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YO BANFA!

(WE HAVE A WAY!)

by

Rewi Alley

Edited by Shirley Barton

Foreword by

JOSEPH NEEDHAM, F.R.S.



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FOREWORD

ONE summer evening in 1943 a truck belonging to the Sino-British Science Cooperation Office pulled into the compound of the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives at Shwangshihpu in Shensi. Quickly I crossed the river and found my way through the fields and the eroded loess gullies to the wooden-fronted cave-dwelling which was the home at that time of Rewi Alley. I remember the welcome of a gay group which included George Hogg and some young Chinese afterwards my intimate friends; and I remember that there was corn-on-the-cob and honey with the local bread for supper. Now 10 years later, in another world, the privilege and the honour is entirely mine that I am asked to write a truly unnecessary foreword to this book of Rewi Alley's.

When after five decades one can begin to see one's life in perspective, it is possible to pick out perhaps half a dozen men who have not only been cardinal influences, but in whom it has been possible to see and touch what constitutes human greatness. Sanderson of Oundle, the prophetic headmaster under whom I sat, I should count as one; and at Cambridge, besides Hopkins, greatest of English biochemists, whose pupil I was, there were E. G. Browne and F. G. Burkitt, legendary scholars, who demonstrated the

romance and grandeur of learning and research. Louis Rapkine's Marxism and Conrad Noel's revolutionary interpretation of Christianity were on the same plane.

Rewi Alley I admit unhesitatingly among my half-dozen immortals. During the weeks and months which followed our first meeting at Shwangshihpu, as we penetrated further and further into China's far Northwest, along the Old Silk Road between the desert and the mountains, Rewi talked and talked and I never tired of listening. Over a roadside breakfast off the truck bonnet he descanted on the strategy of the Three Kingdoms period, in ancient inns he recounted his experiences among the dark Satanic mills of Shanghai and explained the systems of gangmasters and secret societies; during breakdowns on desert tracks he spoke of the profound humanity of the Chinese folk and the revolutionary activities of those who were determined that it should blossom forth in fullness and freedom from age-old oppression.

Although the friendship and love of Chinese friends had given me adequate psychological preparation, although I had felt entirely at home from the first moment I had arrived in China, Rewi Alley's flow of information gave what perhaps no other friend could have given, an objective appreciation and understanding of the basic problems of current Chinese civilisation. Now for the first time, whoever reads this book will be able to accompany him, as it were, on such a journey as I did, and hear him expounding in seemingly casual commentary the background of what future historians will surely regard as the greatest movement of this age.

The Resurgence of Asia. China's real Renaissance. The upsurge which has made the 500,000,000 black-haired people stand up and speak out. To democratic English ears the phrase, embodied in the national song of new China, echoes the song of the 17th century Levellers, "Ye Diggers all, Stand up now, Stand up now." Like a tidal wave the latent energy and initiative of the millions of Chinese people, second to none in the world for warm-heartedness, beauty and richness of humanist cultural traditions, has swept across Asia, unleashing everything that was previously batted down, good health, good farming, literacy, education, science, industrialisation, self-respect, transformed psychological values.

At all costs the occidental people must respond with sympathy and understanding to this overwhelming social phenomenon. They must abandon all the baseless claims of racial superiority and meet the Asian peoples as they ought always to have done, on the level of free and equal comradeship. They must throw off that mentality of domination which the historical accident of the rise of modern science and technology in western Europe so disastrously led them to adopt. For many centuries before that rise, in earlier phases of science, Asian peoples had been the teachers, not the learners. Now all must be learners, teachers and workers together, according to that great call to union which none can fail to hear, though many still foolishly dread. Let them read, mark, learn and inwardly digest this epic book of Rewi Alley's.

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

FIVE years have passed since this book was started, and already a sequel to it, entitled *The People Have Strength*, has been published. The swiftly changing present has made both books a piece of historical material, which the author hopes may still be of use to the person who seeks to gain a better understanding of what is happening in this part of his world today.

