China is a country of peasants: 80% of the population lives in rural areas. The people live in small, basically self-sufficient villages that are self-governing and collectively owned and managed. Most villages receive no aid from the central government and are examples of conservation — wasting nothing, recycling practically everything and working as partners with the environment. They have begun to industrialise using local raw materials and are exploiting local sources of energy.

Briefly, the strategy for spatial organisation consists of capping the growth of the largest cities (such as Shanghai and Tientsin); shifting of growth to middle and small cities; making each region self-sufficient and heavier investment in underdeveloped regions; development of small self-sufficient rural units with its own industry. It is the last item that will be the emphasis of this essay.

Changes have been carried out through the interaction of 1. People as the motive force; 2. Step by step process of collectivisation; 3. Leadership and ideology; 4. Policies.

People as motive force
In practice, this means that people must actively participate in every phase of change. It also means that the benefits of increased production must be equitably distributed and that everyone must feel real improvements in their life.

Step by step process of collectivisation
Despite appearances, collective life beyond the family is not "natural" or "traditional" for the Chinese land and means of production were owned by families and was therefore divided into small units. After land reform, the process proceeded from mutual aid teams of four or five families through several intermediate steps to the commune. Each step had to prove its efficacy before proceeding to the next.

Leadership and ideology
In a step by step process there must be a leadership which can summarise the experiences of the people and organise those experiences into a coordinated set of policies. That leadership must be guided by a collective ideology which is Marxist-Leninist and extended by Mao Zedong on the basis of practice. For spatial organisation the important aspects of this ideology include: the abolition of private ownership of land and means of production; the abolition of classes and the elimination of differences between town and countryside.

Policies
Policies emerged from practice in the step by step process. The central theories of the organisation of space embodied the principles of agriculture as the base, industry as the leading sector; industry in the service of agriculture and light industry; major investment in underdeveloped regions; decentralisation of decision making; and self-sufficiency at every level.

At liberation in 1949, the mass of the peasantry were landless or had very little land. Most of the land was owned by a small class of landlords that extracted exorbitant rents from the farmers. Famines were a frequent occurrence. Peasant rebellions had been occurring for centuries but it was the Communist-led struggle that finally succeeded in the abolition of feudal relationships. The struggle was a long one in which the most important consequences for later development was in the

Since there is a scarcity of flat land, level fields are created from the hillside by terracing.
equipment, enlarged construction could be undertaken, resulting in an increased further demand for better tools and, at the same time, new means to pay for them.

Cultural change was expected to proceed in a dialectic with economic development and institutional change. The institutional changes themselves would be one expression of cultural change, made possible by increasingly rational views of the possibilities of larger-scale social organisation. The analogy of the spiral can be extended into spatial organisation where the combining and rationalising of the use of land can lead to greater productivity and increasingly more efficient use. Similarly, the building of collective housing with social services can lead to the fuller development of collective life and standard of living which in turn will affect the economic base.

**The emergence of a new policy**

In the meantime, industrial growth was following the Soviet model of: investment in heavy industry; extracting the capital from agriculture; centralised economic planning; and material incentives for stimulating production. However, these policies soon ran into difficulties and regional inequalities were exacerbated by continued emphasis on heavy industry; extracting the capital from agriculture; centralised economic planning; and material incentives for stimulating production. These policies were rebated again emphasised the continued development of collective forms and self-sufficiency. The People's Commune is the lowest level of governmental organisation in China. It is a collective political and economic unit that combines production, living and defence. At present, the Commune has the responsibility for overall planning for its constituent units — the production brigade and the production team. The new direction encouraged local authorities to use labour to create capital instead of relying only on a capital investment and interest.

**Rural Organisation Units, 1980.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>2,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People's Commune</td>
<td>54,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Brigade</td>
<td>709,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Team</td>
<td>5,662,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- On an average each People's Commune has 1,833 hectares of land and a population of 15,000 people.
- On an average, there are 13 Brigades in a Commune, and 8 Teams in a Brigade.

Source: Jin Daxin, Academic Committee of Rural Housing of the Architectural Society of China, 1981.

The Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) was the campaign to apply the new policies. Despite problems of organisation, withdrawal of Soviet aid and the worse floods in decades, the Great Leap Forward set the Foundations for the policy today as it continues to evolve. Especially important was the creation of the People's Commune as the present stage of development of agricultural collectivisation. The form and size of the Commune underwent several modifications during the early years. Between 1961 and 1965, there were retreats from some aspects of collectivisation such as in family production, the size of private plots and the encouragement of free markets. Nevertheless, the basic idea has been retained. The Cultural Revolution (1966 and after) once again emphasised the continued development of collective forms and self-sufficiency.

