



SELECTED WORKS OF MODERN CHINESE LEARNING

KEY ECONOMIC AREAS IN CHINESE HISTORY

Ch'ao-ting Chi

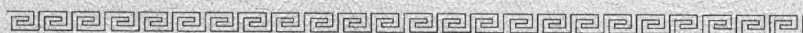


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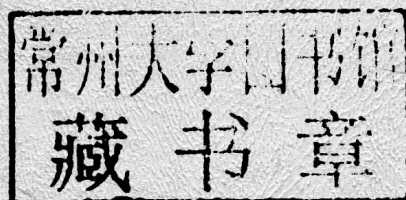


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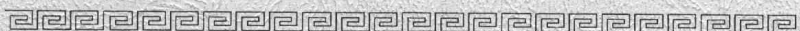
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SINCE 1897

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Ch'ao-Ting Chi, Ph.D.

(1903—1963)

Editorial Note

One hundred years ago, Zhang Zhidong tried to advocate Chinese learning by saying: "The course of a nation, be it bright or gloomy, the pool of talents, be it large or small, are about governance on the surface, and about learning at the root." At that time, the imperialist powers cast menacing eyes on our country, and the domestic situation was deteriorating. The quick infiltration of Western learning made the long-standing Chinese tradition come under heavy challenge. In those days, Chinese learning and Western learning stood side by side. Literature, history and philosophy split up, while many new branches of learning such as economics, politics and sociology were flourishing, which made many Chinese dazed. However, there appeared a vital and vigorous learning climate out of the confusing situation. It was at this critical moment that modern Chinese scholarship made the transition—by exchanging views, basing on profound contemplation and even with confrontation of idea and clash of views, the scholarship made continuous progress, bringing up a large number of persons of academic distinction and creating numerous innovative works. Changes in scholarship and in general modes of thinking made transition in all aspects of the society possible, thus laying a solid foundation for revitalizing China.

It's over a century since the journey of modern Chinese learning started, during which various schools of thought stood in great numbers, causing heated discussions. The journey sees schools of thought as well as relevant arguments rising and

falling, waxing and waning instantly, leaving complicated puzzles to followers. By studying and reviewing the selected works, one may gain new insights into that journey; and it is the editor's sincere hope that readers would ponder over the future by recalling the past. That's why we have compiled "Selected Works of Modern Chinese Learning". The effort includes masterpieces of celebrated scholars from diverse fields of study and different schools of thought. By tracing back to the source and searching for the basis of modern Chinese learning, we wish to present the dynamics between thought and time.

