A Guide for 500 Million Peasants
Advancing Along the Socialist Road

— Commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Publication of Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s “On the Question of Agricultural Co-operation”

by TAO CHU

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TEN years have elapsed since Comrade Mao Tse-tung, on July 31, 1955, made his report On the Question of Agricultural Co-operation at a meeting of secretaries of provincial, municipal and autonomous region committees of the Chinese Communist Party.

China has experienced earth-shaking changes in that decade. Our socialist revolution has won great and decisive victories on the economic, political and ideological fronts. Our socialist construction has advanced at unprecedented speed and achieved great and phenomenal successes in agriculture, industry, national defence, science and technology.

The most decisive of the factors contributing to these victories was that the whole Party, by holding aloft the banner of Mao Tse-tung’s thinking and particularly by following the Marxist-Leninist line profounded by Comrade Mao Tse-tung in his report for solving the agricultural question, speeded up the socialist transformation of agriculture and provided a timely solution to the problem of agricultural co-operation, a solution which was followed by the founding of the people’s communes on the basis of co-operation.

The solution of the agricultural question in accordance with socialist principles is the key problem of China’s socialist revolution and construction. Collectivization of agriculture has not only provided very favourable conditions for the vigorous development of agriculture, but has laid a really solid base for vigorous growth of the national economy as a whole.

China used to be an extremely poor and backward agricultural country. That is why the rapid organization of more than 500 million individual peasants into a socialist collective economy and their advance to a common prosperity along a broad socialist road in such a country is a great event of world significance.

Our country’s practice in the past decade has mercilessly refuted the fallacies of the Right opportunists in the Party on the agricultural question. It has thoroughly shattered the vicious attacks of the Khrushchev revisionists on China’s socialist transformation of agriculture.

Agricultural collectivization is a great and profound revolutionary movement and sharp struggles between the socialist and capitalist roads take place throughout its course. Comrade Mao Tse-tung pointed out: “To bring our more than 500 million peasants through socialist transformation is a project of earth-rocking, heaven-shaking dimensions which cannot possibly be achieved in an atmosphere of calm seas and gentle breezes.” That is the way things stands. It is impossible to finish off an old system and bring a new one to birth without severe class struggles. Such a struggle was reflected within the Party in the form of the Right opportunists’ opposition to the movement for agricultural co-operation. Under the leadership of Comrade Mao Tse-tung, the whole Party waged serious struggles against them. Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s On the Question of Agricultural Co-operation draws a Marxist-Leninist conclusion about that struggle.

The movement for agricultural co-operation started in China immediately after completion of the land reform. The land reform ended the system of feudal ownership which had restricted the growth of the productive forces; it overthrew the landlord class, weakened the rich-peasant economy and helped restore and develop farm production. The economic position of the masses of poor peasants improved and many of them became middle peasants. After the land reform, however, individual peasant ownership was spread over the rural areas like a vast sea. Such ownership, however, had only a limited vitality and, in a short time, it changed from being a factor promoting growth of the productive forces into a serious obstacle to growth.

Though the economic condition of the peasants was improved or even enormously improved after they got

land, because of our vast population, insufficient cul-
tivated land and backward farming methods, many of
them still had difficulties or were not well-off. Parti-
cularly grave was the fact that not long after land
reform a new process of polarization began in the
countryside. On the one hand, the spontaneous ten-
dency towards capitalism grew: new rich peasants
emerged and many well-to-do middle peasants strove
to become rich peasants. On the other hand, many
poor peasants, lacking sufficient means of production,
still lived in poverty; some fell into debt, while others
sold or rented the land distributed to them. If this
polarization had gone unchecked, a grave situation
would have arisen in which capitalism would have
gulfed the countryside.

Under such circumstances, the question arose:
Should the Party continue to lead the peasants forward
and guide them to take the socialist road or call a
halt, discard the peasants and let them follow the
bourgeoisie and rich peasants? This extremely serious
political issue confronted the whole Party at that time.

At this moment of crucial importance, Comrade
Mao Tse-tung told the whole Party clearly that the
masses had an immense enthusiasm for socialism and
that it was necessary to lead the peasants forward
firmly. He pointed out in his report On the Question
of Agricultural Co-operation that the poor peasants
and the lower strata of both the new and old middle
peasants, who accounted for 60-70 per cent of the na-
tion's rural population, were enthusiastic to take the
socialist road and that this enthusiasm was even
stronger among those who had a higher level of poli-
tical consciousness. The new upsurge of the socialist
mass movement in the countryside that took place in
the summer of 1955 was a concentrated expression of
this socialist enthusiasm of the masses of poor peasants
and lower middle peasants.

