

How The “Red Terror” Arose: A Case Study of
Hailufeng, 1927–1928

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Abstract

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Marked by the random killing and plundering of landlords, gentry, and all “counter-revolutionaries”, the “Red Terror” prevailed from 1927 to 1930, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) started its own road of revolution. The “Red Terror” in Hailufeng, Guangdong from May 1927 to February 1928 is notorious for its long duration, heavy casualties, and appalling atrocities. Why and how did such a “Red Terror” arise there at that time? This thesis is concerned with its manifestations, development, and dynamics. It argues that the “Red Terror” was jointly shaped by the CCP’s mobilization and the local peasants’ spontaneous action. In light of their ingrained violent tradition, the inhabitants preferred violence, manifested in rampant clan feuds and banditry, as well as brutal torture. By analyzing the mindset of Peng Pai, I attempt to showcase the CCP’s ideological mobilization, a critical factor that appealed for class struggle and introduced a framework to legitimize and expand massacre in the name of “eliminating counter-revolutionaries.” Even so, the CCP’s policy and tactics only incited the peasants’ spontaneous violence, which was out of the Party’s control due to its undisciplined organization. The “Red Terror” brought unexpected and undesirable results to both sides.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Hailufeng and the Local Violent Tradition.....	7
Violent Tendency.....	9
Violent Form.....	12
The CCP’s Ideological Mobilization: the Case of Peng Pai.....	18
Implanting Class Consciousness.....	19
Shaping the Enemy: The Legitimization and Radicalization of Violence.....	27
The CCP, Peasants, and the “Red Terror”	31
The Development and Manifestation of the “Red Terror”	31
The CCP and Peasants in the “Red Terror”	42
The CCP’s Policy and Tactics	43
The CCP’s Organization.....	46
The Peasants’ Spontaneity	53
Conclusion	61
Appendix 1: Abbreviation of the Major Sources.....	67
Appendix 2: Map of the Hailufeng Soviet (The Largest Range): September 1927–February 1928.....	68
Reference	69
Primary Sources	69
Secondary Sources	70

After returning, each delegate must kill at least ten reactionaries, and each must also lead the peasants and workers to kill ten more to a total of twenty per delegate: with three hundred delegates killing six thousand altogether. But that's not enough. There will still be a lot left... so we must kill! kill! kill! Until the water in Shanwei Harbor and Magong Bay turns red and the clothes of each comrade are tainted red with the blood of the reactionaries! Our last slogan: Long live the red!¹

—Peng Pai, (November 21, 1927)

Introduction

In July 1927, the alliance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang (Nationalist Party, GMD) broke down completely, and the CCP started its own road of revolution. Until around 1930, the main revolutionary form of the CCP was to seize power (establish the soviet regime) by launching armed riots of workers and peasants in the whole nation, following the model of the October Revolution in Russia. Therefore, this phase is sometimes considered as the “Riot Revolution” of the CCP.² At that time, one prominent and pervasive phenomenon was the “Red Terror,” especially in the second half of 1927 and the first half of 1928. It was characterized by the random killing and plundering of landlords, gentry, and all alleged “counter-revolutionaries” in the hundreds of riots.

The “Red Terror” has long been a neglected subject. On the one hand, the “rioting period” is often regarded as the “failure period” of the CCP: the riots were suppressed, the masses were slaughtered, the party members were lost, and the party organization was in

¹ *PW*, 293. I refer to Galbiati's translation and make some revisions. See Fernando Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and the Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 294.

² Ren Wei, “The Origin of Revolutionary Violence: A Case Study of Red Terror,” *Bulletin of Historical Research* 51 (June 2014): 53, DOI:10.6243/BHR.2014.051.051.

chaos. This view resulted in fewer concerns about this period. On the other hand, the “Red Terror” had long been kept low-key in the CCP’s later official narrative of its history. It is regarded as an example of the “Leftist Putschism” of the CCP in its early time, and the cruelty and disorder amid the terror hindered the revolution by the fear it incurred.

Yang Kuisong and Liu Hao pay attention to the “Red Terror” in their works where the former focuses on the decision-making process at the central level, and the latter elaborates on the manifestations of the “Red Terror” in Guangdong and briefly discusses its causes.³ Ren Wei further makes an in-depth analysis of its policy origin, development logic, manifestations, and undesirable consequences.⁴ However, they fail to detail the process of the “Red Terror” going from policy to practice in a certain place. In other words, how did a cruel and chaotic “Red Terror” arise? Why did it take place in that way? These questions provoke my closer examinations in this thesis.

The CCP started to lead riots in Hailufeng, Guangdong as early as April 1927. After several failed attempts, the CCP established the Hailufeng Soviet in November 1927 and maintained it until the following spring. It was widely acknowledged as the CCP’s first rural soviet, and took the lead to carry out the land revolution, hence enjoying a special status in the CCP’s revolutionary history. The “Red Terror” in this course showcases some

³ Yang Kuisong, *“Zhongjian didai” de geming: guoji dabijing xia kan zhonggong chenggong zhidao* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2012), 192–205; Liu Hao, “Lun Guangdong tudi geming zaoqi de hongse kongbu xianxiang,” *Theory Research* no. 2 (2009), 16–17, China Academic Journals (CNKI).

⁴ Ren, “Origin of Revolutionary Violence,” 51–86.

aspects for us to approach the questions above. Furthermore, the rich primary sources, the relevant CCP's archives in particular, make this research achievable.

Considering the causes and manifestations of the “Red Terror” in Hailufeng, there were two major types of interpretation. The first originates from the anti-communists at that time who attributed it to the “communist bandits” and underscored the CCP's sedition.⁵ The second regards the “Red Terror” as the peasants' spontaneous violence; as Fernando Galbiati argues, the “Red Terror” is usually simple revenge in peasant practice.⁶ Stressing the roles of different actors involved in the terror, both views virtually downplay, if not neglect, the role of the other side. The roles of each other are mechanically, but not interactively, interpreted, analogizing a marionette in their respective narratives. If the “Red Terror” was mobilized by the CCP, why did its mobilization succeed in Hailufeng?⁷ Or, if the terror was merely the peasants' vengeance, why did the violence reach an appalling apex at this time, while not in other periods?

In general, two contingencies accounted for the long duration and conspicuous casualties caused by the “Red Terror” in Hailufeng. First, when the uprising happened, generals of the GMD, Zhang Fakui (1896–1980) and Huang Qixiang (1898–1970) were

⁵ See *CHJ*.

⁶ Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 332.

⁷ There is no fixed definition of mobilization. Charles Tilly defines mobilization as “the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action.” He defines resource broadly as “labor power, goods, weapons, votes, and any number of other things, just so long as they are usable in acting on shared interests.” See Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 7. In this paper, mobilization is generally used as a synonym of incitation, which highlights the “rise up” of the participants, while does not refer to the “control” over them. Mobilization and control are treated separately.

contending for the dominance of Guangdong against Li Jishen (1885–1959), the governor then. Neither side was able to reach and control the Dongjiang region where Hailufeng was located, as it is distant from Guangzhou. This situation yielded a favorable “political opportunity” for the CCP. Second, after the failure of the Nanchang Uprising and the Guangzhou Uprising, the remnant armies led by the CCP arrived in Hailufeng and were reorganized into the Red Army. Their discipline and fighting capacity were far better than those of the local peasants’ army, which vitally guaranteed the existence and expansion of the Soviet. These two accidental factors largely determined why the Hailufeng Soviet could last for four months, while in other areas, most riots or soviets lacking similar chances were quickly crushed by the GMD. However, they still could not fully explain why and how the “Red Terror” arose in Hailufeng. Therefore, instead of dealing with the causes of these contingencies, I shall treat them as a given historical context in this research and elaborate on how the CCP and the peasants, under such a milieu interacted and jointly shaped the “Red Terror.”

This paper argues that the “Red Terror” in Hailufeng was both mobilized and spontaneous. The communist ideology, i.e., the theory of class struggle, the organizational strength, and the military support provided by the CCP made the “Red Terror” different from past spontaneous violence. Without the mobilization of the CCP, the peasants relying on the patriarchs of their families and lineages could not have organized themselves, let alone participate in an unprecedented collective action in the name of class struggle.

Nonetheless, the “Red Terror” unfolded in the form of the peasants’ spontaneous violence. First, it was the peasants, not the CCP that were the true implementers of the “Red Terror,” who took this chance to take revenge for various reasons. Second, the local people’s strong vindictiveness and the horrendous torture that prevailed in the “Red Terror” were common and widespread in their daily life. This forcible tradition constituted the background of how and in what forms the “Red Terror” arose.

This paper consists of three sections. The first part briefly introduces the geographical environment of Hailufeng and the deep-rooted tradition of spontaneous violence there, which is analyzed from two aspects, violent tendency and violent form. The second section analyzes the CCP’s mobilization of the peasants. Although the actual political mobilization relies on some concrete organizational structures, this part mainly deals with how the peasants were mobilized ideologically. Peng Pai (1896–1929), an outstanding and charismatic indigenous leader of the CCP in Hailufeng, is the focus of the case study in this section. I attempt to present how he implanted class consciousness into the ideological spectrum of these peasants and how he legitimized violence by shaping their enemies. His practice played an important role in the spread of the “Red Terror” in Hailufeng. I shall trace his steps and the incessantly radical trend in his thoughts, so as to cast Peng Pai’s case into the CCP’s mobilization of the peasants.

The first two sections show a relatively static background and a fragment of mobilization, while the third part centers on the dynamic process of the “Red Terror” which

was jointly and interactively made by the CCP and the peasants. It will illuminate how the CCP and the peasants influenced and exploited each other, which brought about unexpected miseries for both sides during and after this turbulence. Therefrom, my study reveals the dynamics of the “Red Terror” in Hailufeng, depicting a series of factors including the CCP’s policy, its mobilization and organizing ability, and the spontaneity of the local peasants. This research accordingly enriches our understanding of the complex relationship between the CCP and the peasants during the revolution. In a general sense, it might be explainable in the ultimate question concerning why and how the communist revolution took place in China.

Hailufeng and the Local Violent Tradition

Hailufeng is the joint name of Haifeng county and Lufeng county, which are situated in the coastal zone in the southeast of Guangdong Province.⁸ It is close to the sea in the south, with vast waters, a winding coastline and many bays and good ports. In the other three directions, it is surrounded by mountains and rather isolated from the outside world. Internally, it is mostly plain and hilly with a dense water network, which is suitable for farming. In the 1920s, there was a population of approximately 800,000 in Hailufeng, and

⁸ Haifeng before 1930 consisted of nine districts, the capital of which was Haicheng (county seat), Gongping, Meilong, Chishi, Shanwei, Qingkeng, Jiesheng, Qingcao and Ketang respectively. Lufeng consisted of four districts, the capital of which was Donghai (county seat), Jieshi, Jiazi, and Hetian. See Haifeng xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Haifeng xianzhi* vol. 1 (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2005), 66; Lufeng xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Lufeng xianzhi* (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 2007), 128.

the majority of them were peasants. The inhabitants were mainly Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka.⁹

One noteworthy feature of Hailufeng was the prevailing lineages, a form of social organization under which the people lived together on a large scale. For example, the 5,000 residents in Lujing village of Haifeng were all surnamed either Cai or Lü. The most powerful lineage was the Lin in Meilong, with thousands of members that almost predominated the whole third district of Haifeng.¹⁰ Lufeng was nearly the same, especially in its northern part, where several big lineages dominated the surrounding areas, each with thousands of clansmen. The lineages in Hailufeng were so powerful that they affected many aspects of people's lives, which will be detailed later in this paper.¹¹

Another feature was the ingrained violent tradition, which has been noted by scholars in some ways. Political scientist Roy Hofheinz, Jr. analyzed more than 2,000 counties in China, and identified eight "radical hotbed" counties, which underwent the "rapid spread and prolonged success of the Communist movement" because of some "background social factors." Featuring "peasant intransigence" in his words, Haifeng was among the eight counties.¹²

⁹ Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 9–15.

¹⁰ Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 16.

¹¹ At that time, the predominance of lineage was a feature all over Guangdong. The Guangdong District Committee (GDC) of the CCP notes that, "In Guangdong, sometimes there are 70,000 or 80,000 people with the same surname living in a village. In Lianping county of Dongjiang region, 160,000 people surnamed either Yan or Xie live in a village... they get married with the same surnames." See *GNZ*, 24.

¹² Roy Hofheinz, Jr., "The Ecology of Chinese Communist Success: Rural Influence Patterns, 1923–45," In *Chinese Communist Politics in Action*, ed. A. Doak Barnett (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 73–77.

