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Asian Studies

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China*. by Philip C. C. Huang

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Source: *The Journal of Asian Studies*, May, 1986, Vol. 45, No. 3 (May, 1986), pp. 572-574

Published by: Association for Asian Studies

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2056536>

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The longest section in the volume covers terms and phrases about rural land use. Here one can find descriptions of a great variety of farming systems, technical terms in agricultural economics, and agro-technical concepts.

This dictionary has been especially designed as a reference guide for users in Taiwan, and it lists the many laws and organizations pertaining to the use and administration of urban, rural, and residential land for the Republic of China.

More than one thousand special terms and phrases are identified and described, and a rich bibliography lists over two-hundred-and-fifty sources. This handy reference is an indispensable item for all East Asian libraries.

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The Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China. By PHILIP C. C. HUANG. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985. xii, 369 pp. Tables, Maps, Appendixes, Character List, References Cited, Index. \$38.50.

This rich and ambitious work marks a new beginning for social history in the China field. The scope of the study does full justice to the range of its author's formidable talents: in a single monograph, Philip Huang addresses four broad levels of historical inquiry. He offers a critique of method in studies of China's modern history; a broadly sketched picture of agrarian transformation in North China during the Qing and Republican periods; a closely argued, dense analysis of change at the village and household level in that same region; and, finally, a model for explaining the continued resilience of China's small peasant economy in the face of rapid commercialization and population growth throughout most of the period of his study. To accomplish this, Huang has brought his impressive command of secondary theoretical literature and rural survey data (in Japanese and Chinese) to bear on two new sources for the study of Chinese economic history. He spent a year in China culling archives, and he conducted personal interviews in two of the same villages studied in the 1930s by the Mantetsu researchers on whose data he relies. The combined results are smashing.

Huang's first chapter, a wide-ranging critique of theories of social and economic change in peasant societies, opens the book up to comparative historians even while the author addresses problems of intense interest to China specialists. One of those problems is the focus of this necessarily limited review. How did a differentiated peasant economy, under severe population pressure, constrain the process of capital formation in Chinese agriculture—such that an industrial revolution never took place? Huang argues that existing theories have not been able to explain how the peasant economy reproduced itself in the face of pressure from commercialization and imperialism that accompanied population pressure on the land. For example, he says, studies of modern Chinese agrarian history emphasizing commercialization have overstated peasant involvement in the marketing system. "Moral economy" arguments have exaggerated peasant commitments to their home communities. And studies treating "state" and "society" have not paid enough attention to the shadowy connections joining village elites and government officials, particularly where the legendary "gentry" class did not play a critical role. As an alternative to these approaches, Huang proposes a model of agricultural involution derived partly from Geertz and partly from Chayanov. He develops this model in the following way.

First, he argues, the overall pattern of change in North China from early Qing times to the mid-twentieth century was one of increasingly rapid population growth, in the course of which a “sparsely populated” and “relatively unstratified” society gave way to a densely populated commercial economy. The transformation was part of a recovery that replaced the former estate-managed economy—devastated in the dynastic transition—with a peasant freeholder economy divided among managerial farms that hired labor, and semi-proletarianized peasant households that hired out their labor. In between these two groups stood a middle peasant class under constant pressure, from population growth and partible inheritance, to move up or down. Huang shows how the Qing state hastened and guided the transformation by encouraging immigration and cultivation of abandoned lands, passing laws loosening the old estate managers’ claims on their serfs, and giving legal recognition to the rights and status of commoner landlords such that they were placed on a near-equal footing with their tenants. To seal the bargain, the Qing government taxed landlords, but not tenants or the landless.

Having sketched this historical context, Huang asks how the common conditions of population growth and commercialization affected the two types of households emerging at either end of this differentiated spectrum. His answer identifies two complementary models of involution. Managerial landlords built up holdings of 100 to 200 *mu*, which they were able to farm efficiently by hiring cheap labor. Cheap labor in turn came from poor peasant households forced to work at below-subsistence wages to supplement inadequate income from their own small holdings. Together, rich and poor households constructed a symbiotic relationship that maintained itself in equilibrium. Huang demonstrates with a solid array of data that economies of scale in the existing ecosystem reached a ceiling at 100 to 200 *mu*. Farms above that size lost money unless land was rented out to tenants in small parcels, so owners of farms above the optimal size left the village for towns and cities where—as absentee landlords—they became part of the “gentry” class, moving in regional or national circles of mobility and power. Members of the elite remaining on the village scene, then, were not the “gentry” at all, but a group of middle-range landlords who hired peasant labor and often worked side by side with their laborers to maintain and reproduce the conditions of their existence.