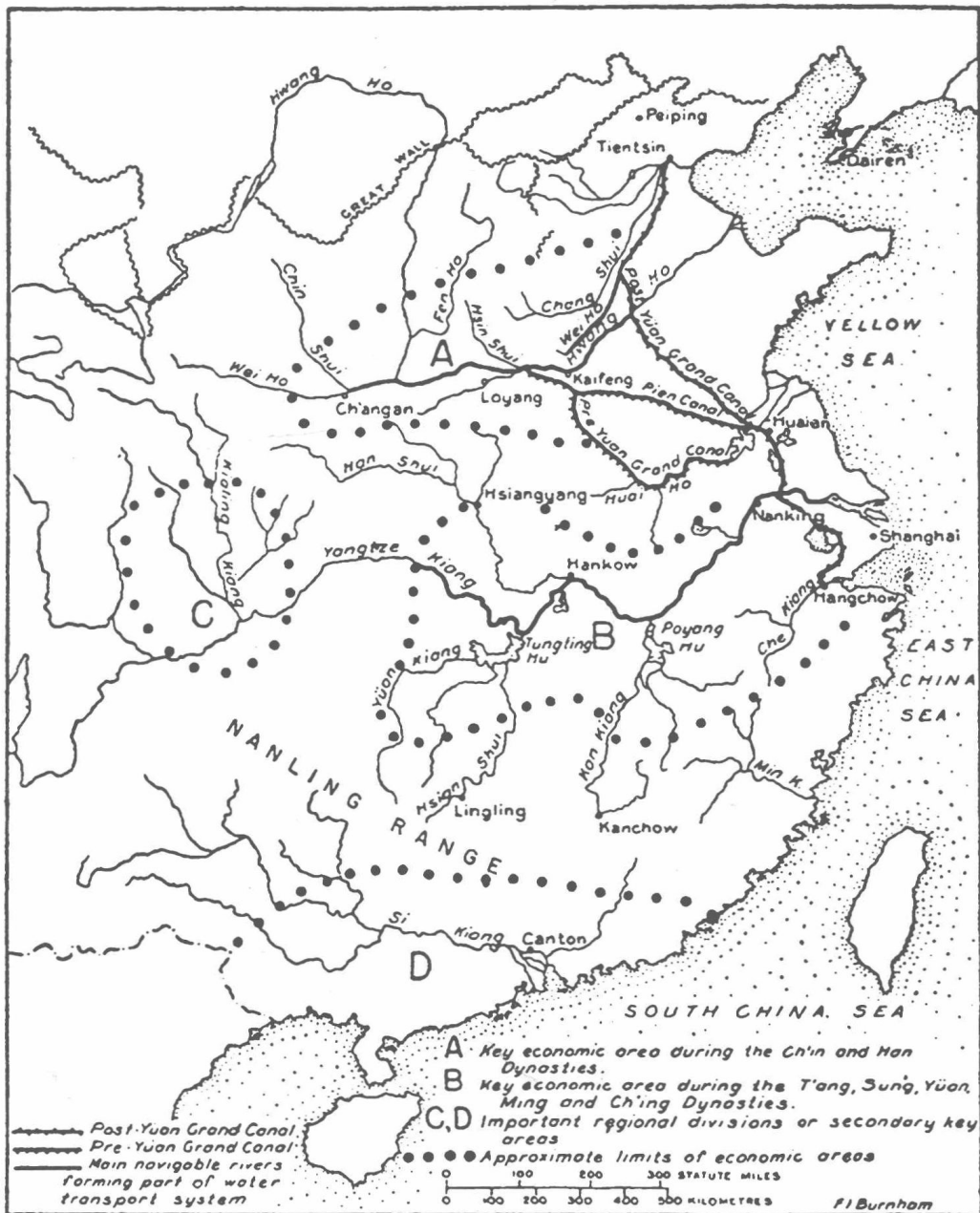
The series of "Selected Works of Modern Chinese Learning" includes works (both in Chinese and in foreign languages) of scholars from China—mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan—and from overseas. These works are mostly on humanities and cover all fields of subjects, such as literary theory, linguistics, history, philosophy, politics, economics, jurisprudence, sociology, to name a few.

It has been a long-cherished wish of the Commercial Press to compile a series of "Selected Works of Modern Chinese Learning". Since its foundation in 1897, the Commercial Press has been privileged to have published numerous pioneering works and masterpieces of modern Chinese learning under the motto of "promoting education and enlightening people". The press has participated in and witnessed the establishment and development of modern Chinese learning. The series of "Selected Works of Modern Chinese Learning" is fruit of an effort to relay the editorial legacy and the cultural propositions of our senior generations. This series, sponsored by National Publication Foundation, would not be possible if there were no careful planning of the press itself. Neither would it be possible without extensive collaboration among talents of the academic circle. It is our deeply cherished hope that titles of this series

will keep their place on the bookshelves even after a long time. Moreover, we wish that this series and “Chinese Translations of World Classics” will become double jade in Chinese publishing history as well as in the history of the Commercial Press itself. With such great aspirations in mind, fearing that it is beyond our ability to realize them, we cordially invite both scholars and readers to extend your assistance.