Hofheinz did not expound on “peasant intransigence,” but from his later monograph, this notion can be inferred as the peasants’ long-time struggle and the prominent violence.¹³ However, this paper holds that it is inaccurate to generalize the situation in Hailufeng as “peasant intransigence.” First, the endemic violence was not limited to the peasants, but was a shared feature among the inhabitants of the whole region. Second, “intransigence” is too vague. This paper argues that there was indeed a special (though not unique) social factor in Hailufeng and specifies it to be the persistent and ubiquitous violent tradition, which facilitated the development of the CCP and the occurrence of the “Red Terror.” I shall examine the local violent tradition from two aspects: violent tendency and violent form.

Violent Tendency

The people in Hailufeng had a strong violent tendency, implying that they could easily exert violence on others for various reasons. In this respect, Hailufeng was not special, for the people in Guangdong had long been widely believed to have a strong inclination for violence. It is noted as follows:

People in Guangdong are intransigent, aggressive, indignant, and indifferent to their families. They easily start fights against others in the name of beating enemies whenever they cannot get along well. Such violence cannot be forbidden by statutes and exhortation, and there were cases with thousands of people crowding and armed fighting. This is because big surnames usually live together, consisting of families from tens to thousands. The slightest disagreement could make them fight against other surnames on an agreed day. If they were short of hands, they would hire

¹³ Roy Hofheinz Jr., *The Broken Wave: the Chinese Communist Peasant Movement, 1922–1928* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).

mercenaries...When the fights started, the flags were raised, drums beat, guns fired. It was like facing a great enemy, and could last for several days.¹⁴

It is no doubt a form of prejudice to see the people in Guangdong as a whole as having a fierce and belligerent nature, but there are numerous examples to show that in history they often had disputes over trivialities and then began to fight for decades or even hundreds of years. This paper briefly introduces the various causes of the violence among the inhabitants in Guangdong to show that violence was fairly easy to be provoked and imposed. These cases are not restricted to Hailufeng, but it is reasonable to believe that they are also applicable owing to the similar socio-economic environment, culture and customs in Guangdong.

To start with, various economic interests and access to resources accounted for the most disputes. In addition to land boundary disputes, Lang Qingxiao summarizes six kinds of economic and resource conflicts, including: market (for dominance), ferry (for passengers), sandy land (for the coastal land occupied by others), reclamation (for forest, water grass, idle land, mountain land, pond, and buffalo), water, and sacrificial land.¹⁵ Even so, the list is not comprehensive.

Besides, disputes were often caused by the local social structure, culture, and customs. The GDC exemplifies feuds on account of traditional novels. The *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* is a novel that acclaims the brotherhood and loyalty of Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and

¹⁴ Xu Ke, *Qingbaileichao* vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1984), 2207.

¹⁵ Lang Qingxiao, "Qingdai yuedong xiedou jishi," *Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies* 4, no.2 (January 1935): 107–108, http://commons.ln.edu.hk/ljcs_1929/vol4/iss2/6.

Zhang Fei, the King and the generals of the Shu Han Kingdom in the Three Kingdom period. Influenced by it, the peasants of Nanhai county once clashed with those of Shunde county, Shunde's called on "surnames Liu, Guan, and Zhang unite!" and so those who were surnamed Liu, Guan, and Zhang in Nanhai ran away, then Shunde's started to shoot Nanhai's remaining peasants. Similarly, animosity existed between the surnames Luo and Su, based on an unknown novel.¹⁶

The GDC also observes the profound effects of superstition on the people's violent tendency in Guangdong, who were extremely keen on *fengshui* (geomancy), especially that about the placement of buildings and tombs. Lineage feud could flare up owing to "picking one piece of flower and leaf" from the other's land and could extend for decades, for it was seen as a damage to *fengshui*.¹⁷ Superstition was once used by the CCP to mobilize peasants in the future riots in Hailufeng. On the eve of the uprising in October 1927, Lin Daowen (1904–1931), one of the leaders of the Soviet, saw a group of peasants go to the temple to ask if Bodhisattva would send troops to Hailufeng. Lin found the "Taoist priest" in the temple and asked him to tell the peasants that the troops would certainly come when he practiced divination for them.¹⁸

¹⁶ GNZ, 24.

¹⁷ GNZ, 25; Lang, "Qingdai xiedou," 110.

¹⁸ Xinghuo liaoyuan bianjibu, *Xinghuo liaoyuan* vol. 1 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), 196. Bodhisattva shared the same place with Taoist priest is a manifestation of the complexity and mixture of the local popular beliefs, which were more like superstition rather than religion.

Litigation was another common cause, for the people were obsessed with it. The GDC notes that, “There are often lawsuits that cannot be settled in eight or ten years. This is because people in Guangdong are pugnacious, and they often would rather break their families than surrender. Meanwhile, the gentlemen are also good at provoking conflicts.”¹⁹ Far more than the above, the Hakka-Punti conflict, weddings and funerals, dragon boat races, family honor, banditry, or simply retribution were all triggers for bloody fights.²⁰ It is no exaggeration to say that there were numerous factors of violence in the rural areas of Guangdong, which had been a hotbed for the occurrence and development of the “Red Terror,” as people could easily find reasons and were willing to resort to violence.

Violent Form

Xiedou, literally “armed affrays,” usually refers to the “endemic lineage feuding” that prevailed in Guangdong and Fujian.²¹ It was the most common form of violence there, and was infamous for its early origin, long duration, wide distribution, and ease of initiation. *Xiedou* was first used by the concerned officials during the Yongzheng reign (1723–1735) to refer to the fights among the lineages in southern Fujian and eastern Guangdong. Since it was a kind of “private conflict” and not aimed at the state regime, it had not been

¹⁹ GNZ, 25–26.

²⁰ GNZ, 26; Lang, “Qingdai xiedou,” 106–111; Harry J. Lamley, “Hsieh-tou Violence and Lineage Feuding in Southern Fukien and Eastern Kwangtung,” *Newsletter for Modern Chinese History* 3 (March 1987): 55, http://www.mh.sinica.edu.tw/MHDdocument/Publication/Publication_589.pdf.

²¹ Lamley, “Violence and Lineage,” 44.

suppressed by the state and had eventually deteriorated to be a “grave social ill” in South China.²² Cheng Hanzhang (1762–1832), who was once an official in Guangdong, wrote:

Among the evil customs in eastern Kuangtung nothing is worse than *hsith-tou*. This custom arose in Chang-chou and Ch’uan-chou of Fu-kien, spread into Ch’ao-chou [Kwangtung], and gradually infested Hui-chou, Chia-ying, Kuang-chou, Shao-chou, and Nan-hai. The situation is worst in Ch’ao-chou. The affliction has persisted for many years and there is no end to it.²³

The occurrence of *Xiedou* was closely related to the lineage in Guangdong. First, the basic forms of *Xiedou* were the “surname affrays” based on kinship and “district affrays” based on territorial connection. But they were both commonly practiced by the whole family instead of individuals. Second, *Xiedou* was mainly financially backed by the collective property of the lineage, which was usually in the hands of several headmen. They often provoked *Xiedou* for personal interests. Moreover, with the lineage being ruled and the collective property being controlled by them, the clansmen in the lineage did not have the freedom to decide whether or not to participate in *Xiedou*. It was common for the rank-and-file of the lineage to be asked to “substitute” when the government wanted the perpetrators, while the leaders who incited the fights escaped by offering bribes to local officials. In return, the scapegoats would receive honor within the lineage, and their families would also be given financial compensation. For many impoverished men, this

²² Harry J. Lamley, “*Hsieh-tou*: The Pathology of Violence in Southeastern China,” *Ch’ing-shih wen-t’i* 3, no.7 (November 1977): 26, Project MUSE.

²³ This quotation is taken from Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 432.

was a business, with their life as the cost. These features more or less accounted for why the *Xiedou* in Guangdong could last so long.²⁴

The scale and cruelty of *Xiedou* were also shocking. Let alone the small-scale affrays everywhere and all the time, there was a tremendous Hakka-Punti *xiedou* that lasted for thirteen years and killed more than 100,000 people in the Xijiang region in Guangdong from 1854 to 1867. The scale was no less than a peasant uprising or civil war.²⁵ The cruelty augmented when foreign firearms with longer range were introduced. On the one hand, the operation of such foreign firearms required professional training, which gave birth to the skilled gunman as mercenaries. Even in small-scale *Xiedou*, recruiting gunmen had become common. On the other hand, the foreign firearms altered the style of warfare. In the past, it used to be open pitched battles between the two sides on an agreed day, but then the two sides fought more from bunkers, and often launched raids on villages, killing, burning, and pillaging. Harry Lamley pointed out that in addition to the heavy casualties and property losses, decline of lineage power, and economic depression, the chronic *Xiedou* made the local people stultified in mind, sullen and cruel in character, and barbarized and shameless in behavior.²⁶

Xiedou in Hailufeng was similar to that of other regions of Guangdong barring its specific form. The most typical form was the Flag feud between the Red Flag and Black

²⁴ Lamley, "Pathology of Violence," 6.

²⁵ See Liu Ping, *The Hakka-Punti War in Guangdong, 1854–1867*, (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2003).

²⁶ Lamley, "Pathology of Violence," 29.

Flag, a kind of district affrays, which was mainly based on territorial connection rather than kinship affiliation. It was recorded that the Flag feud stemmed from the affrays among the strong lineages during the 1820s, not involving the weak ones at first. But the weak lineages got embroiled in it around the 1860s, and began to unite to resist the strong lineages. At last, the Flag feud was formed, which had been expanded to tens of small towns in Hailufeng and adjacent areas.²⁷ The Flag feud was so egragious that it even caused the opposition between father and son, and among brothers:

If the father of a family belongs to the Red Flag, the son's wife belongs to the Black Flag, when the Red and Black Flag fights, the son will fight for the Black. Thus, the father and son fight against each other. The situation is the same among the brothers.²⁸

It is noted that the two Flags “wage war for the sake of it and for no other reason.” Additionally, someone had preserved blood-stained clothes for a long time to urge his sons and grandsons to take revenge. Ghastly dismemberment and cannibalism were also observed, as “the hearts of captured enemies would be sliced up and served round with garlic for condiment.”²⁹

Another major form of violence was banditry. “The banditry was most rampant in Guangdong. They plunder and kill, collect fees, and drop bombs every day.”³⁰ One news article in 1926 reported that there were 100,000 bandits in Guangdong and 40,000 in the

²⁷ Lamley, “Violence and Lineage,” 53; Lang, “Qingdai xiedou,” 117–121; Robert Marks, *Rural Revolution in South China: Peasants and the Making of History in Hai Feng County, 1570–1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 66–75.

²⁸ GNZ, 26.

²⁹ Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 23, 17, 25.

³⁰ Lang, “Qingdai xiedou,” 111.

Dongjiang region, whose mountainous environment benefited bandits' activities. The Dongjiang region had become "a world of bandits."³¹ The CCP also noted that Hailufeng was plagued by banditry.³²

Aside from the large number and widespread distribution, the bandits in Guangdong were also disreputable for their chilling savagery. One gang in Xuwen county slaughtered in ways including "killing all, burning all, and looting all," "shooting living targets," taking turns raping women and killing them by inserting bamboo sticks into their vaginas, inserting sharpened bamboo into the anuses of captured children, pushing all the captured people into wells and throwing big stones to kill them, eviscerating strong adult men and taking their livers to fry. After they were pacified, more than 100 carts were enlisted to load and send the bones of the victims back from their lair.³³ Another gang in Taishan county "slaughtered men, ate human liver, drank human bile" as well as adopted a variety of torture. It included "planting live tree": tying people's hands and feet and burying them alive in the mud; "plucking pedicle of persimmon": hanging people in the tree and "plucking" their heads; "firing-clothes dance": forcing people to wear a straw raincoat and burning them. When the female chief was captured, people found several pieces of human gall bladder from her.³⁴

³¹ Kuang Xiao'an "Guangdong feihuo zhi gaiguan," *Guowen zhoubao* 3, no. 18 (May 16, 1926): 18–22, Dacheng Journals.

³² *GNZ*, 445–446.

³³ Guangdong wenshi ziliao bianjibu, *Jiu Guangdong daofei shilu* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou Press, 1997), 49–50.

³⁴ Guangdong wenshi ziliao bianjibu, *Daofei shilu*, 92.

Although there is no detailed record of the bandit activities in Hailufeng, and no such proof the local bandits were as brutal as those mentioned above, we have no reason to consider them “moderate.” The reason why the banditry in Hailufeng had not been recorded in detail might be that the local Flag feud was so pronounced that it eclipsed the violence of other subjects. But it did not change the violent milieu caused by the fragmentation of grass-roots power.

