

Fanshen

A Documentary of Revolution
in a Chinese Village

William Hinton

V-465 \$9.95



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VINTAGE BOOKS *A Division of*
Random House, New York

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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*A Documentary of Revolution
in a Chinese Village*

For

CARMELITA

whose life began with and remains part of New China

and

JOANNE, MICHAEL, ALYSSA, and CATHERINE

for whom a better world is long overdue

Acknowledgments

Without the co-operation of the Communist Party and the People's Government of Lucheng County and the help of President Fan Wenlan of Northern University, the interpreters Ch'i Yun and Hsieh Hung, the Long Bow work team and above all the peasants of Long Bow the material for this book could never have been collected.

Without the hard driving legal virtuosity of Milton H. Friedman and generous financial aid from Carmelita Hinton, Corliss Lamont and hundreds of other friends and well wishers this same material could never have been pried loose from the U. S. Customs and later from Senator Eastland's Committee on Internal Security.

After I regained possession of my notes, aid from Carmelita Hinton and the Louis M. Rabinowitz Foundation of New York made possible the endless hours of sifting, corollating and revising that later drafts of the manuscript required. I am especially indebted to Susan Warren, Far Eastern expert and free lance writer, for protracted consultation and editing and to Nell Salm of the Monthly Review staff for editorial innovations and the detailed, laborious preparation of the final draft. The making of this book has been, at every stage, a collective effort, and this is as it should be.

I also owe thanks to Angus Cameron for encouragement and advice generously given over many years and to Ida Pruitt and Adele and Allyn Rickett for moral support and critical readings of the manuscript. I am especially grateful to my wife, Joanne, for the patience and good humor with which she has forgone job security, a decent home, recreation and vacations while all our surplus energy and funds poured into the making of this book.

