

provided ample space for essays to proliferate, including the polemical variety known as *zawen*. Essayists were household names. Perhaps the reason for their neglect in this handbook is the same as for *A Selective Guide*'s abandonment of a fifth volume on essays: having no recognizable agenda or shape, they are difficult to describe and their interest too amorphous to concisely convey. However, two veteran essayists do pop up here, though consideration of Zhou Zuoren is slanted toward the matter of his 1946 trial for collaboration with the Japanese puppet government, and Liang Shiqiu is cast only in the role of gourmet.

To sum up, anyone with the leisure, opportunity, and stamina to read through this tome from start to finish would certainly get an all-round education, thanks to its unrivalled range of subject matter and multiplicity of viewpoints. The more common selective use would probably be to seek fresh views on old subjects, and there benefits would also abound.

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Negotiating Socialism in Rural China: Mao, Peasants, and Local Cadres in Shanxi 1949–1953. By Xiaojia Hou. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2016. Pp. viii + 275. \$45.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Many scholars have written the history of China in the early 1950s from above, focusing on the actions and decisions of Mao Zedong and other party leaders. Others have written the history of the early PRC period from below, examining how political campaigns and official policies intersected with the dynamics of Chinese society at the “grassroots.” In the first English-language monograph on the origins of the agricultural producers’ cooperative movement of 1953, which organized China’s rural populace to pool their landholdings, farm together, and distribute harvests based on land and labour contributions, Xiaojia Hou writes from the mid-range perspective that the historian of Russia, Richard Stites, once called “history from the side.” She excels in explaining how negotiations among actors at different rungs on the PRC’s ladder of power, from central government leaders to village-level cadres, impelled China’s earliest steps down the path towards agricultural collectivization.

Paying attention to the role of cadres at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels, Hou’s account of the agricultural cooperativization movement makes it possible to, as she puts it, “observe the mechanism of Communist China from the

top down, from the bottom up, and from government agents in between” (p. 17). Arguing against conventional interpretations that see Mao and other high-level PRC leaders orchestrating agricultural cooperativization from the centre, Hou demonstrates that, beginning as early as 1950, provincial leaders in Shanxi played a pivotal role in pushing cooperatives onto the national agenda. Far from a purely “top-down” initiative, as this book shows, Shanxi party leaders, often from relatively low administrative levels, provided “the inspiration, evidence, confidence, and even theoretical backing” that convinced Mao to launch a nationwide cooperative movement (p. 238).

Debates about the pace and scale of agricultural collectivization after 1949, as delineated in Chapter 2, unfolded against the backdrop of tensions between cadres from China’s previously Nationalist-dominated “white areas” (*baiqu* 白區) and cadres from Communist-controlled “red areas” (*hongqu* 紅區). Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇 was the foremost advocate of moderate agrarian policies inspired by the principles of New Democracy (*Xin minzhu zhuyi* 新民主主義), such as supply and marketing cooperatives (*gongxiao hezuoshe* 供銷合作社). As head of the North China Bureau (*Huabei ju* 華北局), Liu Shaoqi also favoured cadres who, like himself, came from white areas. Liu’s main political rival Gao Gang 高崗, the “King of the Northeast” (*Dongbei dawang* 東北大王), happened to hail from a red area and supported an immediate socialist transformation of Chinese agriculture via the formation of mutual aid teams. Even at the highest levels, as Hou clearly demonstrates, policy disagreements intertangled with factional feuds.

Chapter 3, the book’s longest and most important section, shows that in Shanxi these factional divisions overlapped with internal competition between cadres from the Taiyue 太岳 base area, many of whom found favour with Liu Shaoqi and were able to ascend to high-level official posts, and less influential cadres from the Taihang 太行 base area. Foremost among the politically frustrated Taihang cadres was governor of Shanxi, Lai Ruoyu 賴若愚, who had lost out on an appointment as first provincial party secretary to Cheng Zihua 程子華, a supporter of the supply and marketing cooperatives advocated by Liu Shaoqi. To bolster their political position and catch the attention of higher-level party leaders, Lai Ruoyu and his allies followed Gao Gang in arguing for collectivization via mutual aid teams as a mechanism for tightening party control over farming regimes. Investigations conducted in Wuxiang 武鄉 county in Shanxi’s Changzhi 長治 prefecture in summer 1950 found widespread antipathy towards mutual aid teams among rural residents. Yet Hou’s painstaking archival research reveals how, to justify *expanding* the functions of mutual aid teams, local reports were edited, simplified, and distorted as they moved up the administrative hierarchy from the local to the central level and from internal to public circulation.