In conclusion, this section first shows that there was an extremely high violent tendency in Hailufeng, by which the inhabitants would readily take violence for various causes. It further presents the violent forms by introducing the prolonged and bloody *xiedou*, which mainly manifested in the Flag feud, and the rampant banditry in Hailufeng. In this regard, violence was normal in local daily life. As Galbiati puts it, there was a “tradition of rural militarization.”³⁵ Understanding this, people would not be surprised at the scale (casualties) and intensity (the cruelty of violence) of the “Red Terror” in the later time. That being said, the “Red Terror” emerged in the name of class struggle (at least nominally), which was introduced by the CCP. How was the class struggle brought by the CCP to the peasants? What is the significance? These are what the next part deals with.

³⁵ Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 34–35, 41–42.

The CCP's Ideological Mobilization: the Case of Peng Pai

Although Hailufeng was a hotbed of violence, the “Red Terror” under the CCP's leadership is distinguished from the past collective violence led by the headmen of lineages, the Flag, or secret societies. The CCP's role in the “Red Terror” can be analyzed from two aspects, ideology and organization. Leaving the examination of its organization to the third section, this part deals with the effects of the CCP's ideology, specifically the theory of class struggle.

First, class struggle changes the nature of the conflict. For example, *xiedou* is displayed by the affrays between lineages, which is a supra-class structure that consists of landlords and peasants, while class struggle requires the struggle of the proletariat against the capitalist. According to the CCP, the capitalists in the countryside were represented by the landlords and gentry, who were usually the leaders of their lineages and should be the targets of the class struggle. Thus, conflicts based on vertical cross-class relations give way to horizontal class relations.

Second, appealing to violence in theory, class struggle provides a new violence-legitimizing framework that encourages the peasants to exert violence upon their class enemies. Furthermore, class struggle propels the broadening of the targets. This is best showcased when the term “counter-revolutionary” was adopted, which is so subjective and inclusive to justify any killing. Peasants can wreak vengeance in the name of “eliminating

counter-revolutionaries.” Overall, by legitimizing violence and expanding the scope of targets, class struggle catalyzed the “Red Terror.”

This paper refers to the CCP’s application of class struggle as “ideological mobilization” and argues that the implantation of class consciousness is the core of this process. In terms of the CCP’s ideological mobilization in Hailufeng, Peng Pai, the major indigenous leader of the CCP, played a decisive role. Since the CCP’s activities were closely related to him, his practices exemplified the CCP’s ideological mobilization of the peasants in Hailufeng. As a result, this part takes him as a protagonist to analyze how he implanted class consciousness into the peasants, the significance of it, and how he legitimized the employment of violence. It ultimately aims to elucidate the role of the CCP’s ideological mobilization on the “Red Terror.”

Implanting Class Consciousness

Class struggle is not only an ideology, but also a requirement of action. Nonetheless, several factors prevented the peasants’ participation in class struggle. The first obstacle is the predominant lineages. Generally speaking, class relations are inhibited in places where lineage relations are strong. The landlords and the peasants may be closely connected by kinship, which goes beyond pure economic relations. The landlords provide protection and resources for the peasants, while the peasants offer manpower for the landlords. Robert Marks argues that “it is a system of oppression and exploitation, and one of protection and

security.”³⁶ Within such a patron-client system, the preponderant relation in the countryside was the vertical family relationship based on kinship, rather than the horizontal class relationship, based on socio-economic status.

The second hinderance is the “inherent weaknesses” of the peasants in the GDC’s words, including their “lack of concentration, strong localism, strong superstition, low self-confidence, deep ethnic belief, and strong familial relations and values.” It pointed out that “the six weaknesses are all obstacles on the way to the revolution, any one of which would inhibit the revolution. Peasants naturally have these weaknesses, so it is really not easy to mobilize them into revolution.”³⁷

The key to overcoming these difficulties is the implantation of class consciousness into the local peasants, which is best embodied in Peng Pai’s mind and practice. Peng Pai’s class consciousness originated very early, which could be dated back to at least his earliest existing writings in July 1921, where the “intellectual class” and the “poor class” were distinguished.³⁸ There were still some tints of anarchism at this time, that is, he called for a total destruction of society, but not a proletarian dictatorship. Even so, the class concept was undeniably a core part in Peng Pai’s mindset, and it was applied in all kinds of propaganda and mobilization consciously.

³⁶ Marks, *Rural Revolution*, 92.

³⁷ *GNZ*, 54.

³⁸ *PW*, 1–2.

In her book *Anyuan*, Elizabeth Perry reveals that Li Lisan (1899–1967) and others mobilized the coal miners in Anyuan by introducing foreign class ideas through “cultural positioning,” such as putting forward touching slogans, adapting traditional folk songs, and utilizing popular beliefs.³⁹ Coincidentally, Peng Pai took a similar manner of “cultural mobilization.” He was passionate and versatile, and had a great success by employing various cultural means to publicize the class concept to others.

Peng Pai’s methods covered scripting and performing plays, adapting folk songs, and other such activities. During the peasant movement, he once wrote a vernacular drama entitled “Miniature” in which he played a miserable peasant. This figure was not able to survive under the oppression and exploitation from the landlords even by selling his wife and son. He had to steal the rich men’s clothes in the middle of the night, but was almost arrested and beaten to death by a policeman. In this play, Peng Pai attempted to advocate that the peasants could not get rid of their tragic fate by working hard day and night, and the only way out was to unite and participate in revolution.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, he adapted folk songs, and here is an easy-to-follow excerpt:

Tung-ya! Tung! Tung! Tung!
The tenants curse the landlords
The tenants work the land to death
The landlords sit at home enjoying the white rice!
Workers stumble down in hunger
Lazy people stumble down in self-content!

³⁹ Elizabeth J. Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁴⁰ *PYS* 1: 94–95.

It is you who are muddle-headed!
It is not that your fate is bad!⁴¹

It challenged the peasants' belief of paying rent to the landlords with simple language. Through such a strong contrast of livelihood from the rest of the peasants' life experience, it debunked the landlords' exploitation of the peasant labor on which they relied to live a decent life. Peasants should awake and resist. Similar ballads composed by him included "beating the village chief to death first," "the peasant brothers are really miserable," and so on. They easily caught on and circulate, and their roles in changing peasants' mindset should not be underrated.

In his propaganda, Peng Pai was also good at using exaggeration and metaphor:

Once during a gathering he shouted out "Tiger! Tiger!", causing the peasants to scatter. When they came back after discovering the hoax, he told them in all seriousness that he had seen a "tiger" collecting rent and taxes; the rapacious man-eating tigers were the landlords.⁴²

Besides, other methods such as playing magic, playing records, performing lion dances, and teaching martial arts were also adopted by Peng Pai and his comrades.

The purpose of Peng Pai's practice was to make peasants "aware," which was embodied in three aspects of their mindset: changing their perception of the origin of their suffering, identifying the responsible party, and taking violent means to change the status quo. Making peasants aware also motivated them in practice to join the peasant association and get organized under its leadership.

When talking about the culture and mindset of the peasants in Haifeng, Peng Pai said:

⁴¹ *PW*, 331–332. The translation is from Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 97.

⁴² *PN*, 82. The translation is from Galbiati, *P'eng P'ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 94.

When we raised the question of China under the warlord-imperialist policy of ruining the nation, and politely asked their opinions, the majority of the peasants held to old views that had come down through the millennia: “Until the chosen son of heaven appears on earth there won’t be peace in the world. Once the chosen son of heaven appears all guns will be silenced and he will immediately become Emperor.” On the economic question of poverty and all kinds of hardship and oppression, the majority said, “It’s the will of heaven” and “We haven’t found a lucky site to live on [bad *fengshui*].”⁴³

When he went to the countryside and wanted to mobilize peasants by informing them of their suffering, he often got replies such as “Ah! It’s fate that our life is hard.” “Ah! Fate decides it: rent-collectors have been rent-collectors for ages, and farmers have been farmers.”⁴⁴

How peasants comprehended their suffering largely decided whether they would take action to change their life or not. Regarding misery as misfortune means that it is personal and mysterious, which can only be accepted as destiny in peasants’ opinion, without thinking about making a change. Moreover, people who hold this view are less likely to connect with people who suffer from similar experiences. They tend to focus on their own specific difficulties rather than seeing them as different representations of the same kind of suffering. Peasants were oppressed by landlords in different forms: some were forced to pay more rent, some were forced to do more work, and some were extorted by gentries. But they were likely to impute their hardship to the misfortunes instead of noticing the same origin of their oppression, the class of landlord and gentry.

⁴³ *PW*, 109. The translation is from Donald Holoch, *Seeds of Peasant Revolution: Report on the Hai Feng Peasant Movement* (Ithaca, NY: China-Japan Program, Cornell University, 1973), 18. Holoch’s book is a complete translation of Peng Pai’s famous work *The Hai Feng Peasant Movement*, which is written in January 1926.

⁴⁴ *PW*, 112–113. The translation is from Holoch, *Peasant Revolution*, 20, 22.

By implanting class consciousness, Peng Pai made the peasants realize that their misery was no longer an ill fortune, but an injustice caused by the oppression and exploitation of the class of landlords and gentry. Therefore, the peasants had both the target and the reason to fight against. “The Tenants Curse the Landlords” quoted earlier reflected these two aspects at the same time. As sociologist William A. Gamson argues, an “injustice frame” is required to channel the participants’ grievances to launch a collective action.⁴⁵ Finally, the class struggle under Marxism could be achieved only by violent revolution (at least in the communist revolutionaries’ minds), which legitimized the peasants to use violence under the new framework. If the disadvantaged peasants want to reverse their fate, they must overthrow the class of the gentry and landlord by violence. In this regard, class consciousness paves the way for class division within lineages and surmounts the peasants’ political inertia.

Moreover, class consciousness altered the action level of peasants by uniting the scattered individuals. Unity is the source of the peasants’ strength in Peng Pai’s eyes:

The peasants did not unite before, so they did not have the power to resist and had to choke with silent fury...

One day I emphasized that if peasants had an organization and unified their strength, then rent reduction could be carried out: the landlords certainly wouldn’t be able to withstand us; their hands would be tied. Such forms of oppression as blows with a club, chicken and money for the foreman, special deliveries to landlords’ houses, unreduced cash rent, rent increases, and land seizure could all be wiped out.

⁴⁵ William A. Gamson, “The Social Psychology of Collective Action” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. by A. D. Morris and C. M. Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53–76.

If we're not united, we have no power, and men without power are bullied. If you all want power, come now and join the Peasant Union.⁴⁶

The method to unite peasants was to mobilize them into the peasant associations. Of course, ideological propaganda alone was not sufficient for peasants to join the peasant associations, which must bring tangible interests to them. Realizing this, Peng Pai started by alleviating the difficulties of peasants' daily life. A leaflet in 1922, *The Peasant Association's Interests*, listed several potential benefits for the peasants if they joined the peasant association, such as preventing landlords from raising rent, improving cultivation and production, resisting extortion and war, mediating disputes, and relieving disasters.⁴⁷ These were all immediate and concrete interests that the peasants most cared about. This prototypical peasant association established several departments to take on actual works, including peasant schools, a welfare clinic with free medical treatment and half-price drugs, and loans for peasants.⁴⁸

How about the effects of Peng Pai's work? Peng Pai was once challenged during a speech by a peasant who argued that only once Peng's family reduced the rent would he believe what Peng had said. Someone nearby riposted before Peng spoke:

That's the wrong kind of talk. You farm Ming-ho's [Peng's family business title] fields, so if Ming-ho did reduce rents of course you gain something. Me, I don't farm Ming-ho's fields, how about me? So now it isn't a matter of us asking people for things, it's a matter of whether or not

⁴⁶ *PW*, 95, 115, 119. The translations of the second and third quotation are from Holoch, *Peasant Revolution*, 23–24, 29.

⁴⁷ *PW*, 13–15.

⁴⁸ *PW*, 120–128.

we can unite...Today we're not considering your personal problem, we're considering most people's problems.⁴⁹

When Peng Pai heard about this, he was overjoyed and thought he gained a comrade.

This case well exemplifies that some peasants no longer just focused on their own interests, but realized that this was a problem for all peasants with similar economic status. Subsequently, peasants who were hard to mobilize had really been mobilized. Around 200,000 peasants had joined the peasant associations in Hailufeng and its neighboring areas in less than a year since the beginning of the peasant movement in June 1922. After the GMD and the CCP's United Front began in 1924, which provided a favorable political environment, a similar model was extended to the whole of Guangdong with the development of the CCP's organization. The reversal of mobilization was also noted by the GDC, "when we went to the countryside to publicize, we could make them form peasant associations in less than half an hour."⁵⁰ A notice drafted by Peng Pai after the establishment of the Hailufeng Soviet in November 1927 evidently confirmed his purpose of implanting class consciousness and establishing a class identity which is beyond geographical and kinship identity: "Now, there is only class division and no difference among surnames and villages."⁵¹

Finally, before turning to the next part, one point needs to be addressed. The analysis of class struggle and class consciousness, specifically their roles in class division within

⁴⁹ *PW* 115. The translation is from Holoch, *Peasant Revolution*, 2.