The preface to the first edition stated that there were 500 million Chinese. However, the census of 1953 shows that China had then a population of 602 million. This is a great and encouraging thing in the new world we hope for, which above all needs people to ensure its speedy development. Fighters for peace also will be inspired to know that so great a block of humanity devoted to their cause is backing them up in China.

If this new edition of *Yo Banfa!* helps at all in bringing to others some of the appreciation the author has felt for the ordinary people amongst whom he has lived, then its publication will have been well worth-while. The most satisfying period of his life was certainly that spent amongst peasant youth at Sandan, trying to

evolve with them a way for the training of creative technicians; and he constantly looks back in appreciation of their strength of character, their human warmth and their ability. Today they are scattered throughout many provinces carrying their share of responsibility for the new industrialization that gathers momentum as it sweeps forward.

An earthquake, one of those that have been periodic throughout history in West Kansu, levelled most of the buildings they erected at Sandan. The whole story of how people turned to reconstruction after that natural disaster, as I heard it from those who have come from there, is epic. The school, however, had just completed removal to a new site near Lanchow before the earthquake came. Like all other technical schools, it is very much a going and expanding set-up, and on the visit I made to it last year in the autumn, I looked with considerable pleasure at the faces of old students who were now teachers and technicians there, feeling anew that all the struggles in the other day surely did have meaning.

One more entry has been made to this edition—the story of a Sandan peasant boy, first a coal-miner, and then a student. As it is the story of so many who have found a way in the new life, it seems to me to be worth-while giving, as a good example for study.

Finally, the producers' cooperative movement in China, friends of "Gung Ho" will be glad to know, goes ahead in leaps and bounds, as does every other people's movement the necessity for which has become apparent to all of the awakened throughout this immense land.

REWI ALLEY

June 1955

P R E F A C E

THESE pages from my diary, mainly written during 1951, are now published in the hope that through them some of what is happening in today's China may be better appreciated.

To write fully of the two decades spent living under the old society in this country, would require a work of many volumes—just as to write adequately of what has happened in these three years since liberation, would require the production of a library. Should these scattered entries, however, give some clue to the difficulties surmounted, to an understanding of the struggle which went into this merging of the old with the new, they will have succeeded in their purpose.

The immediate past, for the liberated Chinese of today, is a somewhat bitter subject. Yet, for the average man and woman outside China, there is need for a more thorough realisation of what the old meant in order better to assess the sources of strength that have gone toward making this regenerated, this completely changed China that is gaining in momentum as it swings forward so confidently into the future.

The longing that there is for peace in this part of our world, the suffering that has been endured, the incredible courage, organisation and effort employed by the forces that have struggled so clear-mindedly for the necessary change—these are things of which one has tried to tell a little of here, and of which one hopes more and more will be written. The rest of the world needs to know of them, to realise what is happening to changing man in China.

For here is the epic struggle of our age, infinitely more significant than any atomic bomb; a new way of life that has taken the old, and from it woven new patterns that are bringing to 500,000,000 people fulfilment of hopes on a scale hitherto undreamt of.



I am deeply indebted to Shirley Barton for the task of selecting and editing the passages of diary used. One has been too busy with one's own regular work to do more than make a daily record of impressions and memories and send them off to her in Shanghai, to be the basis for what is now presented to the reader.

REWI ALLEY

YO BANFA!

SANDAN, 1950

December 10th: Mrs. Bai is the wife of the local party secretary, a quiet, unassuming little woman with a thin, pale son of 12, whom she has brought to our school hospital to have a diphtheria injection. Left some very good pickled turnips and peppers with me which she had made herself . . . One would not think, to look at her, that she had been a heroine of forced marches over rugged mountains with heavily armed KMT soldiers in pursuit; that she had lost two sons whom she could not save from bitter cold and hardship; had gallantly managed to save the third in spite of a fractured arm which no one had been able to set properly (she had been sitting on a donkey carrying her child when the animal's hooves slipped on the frozen track and threw her off) and so had come on to her post in Sandan, never having had time to stop and have the bone broken and reset . . . But heroism is so woven into the lives of all the old revolutionary workers that it is taken for granted. Their story is the story of millions.