Wang Qian 王謙, Changzhi prefecture’s party secretary and Lai Ruoyu’s confidant, called for mutual aid teams to collect community funds (*gongjijin* 公積金)

from members and restrict freedom of exit in spring 1951, proposing the formation of higher-level collective organizations dubbed “agricultural producers’ cooperatives” (*nongye shengchan hezuoshe* 農業生產合作社). Not surprisingly, given their resonance with the views of Gao Gang, Liu Shaoqi and the North China Bureau, to which Shanxi province was subordinate, attacked the measures that Lai Ruoyu and Wang Qian spearheaded as a discredited form of “agrarian utopian socialism” and a violation of New Democracy policies. When Lai and Wang proposed setting up ten experimental cooperatives in Changzhi in March 1951—despite explicit opposition from the North China Bureau—it triggered a bitter debate. But factional feuding came to an abrupt halt when Wang appealed directly to Mao, who came down in favour of Shanxi’s proposal. Thanks to Mao’s intervention, by autumn 1951, Lai and his allies successfully manipulated local initiatives and exploited divisions within the PRC leadership to get their version of agricultural producers’ cooperatives implemented nationwide, and the Taihang faction firmly consolidated its control over Shanxi.

What happened in Shanxi during the early 1950s, writes Hou, exemplified “how official reports were modified and distorted to meet the specific agendas of particular interest groups” (p. 238). Party leaders gained access to “reality” only through information passed upward by various levels of subordinates and through numerous layers of distortion. This process would later reach its catastrophic apogee during the Great Leap Forward, but Hou indicates that it started much earlier. In this sense, “the CCP became a victim of its own power structure” (p. 240).

From its inception, as Hou contends, collectivization did not go smoothly. The much-lauded success stories of Changzhi’s trial cooperatives, as made evident in Chapter 4, masked their heavy reliance on government loans and other forms of state assistance, as well as widespread inflation of agricultural production figures. Though the decision to initiate experimental cooperatives in Shanxi came from the provincial leadership, as Hou indicates, rural residents, who put aside their many misgivings and joined cooperatives due to political ambitions, personal connections, economic calculations, opportunism, fear, and other considerations, “were not merely passive recipients” of orders from above. Some cooperative members even managed to modify the rules of these organizations by “bargaining” with leaders to alter income distribution and reduce the rate of community funds collected (p. 140).

During the early stages of China’s Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement (*Huzhu hezuo yundong* 互助合作運動), inspired by the Shanxi prototype and initiated with Mao’s endorsement in winter 1951, cadres at the county level and above, who were already preoccupied with the turmoil of the Three-Anti Movement (*Sanfan yundong* 三反運動), rarely got involved. In the absence of significant intervention or oversight, village heads, rural cadres, and activists took the lead in organizing cooperatives and adjusted official policies to meet local conditions, with many prioritizing agricultural output rather than getting organized. Farmers, at this stage at least,

retained considerable leeway to make their own choices and sometimes steered the campaign to their own advantage.

However, as the Three-Anti Movement and the attacks on capitalism initiated by Gao Gang spread to the countryside in spring 1952, as shown in Chapter 5, the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement grew increasingly politicized. The North China Bureau tried to preach caution. But the radical approach pioneered by cadres in Shanxi held sway and Changzhi prefecture continued to build its reputation as a vanguard in the movement. Village cadres came under direct political pressure, as organizing cooperatives became the litmus test of obedience to the party line. In this highly charged political atmosphere, economic factors were no longer a consideration. Cadres displaying “rash tendencies” frequently employed coercion and violence to make private farmers surrender their property to cooperatives and attacked the sideline employments on which many rural residents depended. Increasing scale, stepping up the pace of collectivization, and fulfilling quotas were top priorities. By late 1952 and early 1953, the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement had sapped the energy of China’s rural populace. Though the “spring famine” (*chunhuang* 春荒) of 1953 (pp. 190–91), which Hou believes to have “wreaked havoc across the nation” (p. 202), demands far more in-depth analysis than it receives in this volume, she holds that the campaign severely disrupted the agricultural economy in Shanxi and elsewhere. Crop production fell; rural unrest broke out in many locales. Ultimately, the central party leadership issued directives, circulated as the “Three Documents” (*San da wenjian* 三大文件) in March 1953, to rein in the movement and check its “excesses” for the sake of maintaining agricultural output.