Editorial Department of the Commercial Press

December 2010



Map showing the location of the Key Economic Area during the various periods of Chinese History

TO
HARRIET
WITH
LOVE, RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

PREFACE

THE present work offers the conception of the dynamics of the Key Economic Area as an aid to the understanding of Chinese economic history. By tracing the development of the Key Economic Area through an historical study of the construction of irrigation and flood-control works and transport canals, it aims to show the function of the Key Economic Area as an instrument of control of subordinate areas and as a weapon of political struggle, to indicate how it shifts, to reveal its dynamic relation to the problem of unity and division in Chinese history, and to give, on the basis of this approach, a concrete and historical-descriptive analysis of one phase of the economic development of China. The book does not purport to give a new interpretation of Chinese history as a whole. However, if the concept of the Key Economic Area proves helpful to the solution of one of the fundamental problems in Chinese history, it cannot but affect the understanding and interpretation of the whole process of Chinese historical development. In order to place this theory in its proper perspective and to indicate its possible extension and further application, it is perhaps better at this point for the author to state his general approach to historical economic studies in China.

Man makes his own history, not only under conditions which history hands down to him, but also through the rewriting of past history. This is because history itself is historical and can only be understood by each epoch, and be of service to it, in the light of its own experience. New experience gives rise to new historical insight, and in the light

of new understanding, new problems can be formulated, old and new evidence resifted, and significant facts selected out of a multitude of seemingly meaningless data. Thus history must be continually rewritten in order to answer the need of man in each specific epoch. The rewriting of history is part of man's efforts to harness the forces of history, and this task becomes particularly urgent at each turning point in the historical process.

Ever since the "opening of China" in the middle of the nineteenth century, the problem of rewriting Chinese history has loomed large on the intellectual horizon not only of China, but of the whole world. Capitalist foreign trade and investment, through its exploitation of the world market, has created an interdependent world economy and has thrown the unevenly and differently developed socio-economic set-ups of various peoples into one turbulent current of world history. Chinese history is no longer the history of just one country, but it has merged into the stream of world history. "Western" institutions have made serious inroads into Chinese life, which, in turn, has become an important factor in the life of the "West." The far-reaching consequences of the situation were epitomized in the Great Revolution of 1925-1927 and its subsequent developments, which brought to the fore, for the first time in centuries, the most fundamental problems of the dynamics of Chinese society.

Economic history, or dialectical economics, recognizes the fact that fundamental problems of China to-day cannot be understood merely by studying contemporary conditions, but must be approached historically through attempts to solve the basic questions

of Chinese history raised by the demands of our epoch, and to discover the dominant tendencies which govern the development of Chinese economy. The main objective of such a study, of course, is historical and socio-economic synthesis.

But synthesis and analysis are two phases of the same process and cannot be mechanically separated. Synthesis signifies building up or organization, while analysis means breaking down or separation. But, since both exclude chaos and wanton behaviour, it is clear that building up is impossible without first having broken down and understood the meaning of the parts, and it is equally true that taking apart is impossible without first having an idea of how the parts are put together. Applying this principle to historical writing, it means that synthesis involves the systematic merging of leading ideas which result from analytical study of special problems, while analysis cannot be fruitful without a general approach to guide its labours in working through a maze of otherwise meaningless data. The apparent contradiction between the two concepts is really a reflection of their dialectical relationship; both represent necessary phases of the same process of scientific investigation. A book may be primarily a work of synthesis or of analysis, but an investigation can be fruitful only when the intimate connection between the two concepts is expressly or tacitly recognized.

Although the final purpose of the author's study of economic history is synthesis, the present book is primarily a work of analysis. It began as an attempt to trace the development of irrigation and flood-control in Chinese history through an analytical study of the immense amount of untouched source material on the

subject hidden in the gazetteers (local historical geographies), special Chinese works on "water benefits," and the dynastic histories. The general direction of the author's researches naturally has been determined by his preconceptions and general method of approach, specifically by his realization of the importance of irrigation and water transportation in Chinese history. But it was only after a close examination of most of the available material in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., that the belief in the importance of water-control to Chinese history was confirmed and the conception of the Key Economic Area and its relation to unity and division in Chinese history developed in the author's mind. This book as it stands, which, except for minor changes, was completed in the middle of April 1934, represents the author's preliminary effort to define the concept, to study the geographical basis for water-control and economic regionalization in China, and to trace briefly the shifting of the Key Economic Area in Chinese history.