⁵⁰ *GNZ*, 54.

⁵¹ *PYS* 1: 7.

lineages and the motives of peasants' collective action, should be best understood as an "ideal type" because of the complexity in reality. The CCP's organizational strength and lineage power were both uneven, implying that the class division was correspondingly not homogeneous in all places. Besides, peasants' mentalities varied from time to time. Once a collective action was launched, there would likely be a lot of free-riders joining in. Thus, it is questionable to determine any single motive of action. Nonetheless, the CCP's role and the changes brought by it should not be neglected or undervalued, which will be examined in the third section.

Shaping the Enemy: The Legitimization and Radicalization of Violence

Another important aspect in Peng Pai's mindset is "shaping of enemy," or an "upgrading of opponent." To be specific, it is not, or not primarily, about how much their opponents had really improved in strength, but more of a radicalization of discourse. Take the peasant movement in the preceding years as an example. The antagonists of the peasant associations were invariable during this course, namely the gentry, landlords, warlords, and bandits, while Peng Pai's reference to them gradually became more hostile. The neutral "gentry and landowner" first turned into "reactionary" and then "local tyrants and evil gentry." Finally, all the adversaries of the peasant associations had become inexcusable "counter-revolutionaries," who must be exterminated. Such radicalization of discourse legitimized the escalating violence and kept extremizing it. Through the *Anthology of Peng*

Pai, I attempt to trace the changes in his mind. While it is impossible to tell exactly when and for what reason his mind changed, the trend toward radicalization is identifiable.

In September 1921, Peng Pai had already appealed for radical social revolution to destroy the government, with nobles, warlords, and bureaucrats being the targets. This was prior to the peasant movement, a moment when he was still heavily influenced by anarchism. From the outset of the peasant movement to June 1924, he had been using the neutral terms “landowner” and “gentry” to refer to the opponents of the peasants. Besides, “warlord” was used to refer to Chen Jiongming (1878–1933) and his lackeys. “Evil gentry” first emerged in his report on June 18 1924, and became a representation of “reactionary forces,” which also appeared for the first time in his words. Up to this point, “local tyrant,” a term that was usually connected with “evil gentry” in his later writings and speeches, had not been used.

The turning point came in his speech at the end of 1924, when he first adopted the term “revolutionary” to describe peasants and soldiers, and “counter-revolutionary” to describe the “landlords and evil gentry,” who confronted the peasant associations. Since then, “counter-revolutionary” abounded in his discourses. Now that there were “counter-revolutionaries,” it was imperative to “suppress” them. In his article *The Haifeng Peasant Movement* written in January 1926, which reviews his work from 1921 to 1923, the original “landowner and gentry” in his early writings often resurfaced as “local tyrants and evil gentry.” “Revolutionary,” “counter-revolutionary,” and “suppress counter-revolutionary”

had all become high-frequency words and often arrived together.⁵² Another hot word was “reactionary,” which was first used in June 1924, and frequently appeared since then.⁵³ It was generally a synonym of “counter-revolutionaries,” all of whom must be eradicated. Meanwhile, the neutral terms like “gentry” and “landlord” appeared fewer times in Peng’s later writings.

The radicalization of discourse hit the peak during the rioting and Soviet period:

Killing all the reactionary forces in the countryside...

All the soldiers should rise up and shoot the officers who opposed the land revolution, whether they are platoon commanders or company commanders, or even the commander-in-chief. Those who teach us to oppose the land revolution should get their heads cut and bones crushed.

Then we rise up again, keep killing until there is no counter-revolutionary, only then could the regime be consolidated and eternal.⁵⁴

According to Wang Qisheng, the 1920s witnessed the rise of the discourse of “revolutionary.” “Revolution” was increasingly justified and sanctified, while “counter-revolution” was constructed as the most heinous sin, which was also the most ambiguous and arbitrary.⁵⁵ Any word or action that violates the will of those who controls the power of discourse can be defined as counter-revolutionary. As Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) said on February 19, 1927, “I only know that I am revolutionary, and anyone who wants to

⁵² *PW*, 3–7, 63–64, 66, 103–186, 202, 212, 255–293 *passim*. Even if we do not use specific words as indicators in a nominalism way, we can explicitly perceive the radicalization of violence in Peng Pai’s speeches by reading through his anthology.

⁵³ *PW*, 64, 74–293 *passim*.

⁵⁴ *PW*, 278–279, 292.

⁵⁵ See Wang Qisheng, *Geming yu fangeming: shehui wenhua shiye xia de minguo zhengzhi* (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2010), 67, 100–101.

thwart and oppose my revolution, I'll kill him [ge ta de ming]. That's all I know about revolution, and whoever defies me is counter-revolutionary!"⁵⁶ Whoever monopolizes on revolutionary discourse legitimizes its being and can deny that of the adversaries. Since "counter-revolution" was the most heinous sin, any means were justified to exterminate it. Anyone could have been "counter-revolutionary" so long as he violated the will of those who grasp the power of revolutionary discourse. This was true of Chiang Kai-shek, and also of Peng Pai.

By implanting class consciousness into the peasants, Peng Pai, or the CCP, successfully mobilized them. Class struggle thus impacted the existing rural social order by facilitating class division and appealing for violent struggle. Besides, the new violence-legitimizing framework provided by the theory of class struggle, especially the "counter-revolutionary" discourse, created great opportunities for peasants' spontaneous violence, under which they could wreak vengeance under the semblance of "eliminating counter-revolutionaries." As a result, it is not surprising that the violence became rampant and out of control in the suppression of the "counter-revolutionaries" during the rioting and Soviet period in Hailufeng.

⁵⁶ Qingdang yundong jijinhui, *Qingdang yundong* (n.p., 1927), 4.

The CCP, Peasants, and the “Red Terror”

Although the largest and most terrifying “Red Terror” occurred during the Soviet from November 1927 to February 1928, it did not crop up, but was the continuation and escalation of the violence with smaller scales in the preceding riots since April 1927. The first part of this section introduces the development and manifestations of the “Red Terror” throughout the CCP’s three uprisings and the Soviet period. The second part tries to set forth on why the “Red Terror” arose in such ways by examining the complex relations between the CCP and peasants in their interaction.

The Development and Manifestation of the “Red Terror”

On April 15, 1927, the GMD’s governor Li Jishen announced to purge the communists and other leftists in Guangzhou. In response, the CCP led the peasant self-defense army in Hailufeng to launch an uprising on the night of April 30, and immediately captured the county seats of Lufeng and Haifeng almost without facing resistance. This was the CCP’s first uprising in Hailufeng, though it was still under the banner of the GMD and aimed against the GMD rightists, instead of raising its own flag. Provisional governments were set up in Haifeng and Lufeng whose duty was “eliminating the counter-revolutionaries,” generally referring to the staff of all kinds in the former governments (the GMD’s and the warlord Chen Jiongmings) and tax agents.⁵⁷ The CCP acknowledged that, even though

⁵⁷ *HGS* 2: 2, 103; Zhong Yimou, *Hailufeng nongmin yundong* (Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Publishing House, 1957), 54–55.

an ad hoc revolutionary court was founded, it did not hold any trial of counter-revolutionaries — most of whom were shot by the peasants at their will.⁵⁸ Lin Daowen wrote that the peasants and workers were seeking revenge, killing and looting, with the casualties numbering over two hundred. But the CCP's leaders, like him, did not restrain such peasants' spontaneous violence.⁵⁹

However, the uprising was soon put down by the returned GMD troops. Haifeng and Lufeng were lost to the GMD on May 10 and 13, respectively. The peasant self-defense army withdrew and marched to Wuhan, Hubei under the command of the Capital Wu Zhenmin (1898–1927), but was raided by the GMD troops in Rucheng, Hunan. Wu was killed and the troops were scattered. The local peasants' armed forces in Hailufeng suffered great losses in personnel and weaponry, which affected their riots in the future.

In June, the GMD reduced its garrison troops in Hailufeng which, together with the local militia, amounted to around one thousand people. But they were separate and lacked cooperation. The CCP took the opportunity to rebuild the local armed forces, and constantly harassed the garrison from July to August. The CCP did not occupy any place, while the GMD and the militia were also unable to pacify them.

In late August, in order to reinforce the troops of the Nanchang Uprising, which were marching to Hailufeng, the Guangdong Provincial Committee (GPC) of the CCP

⁵⁸ *HGS* 2: 2, 103.

⁵⁹ Marks, *Rural Revolution*, 237.

dispatched special commissioner Huang Yong (1900–1970) to Hailufeng to reorganize the remnant peasants' self-defense army into a new local army. In early September, he led the CCP's second uprising, in which the county seats of Haifeng and Lufeng were occupied in a short time. The victory was not achieved by fighting, but by the rapid retreat of the GMD troops and the militia, who nearly gave up the two counties to the CCP. In fact, the discipline of the CCP's local army was lax and its fighting capacity was poor. The CCP's general, Liu Bocheng (1892–1986), recalled that the local army was really disorganized, which could not fight against the GMD's main forces with the assistance of the Red Army, and could not even deal with the landlords' militias alone.⁶⁰

After taking over the counties, the CCP expropriated property, food, and other necessities from “counter-revolutionaries.” Killing was demanded as well:

It would rather be excessively cruel to the counter-revolutionaries than keep the slightest mercy. Therefore, allowing the masses to kill is the most important point of the uprising. It is even better to kill the [innocent people] mistakenly than to let the counter-revolutionaries escape. This should be informed to the Party branches and comrades at all levels.⁶¹

There are not many records of the massacre. But the CCP admitted that the reactionaries in several places, like Gongping and Meilong, had been exterminated.⁶² So it is acceptable to believe that the casualties would not be lower than those of the first uprising. This time, the CCP was soon forced out after a nine-day occupation. Facing the GMD troops, the CCP did not resist, and again withdrew to the mountains and countryside.

⁶⁰ *PYS* 1: 385–386.

⁶¹ *PYS* 1: 457.

⁶² *HGS* 2: 122.

In October, about 1,300 remnant soldiers of the Nanchang Uprising in Hailufeng were reorganized into the “Red Army” (2d Division),⁶³ which was the only regular army of the CCP at that time. Meanwhile, the formal local armies in Haifeng and Lufeng were also established, with a total of about 1,000 people. They constituted the CCP’s main armed forces during the third uprising.

It is worth mentioning that there were still many landlords in Hailufeng after the two calamities. According to Robert Marks, the landlords suffered great economic losses from the peasant movement in the former years, and the fall of 1927 should have been their first time to collect the full rents of that year and even retrieve those of the previous years. Otherwise, they would lose another year’s rents. They realized the looming danger, yet many of them chose to take the risks.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, they lost in this bet on life. What they were going to face was an unprecedented “Red Terror.”

At that time, a war broke out between Zhang Fakui and Li Jishen, who were both unable to reach Hailufeng. The CCP seized the moment to launch the third uprising on October 30. Haifeng and Lufeng counties were taken over on November 1 and 5, and then the “Red Terror” was officially promoted and infested rapidly. Hundreds of landlords and

⁶³ There was only one regiment, the 4th Regiment, in this division. Therefore, it is the same to refer to it as the 2nd Division or the 4th Regiment. The paper generally quotes it as the 2nd Division.

⁶⁴ Marks, *Rural Revolution*, 247–248.

gentry were captured and killed in the towns of Hailufeng.⁶⁵ On November 6, the Haifeng

Provisional Revolutionary Government issued the order of “seven kills”:

1. All landlords who collect rent shall be executed.
2. Those who collaborate with landlords in illicit rent deals shall be executed.
3. All hidden land deeds shall be submitted to this government, or else the holders will be executed.
4. All debts are hereby abolished; those who collect debts from peasants shall be executed.
5. Underlings who collect rent for landlords shall be executed.
6. Those who conceal rental contracts shall be executed.
7. Those who have already collected rent from peasants must return it or be executed.⁶⁶

Although “twenty kills” and “twenty-seven kills” were also in the record, the actual manifestations of the “Red Terror” were more gruesome. “Eight or nine reactionaries were shot, and several others were beheaded, eviscerated, and left on the streets” on the anniversary of the October Revolution in Haifeng on November 7.⁶⁷ At one session of the Assembly of the Haifeng Soviet of Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers from November 18 to 21, Peng Pai beheaded a few reactionaries in person, and was substituted by a skillful executioner when tired, who killed tens of victims at a time. Their heads were hung on the platform, bloody, smelly, and nauseating.⁶⁸

Jiesheng, the capital of the seventh district, was a fortified citadel and used to be a garrison town on the southeast coast of Haifeng. The townspeople had been feuding with the peasants in the surrounding countryside for a long time. Thousands of peasants had been besieging Jiesheng for several days, but could not overpower the defenders, who

⁶⁵ *HGS* 2: 47.

