously raising the slogan of rent reduction joined the Guangning Peasant Union. Landlords responded quickly by forming the Society for the Support of Landlords (Yezhu Weichi Hui) and the Society for Guaranteeing Production (Baochan Dahui)[10] which employed the mintuan to arrest and confiscate the property of those who withheld rent (Liao, 1963: 228). With the landlords uniting under the leadership of these societies to oppose the peasant union, the rent reduction movement came to an abrupt halt. The Peasant Department cadre could get the peasants to agree to the idea of a rent reduction, but to struggle against the organized force of the landlords was another question.

The propaganda work continued to go well, winning many peasants' acceptance of the slogan of rent reduction. The work

was carried out under the direction of Peng Pai, who often used the peasants' sense of fairness to discuss rent reduction. During one meeting, an old peasant said to Peng Pai: "If you rent a landlord's fields, you should pay the whole rent. When we advocate rent reduction, I'm afraid that it isn't fair." Peng Pai replied: "You're right. I have been to the East River region, West River region, and the Southern Route [local names for parts of Guangdong], but I have never heard anyone talk of fairness." Peng then "carefully analyzed" the fairness of how peasants work until they die without enough to eat. He waited for the old man to understand, and asked him if rent reduction was fair. The old peasant agreed. Peng then asked him whether no rent at all was also fair, and again the old peasant agreed. He then said that to kill an unvirtuous (buren) landlord was fair. The old peasant agreed (Ho, 1928: book 3, 56). His general analysis struck such a responsive chord that two years afterwards, "the influence of Peng Pai's propaganda still remained firmly imbedded in the minds of the peasant union members" (Nongmin, 1927: 91).

Although peasant union leaders made progress in getting the peasants to agree to rent reduction, there was no movement to implement it. The peasants, ever conscious of the power of the landlords, were not willing to struggle openly with them. CCP cadre explained that "at that time, there were many peasants who were afraid that because they had no weapons, they would be destroyed by the landlords. We explained to them: 'Our unity is our weapon.' We also went around trying to arouse them. But their attitude was still a passive one of waiting to see" (Renmin, 1953: 140-141).

Peasant passivity was firmly grounded in their assessment of the balance of forces in the countryside and not in any acceptance of ruling class ideology; they believed that their weaknesses could be overcome only by military means. "From the beginning of the rent reduction movement, peasants feared a landlord attack. . . . They always came to us to ask if the government would send any troops to help. We told them that the government had no troops to send. They then asked us, 'Will any guns come?' We

said no. 'Just gunpowder will do,' " the peasants added (Renmin, 1953: 141).

Beginning in late November 1924, the peasant union began collecting guns from the villagers and established a Military Committee to arm and train the peasants. With peasants, both men and women, from two of the five districts in Guangning armed and organized, the rent reduction movement was "heroically and resolutely pressed forward" (Guangdong, 1926: 75). The landlords' mintuan soon attacked, burned two villages, and forced the peasants into a hasty retreat. With the outbreak of open clashes, the xian magistrate, calling for an end to the fighting, arranged a peace conference for December 1. While the peasant union sent many representatives to the conference, the landlords did not attend. Instead, they again attacked the villages. The peasants, extremely agitated, demanded immediate revenge. But the peasant union "stopped them, explaining that they should not take the enemy lightly." Instead of pressing the struggle further, the peasant union declared a unilateral ceasefire, advising its members not to resist when landlords came "to steal the grain" for rent.

During the uneasy truce that followed, the peasant union began strengthening its internal organization and expanding its membership. "When the slogan of rent reduction was raised, the scope of the organization was limited. Because we never imagined that there would be such a large struggle, we became lax in our organization. After we saw the situation developing, we knew we could not but have a tight organization" (Guangdong, 1926: 77). While the peasant union sent daily reports to Canton outlining the situation and requesting troops, the most important work, according to Lo Qi-yuan, was getting the peasants to believe in their own strength rather than relying on government forces. The peasant union increased military training, demanded more discipline from union members, and made an alliance with a local secret society, the Big Sword Society (Dadaohui): "When the situation was not critical we did not need them, but we allied with them to prevent their taking the side of the landlords" (Guangdong, 1926: 78).