The People's Commune is the lowest level of governmental organisation in China. It is a collective political and economic unit that combines production, living and defence. At present, the Commune has the responsibility for overall planning for its constituent units — the production brigade and the production team. The Commune itself owns only the commune-wide production facilities such as forests, large scale waterworks, hydroelectric plants, food processing plants, etc. The production team, or the production brigade collectively owns its land and means of production and is the unit of accounting. This means that each team is responsible for its own financial functioning — i.e. any profit or loss is borne by the unit itself. The team is responsible for agricultural tax, production costs, a reserve fund (generally of grain) for emergencies, a welfare fund for non-productive members (old people, handicapped, etc.) cultural and health services. The profit or surplus is divided according to work points, the value of which is decided by each production team. The present arrangement is seen as a step — not as the end point. The long-term goal is towards collective ownership by the entire country. Before this can happen, however, the inequities between teams must be eliminated and a much higher level of productivity must be reached.

One of the major impetuses for the creation of one People's Commune during the Great Leap Forward was the need to implement the policies of emphasis on agriculture, decentralisation and self-sufficiency. The new direction encouraged local authorities to use labour to create capital instead of relying only on a capital investment and it is the slogan "In agriculture, learn from Taihai".

*Examples of these are presented in the following features. (Editors)*
modern technology as the major factors in economic development.

One of the areas in which the spiral theory of using surplus labour in the off-season was especially effective in terracing and especially critical was the maximisation and control of water resources. In 1958, the collective units (Agricultural Producer’s Cooperatives) were not equipped to initiate, plan, finance and organise new water systems in addition to starting local industries and more intensive cultivation. The creation of the commune became the organisational form for mobilising and allocating rural labour. Throughout China today, the most prominent elements in the landscape are terraced fields, aqueducts, reservoirs and canals.

Although rural housing posed problems of sanitation and shelter, the basic approach was to first increase production through a spiral development of capital construction and mechanisation. Following the principles of self-reliance and putting production before housing, new villages have begun to appear in all parts of China with considerable variation according to local climatic and site conditions. They are always built by the villagers themselves using locally available materials and traditional techniques. They are often decorated with traditional designs in lattice work or ceramics.

They generally follow these principles:

- Minimise the use of land and avoid taking up agricultural lands;
- Compact layout to facilitate collective life;
- Take full advantage of the topography of the site and other local conditions;
- Phase the development in stages, undertake the construction through cooperative efforts and produce building materials locally;
- Centrally locate communal facilities to facilitate the participation of the members in political and cultural activities;
- Improve sanitary conditions;
- Recycle building materials as much as possible;
- People are the motive force. All people have abilities and energies which can be liberated by engaging in continuous, long-term change. People will grow by participating and taking initiative in changing their environment and social condition;
- Unjust social relations had to be changed. Land reform was insufficient. Private ownership had to be abolished before collectives could emerge in which people governed themselves and engaged in further development. Rather than an unimplementable “master plan”, there was an ideology and leadership which understood history and guided the process with principles rather than rules;
- Small is beautiful only when big is also beautiful. The Peoples’ communes cannot exist as self-sufficient units if there is not a national policy of guaranteeing adequate prices for farm products while keeping prices for industrial goods low. There has to be both centralisation and decentralisation. The question is giving the proper role and function to each;
- Changing the whole environment. In order to have long term, continuous change, the commune is thought of as a complete unit and environment: production as well as consumption. The commune solves its production problems first, then, with the surplus skills and collective organisation gained from production, it builds housing and communal facilities for itself.
- Change is a long term process. It is not just a matter of wishing for a different environment or projecting a development plan. The process for China has been long, with failures and successes. There are strands of traditional Chinese thought but also the infusion of Western thought: (Rousseau, Ruskin, Marx, Lenin, Stalin). All these have been forged in the crucible of struggle to create the present situation.
- This is only a beginning and not an end in itself. As some problems are solved, new ones arise and some old ones persist. China is still a poor, underdeveloped country (per capita of about $250 vs. $9,500 in the USA). Her science and technology in underdeveloped. Regional differences still remain despite the policies. There are great variations in productivity between communes because of geography and climate which must be overcome. There are problems of population growth vis a vis agricultural growth. The present policies of rapid mechanisation and emphasis on rapid growth in science and technology may be inconsistent with a step by step spiral development. The Chinese see the process as a long one which has many contradictions and which will undergo many fluctuations. But they have accepted conflict as inevitable for development and are prepared to continue the struggle.

Photographs by Hasan-Uddin Khan.