⁶⁶ *HGS* 2: 12. The translation is from Marks, *Rural Revolution*, 249–250.

⁶⁷ *HGS* 2: 19.

⁶⁸ *CHJ*, 26.

would either win or die. Then, one battalion of the 2nd Division with 200 soldiers was dispatched by Peng Pai to assist the peasants, who also ordered, “We would rather kill one thousand innocents in Jiesheng than let one [counter-revolutionary] get away.”⁶⁹ Finally, Jiesheng succumbed, and a wanton slaughter and burning was initiated, at which 642 people were killed, according to the CCP. The bustling town was burned down and twenty buckets loaded with heads were sent back to Haifeng county seat by the peasants to celebrate the victory.⁷⁰

Jieshi, the capital of the fourth district of Lufeng, was also a fortress along the coast. There was an urban-rural feud similar to that of Jiesheng, that the townspeople despised and exploited the peasants. Thus, the peasants readily responded to the CCP’s mobilization in the third uprising and kept besieging and attacking, but could not conquer it until the middle of December 1927, with the help of the 2nd Division. It is recorded that more than three hundred corpses were found when the GMD retook Jieshi next spring, and those bodies were too damaged to be identified.⁷¹

From these two cases, it is clear that the peasants were unable to defeat their targets alone, implying that they would have not made such a “Red Terror” without the CCP’s leadership and military support. Yet the Red Army was at most a catalyst of the “Red Terror,” as it did not participate in the terror itself. Kim San (1905–1938), a Korean

⁶⁹ *CHJ*, 33.

⁷⁰ *HGS* 2: 219; *CHJ*, 33.

⁷¹ *CHJ*, 39.

communist witness, wrote that the Red Army “was humane and only killed as kindly as possible, with a gun” and “disciplined against torture.”⁷² The “Red Terror” was de facto a “carnival” of peasants’ spontaneous violence, at which the peasants were the true implementers, seeking retribution for various reasons.

For example, the magistrate of Zijin county was captured by the peasants, and begged the Red Army to shoot him to evade the peasants’ torture. But the division commander refused. Finally, the magistrate was sawed in two in a box “as gradually as possible,” during which the peasants even sometimes stopped to drink tea to prolong his agony. The peasants believed that this was a nemesis because the magistrate had ordered one of the leaders of the local peasant association to be killed in the same manner last year, whose father and brother were even forced to watch it. The magistrate was also responsible for the execution of one hundred peasants within his jurisdiction.⁷³ The peasants employed various forms of torture in reprisal. Grisly dismemberment of heads, ears, eyes, hearts, and breasts were everywhere.⁷⁴ Hailufeng thus showcased how inhumane and horrifying torture was rooted into local culture, as we have already had a glimpse of in the first section, and how they revived in the unfettered “Red Terror.”

⁷² Nym Wales (Helen Foster Snow) and Kim San (Chang Chi-rak), *Song of Ariran: A Korean Communist in the Chinese Revolution* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1972), 187–188.

⁷³ Wales and Kim, *Song of Ariran*, 188

⁷⁴ *CHJ*, 26, 85–86. *Eastern Times* (Hong Kong), November 17, 1927, 2, Chinese Periodical Full-text Database; Kuang Xiao’an, “Haifeng Lufeng chihuo ji,” *Guowen zhoubao* 5, no.11 (Mar 25, 1928): 1–3, Dacheng Journals; Wales and Kim, *Song of Ariran*, 325.

The scale of the victims also expanded. In the name of class struggle, the targets of the “Red Terror” were originally specified as the “corrupt officials, local bullies, evil gentry and landlords, spies and propagandists, former KMT police and guards, tax collectors, messengers, and all in any way officially serving the old authorities.”⁷⁵ As vague as they were, such labels at least required a certain social-economic status or profession. But the targets were quickly generalized into one category, the so-called “counter-revolutionary,” which was inclusive enough to justify any killing. Then, the terror was expanding, as anyone could be a victim. The scale of the violence and the various vicious torture converged and erupted into the “Red Terror.”

Kim San had been a member of the Revolutionary Court in Haifeng. Once an intelligent-looking young man was brought to the court whom was charged of being a “counter-revolutionary landlord’s son and a class enemy.” Besides such labels, evidence was his white hands and face. Kim San thought his face was “open and innocent,” and was reluctant to sentence him to death. Peng Pai smiled and told him:

“You are just as young and innocent as he,” he said. “Class justice is not personal but an essential measure of civil war. We must kill more, not less, in case of question. You don’t know the cruelty in Hailufeng under the landlords. If you had seen what I have, you would ask no questions. The peasants are a hundred times less cruel than the landlords, and they have killed very, very few in comparison. The peasants know what is necessary for self-defense, and if they do not devastate their class enemies, they will lose morale and have doubt in the success of the revolution. This is their duty and yours.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Galbiati, *P’eng P’ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 294.

⁷⁶ Wales and Kim, *Song of Ariran*, 186.

Any word would fade beside the savagery of the “Red Terror.” A few sources recorded that the CCP had set quotas for killing in each district of Haifeng and assessed their performance. The quota was passed down to the towns and villages successively.⁷⁷ Peng Pai was reported to declare that it was imperative to kill more than 40 percent of the whole population in Hailufeng.⁷⁸ Moreover, every time when the communists gave speeches, or the government of all levels organized mass meetings, several people were beheaded for celebration, at which heads became a trophy and decoration.⁷⁹ An opium smoker in Chishi, who once sold his wife and daughter to get money for opium, was the most notorious executioner in Hailufeng. “Attired in red coat and breeches and paid ¥2 per session, he could decapitate in one stroke with his left hand. He was eventually caught by the KMT, recanted, and confessed to some 200 beheadings.”⁸⁰

Morality was ruthlessly trampled. One boy was coerced to behead his father, and could not stop crying. His father sighed that he was doomed to die and asked his son to kill him. The boy could still not do so. Then the father was killed by someone else, and so was the son for his constant wailing. Other cases like the grandson’s being forced to kill his grandfather and the nephew’s being forced to kill his uncle were also observed. Some vicious boys played with the heads and limbs from the deaths, and cheered those who

⁷⁷ Kuang Xiao’an, “Haifeng Lufeng chihuo ji,” 1–2.

⁷⁸ *CHJ*, 27.

⁷⁹ *CHJ* 26; Kuang Xiao’an, “Haifeng Lufeng chihuo ji,” 1.

⁸⁰ Galbiati, *P’eng P’ai and Hai-Lu-Feng Soviet*, 307.

carried heads in the street.⁸¹ Cannibalism was not excluded either. For instance, Peng Pai was reported to invite the delegates from contiguous counties to have “human meat soup” at the banquet after the celebration of Jiesheng’s victory.⁸²

Another noticeable fact was the participation of disadvantaged groups in violence, such as women and juveniles. Women were usually vulnerable in the war, many of them suffered rape, torture, and slaughter, which was the same in Hailufeng. But this time many of them became the perpetrators as well. The CCP organized a women army, Powder-Gun Bridge, which was composed of around 300 women from Qingkeng, the sixth district of Haifeng. They were once invited to display their heroism, namely to carry out executions, and several young women won the cheers from the crowd with their prowess in decapitation.⁸³ The CCP also organized a Youth Guard consisting of about 300 juveniles, who were required to do anything they could to support the CCP and promote the “Red Terror.”⁸⁴

The “Red Terror” was carried out by employing the notion and color of “red” other than the bloodbath. Many roads, walls, and shops were painted red. The Haifeng Public Stadium was renamed “Hongchang” (Red Square), the Confucian Temple was renamed “Honggong” (Red Palace), Qingkeng and Qingcao (“qing” means green) became “Chikeng”

⁸¹ Kuang Xiao’an, “Haifeng Lufeng chihuo ji,” 1–3.

⁸² *CHJ*, 28.

⁸³ *CHJ*, 60–61.

⁸⁴ *HGS*, 208–209. Technically, this is a working plan drafted by the Dongjiang Special Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League. Here I treat it as one part of the CCP in Hailufeng.

and “Hongcao” (“chi” and “hong” mean read). Four main avenues were renamed Marx Road, Lenin Road, Libkenesi Road, and Luxembourg Road. Even human blood was used to write slogans, “Carry Out the ‘Red Terror’,” “Kill all the Reactionaries.”⁸⁵ Red in Hailufeng was not a symbol, but a fact.

The CCP catalyzed the expansion of the “Red Terror” by encouraging the peasants’ reckless slaughter and burning, which unexpectedly backfired in the end. The CCP once believed that “the somehow primitive peasant riots could not get rid of the primitive terror” and vindicated the “Red Terror” by a comparison with the GMD’s “White Terror” and seeing it as a just response.⁸⁶ However, the fact that thousands of the innocents had been killed divorced the CCP from the peasants. Many peasants thought that the CCP was a “killing party” and made rumors that the CCP would kill all young and old, which made people highly suspicious of the CCP.⁸⁷ In response, the Dongjiang Special Committee (DSC) of the CCP, the supreme party branch in Hailufeng, had to post a notice to deny such rumors and clarified that the CCP did not kill indiscriminately, but actually helped those vulnerable people in many ways.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, it is reasonable to believe that the “Red Terror” did not cease until the CCP’s fiasco at the end of February 1928. One

⁸⁵ *CHJ*, 43, 45, 55–56.

⁸⁶ *HGS* 2: 214, 223–229.

⁸⁷ *GW* 26, 139.

⁸⁸ *HGS* 2: 211–212.

execution list from February 15 shows that ten men were killed in Haifeng's third district, aging from 19 to 58. The 58-year-old man was charged with being "too old to work."⁸⁹

It is tough to give an exact number of casualties in the "Red Terror." One CCP report estimates that more than 3,000 "reactionaries" were killed.⁹⁰ According to another source, around 10,000 people died and tens of thousands of houses were burned. Refugees to Hong Kong alone amounted to more than 40,000, which accounted for 1/20 of the whole population in Hailufeng.⁹¹ One thing was certain after all, that Hailufeng during the "Red Terror" was undoubtedly a living hell.

The CCP and Peasants in the "Red Terror"

The foregoing part argued that even though the CCP's leadership and support were necessary, the true implementers of the "Red Terror" were the peasants in Hailufeng. But how did the CCP lead the peasants? How did the two actors interact and shape the "Red Terror" together? Why did the terror happen in this way? This part analyzes these questions from three dimensions, including the CCP's policy and tactics, its organization, and the peasants' spontaneity. It argues that the complex relations between the two actors, who wanted to capitalize on each other yet neither did well, that largely dictated how the "Red

⁸⁹ Marks, *Rural Revolution*, 259.

⁹⁰ *PYS* 1: 582.

⁹¹ *H CJ*, 25–54, 177–178.

Terror” arose. Such an awkward interaction brought unanticipated and bitter results to both sides.

The CCP’s Policy and Tactics

One high-frequency term in the CCP’s documents at that time was “military opportunism.”⁹² The GPC warned the branches in Hailufeng to prevent their activities from demonstrating “military opportunism,” and instead mobilize the masses into riots.⁹³ The GPC even took it as an excuse to not send weapons and ammunition there, “If you [the DSC] need bullets, you are committing ‘military opportunism’.”⁹⁴ After the CCP’s defeat in the spring of 1928, the GPC still ascribed the failure to the local party’s “military opportunism,” which made the peasants rely on the Red Army, and thus not fight by themselves.⁹⁵

“Military opportunism” is the opposite of the CCP’s policy of mass rioting, which was the main policy and central task then. What is the correct way of implementing mass riot?

The GPC’s instruction indicates some hints:

Riots must be the outburst of peasants’ action, instead of action of a few peasant armies or bandits...Peasants should hence be the main force in the riots everywhere, of which the peasant army is one part.

⁹² There is no explicit, official definition of this phrase, so I apply Chen’s definition: “military opportunism” refers to anyone (any activity) who (which) relies too much on strength. They decide whether a riot will take place or not based on military organization and the number of weapons, and thus belittle the strength of the masses; or only attach importance to military victory while neglecting the struggles of the masses; or even sacrifice the interests of the masses for military victory. See Chen Yaohuang, *Gongchandang difang jingying nongmin: eyuwan suqu de gongchan geming, 1922–1932* (Taipei: Department of History, National Cheng-Chi University, 2002), 164–165.

