EARTHBOUND CHINA

A STUDY OF RURAL ECONOMY IN YUNNAN

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TO OUR MASTERS

PROFESSOR S. M. SHIROKOGOROFF

PROFESSOR ROBERT E. PARK

PROFESSOR BRONISLAW MALINOWSKI

FOREWORD

THE present book, a study of three types of rural economy in Yunnan, the southwestern province of China, is a translation of three reports of field investigation of the Yenching-Yunnan Station for Sociological Research, National Yunnan University, made during the war by my colleague, Mr. Chih-i Chang, and myself. It has been prepared for the purpose of supplying some material to social scientists who do not have access to Chinese literature on economic conditions in the interior of China. In a sense, the study represents a background to the traditional economy of China. Since in interior China modern industrial and commercial influence is just beginning to be felt, village folk are still farming with the old techniques, economically more or less self-sufficient, and are imbued with the traditional virtue of contentment. The population is dense, and resources are limited. It is old China in miniature.

The demand for knowledge of the Orient is growing. Because of the rapid development of communications, East and West cannot live alone any longer. Formerly, a man in the New World could live happily in isolation. He could be satisfied by an occasional glance at the antiquities of ancient Cathay in curio shops or could amuse himself by enjoying the exotic and queer manners and customs of a foreign visitor. In the last decade, however, the physical distance that once barred intimate contact and protected local interests has disappeared. Land lying beyond the horizon yesterday is as close as the courtyard today. But close contact without intimate understanding leads inevitably to disaster. The disparity between physical propinquity and cultural distance, the disparity between material expansion and social adjustment—this unhappy situation presents a grave problem to the world today. It has challenged the survival of modern civilization.

To achieve a world community in which all peoples can live peacefully and with mutual respect, there is need of a supreme effort toward establishing mutual trust and co-ordinated action. These require mutual understanding. The basic knowledge of how a people lives and what its problems are is necessary for mutual tolerance, sympathy, and aid. Therefore, the importance of studying actual conditions in Chinese rural economy needs no further comment. But the

introduction in the West of systematic scientific information concerning the East is still inadequate

Some ten years ago Professor R. H. Tawney wrote:

> The scientific study of Chinese society is still in its infancy. Such industrialism as exists, being novel, has been frequently described; but the massive and permanent background of the traditional economy has received less attention. In spite of admirable work by Chinese and foreign scholars many aspects of the economic organization and social structure of China are still but partially known. Nor, even were knowledge of the normal operations of her economic system more complete than it is, would it be easy to allow for the dislocation which it has undergone during a decade of disorder.[1]

It may unfortunately be said that with the lapse of more than ten years the statement stands as true today as it was when it was written, while the dislocation of which Tawney speaks is even greater, and the situation more complicated, because of the present war.

To develop the scientific study of social reality is not easy. It requires sound methods of field observation and theoretical analysis, which, as we shall show, are not yet matured in present-day social science as a whole and in China in particular. In China this type of study is in one way a departure from tradition. It is well known that traditional Chinese scholarship was mainly literary research. Students believed that all wisdom could be found in books. When Western social sciences were introduced into modern universities, they did not change the tradition very much. When we were in college, we were usually burdened with heavy assignments in textbooks. We learned from books about Chicago gangs and Russian immigrants in America, but we knew very little or nothing about the Chinese gentry in the town and the peasants in the village, because these were not in books. This situation deeply impressed Professor Tawney, who said:

> The curriculum [in Chinese universities] is based to an excessive extent upon foreign materials. At worst, professors appear to repeat in China the substance of lectures heard, or books read, abroad. At best, insufficient attention is paid to the truism that the object of a university is not to cram students with information, but to prepare them for life in a society, and that, if a university is to aid its members to play a useful part in the life of China, it is less important that they should be informed as to the parliaments and stock exchanges of western nations than that they should understand the political and economic conditions of their own. The result is that the whole system has the air of a thing exotic and artificial. It is top-heavy, over-intellectualised and, in some cases, pretentious. Its atmosphere is that of a hot-house, not of the open air.[2]