At the urging of the Comintern advisor Borodin, the Guomindang finally sent troops to Guangning. Although the first of the troops to reach Guangning were led by CCP members, the local leadership "was afraid that they would not understand the peasants' situation. We therefore held a large welcoming celebration for the troops at which they began to sympathize with the peasants." The Guangning peasants, excited and aroused by the presence of supportive troops, wanted to attack the landlords immediately, even though the following morning had been set for the uprising. "They began attacks at 1 A.M. Sometimes the troops . . . would help." Throughout the day, peasant union leaders attempted to restrain peasants who went on a pillaging outburst in revenge for the surprise landlord attacks. Peasant union leaders had all they could do to stop the peasants from stealing (Guangdong, 1926: 78-81).

The next day, a second detachment of troops arrived staffed by officers who were initially antagonistic to the peasant union. After much discussion between the rank and file and peasants and soldiers of the first detachment, the troops of the second detachment expressed sympathy with the peasants, and their officers agreed to take a neutral position. For the next two months, peasant forces focused their attacks on a few walled fortresses of the biggest landlords, but neither the peasants nor the landlords were able to win a victory. In the midst of the seige, the Canton government sent a telegram ordering the troops to withdraw from Guangning to join the Eastern Expedition. The armed struggle was again stopped before the peasant union had won a rent reduction (Guangdong, 1926: 71-79).

But the experience gained and the lessons learned by the leadership were important for the future development of the peasant movement. Peasants, Peng Pai and Lo Qi-yuan learned, make very cautious assessments of their own weaknesses in relationship to the power of the landlords. While both men and women participated enthusiastically in the movement, Lo wrote, "peasants did not believe they were strong enough, and always wanted to ask the government for help. Even after we would go into the villages to lecture, the peasants still begged us to telegram

the government asking for troop protection." Lo believed that the organization of peasant self-defense corps under the leadership of the peasant union had shown how to overcome this weakness. But there was also the problem of the relationship between the peasants and the leaders: peasants "depended on leaders for everything. If a leader was not there, they were very upset. As soon as a leader arrived, everything was alright." Lo felt, nevertheless, that military organization combined with the propaganda work of attributing all successes to the peasants had proved that peasants could become a strong force in the revolution. In fact, he added, the experience of Guangning not only showed that "peasants believed in their own strength," but also that peasants had developed an "increased comprehension of class" (Guangdong, 1926: 81-82).

The peasants of Guangning did in fact overcome their passivity with the organization of the peasant self-defense corps. That force, however, was too weak to stand up to the landlords' mintuan, outside force being necessary to allow the peasants to press on with the rent reduction movement. Yet reliance on outside force was not necessarily experienced by the peasants as a dependent relationship. Rather, it was experienced as one end of a continuum which had the peasants arming themselves as the other, albeit least desirable, end. The very fact that peasants saw raw force as the determining factor in their relationship with the landlords indicates that the peasants felt that only superior force kept them from taking hold of and changing the world.

REACTION AND THE PU-NING PEASANT STRUGGLES

During the height of the peasant movement and the great anti-imperialist wave in the cities, contradictions within the Guomindang became more and more apparent. As existing property relations in China's cities and countryside became increasingly threatened by the mass movements of workers and

peasants, the Guomindang openly split into the Right-Guomindang which had ties to urban capital and rural land, and the Left-Guomindang which did not have close ties to workers or peasants (or any other class) but needed mass movements to attain its proclaimed goal of the unification of China.