⁹³ *HGS* 2: 23; *GW* 7: 167–168.

⁹⁴ *GW* 26: 136; *HGS* 2: 24, 60.

⁹⁵ *HGS* 2: 273

[We should] call on the masses to encircle the enemies in all directions, charging in all directions, frightening them, and causing them disintegrate, rather than defeating it by a direct attack. This is of paramount importance in the rioting tactics.⁹⁶

The GPC believed that “only in this way can we not consume [sacrifice] too many soldiers and bullets, but disarm a large number of enemies and strengthen our own strength.”⁹⁷ It also held that the peasants’ participation in riots, i.e., slaughter and burning, was more important than a purely military victory or the occupation of some places. Such a policy explained why the division commander refused to shoot the magistrate of Zijin directly. The GPC issued a directive:

We should not kill the gentry and landlords entirely with the 2nd and 4th Divisions and the peasants’ army, but with the peasants as the main force. The 2nd and 4th Divisions are just auxiliary forces — of course, they should try their best to help the peasants. But only when the masses rise up to kill the landlords and confiscate the land can it be a true victory.⁹⁸

Evidently, the CCP encouraged and even required the peasants’ spontaneous action to riot, which evolved into the “Red Terror.” But how did the Party mobilize them? Why did the “Red Terror” escalate? The tactics of the CCP’s mobilization, namely a requirement of radicalism, may suggest an answer.

As was showed previously, even the peasant army could not cope with the militia alone due to their inferior weaponry and indiscipline, let alone the peasants. The peasants were

⁹⁶ *GW* 7: 139; *HGS* 2: 264. It is necessary to note that the CCP often blurred the distinction between “peasant” and “peasant army.” The peasant army sometimes specifically referred to the formal local peasant army (Haifeng Workers’ and Peasants’ Revolutionary Army and Lufeng Workers’ and Peasants’ Revolutionary Army, with around 1,000 members together), and sometimes expanded to include Red Guards, whose members were far more numerous than the formal peasant army. There were 37,800 Red Guards in Haifeng alone, with around just 1 percent of whom being the regular Red Guards, and less than 3.5 percent of whom were armed with guns. This implies that there was not much difference between the peasants and the Red Guards. It is difficult to distinguish them in terms of weaponry and discipline — they were both terrible. See *HGS* 2: 219–220.

⁹⁷ *HGS* 2: 243–244.

⁹⁸ *HGS* 2: 55–56.

usually not armed with firearms, but rather only with blunderbusses and spears, and they sometimes even went to the battlefield with bare hands. Under such a situation, impetuosity and morale were the most important when fighting, which necessitated a radicalism to maintain. As the GPC concluded:

The riots were always made by the masses' impetuous attacks toward the enemies, hinged on their revolutionary fanaticism and courage. But peasants are one hundred times more undisciplined than the urban workers. Any commander would be disappointed with the peasant army and would not believe it can fight. Indeed, the peasants have few good guns and even no bullets. They have to make an uproar and charge toward the enemies. If they balance cautiously, nothing can be done.⁹⁹

An example came along in the first uprising. The CCP had ordered the mass mobilization only two hours ahead of the riots on the night of April 30, 1927. According to the CCP, despite the requirement of secrecy, it was more about overcoming the peasants' apprehension and vacillation:

The peasants participate in riots due to a fervent and nervous atmosphere and the Party's intimidation. If the orders are issued too early, they will have time to discuss and deliberate, and there will be too many difficulties and problems. As a result, they will flinch, impeding the rioting masses.¹⁰⁰

The rationale of the burgeoning of the "Red Terror" surfaces from the words above. First, the CCP had to more or less cater to the peasants' own desires to attract and mobilize them, which encouraged their spontaneous action. Despite the rent-reduction and land distribution, the peasants were seeking killing, looting, and burning. Such ferocities had traditionally been parts of rural life. Consequently, their spontaneous action could easily evolve into a terror. As William Hinton argues, "Only the most severe provocation could

⁹⁹ *HGS* 2: 112–113.

¹⁰⁰ *HGS* 2: 102.

overcome the peasants' great reluctance to act and set them in motion. But once in motion, they tended to extremes of cruelty and violence."¹⁰¹ Second, fanaticism and impulse were necessary to maintain the peasants' morale, without which mass riots would be impossible. These two elements constituted the underlying logic of the "Red Terror," explaining why the "Red Terror" did not stop expanding and radicalizing until being halted by the intervention of the GMD troops.

The CCP's Organization

Although somewhat of an inevitability of the expansion and radicalization of the "Red Terror" has been shown, it is not sufficient to approach the interaction between the CCP and the peasants, which is the real historical process. The CCP had to mobilize the peasants by satisfying their desires and allowing their spontaneous action, while it also aimed for its own interests. As a communist party, its interests diverge greatly from those of the peasants. The CCP usually labeled itself as a liberator of the peasants and the representative of their interests, e.g., the policies of rent-reduction and land-distribution, which were only the methods to its communist ends. The peasants, however, were apathetic to the communist visions, and only focused on immediate and tangible interests. The CCP and the peasants were in reality two actors with different interests. In this sense, the "Red Terror" corresponded to the CCP's intention, but was not its ultimate aim. It was a way for the CCP

¹⁰¹ William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008), 54.

to expand mass riots and improve the peasants' political awareness and devote themselves into the communist revolution.

To reach its goals, the CCP needed not only to incite the peasants, but also to orient their spontaneity and manipulate their actions to subordinate them to the communist revolution. Aside from ideology, this requires certain organization. As we shall see, the CCP in Hailufeng successfully incited the mass riot, but failed to manipulate the peasants' spontaneous action. This was largely determined by the organization of the local CCP. This section hence aims to scrutinize the local CCP's organization and analyze why it performed in that way.

The CCP's successful incitation of the peasants in Hailufeng resulted from its organizational strength developed in the peasant movement. By fall 1926, the CCP had only 700 members in Haifeng. The number surged to around 4,000 by March 1927, when around 340 village-branches were set up among the 850 villages which had peasant associations.¹⁰² By February 1928, there were up to 12,000 members in Hailufeng, accounting for more than a quarter of the whole CCP's membership in Guangdong.¹⁰³

The CCP's solid foundation significantly propelled the revolution in Hailufeng. Dating back to the peasant movement, the number of district peasant associations in Haifeng was the third largest in Guangdong by May 1926, behind Chao'an and Guangning counties. But

¹⁰² *HGS* 2: 97.

¹⁰³ *GW* 26: 124.

there were 660 village peasant associations in Haifeng and 510 in Lufeng, which both far exceeded those of Chao'an and Guangning. Furthermore, there were 194,411 members of the peasant association in Haifeng, almost three times as many as Guangning's, which ranked second in Guangdong with 66,122 members. Lufeng was ranked third with 65,000 members.¹⁰⁴ It shows that the CCP's infiltration into the grassroots of Hailufeng was deeper than in other regions of Guangdong, implying it had better organizational strength in Hailufeng.

The data further reflects that the CCP's revolution is positively correlated to the large number of its members and branches. The more the party members and branches there are, the easier it is for the Party to incite the masses. The long time struggles against the gentry and landlords led by the CCP had also cultivated a large number of politicized peasants who willingly respond to its policies and acknowledged its leadership. This is one of the reasons why the CCP in Hailufeng could swiftly launch the riots and establish the Soviet.

Mass mobilization is not only influenced by the numbers of party members and branches, but also by the quality of the party's leadership. Such a difference is manifested in the contrast between Haifeng and Lufeng, which has long been overlooked by the existing scholarship.

¹⁰⁴ *GNZ*, 336–340.

According to the CCP, it had a better mass foundation and leadership in Haifeng, and there were more party members in Haifeng than in Lufeng. It is reported as follows:

The peasants in Haifeng are more powerful than those in Lufeng, since there are more than twice as many members in Haifeng as there are in Lufeng, and the Party's leadership in Haifeng is also better. It is estimated that there are more than 10,000 Party and League members in Haifeng, and about 5,000 in Lufeng. The organization of the peasant associations in Haifeng also developed earlier and were better than those in Lufeng.¹⁰⁵

It has been a consensus that the Party in Haifeng was better in more organized than its counterpart in Lufeng. "The party affairs in Lufeng were worse than those in Haifeng, which made the party in Lufeng unable to eliminate the reactionaries there and completely incite the people to rise."¹⁰⁶ To make a brief conclusion, the better leadership and more members of the CCP in Haifeng accounted for the difference in the mass mobilizations between the two counties. Such differences further demonstrate the indispensable role of the CCP's mobilization in mass riots.

That being said, the differences can only explain why the CCP's incitation of the masses was so successful, but cannot explain why the CCP failed to effectively orient and control the peasants' spontaneous action. In fact, the CCP's leadership in Haifeng was not invariably operative as there were too many drawbacks to the CCP's organization.

One case is the "December 28th Affair" at the end of 1927. The DSC received intelligence on December 27 that one army of the GMD's general Chen Jitang (1890–1954) had arrived at Hetian in Lufeng with around 3,000 people and would pass through

¹⁰⁵ *HGS* 2: 290. Another source recorded that there were 3,000 party members in Lufeng. See *GW* 26: 124.

¹⁰⁶ *GW* 26: 124.

Hailufeng to fight against Zhang Fakui's army. The DSC had "confirmed" the intelligence and decided that the two county party committees, two county soviets, and other affiliated institutions with itself evacuate from Hailufeng to the mountainous area in the north. Tens of thousands of masses fled in panic, too. However, it was proven to be fake intelligence the next day. Chen Jitang's army did not come. There were only opposing militias, who seized this moment to invade some areas in Lufeng and kill some peasants and party members.

The "December 28th Affair" exhibits how rickety the local CCP's organization was. First, the CCP was unable to check the intelligence in addition to the terrible reconnaissance. Second, the party members were so disorganized and undisciplined that the situation quickly developed out of control. According to the DSC, in the emergency joint-meeting, which was widely attended by local party members, "all" comrades were too scared to listen to the instructions and scattered afterwards. The DSC required one member of the Haifeng County Committee (HCC) to write slogans to boost morale, but he wrote wrong and incomplete ones in a hurry. The CCP did not prepare for any resistance, yet hastily escaped to the mountains in the north of Haifeng. The lively county seat of Haifeng became noiseless in only half a day.¹⁰⁷

The Affair also impeded the Party's activities. As the DSC reflected:

¹⁰⁷ *GW* 26: 29-31.

The HCC has lost its authority in front of the masses. The people's organizations were empty shells, the county soviets fled in panic, and the comrades of two county party committees were isolated and helpless, just like the lost children... The Party branches' activities were really a mess. In a word, the HCC is still a disorganized and inpotent party! ... The Party in Lufeng is even more pitiful. The staff in various departments have not been tested, but are speculators or who had received disciplinary punishment. The Party branches are not sound, and the comrades are baffled... The Party and our people are simply nonexistent in Lufeng!¹⁰⁸

The GPC, which was infuriated by the blunder, ordered the CCP in Hailufeng to reorganize. It accused them of "military opportunism," negligence of peasants and workers, and lack of democracy within the Party. It further attributed all the mistakes to the intellectuals — the local Party was full of intellectuals who were not ideologically reliable and were opportunists. Therefore, it required the CCP and the Soviets in Hailufeng to substitute the intellectuals with peasants and workers in the decision-making bodies of all levels, who should be the leaders or the majority.¹⁰⁹

How about the situation after the reorganization? It was still depressing. In the Dongjiang Peasants' Congress from January 3 to 5, 1928, it is reported as follows:

The peasant delegates were very slack. They could not attend the daily meetings on time. Many entered the conference hall by twos and threes after the meeting had started. They only liked chatting in the dormitory or watching the lion dance and singing songs on the street. Their performance at the meeting was not good. Some were either whispering, dozing off at the table (the delegates from Haifeng were a little bit better), or shivering due to the cold weather. Particularly, they did not pay attention to the ending of the long reports...

There was neither proposal nor decision in the conference. The delegates did not care about it... The delegates rarely, if never, expressed their opinions and criticism and discussed. There was no good result in the meeting.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *GW* 26: 58–59. About the chaotic performance of the CCP in the "December 28th Affair," also see *HGS* 2: 169–173.

¹⁰⁹ *HGS* 2: 196–201.

¹¹⁰ *HGS* 2: 181–182.