[1] *Land and Labour in China* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1932), p. 23.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

True as are these observations of a distinguished scholar, it is also true that the students stifling in the hothouse were far from satisfied with their lot. Students in China have been trying to free themselves from this unhealthy atmosphere, and the present book is an attempt along this line. It may therefore be interesting to give a short historical account of the development of community analysis in China as a background to this study. It is not my intention to review the entire history of sociological or anthropological studies in China; I shall confine myself to the one institute under whose auspices the present work was done.

It was at the end of the 1920's that China entered a period of political stability and reconstruction. Young students, after having participated in the previous revolution, began to settle down and think about more fundamental issues. It was clear that political enthusiasm by itself would be futile if it were not to be followed by a period of practical reconstruction of the country. But when practical problems arose, most of the responsible leaders were at a loss, not for courage or devotion, but for knowledge of the existing realities. Quite naturally, therefore, students of that period directed their attention to the social realities and demanded a better understanding of the situation about them. It was at this time, in 1931–32, that Professor Robert E. Park, of the University of Chicago, visited Yenching University. He met the need of the students by inspiring them to make direct observations of community life and instructing them in how to carry on field studies. He himself visited the prisons and the Heaven Bridge, the red-light area in Peiping, to demonstrate that useful knowledge can be derived from the life of even the lowliest people. Following his example, and with the able leadership of Professor Wen-tsao Wu, the students of Yenching University started, mostly on their own initiative, a series of community studies in various parts of China. The following is a list of their work completed before the present war.

Ching-kun Yang. *A North China Local Market Economy*. 1933. A summary in English published by the Institute of Pacific Relations. New York, 1944.

Yung-shun Hsu. "Litigation in a Village Community in Hopei." 1933. Unpublished.

Shih Huang. "Peasant Custom in Hopei." 1934. Unpublished.

Yueh-hua Lin. "A Clan Village in Fukien." 1934. Unpublished. In English: *The Golden Wing: A Family Chronicle*, published by the Institute of Pacific Relations. New York, 1944.

Tai-chun Liao. *Chinese Rural Education (in Shangtung) in Change*. Privately printed in Chinese, 1936.

TUNG-WEI WANG (Mrs. Hsiao-tung Fei). *The Social Organization of Hua Lan Yao, an Aboriginal Tribe in Kwangsi.* Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936.

TI HUANG. "Ching-ho: A Town-Village Community" (in Chinese), published in *Sociological World* (Yenching University), 1937.

YU-YI LI. "Land Tenure in Shansi." 1938. Unpublished.

AN-LAN CHENG. "Emigrant Community in Fukien" (in Chinese), published in *Social Research Weekly*, 1938.

HSIAO-TUNG FEI. *Peasant Life in China* (in English). London: Routledge; New York: Dutton, 1939.

This list shows the direction of work in our first stage of endeavor. We explored most of the important aspects of community life: economic, political, family and kinship, educational, and ceremonial. We also approached different types of communities—tribal, village, and town. However, many overenthusiastic young students who daringly explored this vast field, like my wife, who sacrificed her life in an expedition to the Yao Mountains in Kwangsi, were without the benefit of specialized training, systematic theoretical preparation, and co-ordinated group effort. Along with these explorations in the field, attempts at systematization of the research program were made when Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown visited the institution in 1936 and when a trip to Europe and America was made by Professor Wen-tsao Wu. But the present war broke out only a few months after Professor Wu returned to China in 1937. Yenching University was first isolated and then captured by the Japanese. The occupation of our base by the enemy temporarily suspended our work. In 1937 Professor An-che Li, a senior member of the research group, was able to get through the Japanese blockade and to come to Free China. He started a research station in northwestern China, studying border communities in that area, near Tibet. Professor Wu entered Free China in 1938 and established his headquarters in the National Yunnan University, with the aim of regrouping the students and carrying on our tradition. This institution now is called the Yenching-Yunnan Station for Sociological Research. The following studies have been completed.