The unification of Guangdong provided the material basis for the development of reaction in Guangdong. The CCP believed that, with unification, the Left-Guomindang would no longer support the Guangdong peasant movement. The Guangdong branch of the CCP argued that "the Left-Guomindang has used the peasants' power to protect their own positions. . . . Now that the Northern Expedition [to unify China] is beginning and Guangdong is unified, the Left-Guomindang will not protect the peasant movement" (Guangdong, 1926: 113-114). Indeed, attacks on the CCP and workers' and peasants' unions began in early 1925. Soon after Sun Yat-sen died, Zou Lu wrote, the Guomindang departments began "a positive struggle against the CCP." Zou himself was a leading figure in the reaction, later boasting that he had used various labor unions, especially the conservative Canton Mechanics Union, to oppose the CCP, in addition to lending active support to the anticommunist "Sun-ist" societies in eastern Guangdong. The peasant unions and peasant militia, according to Zou, were merely organizations for "local rascals and bandits" whose "past crimes were overlooked, and who could do anything they wanted." On the other hand, Zou argued, the mintuan "were the real organizations for self-protection in the countryside." Zou therefore "secretly helped the local mintuan to struggle against the CCP" (Zou, 1938: 165-166).

Nevertheless, the CCP leadership believed that the peasant movement would develop rapidly. On the one hand, Lo Qi-yuan, identified six weaknesses of the peasantry which he thought were obstacles to the revolution: (1) localism is strong, (2) peasants are not spacially concentrated, (3) superstition is strong, (4) peasants believe they are weak, (5) there are problems in ethnic relations (minzu guanxi), and (6) family ties are strong. On the other hand, Lo felt that conditions in the countryside were

making it possible for "peasants themselves to break down and cast off their weaknesses." Lo told his comrades that the hardships and bitterness experienced by the peasants had already caused them to have "self-awareness." "After peasants have this self-awareness, they are receptive to revolutionary propaganda. Thus, when we go into villages, we can get them to form a peasant union in half an hour. . . . Now people say to them, 'Get organized' which they are receptive to. The result is that they embrace revolutionary propaganda . . . and overcome their weaknesses" (Guangdong, 1926: 51-52).

With the expectation that the Guomindang would no longer vigorously protect the peasant movement in Guangdong, Lo Qi-yuan and the CCP leaders made use of the lessons they had learned in Guangning and the Eastern Expeditions to organize peasant unions which they believed would not be dependent on Guomindang forces. Peasant self-defense corps were organized at the same time as the unions. Cadre were told to make it clear that all victories were based on the peasant masses and had nothing to do with the leadership. Dependence on a leader was a tendency which had to be combatted: "After a victory, some comrades do not say that it is the peasants' victory, but boast of their own contributions. This causes the peasants to doubt their power. When something is done badly, peasants lose all faith in the union." Many cadre were severely criticized or removed because they "could not penetrate deeply into the masses. When they go down to the countryside, they only do administrative work and do not articulate the peasants' ideas; at meetings they only lecture the peasants" (Guangdong, 1926: 121-122).

These tendencies, however, were only partly related to workstyle. The major problem in the organization of peasant unions was that the unions had not pressed for the immediate economic gain of the peasants. "In two years of the peasant movement, we have done too much political work and not enough work for the peasants' economic benefit. The result is that many people think that a peasant union does a lot, but at the same time the peasant masses cannot think of how much benefit the peasant union has for them. Thus the village structure is still feudal and village

political power is in the hands of local rascals and evil gentry" (Guangdong, 1926: 63).

Nowhere in Guangdong was the power of the landlord-gentry greater, and the oppression and exploitation of the peasants harsher, than in Puning xian, just northeast of Haifeng. The struggle in Puning between the landlords and peasants had a long history. Shortly after the suppression of the Taiping Revolution in the late 1860s, Puning landlords greatly increased rent and taxes, precipitating a sharp struggle when the peasants of several villages around the city resisted. The struggle apparently was not limited to lineage feuds, but included landlord-peasant struggles as well. "Sometimes the feud would be between village and village, irrespective of clan; sometimes it would be between two clans in the same village; and sometimes it would be between two branches of the same clan" (Ashmore, 1897: 214). Landlords demanded that the peasants pay reparations, and drew up a list of over 400 peasant leaders to be executed by the military. When the peasants refused to comply with these demands, a Qing government official from the Fang lineage, a large landlord family living in the city of Puning, conducted a campaign of terror throughout the countryside. General Fang Yao "effectually stamped out the feuds by stamping to death many of the men engaged in them. Before he got through with it, he had burned some twenty towns and villages and cut off about four thousand heads. . . . Peace and order were restored" (Ashmore, 1897: 215).