Perhaps most tellingly, in May 1953 Tao Lujia 陶魯筋, the provincial leader who directed the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement in Shanxi, undertook a critical review of the campaign. Tao acknowledged that cadres at various levels had overstated increases in agricultural production, that the success of Changzhi’s first ten experimental cooperatives was exaggerated, and that “the peasants’ enthusiasm for collective labor had been overestimated.” Admitting that Shanxi’s leaders had not considered opposing opinions and that “rash tendencies” emerged as a result, Tao asked rural cadres to focus on agricultural production and “downplay the ideological role of mutual aid teams and cooperatives.” These critical remarks “cast a pall over Shanxi’s quest for collectivization over the previous three years” (pp. 198–99). Even Shanxi’s provincial leaders had lost their enthusiasm for the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement, and by summer 1953 the campaign had come to a virtual standstill.

Some rural cadres were unwilling to “rectify” the cooperatives that they had only recently established. But, as Hou argues in Chapter 6, the biggest obstacle to correcting the adverse effects of the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement was Mao and his belief in the necessity of moving forward with collectivization to achieve an immediate socialist transformation. In summer 1953 Mao began to actively

pursue this agenda. Driven by what he saw as an urgent need to increase agricultural productivity, Mao grew “obsessed with the virtues of large-scale cultivation.” A crisis in the PRC’s efforts to procure grain from the rural sector in 1953 led the central government to implement its system of Unified Purchase and Unified Sale (*tonggou Tongxiao* 統購統銷), while also providing Mao with a platform to assert “the necessity of building agricultural producers’ cooperatives; the more, the better” (p. 232). Despite its early failings, by late 1953 the drive to establish agricultural cooperatives gained greater momentum, laying a foundation for the “high tide” of collectivization that would follow.

Hou bases these arguments on an extensive range of documents collected from the Shanxi Provincial Archives, the Jincheng 晉城 Municipal Archives, the Changzhi Municipal Archives, and the Wuxiang County Archives. The book shines in its discussion of the national- and provincial-level political intrigues that underlay the cooperative movement. But curiously, given her immersion in these local archival sources, Hou avoids engaging in comparative micro-scale historical analysis. Although in some sections Hou moves beyond Shanxi to discuss developments in other parts of China, she pays scarcely any attention to the diverse ecologies, economic conditions, forms of social organization, and cultural legacies that must have shaped histories of cooperativization as they played out at the local level. Changzhi prefecture, Wuxiang county, and other sites that figure prominently in the narrative come across as mere place names rather than spaces in which meaningful and multidimensional lived experiences unfolded in dialogue with state-initiated campaigns. (In addition to its frustrating lack of Chinese characters, the book does not contain any maps.)

What differentiated collectivization in Shanxi from other parts of China? Did the Mutual Aid and Cooperation Movement of 1952–1953 have the same effects on agricultural production in every locale? Was it an unmitigated tragedy *everywhere*? Did all rural residents perceive and respond to it in the same way? What social, ecological, and political factors led to different local outcomes in this stage of collectivization? Hou opts not to consider these questions. The book’s inattentiveness to local particularities is especially striking given that, in Chapter 1 and elsewhere, the author takes Chinese communists to task for failing to understand “Chinese peasants,” overlooking “the magnitude of regional differences in China,” and simplifying “the complex reality of the rural situation” in ways that conformed to their ideological presuppositions (p. 58). Yet this limitation does not in any way detract from Hou’s overall contribution. Her ambitious, provocative, and expertly researched monograph provides an essential starting point for future research on the early history of collectivization.

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