A large crowd of people, mostly men and children, are gathered in a village square. They are wearing winter clothing, including hats and coats. In the background, there are traditional Chinese buildings with tiled roofs. The overall tone is historical and somber.

TEN MILE INN

MASS MOVEMENT IN A CHINESE VILLAGE
ISABEL AND DAVID CROOK

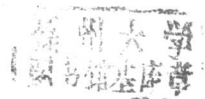
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Mass Movement in a Chinese Village

by

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PREFACE

Huang Hua

It is a great honor for me to write a preface for the new, PFS (China Society for People's Friendship Studies) 50-book series under the general title of *Light on China*. All these books were written in English by journalistic and other eyewitnesses of the events described. I have read many of them over the seven decades since my student days at Yenching University. With some of the outstanding authors in this series I have ties of personal friendship, mutual regard, and warm memories dating from before the Chinese people's Liberation in 1949.

Looking back and forward, I am convinced that China is pursuing the right course in building a strong and prosperous country in a rapidly changing world with its complex and sometimes volatile developments.

The books in this series cover a span of some 150 years, from the mid 19th to the early 21st century. The numerous events in China, the sufferings and struggles of the Chinese people, their history and culture, and their dreams and aspirations were written by

foreign observers animated by the spirit of friendship, equality and cooperation. Owing to copyright matters and other difficulties, not all eligible books have as yet been included.

The founder of the first Chinese republic, Dr. Sun Yat-sen wrote in his Testament in 1925, “For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of the people’s revolution with but one end in view: the elevation of China to a position of freedom and equality among the nations. My experiences during those forty years have convinced me that to attain this goal we must bring about an awakening of our own people and ally ourselves in common struggle with those people of the world who regard us as equals.”

Chairman Mao Zedong declared, at the triumphal founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, “The Chinese people have stood up.” Today, having passed its 53rd anniversary, we see the vast forward strides that have been taken, and note that many more remain to be made.

Many foreign observers have traced and reported the real historical movement of modern China, that is: from humiliation — through struggle — to victory. Seeking understanding and friendship with the Chinese people, their insight and perspective were in basic harmony with the real developments in China. But there have been others who viewed China and the Chinese people through glasses tinted by hostile prejudice or ignorance and have invariably made irrelevant observations that could not stand the test of time. This needs to be better understood by young people and students, at home and abroad. The PFS series *Light on China* can help them gain an overview of what went before, is happening now, and will

emerge in the future.

Young students in China can additionally benefit from these works by seeing how foreign journalists and authors use fluent English to record and present historical, philosophical, and socio-political issues and choices in China. For millions of students in China, English has become a compulsory second language. These texts will also have many-sided usefulness in conveying knowledge of our country to other peoples.

Students abroad, on their part, may be helped by the example of warm, direct accounts and impressions of China presented by their elders in the language that most readily reaches them.

Above all, this timely and needed series should help build bridges of friendship and mutual understanding. Good books long out of print will be brought back to strengthen the edifice.

My hearty thanks and congratulations go first to ex-Premier Zhu Rongji, who has been an effective supporter of this new, PFS series. They go to all engaged in this worthy project, the Foreign Languages Press, our China Society for People's Friendship Studies, and others who have given their efforts and cooperation.

Chairman Mao Zedong has written: "So many deeds cry out to be done, and always urgently. The world rolls on, time presses. Ten thousand years are too long. Seize the day, seize the hour."

The hour has come for making these books available to young people in China and abroad whose destiny is to build a better world together. Let this series add a small brick to that structure.

Beijing, Autumn 2003

Acknowledgments

Our first debt is to the people of Ten Mile Inn, who “opened their hearts” to us; to the work team and to the group of Border Region cadres who served not only as interpreters but as fellow researchers. We also owe thanks to the Border Region Government and Party leaders who granted us the facilities needed for our work; to the Chinese and Western friends who read all or part of the original draft and gave us many helpful suggestions for correcting and improving it; and to students of the Foreign Languages Institute of Peking, who helped with the translation of documents. Finally we express special appreciation to Mary Barnett, Jeffrey Faude, and James Peck for their constant encouragement, editorial expertise, and inexhaustible energy in whipping our unwieldy manuscript into shape. Without this collective effort, the book could not have been written.