The road has been so long and so full of tragedy, suffering and bitterness. It is their revolution and they have made it succeed. Yet they know that today's success must be taken thought-

fully, for there is much planned work to be done before their great vision of bread and peace for all of China's children can be transformed into proud reality.

Today I have been out over some of the wasteland at Ssu Pa. We have been talking about reservoirs for storing spring and summer water—reservoirs with tree belts. But out among the deserted graves of a forgotten village I stumbled across a system of reservoirs which, when they were in working order, must have brought prosperity to a great area of which Sandan is the centre. This ancient network runs for miles across the steppe and is really something to marvel at. There must have been a considerably larger population then to have done such work. There must have been rich homesteads and a thriving people, though save for these vestiges of irrigation works and some scattered pottery shards there is no trace of such today. An old Ming Dynasty tablet says that water from the Tat'ung River in Chinghai was made to run over these lands now waste and that both Chinese and foreigners helped in the construction of the waterways.

Our new four-wheeled carts, with their rubber tyres, were carrying out manure to the wheat land at our Ssu Pa farm today when I passed on my way back to Sandan city and the school. The drivers are very pleased with them and the peasants get off their donkeys to stare at them. The old peasant cart, with its lumbering couple of cows, could not haul more than 200 pounds. The four-wheeled cart can haul a ton.

It has been a perfect winter's day; the South Mountains, as they always do on still, calm days, standing in closely. The great peaks of Yen Tse Shan to the east and Ho Li Shan to the north are still covered with the last fall of snow. Smoke from our kilns and coal mines goes straight up in the air. Skimpy, the dog, chases birds as usual.

Back in Sandan city, a bunch of small boys wait at the Lei T'ai to collect the postage stamps from the mail. Not many letters this time. The convoy on the way from Chungking wants money but we do not have money, much . . . The old problem that has stayed with our little group for the past 10 years is still with us, but now the solution is near. The whole basis of our society has changed and now we stand on firm ground, where that which is built will stand. Our little problem of livelihood will be solved, as others are being solved.

Yet, for the moment, it is a headache. To bring 16 vehicles with precious machinery and some 50 souls—our school drivers, new students, technicians and their families—2,000 kilometres with our store of cash and gasoline dwindling and threatening to stop halfway does present a little difficulty. The older boys in charge will have to think up ways and means on the road.

December 11th: Today's radio showed the terrible determination of American big business to keep on with the war. They have been preparing their public for this for many years. It is not China, it is not Korea. What they itch to do is to try out their bombs on the USSR. What alternative to another depression but to keep the war going along nicely? It is very tragic to hear the long string of lies and to know that everywhere in the West decent people are being fooled. Some even seem to want to be fooled

Out at the flour mill this evening I noticed a big meeting of peasants. The new government workers were there with them. The peasants were talking with much energy and determination. There was a graduate of the school, Wang Chung-chuan, taking minutes. It is democracy from the bottom up these days; everyone taking part and saying all that he has to say. The great principle seems to be, "Let everyone get it off his chest!" Funny to come back home to the Lei T'ai, turn the knobs on the short-wave radio, and listen to the lies.

In the past, the attendance of any KMT official from the yamen at a meeting of peasants in the country would have been unheard of. Had he been there at all it would be for some purpose that boded ill to the peasants The peasants walk with a new air of assurance, and it is very clear that life is taking on a new meaning for them. They are not the same peasantry as they were last year and they will not be the same next year. The process of liberation has begun in their minds as well as in their physical surroundings. For the first time they really "stand up on their feet" and take stock of what they see about them. Before, they were beaten down too low, physically and spiritually, too drugged with opium and despair, even to raise their heads.

Max Wilkinson, the young New Zealander who looks after the sheep, came in with some sad pictures from a New Zealand

paper of recruits for a "K Force" (Korean Force). Those who are prostituting youth for this adventurism will have something to live down. They are the new war criminals.

* The mail brought some magazines with pictures of a more constructive kind, two types of machines which would help us here: the old-fashioned windmill and the stream-lined small steam power unit. Both would be excellent here, though perhaps the rotor wind power unit would have more chance in the long run. We have been experimenting with wind rotors, using cut-down 50-gallon oil drums. Before liberation, however, it was not easy to leave anything so valuable standing in the countryside. People were so very poor, and we had no way of having them understand what a centre such as that at Sandan could mean to them. The first wind rotor we erected vanished completely one night.