I. ON RURAL ECONOMICS

HSIAO-TUNG FEI. *Land System in Luts'un.* 1940.

CHIH-I CHANG. *Rural Industry in Yits'un.* 1941.

———. *Land and Capital inYuts'un.* 1943.

The first two have been summarized in *Three Types of Rural Economy in Yunnan* (in English), distributed by the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1943. The full texts of these three studies are translated and re-edited in the present book.

II. On Aboriginal Economics

Yu-yi Li. *Economics of a Mixed Community of Lolos and Chinese.* Summarized in *Three Types of Rural Economy in Yunnan.* 1943.

Ju-kong Tien. *Ceremonial Disposition of Wealth in Tai-speaking Tribes in Yunnan.* 1943.

———. *Land System in Yunnan-Burma Border Communities.* 1944.

The above studies will be translated into English in one book, *Primitive Economics in Yunnan.*

III. On Labor and Labor Relations

Kuo-heng Shih. *Industrial Workers in Kunming Defense Industry.* 1942. Summarized (in English) in *Labor and Labor Relations in the New Industries in Western Yunnan,* distributed by the Institute of Pacific Relations (New York, 1943); full text translated in *China Enters the Machine Age* (Harvard University Press, 1944).

Ju-kong Tien. *Female Workers in a Cotton Mill.* 1942. Summarized, inEnglish, in the above pamphlet and reprinted in the above book.

Kuo-heng Shih. "Education and Modern Industry in China: A Study of Apprenticeship" and "Mine Workers in South Yunnan," prepared for publication in Chinese.

IV. On Magic and Religion

Francis L. K. Hsu. *Magic and Science in Western Yunnan: A Study of the Introduction of Modern Medicine in a Rustic Community* (in English). Distributed by the Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1943.

———. "Family, Clan and Ancestor Worship in Western Yunnan." In preparation.

V. On Local Government

Pao Kuo, *The Power Structure in a Rural Community in Yunnan.* 1943. English translation in preparation.

The research station started its work in the autumn of 1938 when the Japanese had occupied all the coastal region of China. The front was drawing near to the interior. Conditions were growing steadily worse. In 1940 air raids became a daily routine in Kunming. Academic centers were especially attractive to enemy bombers. One day in October, 1940, our university was bombed and our houses destroyed. So we moved to a village and established our station in a temple. It was called Queike, the tower for worshiping the God of Literature; and later our station was known by that name. By living together in the same village, more or less isolated from the outside, and occupying a common study up in the ancient tower, surrounded by aged pine trees and by rice fields, an informal and intimate atmosphere was created among the small community of research students which encouraged their constant intellectual interaction.

Regular seminars were held in Queike. Fresh ideas developed as new observations were brought back by the field workers. Inspiration

came from various sources: from the statue of the monkey-like god; from the purified light through the paper windows, giving the feeling of a reflection from the snow; from the roar of the wind in the pine trees; from the hot tea which was never lacking in the station; from the incense burning on the altar, placed there by devoted old country women; and from the friends from different lands and with different interests who visited us. We kept the research work going in the spirit of individual initiative and personal responsibility—a spirit which was seriously lacking in the pre-war universities.

We began to realize the truth in Tawney's words, "If education is to be alive, it must have its roots in the soil"[3]—the soil here implies a genuine interest in knowledge of the living problems of the day. The poverty of material life; sympathy for the hardships of the masses; the moral enlightenment which comes with the realization of one's part in the community, in the nation, and in the age; the bitterness of facing reality—all these combined to develop intellectual maturity. It is the war which has provided the stimulus long needed by Chinese scholarship. If there is anything of value in the following pages, as well as in the other treatises produced by the research station during the war, perhaps it is due to the adventurous spirit of exploring living problems. If there is anything in the exploration that shows insight and thoughtfulness, it is due to not easily satisfied young minds; the urge for knowing the conditions under which they are living is the incentive for the raising of new problems and the selection of data. To a Western reader the direction of these studies and the problems raised there may be more interesting than the findings themselves.