Managerial landlordism replicated itself in lockstep with the small family farms that depended on wage labor for subsistence, even under the changing conditions of the nineteenth century. Population pressure merely increased the supply of cheap labor, driving down wages and depressing incentives to use more draft animals or improve economies of scale in managerial landlordism: managerial landlords simply farmed the land more intensively. The spread of commercialization and the introduction of foreign markets only increased the risk taking and vulnerability of the poor, driving rich and poor farther apart. Turning to the question of the revolution, Huang expands this perspective to examine other aspects of the changing relationship between managerial landlords and poor peasant households under the late Qing and Republican governments. He describes the consequences of the shift from sharecropping to fixed rent, the commercialization of landlord-tenant relations, the rise of tax assessments on the landless, and the changing character of village leadership (from *xiangbao* to *tuhao*, so to speak).

Readers familiar with the survey data Huang uses will be dissatisfied with his belated attempt to systematize the differences among the sample villages in his study (pp. 259–70). Some were highly commercialized, some remote and barely touched by the changes he describes, but the implications of these differences for his models

of involution are not systematically explored. Pursuing those differences will shed new light on old questions. Why didn't farm households practice family planning rather than tolerate ever-increasing labor surpluses and declining standards of living? What role did infanticide play in curbing involution? What about migration as a safety valve? How did female and child labor contribute to the involuted peasant household economy? These questions return our attention to the Chinese kinship system, the marriage imperative, and ties to the land confirmed and stabilized by partible inheritance. Huang's book does not talk about rituals, symbols, and festivals that undergirded a common culture in this society. His focus on documents and data relating to land (and the class cleavages that grew from unequal access to land) does not enable readers to understand why poor peasants subscribed so fully to kinship and land tenure ideals that they could only rarely hope to achieve. These questions await future research, including Huang's next monograph.

The most arresting finding of this study is Huang's identification of an underclass in Chinese agrarian society. His model separating the elite social system from the "farming world" of village commoners (see pp. 177–78, 219, et passim) provides us with a new way of thinking about Chinese society—an alternative to the gentry society paradigm that has dominated the field for decades. For China scholars seeking to understand how ordinary people "lived the big changes" of the modern era (to borrow a phrase from Charles Tilly), this book is the place to start.

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Morality and Power in a Chinese Village. By RICHARD MADSEN. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. xvi, 283 pp. Index. \$24.50.

Richard Madsen's book brings a fresh approach to the problem of Mao's revolution because it stands at the intersection of two discourses, itself being part of both. The first discourse is concerned with the evaluation of morals in the study of societies, and is represented by the recent and highly acclaimed *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), a study of the moral basis of modern American culture by Robert Bellah and some of his younger colleagues, of whom Richard Madsen is one. The most interesting premise of this discourse is that the values of a studied community can, and indeed ought to be, evaluated by the student of that community, that the examination of a community's morals ought itself to provide a moral lesson for the writer and the reader. The second discourse is concerned with the recent history of a small community on the fringes of the Pearl River Delta. It is represented by a general ethnography at a distance, *Chen Village: The Recent History of A Peasant Community in Mao's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), by Anita Chan, Madsen, and Jonathan Unger, and by part of the material in Chan's *Children of Mao: Personality Development and Political Activism in the Red Guard Generation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), which is about the personalities and life histories of four youths active in Guangdong during the Cultural Revolution. The most interesting premise of this discourse is that outsiders cannot hope to understand the tumultuous events of the 1960s and 1970s in China without understanding how these events played themselves out in particular local communities. *Morality and Power* tries both to understand how the inhabitants of Chen Village understood, in moral terms, the "jarring series of