Peace and order meant the total repression of the peasants, as land was seized for the payment of the reparations demanded. Peasants later remembered[11] with great bitterness that "every village had broken families. . . . The rest, who temporarily escaped the disaster, could only pay off the debt by selling their women and children; changing their names to Fang, some surrendered themselves to that family by placing all of their wealth under their control. . . . The landlords and gentry also demanded that the peasants worship them as adopted fathers [yifu]" (Renmin, 1953: 158-159).

General Fang "issued strict orders for dealing with tenants" (Huazi ribao, January 22, 1926). Landlords expected peasants to provide gifts of pigs, chickens, sugar, and wine and to prepare feasts at rent collection time. Peasants were also required to prostrate themselves before any landlord (Ho, 1928: III, 75). If peasants quit the fields, they were still forced to pay the rent. Nevertheless, "two out of three peasant families [sold] themselves as piglets [*zhuzai,* a local term meaning to enter the coolie trade] in the South Sea" (Guangdong, 1926: 101-102).[12]

Political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of the Fangs, who comprised about 50% of the population of 20,000 in Puning city. Except for the position of xian magistrate, the Fangs controlled several tax bureaus, the mintuan, the schools, and many other important positions. After the death of Fang Yao, "Eighth Uncle Fang" became the most powerful, and feared, person in Puning. "Eighth Uncle Fang" raised sumptuary taxes by 1,000% and levied new taxes at will; in one year alone he raised 10,000 yuan in new taxes to send his son to school in Beijing (Peking; Guangdong, 1926: 36).

Not only peasants, but also small landlords, chafed under the hegemony of the Fang lineage.[13] Around 1920, the peasants and landlords of 32 villages near the city, unable to stand "the oppression greater than the 18 levels of hell," established an organization called the United Villages, under the leadership of small landlords and lesser gentry, which collected a fund of 25,000 yuan for resisting the Fangs. But except for a few thousand yuan which was actually used to establish a United Villages school, the rest was spent by petty landlords for their own aggrandizement (Renmin, 1953: 162).

When the Guomindang Army fought through Puning in the 1925 campaigns against Chen Jiong-ming, peasants with the help of a Haifeng Peasant Union Propaganda Team quickly established unions. Unlike other xian peasant unions, none of the leaders of the Puning Peasant Union locals had attended any of the sessions of the Peasant Movement Training Institute at Canton. It appears that some of the local leaders were peasants with *huaqiao* (overseas Chinese) connections. Although many

peasant families with members overseas had become well off because of "overseas remittances in their budgets" (Chen, 1939: 87), in areas such as Puning where powerful landlords held power, huaqiao families were often poor tenants (Chen, 1939: 68-69). With a knowledge of the world which extended well beyond the boundaries of the local area, poor peasants with huaqiao connections became leaders of local Puning peasant unions (Nanfang ribao, September 11, 1950: 4).

With the establishment of the peasant union, landlords in Puning city united under the Fangs, doing "everything they could to destroy the unions; they even linked up with bureaucratic gentry to stop the progress" (Huazi ribao, January 30, 1926). Unlike the struggles of Haifeng and Guangning, the conflicts in Puning did not focus on the problem of tenancy, but rather on the marketing of agricultural produce in the city. Conflicts occurred largely in Puning city, where hired thugs overturned the peasants' produce in the markets, cursed them, and beat them up.