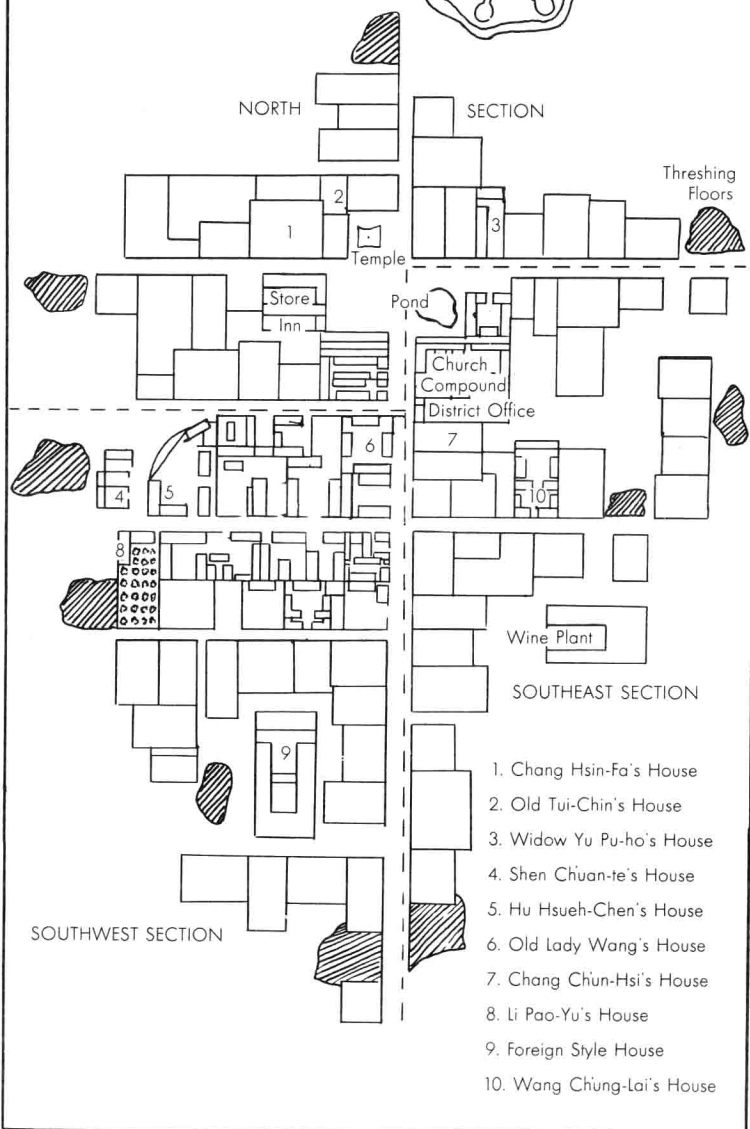
Fanshen

Every revolution creates new words. The Chinese Revolution created a whole new vocabulary. A most important word in this vocabulary was fanshen. Literally, it means "to turn the body," or "to turn over." To China's hundreds of millions of landless and land-poor peasants it meant to stand up, to throw off the landlord yoke, to gain land, stock, implements, and houses. But it meant much more than this. It meant to throw off superstition and study science, to abolish "word blindness" and learn to read, to cease considering women as chattels and establish equality between the sexes, to do away with appointed village magistrates and replace them with elected councils. It meant to enter a new world. That is why this book is called Fanshen. It is the story of how the peasants of Long Bow Village built a new world.

LONG BOW VILLAGE



Blockhouse



Preface

THIS BOOK is based on extensive notes gathered in the village of Long Bow, Lucheng County, Shansi Province, China, during the spring and summer of 1948.* At that time, local land reform, which had already been in progress for two years, was under investigation by a work team dispatched jointly by the People's Government and the Communist Party Committee of Lucheng County. I was attached to this work team as an observer.

The main focus of the book is on the conditions which the members of the work team found and the actions which they subsequently led the people of the village to take. But since it would be impossible to understand these conditions or these actions without a review of the revolutionary upheaval that led up to them, and since this upheaval in turn could hardly be understood without some knowledge of the traditional society which brought on and was itself transformed by revolution, a large section of the book (Parts I and II) is devoted to a history of the village.

This history was not easily assembled. The past was reviewed for me by a multitude of people whose memories of what had happened differed somewhat and whose stories contained both contradictions and gaps. Where contradictions could not be resolved or gaps filled in through careful checking and cross-checking, I have had to adopt such interpretations and solutions as seemed most consistent with other known facts. If the history that has thus emerged is not accurate in every detail, its main content and spirit nevertheless portray the truth about Long Bow.

What I have tried to do in the book as a whole is to reveal, through the microcosm of Long Bow Village, something of the essence of the great anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution which transformed China in the first half of the twentieth century and unleashed political and social forces so tremendous that they continue to shake not only China but the world.

* The Chinese name for this village is *Changchuang*. *Chang* is a common Chinese surname. It is also a word that means to extend, publish, open or boast. In written Chinese the character for *chang* is made up of 11 brush strokes. The first three comprise the radical *kung* which means bow—the hunter's bow. The last eight comprise the phonetic *chang* or *ch'ang* which means long. It is from these separate elements of the written word rather than from the meaning of the spoken word that I have extracted the designation "Long Bow."

The question naturally arises as to whether Long Bow can be considered a microcosm typical enough to reveal the essence of the Chinese Revolution. Was Long Bow's development universal or unique? The answer can only be that it was something of both.

Throughout rural China the social forces in conflict, the basic problems, the goals and the final outcome of the Revolution were the same. In Long Bow the same classes stood in opposition to each other as stood opposed nationally. United action of all laboring people was as vital to revolutionary victory in Long Bow as it was in the country as a whole. The petty-producer mentality of Long Bow's peasants did not differ in quality from that which characterized the peasants country-wide, and the tendency toward extremism, which in Long Bow grew to alarming proportions, had to be checked wherever peasants moved to divide the land.

At the same time, certain external circumstances, certain internal characteristics, and the specific course of events which shaped Long Bow were unique. For one thing, the village had a sizeable Catholic minority in a country where only one or two million people out of 600 million were Catholics. For another, it contained many families without ancestral roots or ancestral graves in the region. This meant a weak clan structure in a country where clans have traditionally played a very important role. Furthermore, on the edge of an area that was surrounded but never conquered by the Japanese, Long Bow was one of the few villages which the Japanese invaders occupied and fortified.

As a consequence, Long Bow had a very different history from that of the average North China community lying within the wide net of Japanese encirclement during the years 1937-1945. At the same time, its history was very different from that of the great majority of Chinese villages which had never been cut off by Japanese armies and were wrested from Kuomintang rather than Japanese control by the revolutionary armies after 1949.

