

**“THE QUESTION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION”  
(SPEECH, JULY 31, 1955)  
By Mao Zedong**

**Introduction**

In the early 1950s, China chose to model its socialist economy after that of the Soviet Union. The Soviet model called for capital-intensive development of heavy industry, with the capital to be generated from the agricultural sector of the economy. The state would purchase grain from the farmers at low prices and sell it, both at home and on the export market, at high prices. In practice, agricultural production did not increase fast enough to generate the amount of capital required to build up China's industry according to plan. Mao Zedong (1893-1976) decided that the answer was to reorganize Chinese agriculture by pushing through a program of cooperativization (or collectivization) that would bring China's small farmers, their small plots of land, and their limited draught animals, tools, and machinery together into larger and, presumably, more efficient cooperatives.

The farmers put up resistance, mostly in the form of passive resistance, lack of cooperation, and a tendency to eat animals that were scheduled for cooperativization. Many of the Communist Party leaders wanted to proceed slowly with cooperativization. Mao, however, had his own view of developments in the countryside, which he expressed in this speech of July 31, 1955.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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**“The Question of Agricultural Cooperation” (Speech, July 31, 1955)  
By Mao Zedong**

A new upsurge in the socialist mass movement is in sight throughout the Chinese countryside. But some of our comrades are tottering along like a woman with bound feet, always complaining that others are going too fast. ...

...

The tide of social reform in the countryside — in the shape of cooperation — has already reached some places. Soon it will sweep the whole country. This is a huge socialist revolutionary movement, which involves a rural population more than five hundred million strong, one that has very great world significance. We should guide this movement vigorously, warmly, and systematically, and not act as a drag on it. ...

**Primary Source Document, with Questions (DBQ) on  
"THE QUESTION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION" (SPEECH, JULY 31, 1955)  
BY MAO ZEDONG**

...

... The situation in China is like this: its population is enormous, there is a shortage of cultivated land (only three *mou* of land per head, taking the country as a whole; in many parts of the southern provinces, the average is only one *mou* or less), natural catastrophes occur from time to time — every year large numbers of farms suffer more or less from flood, drought, gales, frost, hail, or insect pests — and methods of farming are backward. As a result, many peasants are still having difficulties or are not well off. The well-off ones are comparatively few, although since land reform the standard of living of the peasants as a whole has improved. For all these reasons there is an active desire among most peasants to take the socialist road.

**Questions:**

1. What can you deduce from this excerpt about the debate within the Communist Party on the subject of land reform?
2. Compare Mao Zedong's rhetoric in this document to his rhetoric in his "Report on the Hunan Peasant Movement."
3. In Mao's opinion, what is driving the move toward cooperativization?

**Longer Selection**

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A new upsurge in the socialist mass movement is in sight throughout the Chinese countryside. But some of our comrades are tottering along like a woman with bound feet, always complaining that others are going too fast. They imagine that by picking on trifles, grumbling unnecessarily, worrying continuously, and putting up countless taboos and commandments, they will guide the socialist mass movement in the rural areas along sound lines.

No, this is not the right way at all; it is wrong.

The tide of social reform in the countryside — in the shape of cooperation — has already reached some places. Soon it will sweep the whole country. This is a huge socialist revolutionary movement, which involves a rural population more than five hundred million strong, one that has very great world significance. We should guide this movement vigorously, warmly, and systematically, and not act as a drag on it. ...

It is wrong to say that the present pace of development of the agricultural producers' cooperatives has “gone beyond practical possibilities” or “gone beyond the consciousness of the masses.” The situation in China is like this: its population is enormous, there is a shortage of cultivated land (only three *mou* of land per head, taking the country as a whole; in many parts of southern provinces, the average is only one *mou* or less), natural catastrophes occur from time to time — every year large numbers of farms suffer more or less from flood, drought, gales, frost, hail, or insect pests — and methods of farming are backward. As a result, many peasants are still having difficulties or are not well off. The well-off ones are comparatively few, although since land reform the standard of living of the peasants as a whole has improved. For all these reasons there is an active desire among most peasants to take the socialist road. ...

We have been taking steps to bring about a gradual advance in the socialist transformation of agriculture. The first step in the countryside is to call on the peasants, in accordance with the principles of voluntariness and mutual benefit, to organize agricultural producers' mutual-aid teams. Such teams contain only the rudiments of socialism. Each one draws in a few households, though some have ten or more. The second step is to call on the peasants, on the basis of these mutual-aid teams and still in accordance with the principles of voluntariness and mutual benefit, to organize small agricultural producers' cooperatives semi-socialist in nature, characterized by the pooling of land as shares and by single management. Not until we take the third step will the peasants be called upon, on the basis of these small, semi-socialist cooperatives and in accordance with the same principles of voluntariness and mutual benefit, to unite on a larger scale and organize large agricultural producers' cooperatives completely socialist in nature. These steps are designed to raise steadily the socialist consciousness of the peasants through their personal experience, to change their mode of life step by step, and so minimize any feeling that their mode of life is being changed all of a sudden.