Thus the analytical study of source material on the history of water-control gave birth to a new concept which has in turn been used as a device to define the course of development of water-control. But a concept is like a lamp—once lit it does not illuminate merely one corner of the room. The concept of the Key Economic Area throws light on every fundamental problem in Chinese history. It emphasizes the local and regional character of Chinese economy. The First Emperor, Ch'in Shih Huang Ti (221-210 B.C.), successfully battered down the feudal barriers between the warring states, but the unity he achieved was a loose unity. It was not bound together by economic ties like those in a modern state, but was held together

by military and bureaucratic domination through the instrumentality of the control of the Key Economic Area. Such a unity cannot be enduring, and as soon as the supremacy of the Key Economic Area was challenged, the ruling power lost its place of mooring and source of supply. Division and chaos then became the order of the day until a new power rooted itself in a Key Economic Area and successfully used it as a weapon for re-establishing unity. This is the true meaning behind the classical Chinese saying that "A long period of unity must eventuate in division; a long period of division must eventuate in unity." It is an iron law describing accurately one of the fundamental movements in the semi-feudal phase of China's history, from the first Emperor to the breakdown of China's isolation in the last century.

The existence of the Key Economic Area motivated the geographical differentiation in the land system and methods of taxation, and accentuated the natural tendency toward uneven development of the different regions. It also affected the distribution of merchant capital and created varied conditions for its development. Differences in the land system, taxation and the degree of development of commercial and usurious capital meant differences in the social characteristics and power of the local ruling groups, differences in the degree of exploitation, and differences in the conditions of the life and work of the peasants, the overwhelming majority of the population. While these differences were never of such a nature as to alter the picture of an essentially homogeneous structure of society in the wide territory of China, they were sufficiently important to influence materially the development of the multifarious phases of the class

struggle, especially the peasant wars. Furthermore, although the theory of the Key Economic Area does not explain the persistent tendency to latifundia, the growth of merchant capital and forces retarding its development, the antagonisms between the bureaucracy, the landowners, the merchants, and the peasants, and the periodic decline and breakdown of internal economy—in a word, although this theory does not explain the class struggle, it does reveal one of the important influences shaping the course of development of that struggle.

Let us consider for a moment the influence of the Key Economic Area on the peasant wars, which have always been the culmination and sharpest expression of China's social crises, and, therefore, deserve to be studied as the corner-stones of Chinese history. When a socio-economic cycle, which usually coincided with a dynastic period, drew to a close, when exploitation of the peasants increased and production declined, when extravagance and corruption weakened the ruling power, and when bankruptcy faced the government and starvation confronted the pauperized population, the peasants usually took the road of rebellion, refusing to pay rent, taxes and debts, harassing and expropriating the rich and sacking centres of political power and administration. Such a movement usually started with a series of rebellions in various localities. Owing to the locally self-sufficient economy of the country, consolidation of the scattered forces of the peasants was difficult and speedy conclusion of any such struggle was well-nigh impossible. In the course of the protracted struggle, geographical and economic conditions of the localities limited the growth of certain groups and favoured the development of others. The struggle

was one against the government as well as a painful process of elimination among rival groups. Usually the group most favoured by geographical and economic advantages and able leadership emerged from the struggle as the master of the situation. The importance of the geographical locus is considered here not so much from the point of view of strategy as from the point of view of economics. When the problem is studied concretely, in a history of the peasant wars, which the author plans to do, it will be seen that the theory of the Key Economic Area will help an understanding of many hitherto unexplained or misunderstood events.

Thus, despite the fact that the question of regional relations is not the central question in Chinese history and the concept of the Key Economic Area cannot be the ruling idea in the interpretation of Chinese history as a whole, it is important to realize that under conditions of regional natural economy the theory has a special significance, advances considerably our understanding of the whole process of Chinese history, and provides a background for a study of the effects of the impact of imperialism and the problems of contemporary China. Before the full import of the idea can be realized, many articles and monographs dealing with specific phases of its application will have to be written. On the question of the history of water-control alone, the author has collected much more material than he has been able to use. The present volume can only be considered a beginning. Its ruling concept remains to be tested, to be related to other prevailing tendencies in Chinese history, and its manifold implications as outlined in the two foregoing paragraphs still have to be worked out. On the basis of these possibilities