

# **Rural Decollectivisation in China**

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Title of paper: Rural Decollectivisation in China

Abstract of paper: Why did the early post-Mao regime permit decollectivisation across the countryside? Some argue that the disastrous Great Leap Forward (GLF) and/or Cultural Revolution catalysed reform. Others point to Deng Xiaoping's leadership and farmers' demands. Recently, Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun argue that decollectivisation was a contingent measure. In light of national financial difficulties, the state could ill afford to subsidise agriculture any longer. It thus resorted to decollectivisation as a cost-effective expedient to raise production. While these explanations shed important light on the origin of decollectivisation, they leave an important question unanswered: why did reforms on people's communes fail in the first place? In 1978, the regime reintroduced the "Sixty Articles in Agriculture" to increase material incentives and individual autonomy within the collective structure. When the Sixty Articles was first promulgated in the aftermath of the GLF in 1962, it was well-received and successfully preserved the collective structure from collapse. However, it was ineffectual in 1978, thereby making decollectivisation possible. To resolve this puzzle, this paper traces what happened to the Sixty Articles during the protracted national campaign to "learn from Dazhai" from 1964 to 1978. The campaign was appropriated by Party elites as a platform to engage in discursive struggles over the national rural policy direction. The legitimacy of the Sixty Articles was severely damaged in the process and was irredeemable thereafter. Despite repeated central-level assurances, rural cadres were still hesitant to implement the Sixty Articles in 1978. This explained the failure of the post-Mao reforms on people's communes, being a precondition for decollectivisation.