A few words may be added to describe briefly the material condition of the station. Visitors are surprised by our primitive equipment —a bare temple and a small library, consisting of old books that some of our colleagues accumulated during their student days. Occasionally we have a maid, but frequently we ourselves must cook and fetch water. There are no secretaries, so that we must copy every word and mimeograph every sheet of class material or manuscript. When we go to the field, we usually walk tens of miles and climb mountains day after day. Once we came to a village which was not hospitable. We were put in a supposedly haunted house to share the quarters of dying horses. But we were not in the least discouraged, because in this way we were able to experience the hard bare facts of human existence.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

The limitation of material facilities and financial support does, indeed, account for some of the weaknesses of the studies. For instance, without any assistance, we were limited to those materials we were able to collect personally while in the field. Although this helped to emphasize the importance of firsthand observations, it did prevent us from collecting data which could profitably have been gathered by assistants, such as the accounts of the villagers' daily expenditures, the enumeration of individuals in the markets, etc. We had no camera. Only by chance were we sometimes able to borrow one from friends. But films were so expensive that we at last gave up the attempt to take pictures. We could not afford to have experts make maps or surveys but had to be content with rough, inaccurate sketches. Moreover, the station could provide only a few full-time research workers. Most of us had to teach in the university. Those who had families were burdened at the same time with housework—shopping for supplies, cooking, and sweeping the floors. Therefore, it was not possible to stay in the field for a whole year. Medical care was lacking entirely. With a diet often inadequate, research workers easily became ill. Once the whole staff was affected by dysentery, and the work was suspended for weeks. Under such conditions the work of the research station has been and is being carried on. It is sustained by one conviction alone, the conviction of the importance of knowledge in reconstructing China as a member of the world community.

Even working in the most economical way possible, under present conditions of wartime inflation, we should not have been able to carry on if encouragement from our government, foundations, banks, and private sponsors had not been vouchsafed us. We are indebted to these sources not only for moral support, such as the prize of the Ministry of Education for the report on Luts'un and that of the Academia Sinica for the report on Yits'un, but also for financial subsidies. The Yenching-Yunnan co-operation program was started with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. The Farmers' Bank in China, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and Mr. Chin-hsi Li have repeatedly given us grants. In 1944 the Economic Council of Yunnan Province took up the sponsorship. If we have done anything worth while in science, they should share the credit.

All the reports of the research station have been written in Chinese, and a number of them have been published. Realizing the importance of preparing an English edition of our report, we summarized our work, mainly for private circulation, in the pamphlets mentioned

above, which were prepared with the co-operation of the International Secretariat of the Institute of Pacific Relations. By various scientific circles in England and America we were then encouraged to translate the full texts of our reports. In 1943–44 I was sent by the National Yunnan University, at the invitation of the Department of State of the United States, to visit America, being instructed at this time to prepare an English edition of our work.

The Institute of Pacific Relations granted me the necessary funds for secretarial work. I am grateful to Professor Ralph Linton for his encouragement and co-operation during the preparation of this book. Part I was prepared at Columbia University with the assistance of Mr. Paul Cooper. The remainder of the book was prepared at the University of Chicago, which provided me with a study bearing the name of Robert E. Park on its door. I mention this not simply to make much of an accident—an accident which, however, through the force of what the Melanesians call *mana*, did actually stimulate me in my work—but, since "door" means "academic entrance" in literary Chinese, to symbolize my intellectual allegiance to this great teacher who initiated our rural studies in China. Could it have been a comfort to him to know before he passed away, only a few months before the completion of this book, that the seeds he had sown on his trip to China had at last borne fruit?

While I was working in the University of Chicago, I profited from daily discussions with the members of the Department of Sociology. Dean Robert Redfield made valuable suggestions in re-writing the material, and Margaret Park Redfield collaborated with me in editing Parts II and III and in arranging the final form of the book.