A Note on Romanization

The system used in this book for rendering Chinese words, including names, is Hanyu Pinyin, the official Chinese system of spelling. It has the advantage of helping people who do not know Chinese to pronounce it more accurately than do other systems, most of which are misleading to the ordinary person. In Hanyu Pinyin most letters are pronounced roughly as in English or other languages using the Latin alphabet. The following are some exceptions: c is pronounced ts (as in its); o before ng rhymes with oo (as in look); q is pronounced ch (as in cheese); x as sh (as in sheep); zh as j (as in Jack); e as in her. The diphthong ao rhymes with ow (as in now). Thus Mao Tse-tung in Hanyu Pinyin is written Mao Ze-dong.

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I

Arrival at Ten Mile Inn

In the middle of the civil war between the Chinese Communists and the Guomindang, we floated on a barge down the Grand Canal through no man's land and into the Liberated Areas. As we passed into these vast, scattered patches of North China, we entered a world of over 140 million people engaged in the final stages of the struggle against Jiang Jie-shi. The year was 1947, the turning point in the demise of Jiang's twenty years of corrupt and reactionary rule. Feudalism in China was collapsing, even in the smallest villages.

We quickly found that the people in the Liberated Areas had coined new words to express the ideas and circumstances of this revolutionary society. Few of them more powerfully symbolize the heart of the revolutionary process than the word "fanshen."

Literally, fanshen means "to turn the body." Freely translated, it means to get up on one's feet, stand up for one's rights, and come into one's own. For the peasant the heart of this individual and social transformation was land reform. When the Communists set out to change the traditional land relationships in China, they literally began an effort to reform all of Chinese society. To China's hundreds of millions of landless and land-poor peasants, this meant the overthrow of the omni-present landlord yoke. It meant the acquisition for the first time of animals and houses. It was a

struggle in which the peasants were urged to overcome their ancient feeling of deference and dependence and to assert themselves against those who had long oppressed them.

The Chinese speak of “dissecting a sparrow”—making a careful and thorough examination of a particular situation in order to discover the general processes at work. This is what we sought to do in one Chinese village—Ten Mile Inn. Though unique in many ways, it also served us as a microcosm for what was taking place in countless villages throughout the Liberated Areas.

In November 1947 we arrived at Ten Mile Inn, one of a cluster of villages forming the capital of one of the border regions which constituted the Liberated Areas. This particular region was called Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu and comprised vast borderlands of four adjoining provinces, Shanxi, Hebei, Shandong, and Henan. It covered an area of some 80,000 square miles with a population of about 30 million. The village itself is about 275 miles southwest of Peking and 600 miles northeast of Shanghai. It straddles the major trade and transport route in the area, which connects the village to the county town of Wu An 20 miles to the east and to the city of Handan, which was a train stop along the Hankow-Peking Railway.

Ten Mile Inn stands beside the Min River. Approaching the village from the east, the old dirt road follows the riverbed, dry nine months of the year. The valley narrows and the hills rise more steeply, their lower slopes laboriously terraced, their tops eroded and bald “as a monk’s pate.”

From a distance there appear to be two villages rather than one. Down in the valley is the main village, or “the Street,” as it is usually called; to the northeast, climbing up the side of the hills, is “the Fort.” With its cobbled causeway slanting up to a massive stone gate and the backs of its stone houses rising sheer from the hillside, cut away below to form a cliff, the Fort once was a citadel from which the feudal landlords dominated the peasants in the village below.

We arrived by mule cart passing through the picturesque south gate. In bold white letters above the graceful arch was a line from a popular folk

tune set to new words: "Mao Ze-dong is the great savior of the Chinese people." Other slogans lambasted Jiang Jie-shi. And on another wall was chalked up the day's edition of the "Blackboard News" copied from the official Party paper, the *People's Daily*, which always carried a simply written feature especially for this purpose.

