

## The rise and fall of an advanced co-op in the People's Republic of China: The case of Hebei Province

by *KONO Tadashi*

This paper focuses on the various problems encountered during advanced agricultural production co-op (*gaoji nongyeshengchan hezuoshe* 高級農業生產合作社) of the People's Republic of China era against the background of conditions in rural society. After implementing its initial land reform, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) executed a plan for agricultural collectivization that began with a mutual aid team (*huzhu-zu* 互助組) and proceeded through two levels of collectivization (primary and advanced) into socialist production co-op, leading to the formation of people's communes (*renmin gongshe* 人民公社). Within this process, compared to the analysis of land reform, primary collectivization and people's communes, the advanced collectivization era itself and the problems that developed during that time have not been sufficiently examined in the research to date. Moreover, the existing research tends to argue that due to the fact that advanced collectivization was implemented so rapidly, local society at the production base, which had already experienced the destruction of its traditional village autonomy, had no power to resist the Party. However, the question of whether or not rural communities were able to unite in resistance to advanced collectivization is an important problem in terms of understanding the workings of society at the point of production. This article is one attempt to reexamine this problem from the actual situation in Hebei Province, based on archival sources.

To begin with, the author finds that the advanced collectivization era was plagued by a large number of problems that prevented a smooth transition from advanced product co-ops to people's communes. Furthermore, there is evidence that local society did unite at the village level and respond proactively to the actions of other villages and the Party hierarchy. The ultimate response on the part of the majority of production co-op was to demand that their organizations

be decentralized into smaller units, and consequently decentralization was promoted, resulting in advanced co-ops initially collectivized on the scale of multiple villages or a whole township (*xiang* 郷) being broken up into one co-op per rural village (*cun* 村). In other words, decentralization was won through active resistance on the part of direct producers. It was in this way that the influence of the CCP in rural Hebei Province during the late 1950s was limited by resistance organized by social forces at the grass-root level.