However, the bourgeoisie and rich peasants were
firmly opposed to the movement for agricultural co-
operation. The well-off or relatively well-off peasants,
who made up 20-30 per cent of the rural population,
were vacillating about taking the socialist road and
some were trying hard to push along the road to capi-
talism. Behind the well-off middle peasants, stood
landlords and rich peasants giving them support.
Standing on the side of the bourgeoisie, the rich pe-
asants or the well-off middle peasants who had a spon-
taneous tendency towards capitalism, the Right oppor-
tunists in the Party did their best to find pretexts to
oppose the agricultural co-operation movement led by
the Party.

The Right opportunists were stunned by the emerg-
ence of several hundred thousand co-operatives in our
countryside. They opposed the socialist revolutionary
movement of the peasants at that time on the pretexts
that the development of co-operatives had allegedly
gone "beyond the real possibilities," "beyond the level
of the political consciousness of the masses" and "be-
yond the level of the cadres' experience." Instead of
giving warm support to the co-operative movement in
its vigorous development, they poured cold water on
it and advanced the so-called policy of "resolute con-
traction." Comrade Mao Tse-tung sharply criticized
these people. He said: "In a revolutionary period
those who only know how to follow the routine paths
cannot see this enthusiasm at all. They are blind. All
is dark before them."

The attitude towards the peasants' co-operative movement—to let it develop or
"chop" it off, to help it ahead vigorously or work for
its "resolute contraction," to guide it with enthusiasm
or to find fault with it— is, in the final analysis, a
question of how to deal with the enthusiasm for social-
ism of the more than 500 million peasants, particularly
the broad masses of poor and lower-middle peasants,
as well as a question of whether or not we want to
give active leadership to the peasants and guide them
to take the socialist road.

1955 was a great year of an unprecedented upsurge
in our socialist revolution. Why did the Right oppor-
tunists spare no effort to oppose agricultural co-opera-
tion at that time? This had its deep-going social roots.
As Comrade Mao Tse-tung said: "Instead of taking
the standpoint of the working class and thinking on
behalf of the whole country and the entire people,
they always take the standpoint of the bourgeoisie,
the rich peasants or the well-to-do middle peasants who
have a spontaneous tendency towards capitalism, and
think on behalf of the few" and their stand means
"seeing only the comparatively small number of well-
to-do peasants, and forgetting about the great majority
—the poor and not well-to-do."

Socialist transformation of agriculture was a life-
and-death struggle for the bourgeoisie. By transform-
ing the individual small-peasant economy into a so-
cialist collective economy, we eradicated the main root
of capitalism in the countryside and left the urban
bourgeoisie isolated. In such circumstances, it was by
no means strange that certain people in the Party
subject to the influence of the bourgeoisie and rich
peasants should come forward to oppose the co-opera-
tive movement. This was in full accord with the law
of class struggle. In the period of the socialist rev-
olution, these people still remained in the period of
the bourgeois democratic revolution as regards their
attitude towards the peasant question. This showed
that they were not proletarian revolutionaries but
bourgeois revolutionaries.

With the strategic view of a great proletarian
revolutionary, Comrade Mao Tse-tung discerned the
essence of the matter and foresaw its lines of devel-
opment. At this great, crucial moment of change in
history, he once again elaborated for the whole Party
the programme of socialist revolution, waged a timely
struggle against the Right opportunism in the Party,
and called on the whole Party to go all out to arouse
the masses and give active leadership to the movement
for agricultural co-operation.

August 20, 1963

2 Ibid. p.44.
3 On the Question of Agricultural Co-operation, Eng. ed.,
Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1962, pp.21, 17.
The peasant question is an extremely important one which must be solved in the course of the proletarian revolution. China is a big country in which the peasants make up more than 80 per cent of the population, the peasant question is therefore of paramount importance. Our Party has led the peasants in carrying out the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution, and accumulated a particularly rich store of experience on the peasant question. After Comrade Mao Tse-tung's scientific summing up, this experience has greatly enriched and developed Marxism-Leninism.

1. On the Question of the Peasants' Place in Socialist Revolution and Construction

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has always attached the greatest importance to the peasant question. As early as the beginning of the democratic revolution led by our Party, he pointed out more than once that the peasant question was the basic question of the Chinese revolution and that the strength of the peasantry made up the main force of the Chinese revolution; he went on to note that the Chinese democratic revolution was in essence a peasant revolution and that the Chinese revolutionary war was essentially a peasant war. However, the Right opportunists within the Party turned a blind eye to the broad masses of the peasants and regarded the democratic revolution as mainly a matter of the bourgeoisie. In another way the "Left" opportunists neglected the special role of the peasants in the Chinese revolution, they stressed work in the cities as the centre of gravity and made the middle-of-the-road forces the main direction of attack, thus pushing the peasants into the arms of the bourgeoisie.