Although the village street was part of the highway, it contained only one shop of note—the cooperative. In addition, there were a couple of inns and restaurants catering to passing travelers and peddlers, and a mutton-soup shop known far and wide as a good pull-up for carters.

All these places served as social centers. Groups of men gathered in front of them, while in gateways or other sheltered spots were women sitting in their own groups spinning, reeling yam, or hanging up pieces of newly dyed cloth. Children were everywhere, adding their shrill voices to the other village sounds—the rumble of wooden-wheeled carts on the potholed street; the musical chant of doughnut peddlers; the braying of donkeys; the clang of picks and hoes intermittently striking stones up on the hillsides.

Before arriving at Ten Mile Inn, we had submitted our plan for a study of land reform in one village. While awaiting the official decision on our request, we were invited to stay in the border government guest house in Ten Mile Inn. Actually, the "guest house" was a number of rooms scattered in different villagers' homes. We slept in one, ate in another.

The village leaders and Communist Party members were told that we were foreign friends visiting the Liberated Areas. Consequently we had a free run of the village and were treated in a friendly fashion by the great majority of villagers, who took the time to answer our constant questions.

We had arrived at an eventful moment. The Communist Party of China had called a conference in September 1947 to draft an agrarian law which was to bring about the thoroughgoing reform of the feudal land system; for this, it considered, was the key to rousing the entire peasantry to enthusiasm for production and for bringing the war to a victorious conclusion. The draft law that was drawn up included instructions for

carrying out its decisions in three different sets of circumstances: in old Liberated Areas where feudalism had been pretty well smashed, but where land holdings were still not equitable, democracy inadequate, and where, it was believed, many Party branches were impure (that is, leadership had fallen into the hands of landlords, rich peasants, or other "class aliens"); in "semi-old areas" where much more sweeping measures were required*; and in newly liberated areas which were not yet sufficiently consolidated to embark on fullscale land reform. To work out the detailed plans for implementing the law, the Central Committee's Party Bureau for each Border Region held a followup conference.

At the time of our arrival the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu Border Region agrarian conference was in session. It was a lengthy session which not only worked out the practical details for carrying through the campaign, but also conducted a "self-rectification" for senior Party cadres to prepare them for leading the work of agrarian reform.

When this conference was over, we discussed our plans with the Border Region chairman. He suggested that the most valuable course for us to pursue would be to study the operations of one of the pilot "work teams" which were to be organized to carry out the conference's decisions. One of these teams was soon to start work in Ten Mile Inn, which was a typical old Liberated Areas village. We agreed that this village would be an appropriate location for our work.

There were still six weeks until the work team was due in Ten Mile Inn. So from early December until February 1948, we gathered material for a ten-year history of the village (1937-1947) and of the transformation of the feudal land system which had already been basically completed during the preceding eighteen months. Collecting the materials was the work of a team, the size and composition of which varied at different periods. Out of

* For an account of the campaign in such areas, see William Hinton, *Fanshen* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

this collective effort with our Chinese colleagues came *Revolution in a Chinese Village*.*

Then from February 26 to April 15, 1948, a campaign for thorough implementation of the Agrarian Law was launched in Ten Mile Inn. Since the village was in an old liberated area and some of the provisions of the law were already in effect, it was not necessary to start from scratch. The new campaign, therefore, was called the "Adjustment of Landholdings and Educating and Re-organizing the Party Members" or, for short, the Adjustment Campaign. We were given facilities for observing this campaign and investigating what was going on. The only limitation was that of our own ability to understand what we saw and heard. We were permitted to attend meetings of all sorts—of the villagers themselves and of the work team—and to examine a mass of written material: village documents, statistical records, instructions to the work team, and so on. Besides this, we saw much of the ordinary course of daily village life, and attended numerous meetings concerned with routine village matters. This book is a play-by-play account of the seven-week Adjustment Campaign as we saw it with our own eyes.