The title of this book was given by Professor B. Malinowski. When we parted in London in 1938, he assigned to me the duty of investigating the rural community in the interior of China, for he foresaw the possibility and the importance of this work. Before his untimely death he constantly wrote me and suggested many points worthy of special attention. Although a full list of questions was, unfortunately, lost in the mail and never received, the title suggested by him for the book did reach me. I cannot help expressing here my personal feeling of dismay that death has taken from me my three esteemed masters, Professors S. M. Shigorokoroff, R. E. Park, and B. Malinowski. From them I inherited most of my ideas; yet none of them has been able to see the work which has resulted. To them this book is dedicated.

In presenting this English edition I have an additional note to

make. This book has been prepared for social scientists, with little consideration for the general reader. Yet I do not underrate the latter. If such a one should come to read this book, I would ask from him the courage to face reality and his sympathy toward an age of transition. There are, at present, certain symptoms of oversensitivity between Americans and Chinese. Most of those who have visited China during this war, as Dr. John K. Fairbank rightly pointed out in a letter to Chinese students in America, "have never studied Chinese history, so that they have no way of knowing how rapidly the Chinese Republic has advanced during the past generation. This makes them often uncomprehending and unreasonable in their criticism. . . . . There is good and bad in China, as everywhere, especially during wartime, and Americans must be made to think about it with understanding, not with emotions of idealistic enthusiasm or disillusioned pessimism." Such an irresponsible emotional reaction which leads to unreasonable criticism, he said, "raises a very great doubt whether the people who have been trying to interpret China or Chinese history to the West have really made any progress." In this sense, the present book will be a test of whether a realistic approach will help to build up friendship between these two peoples. Our success depends on the response of the readers. The encouragement to take up this task, I must not fail to mention, comes to me mainly from Mrs. John K. Fairbank. Through her indefatigable assistance in arranging for me connections with American academic centers, I was able to undertake the present translation. She it is, I believe, who, having lived in China and loving it, sees most clearly the real need of an intelligent understanding as a background to cultural relations. May this book vindicate the correctness of her view.

HSIAO-TUNG FEI

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INTRODUCTION

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE CHINESE RURAL COMMUNITY

THE present book is a study of the economic aspects of the Chinese rural community. Because the economic life of the Chinese peasant has been deteriorating ever since his first contact with the West, this aspect of the rural community has for a long time attracted the attention of students, both Chinese and foreign. The best book on this subject, in our opinion, is Professor Tawney's *Land and Labour in China*. It is a summary of the Chinese economic situation prior to 1931, based on the data available at that time. All the data are from the work of other investigators. Tawney's conclusions are valuable not so much because of the factual material but because he interprets the data against the background of the general economic changes taking place in China—changes which are comparable to those which occurred in Europe during the Industrial Revolution. The data which sustain Professor Tawney's theoretical deductions were gathered by the social-survey method, of which the work of Dr. J. L. Buck is an example.

Buck's *Chinese Farm Economy* (1930) and *Land Utilization in China* (1937) are still the best-known books in the field of rural economics in China. In the first book, 2,866 farms in seventeen localities and seven provinces, and in the second, 16,786 farms in 168 localities in twenty-two provinces, were studied. The contribution made by these monumental works is great. They not only present a vast amount of information on various topics in the field of rural economics and land utilization but also lay the foundation for the use of the survey method in studying Chinese economic and social problems.

Buck approaches rural problems in China from the technical level, as an agricultural expert whose interest is mainly in increasing the economic return of the land. He defines the situation as follows:

> The technic of crop and animal production is practically the same in both [Chinese and European] civilizations, except for contrasts in the extent of the development of agricultural science. It is rather the type of land utilization, and the success in land use that differentiates the agriculture of the Oriental and the Western civilizations.[1]

[1] *Land Utilization in China* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1937), p. 1.