As an occupied village, Long Bow did not benefit at all from that long period of united resistance, democratic rule, and moderate reform which laid the groundwork for basic changes throughout the Communist-led Base Areas of North China once the Japanese War was over. Nor did Long Bow benefit from that extended period of internal peace that enabled communities in South, Central, and West China to carry out land reform calmly, step by step, in orderly fashion after the Civil War was over. Freed from Japanese control at a turning point in history, 1945, Long Bow leaped perforce from reactionary bastion to revolutionary storm center in the course of a few days. All the changes that subsequently occurred were not only compressed

into a relatively short space of time; they were also warped by the intense pressures of all-out Civil War as wave after wave of Nationalist attacks swept across the highlands of Southeast Shansi. Long Bow was not the only village in China to be transformed under forced draft, but such villages were the exception, not the rule.

In Long Bow the sudden destruction of the power and privileges of the gentry led to rapid social advances, to the release of unprecedented popular energy, to burgeoning enthusiasm, optimism, and popular confidence. It also led to excesses and tragedies. At least a dozen people were beaten to death by angry crowds; some hard-working small holders were wrongly dispossessed; revolutionary leaders at times rode roughshod over their followers. When the land reform team to which I was attached came to the village in 1948, its main job turned out to be righting the wrongs of the immediate past.

Before these wrongs could be righted they had to be exposed. The work team, the village officers, and the majority of the population concentrated for an extended period on what was wrong with past policies and the conduct of individual leaders. They did this, not because the wrongs of the situation outweighed the rights—on the contrary, quite the reverse was true—but because the wrongs constituted a serious obstacle to further progress, an illness that if not cured could become lethal. This book, by reflecting this concentration, gives crimes, mistakes, detours and discouragement more weight than they deserve in any over-all evaluation of Long Bow's development. It thus tips the scale even further toward the exceptional and away from the typical.

When it comes to telling the story of the Chinese Revolution, however, all of these exceptional factors, far from creating obstacles, present very definite advantages. Because contradictions arose in especially acute form in Long Bow and problems tended to etch themselves in very sharp relief, I felt able to observe the revolutionary process more fully and to understand it more deeply than I would have been able to do under more average circumstances and in more average surroundings. But the reader should keep in mind that not many villages in China followed such a tortuous path to liberation or experienced so much pain on the way.

Everyone in the revolutionary ranks learned from the kind of mistakes made in Long Bow at the height of the Civil War and when, in 1949, land reform workers went out from the Taihang Mountains by the tens of thousands to lead the Revolution in South and West China, they were far wiser men and women than they had been when they challenged the local gentry for control of the future at the end of the Japanese War.

The revolutionary process as it unfolded in China included advances and retreats, swings to the Right and swings to the Left, daily, hourly, minute-by-minute accretions and sudden, qualitative changes of state. Above all, the process went deep. It remade not only the material life of the people, but also their consciousness. It was this latter aspect that constituted the special strength of the Revolution and ensured, insofar as anything could, that the changes which it wrought would be both profound and lasting.

Because I have tried to delineate not only dramatic leaps in the life of the people, but also that slow accumulation of small changes without which no leaps could have occurred, I have written a book of considerable length. Along the way I borrowed from the literary arsenal of the novelist, the journalist, the social scientist, and the historian. What I have produced, finally, seems to me to resemble, in spirit and in content, a documentary film. I call it, then, a documentary of revolution in a Chinese village.

In the last analysis, what made such a documentary possible was the involvement of hundreds of people in its creation. Collectively the people of Long Bow, the members of the work team, and the two interpreters who helped me, delved into the past of the community and revealed it in its dynamic, many-faceted complexity.* Hence, the reader will find here, not one man's analysis of a small community in transition, but the community's own self-examination, its own estimate of what happened during the most crucial years of its existence. That examination was characterized by honesty, thoroughness, and depth, because on it would be based not only understanding but action, not only theory but practice—practice that must vitally affect the lives of millions.

The relevance of Long Bow's history to the present day can hardly be overemphasized. The story revolves around the land question. Without understanding the land question one cannot understand the Revolution in China, and without understanding the Revolution in China one cannot understand today's world.