Su San, the lad who looks after the Lei T'ai where I live, gets the vegetables bought, audits the accounts, etc., and is a junior student in the transport section. The older boys have, in the past, only allowed him to do odd jobs with them, fetch and carry, take down engines, clean and fix and so on. Tonight he is quite proud of himself, as he has been trying to bring in coal. Most of the older boys are away in Chungking, trying to bring up the convoy, so this gives the younger ones a chance to learn.

Not very easy these days to keep the house warm, so we all have colds, with running noses. But I have now, in tune with liberation, had a wooden floor put in my room. It is very much more pleasant than the dusty old mud bricks. Max comes in from the farm and exclaims, "God, how cultured we're getting!"

December 12th: Today's mail brought back some old snapshots I had taken in 1939 of the Red Army Memorial in Juichin, in Kiangsi. It was a very imposing monument, and even bourgeois old Chang Fu-liang, one time secretary-general of the CIC, said that the inscriptions "stirred his blood." They were composed by those leaders whose names have meant so much to the Chinese common man all these years—Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, Chou En-lai and others. They must have stirred many people's blood, because it was found that young KMT military college students were making trips into the country to read them. So the monument was smashed by the KMT officials.

It had been grandly conceived, a natural amphitheatre, in the centre of which was a pillar in red stone, representing the Chinese people, capped by a white device symbolizing foreign imperialism. The old KMT army monuments, erected after their occupation of Juichin were, on the other hand, simply funny. Tawdry and meaningless in design, so jerrybuilt that many of them already lurched drunkenly to this side and that, they looked for all the world like some fantastic graveyard, scattered over the hill one passed on entering Juichin valley from the west side.

It is pleasant in this yellow Northwest to think back on those wooded valleys, the bamboo shacks beside the roads where rice beer and peppermint sweets were sold, and where country people greeted one as "Lao Piao" (Old Cousin)—and junks took our cooperative produce down the river to Kanchow with ease, speed and economy.

One wonders how the people of all those hills felt when the Red Army returned, at long last, to liberate them. The two old women, for instance, who served me tea as I once hiked by myself from Ningtu to Yutu and stopped for shade under their big front door tree; who said, chuckling, in answer to the question, what did they think of the Red Army, "We *are* the Red Army!" And those farmers who had brought oranges as gifts for their army... How proudly the old revolutionary slogans, still showing on the walls, must have stood out in welcome!

But this is 1950, and a new generation struggles towards maturity. Tsao Pai-cheng—"Buttons"—so called because for some years he made, out of sheep's horns, all the buttons for the school, feels that he is growing up. He is a good sixteen now. Somewhat resents being sent to the flour mill to grind flour and has called to make a little scene about the matter, finally stating that he will go off and serve the country as a soldier, and that will be that! The adolescent is usually less of a problem when he has the kind of work he likes. But Tsao will be a success in whatever he does as soon as he sees his way clearly.

Tsao is a natural leader. When a child, he was the accepted leader of some few hundred refugee women and children who lived in a broken down temple after their lands had been flooded. The fact that he could lead and that others would follow him led to his becoming something of an individualist "hero" type in the old

society, for, try as we would, the collective spirit could not be brought out as it is today. After liberation, those he had led rebelled somewhat, and Tsao was left without a following. Now he is going through the process of learning how collective man really operates, and where the place of the leader lies. In his learning he rebels, naturally, at any authority; wants to work hard, yet feels he is not making much headway, and begins to realise that he can only advance if his efforts are co-ordinated with others.

Other lads are going through similar experiences and it is not easy for these, either; while some of the more uncreative and shallow are seeing in the new way a chance of getting old scores paid back, for in our group many have had to do bitter jobs, unlike the ordinary city school lad. The group leaders have had to send students to work on irrigation ditches, to take food to the shepherds in the mountains, to weed sugar beet, to clean out stables, to guard stud sheep against wolves and bandits at night. As a progressive school, we tried to use the group method to get these things done, but there had to be leaders, and there were shirkers. Today we have a better way, with the whole state standing behind the new collective method; and we can work towards having leadership understood and supported, the group held together and the maximum creative potential of each lad brought out.