He is conscious of a certain one-sidedness in his approach. He adds:

> Associated with the type of use, however, are the various agrarian relationships which may facilitate or hinder any particular type of land use. In this study no attempt has been made to appraise in detail the so-called agrarian situation which may be thought of in terms of the political, economic and social relationships between farmers and other classes of society.[2]

The problem of farm ownership and tenancy, which apparently does not interest him, is treated as a side issue. In his first study he remarks that "a special treatment of tenancy was not contemplated in the schedule used for these studies."[3] It is, therefore, unfair to criticize Buck on the ground that his study does not represent a complete picture of the economic life or of the land system in Chinese villages. This is not his purpose, although sometimes he does express an opinion on political, economic, and social problems in the "so-called agrarian situations."

However, it should be asked how far agricultural problems can be studied without taking into account their institutional background? I should like to consider this problem purely from the methodological point of view.

In Buck's study it is clearly demonstrated that types of land use vary among owners and nonowners. A clear analysis of types of land use thus requires an adequate classification of operators, according to the varying categories of social status developed. It is to be expected that these categories will vary from one community to another. Thus, a tenant in one region may have a social status which is somewhat different from that of a tenant in another. Therefore, a study of land utilization requires a study of the whole system of landholding in the particular field being investigated. Buck, however, does not pay any attention to these variations but adopts throughout his study the conventional American classification into owners, part owners, and tenants. The similarity of the Chinese and American land systems is taken for granted; and he draws the conclusion, comparing his figures with those found in America, that "the extent of farm tenancy in China is no greater than in many other countries and, therefore, is not a problem peculiar to China."[4] In a later publication he maintains the same position by saying: "Tenancy is prevalent in Szechwan, 47 per cent of all farmers, but not greatly different than in many countries. In the United States 42 per cent of all farmers are tenants."[5] It is clear that

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 1. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 145. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

[5] *An Agricultural Survey of Szechwan Province, China* (Chunking, 1943), p. 2.

when he makes these conclusions he is not only assuming the similar meaning of tenancy in China and in America but is also isolating the problem of tenancy from other essential facts, such as the size of the farm, amount of rent, standard of living, nutrition, etc., on which he has ample data. This illustrates the danger of the social survey which pays no attention to the interrelation of the separate items, that is, the institutional background.

If Buck had consistently confined himself to compiling "certain elementary information about land utilization, food and population in China,"[6] he would have kept clear of such questionable conclusions. But he seems not to have been content with remaining on the technical level, omitting entirely the vital issues of the agrarian situation. However, when the survey method is applied without proper preparation to the study of social institutions, the weakness of the method becomes even more apparent. An example is the report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission of the Executive Yuan in 1935. This report consists of a number of volumes, one of which deals with rural economics in Yunnan, and is the first extensive study made in that province. A summary in English of this report is found in *Agrarian China*.[7]

In making a social survey, a questionnaire form is usually prepared before the investigator undertakes the work. Items to be observed are determined beforehand. In the questionnaire a classification of status in land system is provided, definitions for each status being given according to some preconceived idea. In this survey, following the American convention, villagers are classified into landowner, part owner, tenant, landless laborers, and nonfarming villagers. The same classification is used in studying various provinces, and the data are assumed to be comparable. Unfortunately, in Yunnan, as we shall see, the social and economic position of the tenants of collective owners, such as clan owners, is essentially different from that of the tenants of private owners. But, since there is no separate category in the questionnaire form, which obviously was prepared by someone who had no knowledge of the conditions in Yunnan, these two different kinds of tenant are thrown into the same category. When figures on the tenant class in Yunnan are compared with those from Kaingsu, still

[6] *Land Utilization in China*, p. viii.

[7] *Report on Rural Investigation in Yunnan*, ed. Rural Reconstruction Commission of the Executive Yuan (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935); "Land Ownership and Land Cultivation in Yunnan," *Agrarian China* (Institute of Pacific Relations, 1938), pp. 50–56.