The situation was virtually the same during the Second Haifeng Party Congress in late January 1928, as reported:

The delegates did not receive [political] education and training. They asked if non-communists could be elected members of the county party committee. They mistook it as an election for the magistrate. Some delegates had been the party members for just twenty days.¹¹¹

It is also recorded that the delegates were typically distracted at the conference and careless about it. In the same report, the HCC complained that the delegates censured the DSC at first, yet instantly became silent after the representative of the DSC, Peng Pai's refutation. The peasants had a cult of Peng Pai. Despite realizing his mistakes, most of them did not dare to criticize him. Rather, they turned to reproach the HCC severely.¹¹²

The poor organization of the CCP was closely related to the peasant party members. The CCP's membership in Hailufeng mushroomed several times in a very short time, of which most of the increment came from peasants. One HCC report from mid-January 1928 wrote that the party members had increased by 7,570 to a total of 10,000, of which 85 percent were peasants.¹¹³ As mentioned earlier, the peasants had different interests than the CCP's, and needed to be politically trained and educated by the CCP, e.g., implantation of class consciousness, to surmount their spontaneity and serve the communist revolution. But with such a great number of untrained peasants pouring into the Party, the distinction

¹¹¹ *HGS* 2: 195–196. About the slackness and indiscipline of the peasants, also see *HGS* 2: 177.

¹¹² *HGS* 2: 195–196. This report was written by the HCC to the GPC. Interestingly, in this report, the HCC criticized its direct supervisor, the DSC, and its leader, Peng Pai. Generally speaking, the inferior's public criticism of its superior violates the organizational principles of the CCP. Bypassing the immediate leadership, this criticism indicates that in Hailufeng, the CCP's organization and discipline were full of loopholes.

¹¹³ *HGS* 2: 176. This report does not detail how long it took to quadruple the Party's membership in Haifeng. But the HCC reveals in another report that it accrued 15,000 party members in four months throughout the Soviet period. See *HGS* 2: 325.

between them became obscured. The CCP could not implement its policies well, for the organization itself did not serve it completely. This is why the CCP could incite the peasants by encouraging their spontaneous action, but could not manipulate it. As the DSC concluded:

As a proletariat party, the DSC could always only incite the masses; it did not know how to lead and educate the masses in practice. Specifically, it failed to lead the masses in a well-organized and well-planned way, and proletarianism did not play a role. Instead, the DSC left all the work to the masses or simply instigated them..¹¹⁴

“Able to incite, unable to control” could best generalize the impact of the CCP’s organization on the masses. The CCP’s organization in Hailufeng was only enough to incite the peasants, but could not control them, which suggests a similar logic to the infestation and radicalization of the “Red Terror.”

The Peasants’ Spontaneity

On the other end of the interaction between the CCP and the peasants, peasants’ spontaneity also deserves further analysis. What kind of spontaneity did they have? How did their spontaneity interact with the CCP? How about its influence? Though many kinds of the peasants’ spontaneity endured, this part only deals with the continuous influence of lineage and the peasants’ opportunism respectively, for they were most closely related to the development and manifestations of the “Red Terror.” But one point needs to be

¹¹⁴ *GW* 9: 298.

illuminated, that is that they were to some extent overlapped in practice, hence it is better to understand them holistically.

As presented previously, lineage feuds were ubiquitous in Hailufeng. In many cases, under the cloak of class struggle, they shed light on why so many peasants responded to the CCP's mobilization. As the HCC reported:

In the southeast districts of Haifeng, the party organization was unsound, and the feudal ideology of the masses and lineage power were very strong. Therefore, if the big families or big villages become reactionary when the enemies arrive, the small ones would be so as well, or they would be crushed severely. For example, if one member of the influential family in one lineage turns out to be reactionary, he will call on the people of his family to deal with other revolutionary families. It was often the case that if one became reactionary, then the whole family followed.¹¹⁵

Such a relation was best exhibited in Hetian, north of Lufeng, where several big lineages dominated and fought against each other for centuries. The most preponderant lineage used to be the Peng, which was followed by the Ye, Zhuang, and Luo. The Peng had been seriously challenged by the Zhuang of neighboring Shangsha village since the nineteenth century. The Zhuang kept expanding and had occupied Wuyundong by the 1920s, a village that had belonged to the Peng since the seventeenth century. The preceding peasant movement led by the CCP provided good chances for the declining Peng to counterattack. Though it is uncertain whether Peng Pai had a remote lineage relationship with the Peng in Hetian, the latter took the advantage of the same surname to build a close connection with the supreme leader and stood with the CCP.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *HGS* 2: 319.

¹¹⁶ Marks, *Rural Revolution*, 264–266.

In alliance with the CCP, the Peng had constant fights against the Zhuang and its allied families since the end of 1925. The Peng accused the Zhuang and other allied families of disobeying the district and village peasant associations and the CCP. The peasants led by the Peng once kidnapped tens of clansmen of the Zhuang and asked for ransom, whom were all killed afterwards.¹¹⁷ Noticeably, such an event took place during the United Front, not the rioting period. It implies that there was no difference between such fights and the past *xiedou*, except the fights were under the banner of eliminating counter-revolutionaries.

Xiedou continued well into the Soviet. The HCC admitted that:

We worked there [Shuirong village in Hetian] for less than a month, and the reason why the [thousands of] peasants stood on the revolutionary side is that they were surnamed Peng. There have been constant conflicts and lineage feuds between them and the Luo...so the Peng became our forces.¹¹⁸

The peasant army in the northwest of Lufeng, areas surrounding with towns Xintian and Hetian, was the most active and powerful one led by the CCP in Lufeng (In contrast, the CCP could not lead the peasant army in the southeast well). The local CCP had praised their activeness and valor in battles many times. As the DSC reported that, “the peasants there attack the [reactionary militia] voluntarily (without the reliance on the peasant army). Though they cannot win, they do not lose. The peasants’ bravery in the northwest has been displayed.”¹¹⁹ Activeness and valiancy were de facto killing, burning, and pillaging, as

¹¹⁷ *HCI*, 40.

¹¹⁸ *HGS* 2: 346.

¹¹⁹ *HGS* 2: 65–66. The formal peasant army in the northwest of Lufeng consisted of around 300 men, while thousands of peasants joined the riots. See *HGS* 2: 47.

what the peasants of the Peng did in Huangtang and Jianmenkeng, two small village settlements nearby. Their violence was indiscriminate and toward the whole family or the village instead of a real class war.¹²⁰

What strikingly contrasts to their activeness in the plunder was their passiveness in the elimination of the “true class enemies.” One CCP report states that, “although the peasants in the northwest were courageous and resolute, they did not kill many local tyrants, evil gentries, and landlords in the countryside.”¹²¹ Inconsistent as it seems, it indeed manifests that the essence of the peasants’ riots was still *xiedou*. United under the leadership of the headmen of their lineage, the peasants attacked others based on the lineage feud, but did not respond to the CCP’s call to struggle against the class enemies within their lineage. There the horizontal class differentiation appealed by the CCP succumbed to the traditional vertical family differentiation.

Kim San recalled that lineage power and lineage feud were so persistent in Hailufeng that the CCP could not destroy them entirely, but only gradually undermine them. He noted that:

During the armed struggle in Kwangtung, the poor and oppressed usually joined the revolution against their rich and powerful family members. In some cases, whole families, rich and poor alike, joined the revolution, while others, rich and poor inclusive, joined the counter-revolution. This is a mistake in revolutionary tactics, and the Communists should have insisted upon a class split to insure true solidarity.¹²²

¹²⁰ *H CJ*, 37–38.

¹²¹ *HGS 2*: 77.

¹²² Wales and Kim, *Song of Ariran*, 324.

Impressively revealing the complexity of the real situation in the “Red Terror,” Kim San’s observation was also acknowledged by the GPC, who reflected upon their prior drawbacks in July 1928 after the failure in Hailufeng:

In the past, the so-called mass struggle in various localities was actually the rural *xiedou* led by the small gentry against the big gentry, which resulted in the division amid the countryside far more than class division there. The Party grew up in such rural *xiedou*. Many of the party’s commanding bodies were in the hands of the intellectuals and rich peasants, who were influenced by the small gentry; and sometimes directly in the hands of the small gentry, who did not want the masses of workers and poor peasants to rise.¹²³

Such cases suggest that the CCP’s riots in some places were to a large extent embedded in the peasants’ spontaneous collective action, such as *xiedou*. In areas where the lineage power was strong while the CCP’s organization was incompetent, the CCP could not transcend the powerful grassroots brokers and mobilize the peasants directly without their support. In this sense, the CCP was incapable to maneuver the peasants and was exploited by them.

When it comes to the peasants’ opportunism, it could be generalized as “seeking profits and avoiding harms.” For example, the CCP had ordered the peasants in southeast Lufeng to attack Jieshi alone. Hundreds of peasants had been organized overnight but did not move until the 2nd Division arrived the next afternoon. Then, the situation immediately reversed:

Realizing that the 2nd Division had arrived, the peasants all rose up. Men, women, the old, and the young all came to the frontlines. They were not armed to kill the enemies, but took this opportunity to make a fortune with sacks in hand... It is more difficult to ask them to carry the wounded soldiers and serve as guides and bearers than force them to die. Later a meeting was held to let them know the significance of the riot and the implication that they should kill the enemies first

¹²³ *GW* 11: 67–68.

and then take their belongings. They all exclaimed, 'Yes! Yes!' Some had returned home to bring their firearms, and most had dropped their sacks and charged toward the enemies murderously. But seeing others being pillaging, they took their sacks out again.¹²⁴

The peasants' opportunism was better exposed in the defensive battles of the Soviet.

Da'an town was the place where the CCP had a relatively better foundation than other regions in Lufeng. But regarding the surrounding battles against the GMD's troops, the DSC reported that, "none of the masses have come up to help. One comrade called the peasants to fight by waving red flags and blowing horns, but helplessly saw them fleeing. They said they only came to hunt the enemies when they were defeated."¹²⁵

This was also the case in the CCP's counteroffensive of Xintian town in Lufeng in May 1928. According to the Lufeng County Committee (LCC), the Red Army first hit the enemies hard and recovered the county soviet, so the peasants around there started to rise up. "Eight or nine thousand peasants assembled, most of whom were not armed men mobilized by us, but only came to seek profits." Together with the 2nd Division, they attacked several "reactionary" villages, from which they took back all the belongings, including five or six hundred farm cattle, and burned sixty percent of the houses there.¹²⁶

The CCP realized the importance of overcoming the peasants' opportunism. The Central Committee of the CCP instructed the Party in Hailufeng as early as December 5, 1927 that the political propaganda should have been carried out as well as possible to

¹²⁴ *HGS 2*: 77–78.

¹²⁵ *HGS 2*: 258–259.

¹²⁶ *HGS 2*: 349.

enable the masses to comprehend the purpose of the riots. Otherwise, the riots would easily become the peasants' own speculation.¹²⁷ Unfortunately, the situation still proceeded in the way the Central Committee had foretold.

Another case is the serious desertion in the Red Army. The 5th Regiment of the 2nd Division was organized in December 1927, which was made up of the soldiers from the Haifeng Peasant Army and the local Red Guards. But it was so undisciplined that desertion was prevalent within the 5th Regiment. One draft of the Haifeng County Soviet told that 57 soldiers deserted at one time.¹²⁸ Several CCP reports substantiated this problem, and further pointed out that the 5th Regiment finally dissolved, for “nine in ten escaped home.”¹²⁹ Though the peasants' provincialism, that they did not want to leave home and fight in other places, and the inadaptability to the CCP's strict discipline also account for the desertion, opportunism was the essence. The peasants did not see any benefits to serving in the Red Army, so it was a foregone conclusion that they passively resisted the CCP's constraint through desertion.

In so far, this part has been mainly concerned with why the CCP's organization could not manipulate the peasants' spontaneity in Hailufeng and how the peasants' spontaneity troubled the CCP. However, we cannot simply deem that the CCP could merely dance to

¹²⁷ Zhongyang dang'an guan, ed., *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanji* (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 1989–1992), 3: 59.

¹²⁸ *HCI*, 71–72.

¹²⁹ *HGS* 2: 369; *GJD*, 304; *GW* 26: 127.

the tune of the peasants in every place because the peasants in some districts of Haifeng were indeed more responsive and faithful to the CCP's leadership than in other areas. As the HCC reported:

The peasants were equally dauntless [as the workers]. In the second counterattack on Gongping, the peasants had no firearms and received no help from the Red Army. But the enemies were broken through by the charging peasants, who almost fought with their bare hands in the streets. In the first counterattack on Shanwei, thousands of peasants arrived, and even women went to the battlefield to help. The soldiers were unable to advance because we were not resolute in commanding. The peasants from Meilong and Chishi came to the county seat to challenge the garrisons in the daytime before Cai Tenghui's army arrived, and had a fierce battle against Cai's army after their arrival. The masses were fearless. Although the enemies carried out the "White Terror" by its military forces, there were 5,000 or 6,000 peasants in the southeast participating in the second counteroffensive on Shanwei. Moreover, they dared to advance with the Red Army, and their courage was not lost. At this time, the masses showed their valor one hundred times and never shrank back.¹³⁰

These cases are also corroborated by the GMD's sources, that one of its regiments was assaulted by around 2,000 "peasant bandits" in Gongping one night. Similar assaults occurred in Shanwei some days later.¹³¹ But with its series of debacles in Hailufeng and the following ruthless "White Terror" conducted by the GMD and militias, during which the peasants suffered great casualties, the CCP lost these committed masses in the end.