December 16th: Just heard Truman's latest speech, rendered over the radio in a fuzzy voice. Harry the Haberdasher is a poor puppet for the Big Boys, really! After this came the news of huge bombing operations over North Korea. The broadcast ended with the pious hope that the American railway strike would not affect the sending of chickens to the soldiers in Korea at Christmas.

It is snowing here today, with a keen wind. The people who are suffering under American bombs in Korea will be suffering as few have done in history. The first time that a whole country has been wrecked in the name of "UN" . . . The foreign radio said that Patel had died. It did not say how many children had died in Korea.

At our study group last night we talked about the new Common Programme for China, and the position of women; and how very difficult it is for men, who have held a privileged position for

so long, to change at once from a feudal attitude to a modern one —yet how quickly this great change is coming into being now.

At our leather section, the girls who are making next summer's shoes are doing very well. The boys' work has fallen down, however, because they lack leadership at the moment. The girls seem better able to provide their own leadership. The obvious answer is to get the girls to lead this section and the boys to accept their leadership.

Returning on my bicycle from a visit to the waterwheel, against the biting wind that swept across the steppe lands, reflected what a terrific difference shelter belts will make to this country; how very essential every tree will be. The Ma warlords did afforestation in Chinghai. Their methods were simple. They shot anyone who cut down a tree. In the early days after our arrival at Sandan there was a Ma magistrate who had peasants beaten and animals confiscated for the spoiling of trees. Naturally, as liberation approached, the peasants cut down what they liked and their animals chewed the bark from around the saplings so that they all died. The KMT army planted several thousand trees one year. Not one is left growing. They had neglected to do one thing: to take the people into their confidence and teach them what tree planting in that kind of country meant. With Gobi sands advancing each year, one of the great battles liberated man will have to fight is the preservation of his lands from desiccation. The tree becomes of incredible importance.

At the waterwheel, the boys at work extracting sugar from beet are plodding away, but the boiler is short of fittings, there are leaks in the big tubs the local carpenters made. And so on, as it is with everything new in a countryside so steeped in the old, trying to make new production and new livelihood.

December 17th: The mail that comes in twice a week brings many newspapers these days, and soon the sunny patch outside the library is alive with reading boys. They all read the political news with the liveliest interest. I wonder how the youth of New Zealand, say, would compare with them in knowledge of the outside world and its current problems, or in knowledge of technical things for that matter, and how to organise production? I begin to think of the fine institutions of my old home with a certain amount of pity. The boys who grow up there are not living as fully as these

at Sandan. They eat more, they are clothed better, have easier lives physically and mentally, but they are poorer in understanding than our liberated youth.

At the meeting of the heads of sections last night we decided to get on with the job of examining all the good and bad points of the staff. There will be many heartburnings. But it is really something to have people stand up and analyse their past mistakes and show how these have been corrected. It is something very new in China to see people accepting criticism and profiting by it. In a school where there are many young people who do not like to be fooled, the process is quite a trial for the backslider. Naturally, many of the older technicians get a bit hot under the collar, especially when some young student puts his finger on a very weak spot. But the results in the end are all for the good. The lad in transport, for instance, unable to hold out any longer, gets up and says, "Yes, I stole tools and sold them. I can see now I'm a fool;" and another, "Yes, I realise now that I tried to pull things down, not make them work. I did this because I wanted to be boss myself."

The foreign radio today was completely hysterical. The madness in America is a queer phenomenon. Our boys here in Sandan have seen advertisements in the papers calling for volunteers to train technically for defence. Many of them feel they should go in spite of the need for technicians in the new Northwest.

Talked this morning about the old gentry of Sandan. They were a scabby lot, all in all, and now that the people see them as they are, and not as glorified chairmen of government committees, as they were in the old KMT days, they are taken at their true value and laughed at as they deserve. Chung Shing-ling says that ex-Chairman Kuo is looking much better physically since he has been making coal bricks every day, and that ex-Chairman Chou, who hauls in water now, is becoming less sly than before, or "a little more honest," as Chung puts it kindly.