In the course of the Chinese democratic revolution, Comrade Mao Tse-tung thoroughly refuted these erroneous views and defined a Marxist-Leninist line for the Chinese revolution; i.e., that under the leadership of the proletariat, we should give full play to the revolutionary enthusiasm of the peasants, shift the centre of gravity of the Party's work to the countryside, give a

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free hand to the development of peasant guerrilla warfare, build revolutionary base areas in the countryside, encircle the cities from the countryside, lead the revolution to victory step by step and finally seize state power throughout the country. By carrying out the correct line of Comrade Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese Communist Party finally won the great victory of the people's revolution in China with its more than 600 million people. This is a great achievement unprecedented in the revolutionary movement of the world's proletariat.

In the period of socialism, Comrade Mao Tse-tung has continued to view the peasant question as an extremely important one. He said: “We have a farm population of over five hundred million, so the situation of our peasants has a very important bearing on the development of our economy and the consolidation of our state power.” The scale of our socialist revolution and socialist construction and the speed of their development depend on the policy we adopt to solve the peasant question and the agricultural question.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung correctly solved the relationship between the socialist transformation of agriculture and the socialist transformation of capitalist industry and commerce in the cities. He views the socialist transformation of agriculture as the key link in the whole chain of the socialist revolution because, with the socialist transformation of agriculture, the ties between the bourgeoisie and the peasants are cut, the source generating capitalism on a mass scale is eliminated, and urban capitalist influences are thus isolated. In our country where small-peasant economy held the upper hand, this thesis is particularly important.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung negated the view that cooperation should develop slowly and stressed that the advance of socialist transformation in agriculture should be quickened. In this way, we would not only be able to solve the question of agriculture more quickly but greatly promote the socialist transformation of urban individual handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce, thereby developing the socialist revolution more smoothly, more extensively and more thoroughly. Subsequent facts have fully proved the correctness of this policy. It was under the impact of the movement for agricultural co-operation that the upsurge in the transformation of individual handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce took place in 1956.

One of the most fundamental questions in socialist construction is how to handle the relationships between the workers and peasants and between industry and agriculture. Some people held that in building socialism it was sufficient to pay attention only to the development of industry. Comrade Mao Tse-tung refuted this harmful viewpoint. He said: “We must on no account look at industry and agriculture, socialist industrialization and the socialist transformation of agriculture, as two things which can be separated and isolated from each other, nor must we on any account emphasize the one and underrate the other.”

Industry is closely interrelated with agriculture. In socialist construction, it is, of course, extremely important to develop industry, especially heavy industry. But that development must take agriculture as the foundation and the problem of food, clothing and other consumer goods must be solved first. Food grains and other foodstuffs come from agriculture; light industry which provides people with clothes and other consumer goods gets most of its raw materials from agriculture too. Moreover, the funds used in the building of heavy industry are mainly accumulated from agriculture and light industry; the labour power necessary for the development of industry has to be furnished by the countryside; and only by taking the countryside as its main market, can industry have broad prospects for development. Agriculture is the foundation of the national economy. Therefore, only by combining the industrialization of the country with the socialist transformation of agriculture, and the rapid development of industry with the rapid development of agriculture can there be a firm and sure guarantee for the development of our national economy as a whole.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has summed up the experience gained in our construction and put forward the general policy of taking agriculture as the foundation and industry as the leading factor in developing our national economy. The nation's plans, he pointed out, should be arranged in the order of priority of agriculture, light industry and heavy industry. By implementing this policy, we will be able to bring about a rapid development of agriculture and a simultaneous development of both agriculture and industry, and achieve a high-speed development of industry on a strong foundation of agriculture, so as to bring about a continuous and high-speed development of our national economy as a whole. Our tremendous achievements in socialist construction have been gained precisely under the guidance of this general policy. This policy, mapped out by Comrade Mao Tse-tung, is a profound reflection of the objective laws of the development of a socialist economy and a new and important contribution to Marxism-Leninism in the question of socialist construction.

2. On Applying the Principle of Integrating the Theory of Development of the Revolution by Stages With the Theory of Uninterrupted Revolution in Guiding the Socialist Transformation of Agriculture

Comrade Mao Tse-tung has at all times guided the revolutionary movements in China, including the peasant movement, in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist principle of integrating the theory of the development of the revolution by stages with the theory of uninterrupted revolution. He has pointed out that the aim of the peasant movement led by our Party is not only to

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fulfill the task of the democratic revolution but to guide
the peasants onto the broad road of socialism and com-
munism. These two tasks are different in nature and
should be tackled separately in two different revolu-
tionary stages. And yet we must not build a "Great
Wall" between these two revolutionary stages but strive
to link them together. We must endeavour, during
the stage of the democratic revolution, to prepare condi-
tions for carrying out the socialist revolution, and with-
out interruption launch the struggles of the socialist
revolution immediately after fulfillment of the task of
the democratic revolution.