The presence of large numbers of peasants in the city selling produce points toward their need for money, either to pay rent or to buy other commodities. The very act of engaging in monetary relations exposed the peasants to forces which were out of their control. With the Guomindang government printing money to finance its military campaigns, silver coins were being withdrawn from circulation or mixed with other metals. The Swatow Maritime Customs observed in 1925 that "large quantities of debased small silver coins continue to circulate this year, and there is little doubt that many of the ignorant or unwary members of society, especially the lower classes, sustained undeserved hardships by finding their hard-earned money either discounted or refused altogether by shops or money-changers" (South China Morning Post, July 1, 1926). The Huazi Newspaper (January 30, 1926), on the other hand, reported that "because of problems in exchange rates, the peasants of eight villages [around Puning city] came into conflict with the city merchants."

It also seems that peasants of Puning had to pay their rent in silver, while they received either paper money or debased silver for their produce.[14] This relationship was complicated by the

fact that rent was paid and produce sold to the same family, the Fang lineage.

In early January 1926, when a union member entered the city to sell his produce, an argument started between Fang shopkeepers and the peasant, apparently over the amount or kind of money he would receive in return. The Fangs threw the peasant's vegetables on the ground and beat him up. Soon over 100 peasants gathered in his support, marched through the city, and seized any merchant they met (Huazi ribao, January 22, 1926). Peasants, who had probably once engaged in cloth weaving and dying as sideline occupations until they were squeezed out by the industry of city merchants, looted Fang-owned piece-goods shops (Renmin, 1953: 169) and seized handicraft textile workers as they bleached cloth (Huazi ribao, January 22, 1926). That afternoon, the mintuan and police (all lumpen-Fang) assaulted peasants in the city and raided several villages.

The Fangs used all that was at their disposal to isolate the peasants and deprive them of support from any other classes. They called on the xian magistrate to declare the implicated peasants "bandits," used their lineage ties to marshal all of their members, landlord and peasant, merchant and handicraftsman, behind the call of "Fang people unite!", and divided the city from the countryside to gain the support of the non-Fang merchants and handicraftsmen: "Before the peasant union came, we city-folk could go into the villages anytime, and peasants would enter the city not daring to disrupt anything. Now, we are cursed when we go into the villages, and when the villagers come into the city they cause trouble. We city-folk should unite to strike down the villagers" (Guangdong, 1926: 105).

The peasants also experienced the struggle in these terms, since their world was in fact divided into Fang and non-Fang, and city and countryside. While the conflict had been sparked by fluctuations in monetary exchange rates, there is no reason to assume that the peasants saw these changes as the result of forces outside of their society. To the peasants of Puning who had lived under the domination of the Fangs for decades, the squeeze in the market was just one more example of urbanized Fang

power which seemed to become increasingly arbitrary as monetary rates fluctuated. And indeed it was, since the Fangs did have the power to deal with peasants in the same kind of money for both rent and produce. Under the slogans of "Down with the Fangs!" and "Down with the city-folk!", peasants beseiged the city and imposed an economic blockade. Roads were barricaded, the water supply cut off, and people prohibited from entering the city to market their produce.[15] In order to maintain a market for their goods, the peasants set up a new market outside of the city.

The Fangs sent several telegrams to Swatow, the nearest city with a standing military force, declaring that the city was under attack by bandits, while the magistrate sent confirming telegrams. Although the peasant union also sent message claiming that it was "only peasants attacking the city," the Canton government nonetheless sent troops to "suppress the bandits." The landlords immediately sent a messenger to meet the troops; however, seeing the peasant union flag, the officers refused to take military action against the peasants. Nor did they help the peasants; instead they ordered a cease-fire.