But the impact of the land question on world affairs is not a function of China's specific gravity alone. Who shall own the land? Who shall rule the countryside? These are primary questions in the revolution that is sweeping the whole of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

* The language spoken in Southern Shansi is not pure Mandarin but a dialect. In addition to pronouncing most words in their own local way, Shansi peasants use many words that do not appear in any Chinese dictionary. Even interpreters well versed in Chinese dialects often find themselves at a loss to decipher the details of conversations between peasants. Thus, though I had a working knowledge of Chinese, it would have been impossible for me to follow the meetings without help.

That revolution, far from dying away, is intensifying. Sooner or later, all those countries where agricultural production is a main source of wealth—and the relation between owners and producers a main source of social conflict—will undergo great transformations. An understanding of the issues involved and the solution already applied by one great nation is therefore important. In countries that stand on the verge of land revolution, people are eager to study such lessons. In countries like our own, whose leaders have the capacity to hasten or delay—though not forever to prevent—such transformations in other lands, people *ought* to study them.

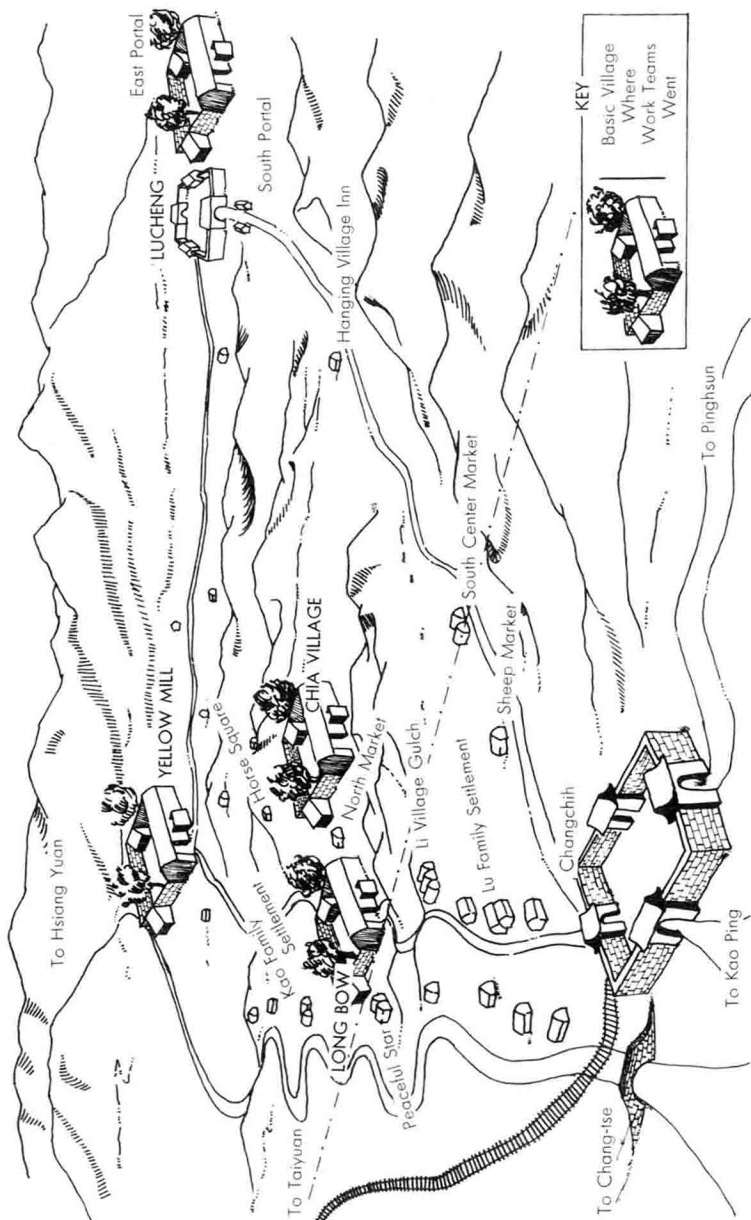
Because of these facts, I believe that this book is at least as timely today as it would have been had it come out 18 years ago when I first gathered the raw notes for it in Long Bow Village. What happened in China yesterday may well happen in Brazil, Nigeria, or India tomorrow.

Land reform is on the agenda of mankind.

William Hinton

Fleetwood, Pa.
May, 1966

CHANGCHIH LUCHENG AREA



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