In contravention of the Marxist-Leninist principle
of integrating the theory of the development of the rev-
olution by stages with the theory of uninterrupted
revolution, the Right opportunists within the Party
viewed the two revolutionary stages as being diametri-
cally opposed to each other. After the land reform, they
advocated the "four great freedoms": hiring labour,
giving private loans, trading, and buying and rent-
ing out land in the rural areas in order to guarantee
the private ownership of property and consolidate the
so-called "new democratic order." These comrades were
purely bourgeois revolutionaries. They hoped that the
Chinese revolution would come to a halt at the democ-
tratic stage.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung thoroughly refuted these
views. As early as the period of democratic revolution,
he pointed out that the poor peasants must be made
predominant politically in the land reform, that the
rich peasants must be isolated politically and the rich-
peasant economy weakened simultaneously with the
wiping out of the feudal-landlord economy; and that
active steps must be taken to get the peasants organized
into mutual-aid teams (which contain the rudiments of
socialism) and co-operatives after the realization of
"land to the tillers." All this provided favourable con-
ditions for the subsequent development of the move-
ment for agricultural co-operation.

Later, when the land reform was in the main com-
pleted throughout the country, Comrade Mao Tse-tung
again warned that the revolution should not be brought
to a halt and that the revolutionary enthusiasm of the
masses should not be allowed to cool down. He main-
tained that the revolutionary consciousness of the peas-
ants must be enhanced continuously and that the move-
ment for agricultural co-operation must follow close on
land reform so that the peasants could be guided to
continue their advance without interruption and trans-
form their individual economies into collective econo-
mies.

Comrade Mao Tse-tung worked out for China's
agricultural collectivization all the various forms
suitable for a gradual transition to socialism. This is
another brilliant example of creatively applying the
principle of integrating the theory of the development
of the revolution by stages with the theory of uninterr-
upted revolution.

The movement for agricultural co-operation in
China followed the method of setting up typical ex-
amples of organization for the rest to follow and of
popularizing them step by step. It was carried out in
three stages that differed from one another but were
interconnected. The first stage consisted in mobilizing
the peasants to form agricultural producers' mutual-
aid teams on the principle of voluntary participation
and mutual benefit. These teams contained only the
rudiments of socialism. In the second stage, the peas-
ants were called on to set up semi-socialist agricultural
producers' co-operatives on the basis of the mutual-aid
teams. In the third stage, the peasants were called on
to take a further step forward by combining their forces
to set up larger, fully socialist agricultural producers'
co-operatives. Later, when there was a greater growth
of agricultural production, the people's communes were
set up in answer to the demands of the broad masses
of the peasants. This step-by-step transformation of
the small-peasant economy was conducive to the gradual
enhancement of the socialist consciousness of the peas-
ants and the realization of agricultural collectivization
at a relatively early date. It also avoided the adverse
effects on production which might have resulted from
catastrophic changes in the relations of production and
thus guaranteed a steady rise in agricultural production.

Can it be said that with the establishment of the
socialist economic system in the countryside the socialist
transformation of agriculture has been completed? Some
persons think so. In their eyes, the socialist revolution
in ownership of the means of production is the last
revolution in human history, or, at least, the last rev-
olution that involves class struggles. Comrade Mao
Tse-tung has repudiated this view. He holds that,
while the turning of the individual peasants into col-
lective peasants constitutes a great change in the mode
of production and their way of life, the socialist trans-
formation of agriculture is far from being finally com-
pleted.

Facts have shown that as long as there are remnants
of private economy in the countryside the peasants will
retain some of the characteristics of the small producer,
and it will hardly be possible to avoid polarization
among the peasantry. Moreover, in the long run, the
mere attainment of the present system of collective
ownership is not our ultimate goal. In the future, when
conditions mature, the system of collective ownership
which is relatively small-scale and represents a rela-
tively low degree of public ownership must still be
turned gradually into a system of collective ownership
that operates on a larger scale and represents a higher
degree of public ownership, so that the transition from
socialism to communism and the elimination of the es-
tential differences between workers and peasants and
between town and countryside can finally be achieved.
It is quite obvious that in order to fulfill such an his-
toric task it is necessary to continue to push the socialist
revolution steadily forward in the countryside in line
with the principle of integrating the theory of the de-
velopment of the revolution by stages with the theory of
uninterrupted revolution.

(To be continued.)