Ten years of struggle had profoundly changed Ten Mile Inn.** In 1937 before the beginning of the reforms, 70 percent of the people of the village lived in the most dire circumstances. For much of the year they subsisted on husks, wild herbs, and watery gruel "so thin you could see the reflection of the moon in it." In terms of an economically advanced country, there were no wealthy people in Ten Mile Inn. Landlords and peasants alike were pitifully poor. Nevertheless there was a profound difference between them. In time of famine, it was the members of the poor families who died or emigrated, who were forced by poverty to kill or sell children whom they could not feed, who were driven by hunger to join the warlord armies, who were imprisoned for the nonpayment of taxes or lost

* David and Isabel Crook, *Revolution in a Chinese Village* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

** What follows is some of the basic facts from *Revolution in a Chinese Village*.

their meager property by default for nonpayment of debts. But for the landlords and rich peasants, famine was a time for foreclosure on mortgages and for adding to their own landholdings.

In 1937 there were just over 1,400 people in Ten Mile Inn, and just under 700 acres of land. This would have worked out to half an acre a head if it had been evenly divided. But it was not. Eight households of landlords and rich peasants owned 120 acres, and landlords living in other villages owned another 90 or so. There were 40 families of upper-middle peasants who had enough to get along on and could even put aside a little each year. The remaining 373 families had only 218 acres among them.

For every ten people in the village there was only one draft animal. But here again, the twenty richest families had two animals each; the remaining families averaged only "one leg each," as the peasants said when four of them shared a donkey. In fact, most of them owned "not even one hair of a donkey."

Poverty drove numerous peasants to leave Ten Mile Inn. There was simply too little land for the poor to make a living. As a result many became itinerant brickmakers during the slack farming season. When they were lucky enough to find work, the brickmakers earned more in a month than a farmhand could make in a year. But the work was too irregular to afford a reliable income. Nonetheless, in 1937 as many as 201 families had men engaged in this craft. Other villagers found work in other areas. Without such secondary occupations, many of the poor-peasant families could not have survived even at their customary miserable level.

Before the Communists came, Ten Mile Inn limped along in this crippled condition. Landholdings had long since become uneconomically small, for according to Chinese inheritance tradition, the land was divided equally among all the sons. Most landlords and rich peasants tried to keep themselves from falling into this pit of land fragmentation by supplementing their income from rents with business or usury. The traditional aim in each generation was to add so much to the family estate by purchase, foreclosure, and other practices, that each son could inherit as much as

his father had done before him. Since usury—supported by hired toughs—yielded a much higher profit than productive enterprise, it was by far the most practical method of realizing this aim. Demanding the most extortionate rates of interest might thus be interpreted as an act of loyalty to the family.

This diversion of capital into usury rather than production or construction not only grossly hampered the already retarded development of the economy; it also engendered a dog-eat-dog world within the village, a ruthless competitive struggle for existence that practically destroyed genuine cooperative efforts.

In 1940 the Japanese Imperial troops swept up the valley, bringing with them death and destruction and undercutting the power of the local Guomintang authorities. Elements of Jiang's Nationalist Army had been stationed in Ten Mile Inn on and off until that year, when they fled Wu An County and left behind them villages with bitter memories of brutal conduct by Guomintang soldiers, but no defense against the Japanese invaders. Although the Japanese never occupied Ten Mile Inn, a "mopping up" mission looted the village and killed ten villagers.

Then, as the peasants say, "The sun arose in the West." Units of the Communist-led Eighth Route Army, driving eastward from their bases in the heart of the Taihang Mountains, organized the peasants to defend themselves.

In 1942 and 1943, in the midst of a growing struggle with the enemy, famine struck. For untold generations famine had been a regular feature of Chinese rural life. It had brought death and disease to millions and sent millions more into beggary. It had broken up families, forcing parents to sell, give away, abandon, and even kill their own children rather than see them starve.

The famine of 1942-1943 was exceptionally severe, and in adjoining areas under Guomintang administration the misery of the people was on a scale and of a nature which hardly bear description. The Communists,