Since "the Puning Peasant Union was run by local rascals," all conflicts which had occurred in the previous months had been turned over to the magistrate for disposition (Ho, 1928: book 3, 79). Although the peasants had carried on a heroic struggle and were recognized as "strong and fearless," attacks on the city had been costly. "Masses of peasants had been killed or wounded" in these battles (Huazi ribao, January 22, 1926). Because the peasants "no longer had faith in the Puning Peasant Union," members of the Haifeng Peasant Union Propaganda Team took over the leadership of the struggle (Guangdong, 1926: 105; Ho, 1928: book 3, 79). The Haifeng team, identifying mistakes which had to be corrected in order to ensure victory, pointed out that not all of the Fangs or city people should be attacked, but only the landlords and gentry. The Haifeng team also explained that the landlords should be isolated in order to sever their alliances with the merchants and workers in the city. Because of this change in tactics, the poor members of the Fangs

lineage who lived in the villages no longer supported the Fang landlords, and merchants agreed not to side with the landlords (Guangdong, 1926: 107-108).

After the fighting stopped, the Swatow Peasant Bureau of the Guomindang arranged a peace conference to settle the conflict. But like the peace conference in Guangning, the landlord representatives did not arrive. Instead, forming a branch of the Sun-ist Society, a rightist group using the name of Sun Yat-sen, landlords began to re-arm their forces. When the Sun-ist Society claimed that it had the right to disband the peasant union because it was Sun's own organization (which it was not), the peasants again prepared for battle.

The Swatow District Office of the Guangdong Peasant Union thereupon decided to send Peng Pai to Puning to settle the conflict. When the peasants heard the news, they planned a large welcoming celebration. "The village and district peasant unions [as distinct from the Puning Peasant Union] enthusiastically made preparation, leafletted, and posted handbills" (Guangdong, 1926: 109-110). Apparently fearing what would happen if Peng Pai arrived to lead the peasants, the landlords hastily agreed to negotiate with the Peasant Union, reaching an agreement on the morning of Peng Pai's arrival.

The peasants made four demands of the landlords which reflected both the nature of the conflict that had occurred and what the peasants believed to be the source of their problems: (1) that the instigators of the incident be punished, (2) that 1,500 yuan be paid in reparations for damages, (3) that 250 yuan be paid for medical costs, and (4) that the Fangs no longer oppress the peasants (Renmin, 1953: 169). The first three demands were reactive in the sense that the peasants wanted redress for actions which they felt were unjust. The fourth demand reflected the historical development of the peasants' struggle with their landlords. The forced deference which landlords demanded from the peasants was the primary burden which they experienced. While rent, forced gifts, and sumptuary taxes had been imposed on the peasants at the will of the landlords, these forms of exploitation and oppression had become more or less regularized. But

as the peasants became more and more enmeshed in market relations, they experienced the exactions of the Fangs as increasingly arbitrary when monetary rates began to fluctuate. Thus the Puning peasants did not demand the stabilization of exchange rates, but rather an end to what they saw as arbitrary landlord exactions.

The Puning peasants severed relations with the city by building their own institutions. In this way they hoped to strengthen their position. The peasant market which was established in the midst of struggle was so successful that "business in the city fell to an all-time low." With the help of activists from Swatow, the peasants also established a peasant bank which not only guaranteed equitable exchange rates but also provided funds for a cooperative and a school (Ho, 1928: book 3, 81-82).

Equally important is the way in which the peasants experienced the victory. As he had so many times before, Peng Pai attempted to explain to the peasants why a victory had been won. At the victory celebration, Peng asked the peasants: "Does everyone know how this victory was achieved and why the landlords wanted to settle at 10 this morning? The agreement was reached not because of landlord and gentry warm-heartedness, but because they knew that the Provincial Peasant Union representative speaking for 800,000 organized peasants, was coming. They were afraid. . . . The landlords bought guns and fortified the city. It is obvious that they were preparing for a final struggle with you. We must consolidate our power, get guns and ammunition, and never forget unity and armed self-defense!" (Guangdong, 1926: 110).