It is challenging to further analyze why the peasants in these places were more receptive and loyal to the CCP's leadership owing to the lack of sources. The better organization and discipline of the CCP there may account for it, but they are more likely the results of some underlying factors. For instance, the remnant lineage power in the

¹³⁰ *HGS* 2: 318.

¹³¹ *HEX*, 343.

northwest of Haifeng, in which Gongping, Chishi, and Meilong were situated, was not as strong as that in the southeast after the CCP's long-time struggle there.¹³² Such an "outlier" cannot invalidate the fact that the CCP was generally unable to control the peasants, increase their political awareness, and make them dedicated to the class struggle, let alone the lofty communist ideals. But at least to some degree, even at the very beginning of the CCP's revolution, a period marked by inexperience and undiscipline, the CCP could still subordinate the peasants and exert its will on them, which was the key to their final success in 1949. This also reminds us that no side is merely the "hostage of historical process" in Joseph Esherick's words.¹³³ Both the CCP and the peasants were critical in the arising of the "Red Terror," they interacted with each other in a subtle yet profound way and shaped the history together.

Conclusion

Focusing on Hailufeng, this paper comprehensively analyzes the manifestations, development, and dynamics of the "Red Terror" in a certain place. There are two popular yet unilateral interpretations of the occurrence of the "Red Terror" in Hailufeng – it was either incited by the CCP or a continuation of the peasants' spontaneous violence. While attaching attention to both sides, this paper concludes that it was both mobilized and

¹³² *HGS 2*: 319. For example, the rival militias were quickly revitalized by the lineages in Qingkeng after the CCP's defeat, which was located in the southeast of Haifeng. The CCP's Qingkeng District Committee was destroyed, and more than two thirds of the party members were killed.

¹³³ Joseph W. Esherick, "Putting Society, Economy, and Politics back into Twentieth Century Chinese History," in *Zhongguo xueshu* vol. 1, ed. Liu Dong (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2000), 204.

spontaneous. Without the CCP's leadership, including ideological mobilization, organization, and military support, the peasants could not have made such a massive and atrocious "Red Terror," which was under the banner of class struggle and legitimized by "eliminating counter-revolutionaries." The peasants played a vital role as well. The first section shows that there had been a deep-rooted violent tradition in Hailufeng, from which the inhabitants readily resorted to violence in their daily lives, which was usually embodied in various kinds of horrible torture.

The second section examines the influence of the CCP's ideology on the peasants through a case study of Peng Pai. He ideologically mobilized the peasants by introducing class consciousness, which encouraged and justified the peasants' violence against the gentry and landlords. Besides, Peng Pai's writings and speeches present a radicalization of enemy-making. It culminated when the discourse on "counter-revolutionary" was widely applied, which is so subjective and inclusive that anyone could be labeled as such and thus become subject to being killed remorselessly. The CCP's ideological mobilization induced the expansion and escalation of the "Red Terror."

The last section presents the manifestations of the "Red Terror" and elucidates the dynamics of its development. The extremely macabre violence amid the "Red Terror" was a revival of the peasants' violent tradition in terms of their strong vindictiveness and horrific torture. Furthermore, it argues that the true historical course of the "Red Terror" was more or less unexpected and undesirable for both the CCP and peasants. They wanted

to exploit each other, but neither did as supposed. The CCP's policy of mass rioting spurred the peasants' spontaneous action and entailed a radicalism to realize the goal, which explicitly intensified the "Red Terror." However, the CCP's organization was generally undisciplined and powerless while the peasants' spontaneity, e.g., the lineage feuds and opportunism, was formidable. As a result, the CCP could incite the peasants by encouraging their spontaneous action, usually manifested in unfettered violence, but could not manipulate them to serve the communist revolution. Such an awkward interaction explains how the "Red Terror" arose.

Furthermore, what else can we learn from the case of Hailufeng? The dynamic framework developed in this paper responds to an influential paradigm in the field of Chinese Communist Revolution. Underlining the peasants' spontaneity, Lucien Bianco argues that the large-scale organized rebellions in modern Chinese history were embedded in the smaller-scale popular collective struggles, including food riots, tax resistance, and *xiedou*.¹³⁴ My analysis on the "Red Terror" in Hailufeng somewhat substantiates his opinion. It suggests that although the outside political ideology and organization are crucial to a modern revolution, the underlying social contexts, such as the local socio-economic conditions, the inhabitants' mindset and behavior patterns, are more fundamental. The

¹³⁴ See Lucien Bianco, *Peasants Without the Party: Grass-Roots Movements in Twentieth-Century China* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015).

variations of the conditions in each place endow different regional features to the revolution taken place there.

In another paper, which centers on the whole process of the revolution in Hailufeng (1922–1928), Bianco contends that the interaction between the CCP and the peasants was an “unequal alliance.” The organization introduced by the CCP provided the peasants an effectiveness that they lacked before, while undermining their independence and subordinating them to the interests of the CCP. He further concludes that “In general, the experience [of the communist-peasant mobilization] in the 1930s and 1940s duplicated the Hailufeng matrix, in spite of obvious differences in circumstances and in scale.”¹³⁵

By contrast, his viewpoints are actually at variance with the situations in Hailufeng through my examination on the “Red Terror” there. First, as is presented, it is difficult to differentiate the CCP from the peasants after the massive influx of the peasant Party members. As an advocator of the peasants’ interests and subjectivity, Bianco overemphasizes the CCP’s exploitation of peasants, while neglecting how the peasants traded on the CCP. He presumes that the peasants regarded the indigenous CCP members as outsiders, exaggerating their nominal differences, but fails to realize that the CCP members were more consistent than divergent at that time. By contrast, the CCP and the peasants were inextricably intertwined, making it problematic to identify their

¹³⁵ Lucien Bianco, “Peasant Movements,” in *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 13: Republican China 1912–1949, Part 2*, ed. by John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 318, 322.

independence from each other.¹³⁶ Bianco here falls into a trap, that “the party is typically reified as an autochthonous political agent standing outside the population it is acting upon” in Eshrick and Perry’s words.¹³⁷

Second, his overemphasis on peasants’ subjectivity results in an anachronistic issue, as he simplifies the dynamic relations between the CCP and the peasants to a static one. In the Second Civil War, the CCP finally triumphed over the Nationalist Government by its extraordinarily effective mass mobilization. The situation in the late 1920s, however, cannot be mentioned in the same breath with that in the late 1940s. Even in Hailufeng, where the CCP had the most entrenched organization and the largest membership at that time, the quality of these features were lackluster. Although the Party incited the peasants to riot, it failed to channel them into the communist revolution, which conflicts with Bianco’s viewpoint. In this sense, the CCP was eager to utilize the peasants to serve its visions, but in practice, the peasants probably exploited the CCP and weakened its independence, instead of vice versa.

The CCP inarguably foundered in Hailufeng, yet it was too early to claim the victory of the peasants. Immediately following the “Red Terror” was a retaliatory “White Terror”

¹³⁶ It is worth further clarifying this point. Specifically speaking, it was difficult to differentiate the party members from the peasants when the latter, especially those who had not been politically educated, joined the party, while it was not so if the peasants kept outside of the party. This is why the local CCP sometimes complained about the mixture of the peasants and the party members, while other times specifying their own identity, respectively. The two situations were not paradoxical, but were both true depending on the different contexts. Such a feature also helps us understand why this thesis argues that the peasants were the actual implementers of the “Red Terror.”

¹³⁷ Joseph W. Eshrick and Elizabeth J. Perry, “Editor’s Introduction,” In *Revolution in the Highlands: China’s Jinggangshan Base Area*, by Stephen C. Averill (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), xxv.

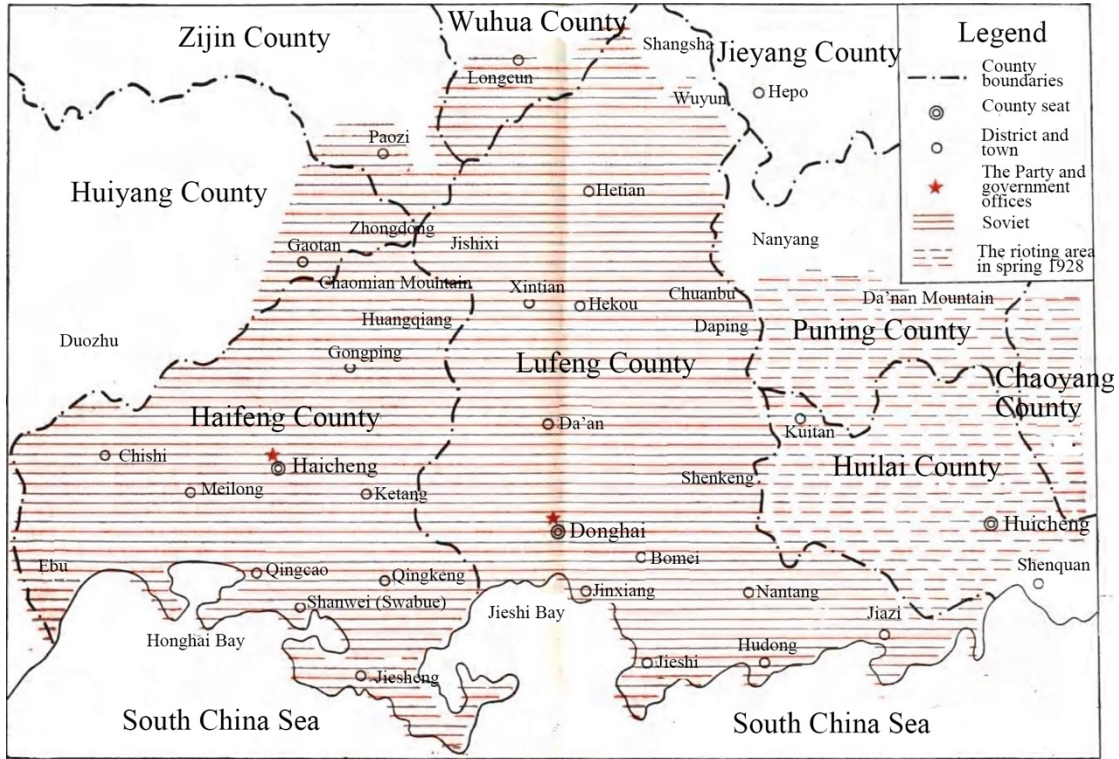
with an even larger scale of massacre in the form of *qingxiang*, i.e., cleansing the countryside. The DSC estimated that the casualties amounted to around 3,000 in March and April, 1928, and twenty percent of the victims were party members, while the rest were all peasants. The torture once taken by the peasants in the “Red Terror” was given back to them in the “White Terror.”¹³⁸ This time, however, the peasants’ suffering was only scattered in a few CCP’s reports. The peasants without the Party were more miserable in a social order by which the violence against them was acquiesced and legitimized, while they were unable to speak themselves.

¹³⁸ *GW* 26: 142. About the casualties and atrocities in the “White Terror,” see *HGG*, 286; *HGS* 2: 412–427, 447–448.

Appendix 1: Abbreviation of the Major Sources

- GW* *Guangdong geming lishi wenjian huiji* 廣東革命歷史文件彙集. 1980s.
- GNZ* *Guangdong nongmin yundong ziliao xuanbian* 廣東農民運動資料選編. 1986.
- HCJ* *Hailufeng chihuo ji* 海陸豐赤禍記. 1932.
- HGG* *Hailufeng geming gejudi* 海陸豐革命根據地. 1991.
- HGS* *Hailufeng geming shiliao* 海陸豐革命史料. 1986.
- HEX* *Hong er si shi shiliao xuanbian* 紅二、四師史料選編. 1984.
- PN* *Peng Pai nianpu* 彭湃年譜. 2007.
- PW* *Peng Pai wenji* 彭湃文集. 1981.
- PYS* *Peng Pai yanjiu shiliao* 彭湃研究史料. 2007.

Appendix 2: Map of the Hailufeng Soviet (The Largest Range):
September 1927–February 1928



Source: HGG, front page. I translate the base map in Chinese to English.

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