Today is all setting papers for examinations that start next week. I have only three—Economic Geography, Industrial Hygiene, and Technical English.

Walter Illsley has come back from Kaotai after seeing the small flour mill there. He went to fix the Diesel, but the jeep broke

down on the way back. So he had to hire some cows to pull it for the last 40 *li* from Tunglo.

December 23rd: Last night at our study group we talked for a while about the tragedy of conscription in the old KMT days.

As one looks at the soldier of today one feels that the scenes which were a daily occurrence on the Tsingling Shan roads around Shwangshihpu must have happened in the realm of nightmare . . . The emaciated carriers of dying boys on bamboo litters, who would toss them over the Shwangshihpu bridge, laughing hollowly and saying, "Give them a bath!" . . . The 80 kids who died in one night there and were carried over the river and dumped . . . The long lines of dysentery and malaria victims wending their way along the roads . . . sometimes they would throw themselves under passing trucks, sometimes just sit by the roadside until they died. There was a never-ending procession of Szechuan farmer boys being dragged to the Northwest, and leaving their bones along the way. What conceivable purpose the whole operation was intended to serve, God alone knew.

Out of one army of conscripts for Sinkiang, 10,000 left Szechuan, 700 got to Lanchow, and the handful who reached Sinkiang died there, for they arrived in the depth of the winter and had no warm clothing.

The ones who would die most easily were the kids of 16 or so, who could not fight so well for their food, always a racket in the hands of the old soldiers in charge of the convoy. They would get thin and weak and then dysentery would clean them up. The brutes who had undertaken to deliver them would walk behind them and beat them with sticks, urging them forward. Sometimes the suffering lad would lie down in the dust and die, with the driver senselessly beating, beating, and still beating. Not once or twice, but every time one took the road to Paochi, or south to Hanchung, one saw these scenes. The human waste was incalculable, the degradation complete. The full story will be told one day, perhaps.

The deeper one delves into one's memory, the more that comes up, so that one wishes one could forget . . . down to the long eels that picked the flesh clean from the bones thrown into the river . . . the skulls one would stumble over in the swimming

hole . . . the dogs worrying at odds and ends of people down amongst the scrub at roadside edges . . . and the batches of officers in Shwangshihpu restaurants. Gangsterdom in charge of a people has to be seen to be realised. It was on too vast a scale to be fully comprehended. In the country the horrible signs were seen everywhere, but in the streets of Sian and Chungking they were often shoved out of sight lest they offend the eye of the foreign diplomat and the American "advisor" and bring into contempt the "New Life" movement by which the Generalissimo and his Lady strove to show how modern, how progressive, how Christian they were.

Today we have entered a different world, and it is well, perhaps, to compare and note for others who will come after us.

One is haunted by these memories—so many and so dreadful. One remembers the young foreign correspondent who had been in the country "observing the effects of the war on the economy" or something of the sort. He came back to Chungking one day and said, "I'm going. This is a hell of a place." He went on to tell his story. He had just come from a village where hundreds of conscripts, taken from their homes and roped together, had been herded into a deserted temple and locked in. The KMT officer in charge had then gone off, and meeting some friends had gone carousing with them, forgetting all about his conscripts. The conscripts yelled and wept, but the peasants were too scared of the soldiers to go near the place. It was summer, in sticky heat. After two days peasants came round the temple in great number and at last broke in and saw the terrible sight of men who had gone mad, men who were suffocated, dying and insane. The room was jammed to capacity. It had a low ceiling and no windows, and the heavy door was barred from the outside. How any lived at all was a miracle. This was "mobilisation of the people" by the KMT.

While this story was being told me I thought of the other part of our Chungking compound, in charge of the "Spiritual Mobilisation" section of the KMT army. It had large premises, and as we could see was a place to which all the friends of the great came for jobs. They sat around in the gardens and played mahjong each day. On Monday mornings they had so-called "Sun Yat-sen Memorial Meetings" at which they droned out the anthem "San Min Chu I." It sounded like the tail end of a temple ceremony