Although the peasants of Puning experienced a victory, it was a victory for them, not by them. Instead, they experienced Peng Pai as their strength, as the person who had resolved their primordial problem. "When Peng Pai arrived in Puning, 7,000 peasants, men and women, old and young . . . came from 20 *li* [about 7 miles] around to welcome him. The crowd was very excited. Several peasant women held their children up to look, and shouted, 'Look! The Eternal One [*Wansui*][16] comes! Look! The Eternal One comes!' " (Guangdong, 1926: 110).

Peng Pai, the Eternal One, the Wansui, the peasants' king. The experience is cathartic. The peasants of Puning saw the possibility of changing the world, and experienced the chiliastic expectation that the world would change *now*. All forces aligned against the peasants seemed to vanish in the face of Peng Pai; all things became possible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we accept the belief that the development of modern political organizations precludes, or at least tends to replace, more archaic forms of political power, we are confronted with the paradox that the peasant movement in Guangdong appears to have traveled backwards. The peasants tended to raise up a *wansui* rather than to experience their own organizational strengths, even as their organization expanded to engulf over 800,000 peasants. While the modern political organizations established by Peng Pai and others in the belief that they would provide the means by which peasants would come to know their own strengths showed that the world could change, these same organizations nonetheless proved inadequate when confronted with the terror perpetrated by landlord forces. The experience of weakness and vulnerability, of the inability to change the world, drew the class lines just as clearly as victory would have.

Arising from this specific class relationship in which peasants could not change the world through struggle, a form of alienated social power developed where peasants came to experience their own strengths through Peng Pai. He had become the focus and spokesman for all their unarticulated hopes and aspirations, especially those for strength in the face of the forces confronting them. Realizing that the peasants thus came to see him in millenarian terms, he attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to counter that tendency at every opportunity. Nevertheless, a cult developed around Peng which transcended the organizational structure of the peasant unions and became the nexus of strength for the movement as a whole: Peng Pai became the Eternal One.

NOTES

1. Regardless of what one may think of Marx's characterization of peasants, his analysis of the relationship between peasants and the emergence of a Bonapartist state does raise many important questions for understanding the role of peasants and peasant movements in twentieth-century revolutions. One question which has to be asked, and as far as I know has not yet been examined, is whether or not socialist revolutions in the largely peasant Third World continue to keep alive, and recreate, the conditions under which the state can exist independent of class ties and subordinate society to itself.

2. A generally good description of the period is provided in Isaacs (1962), although his perspective is based on Trotsky's analysis of the Chinese revolution.

3. Similar accounts of the various xian peasant movements are found in three separate collections: Renmin (1953), Guangdong (1926), and Ho (1928). In the text, I have chosen those sections which give the fullest account of any given event. The other major source, Peng (1973), is a generally good translation of a series of articles by Peng Pai which appeared in 1926 in the journal *Zhongguo Nongmin,* (nos. 1, 3, 4, and 5). All references used here are from the 1973 translation, except for minor changes.

4. There is considerable difficulty in using the concept of tenancy to describe social relations in rural China because of the nature of land rent. I will nevertheless use the term here to indicate a social relationship where a peasant rents all or part of the land he works in order to maintain a subsistence-level existence. See Ch'en (1936) for an excellent discussion of the problematic use of the concept of tenancy. Even within Guangdong, for example, the amount and type of land rented varied widely, making tenancy rates calculated as a percentage next to useless.

5. The Red Flag and Black Flag Societies do not appear to have existed outside of Haifeng and Lufeng. The earliest record of the Flag Societies is an 1883 report of a Qing official sent to Lufeng to investigate the chronic disturbances there. Yu Geng-bi (1883) found that the Flags had existed for about 40 years prior to his investigation, or from about the time of the Opium War of 1842. During the Opium War, irregular militia units (*tuanlien*) arose in the areas around Canton to do battle with the British. They were organized under flags on the basis of village. Wakeman (1966: 39) notes that the flag for the whole assembly was black, "which was designed to ward off evil spirits." It is thus possible that the weak villages of Haifeng and Lufeng learned of the flag organizations from the Canton areas and adopted them for their own purposes.

6. A silver yuan was worth about one Mexican silver dollar on the international market. It is quite difficult, however, to arrive at any meaningful equivalent for paper yuan.

7. The Soviet Union had been looking toward the nationalist movements in Asia for signs of revolutionary activity since the defeat of revolutionary forces in Europe. Part of Comintern policy was therefore to make contact with, and help, the nationalist movements in colonial or semicolonial countries, which would hasten the collapse of the imperialist world order.

8. Unless otherwise noted, the account of the Merchants' Volunteer Corps uprising is taken from the China Illustrated Review. See also Chesneaux (1968: 248-249).

9. The other major account of the Eastern Expedition, Liu (1928), does not mention in any detail the assistance of the Hai-feng peasants. As a military officer, Liu's record is concerned almost exclusively with strategy, battle conditions, etc. But portions of Liu's

account tend to corroborate the Huazi ribao story. Firstly, he notes that the Guomindang Army could not take the strategic passes in a battle on February 26. Secondly, his figures for troop strength jumped from 1700 on February 26 to 1800 on the 27th, and back to 1700 on the 28th, thus accounting for the peasants who participated under Peng Pai's command. Thirdly, when the Guomindang troops marched into Haifeng, they did not encounter any resistance from Chen Jiong-ming's forces. And lastly, Liu noted that the people of Haifeng "gave a great welcome to the Party army" (1928: 202-209).

10. The similarity of the name of this society with that of the Haifeng society raises the interesting question of relations between landlords throughout Guangdong in repressing the peasant movement. A report in Ho (1928: book 3, 17) noted that of all the landlord organizations, "the landlord support societies are the most recent organs for opposing the peasant unions."

11. Two contemporary sources (Huazi ribao; Ho, 1928) place Fang Yao's extermination campaign around 1900, or after some 40 years of struggle between the landlords and peasants. Writing in 1897, however, Ashmore (p. 215) found that Fang Yao had "restored peace and order" in the 1870s. The China Maritime Customs Report for 1901 (p. 150) reported that "over 30 years ago [clan fighting] was ably suppressed by the firm hand of General Fang." However, both Ashmore and the Customs Report indicated that there had been a "recrudescence" of the fighting in the late 1890s. It is entirely possible that the two periods became fused into one in the minds of the peasants and was reported as such in contemporary accounts.

12. The report reprinted in Renmin (1953: 160) differs on the number of people who fled Puning and the terminology used to refer to them: "one out of three males sold themselves as 'little foreigners' [fan-cai] in the South Seas" coolie trade.

13. The term "lineage" is used rather than "clan" because of the fundamental differences between the Scottish clans and the Chinese family system. See Hu (1948) and Freedman (1965) for a full discussion.

14. Paige (1975: 18) argues that "the presence of a landed upper class tends to focus conflict on the control of the means of production, while the presence of a commercial or industrial agricultural upper class tends to focus conflict on the distribution of the goods produced." If this is generally the case, one could expect to find that the landlords in Puning were becoming increasingly reliant on commercial transactions, rather than rent, for their income.

15. Peasants had used many of these tactics for decades. In 1897, "there would not only be occasional pitched battles, but marauding parties would assail wayfarers. . . . Roadways would be blocked, fields would be devastated" (Ashmore, 1897: 214). A report in Guangdong (1926: 105) argued that these tactics had been learned during the anti-British boycott of 1925-1926.

16. The translation of wansui in this context is quite difficult. Wansui is usually used as an adverbial phrase meaning "Long live," as in "Long live Chairman Mao" (Mao Zhuxi wansui). Wansui was seldom used as a noun, except as an honorific for emperors. It seems that the Puning peasants were using the term in a similar fashion, although there is no direct evidence that they saw Peng Pai as a new emperor. "Eternal One" would therefore seem more appropriate, capturing both the more literal sense of the word with its attribution to Peng Pai.

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Robert B. Marks is a graduate student in the History Department at the University of Wisconsin—Madison.