Part-Peasant, Part-Trader: A Study of the Rural Poor in Republican Shanxi

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半耕半商：近代晋中贫农的兼业与家庭经济

——以文水县为中心的考察

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Abstract

Mixed occupations are a prominent feature of China's smallholder peasant economy. For poor peasant households with little land, working in multiple occupations is a survival strategy that represents a more rational or efficient allocation of household

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labor. In central Shanxi in the 1930s and 1940s, the growth of the commercial economy encouraged peasant households to dedicate their surplus labor to small-scale commercial activities (including itinerant trade and shopkeeping apprenticeship), thus leading to the formation of a mixed "part-peasant, part-trader" 半耕半商 economy. This economy was characterized by the following practices: First, many young, able-bodied men farmed during the busy seasons and peddled goods in the slack seasons. Second, other able-bodied men engaged in off-farm commercial activities year-round, while female and elderly dependents did the farming—often with the help of relatives and neighbors. This represented a rational gendered and intergenerational allocation of labor that undercut labor market prices to maximize household income. Third, any surplus income from commerce, after satisfying basic consumption needs, was used to purchase more land as subsistence insurance against the vagaries of the commercial economy. These mixed practices of mutually supporting agriculture and commerce developed into a robust and competitive part-peasant, part-trader economic system.

Keywords

Shanxi, class background registers, mixed occupations, itinerant peddlers, smallholder economy, family farms

摘要：兼业化是中国小农经济的显著特征，对贫农式家庭来说，是一种因为耕地不足而谋生的手段，也是一种家庭内部劳动力资源的合理分工。在 20 世纪三四

十年代的山西中部，由于土地的极度匮乏和经商风气的盛行，贫农式家庭农场中的剩余劳力多在农业之外从事商业活动，形成了“半耕半商”的经济模式。主要表现为：第一，青壮男劳力在农忙期耕种土地，在农闲期做肩挑小贩。第二，青壮男劳力在外学商或经商，妇女老人等辅助劳力在家种地，或由亲友帮种和与人半种，通过代际分工与性别分工实现了家庭劳动力资源的合理配置。由于家庭辅助劳力是无法被“解雇”的，也比劳动力市场上的全职雇工更为廉价，使得经营式农业难有发展空间，从而巩固了家庭式农场的发展。第三，商业的辅助性收入在满足基本消费后，主要被用来购置田产，而购置的田产又成为经商者的安全保障。农业与商业相互支撑，互相挹注，最终在乡村中形成了一个顽固的、竞争力很强的小商小贩体系。

关键词：文水、《阶级成分登记表》、兼业、半耕半商

Introduction: Understandings of Rural Mixed Occupations[1]

Traditional rural society is typically characterized as an insular and self-sufficient village community comprised of peasants who have been farming the land for generations. This rural economy is dominated by smallholder peasant families, but in rural China since as early as the Tang and Song period (7^{th} – 13^{th} c.), commercialization led to increasingly mixed occupations in the countryside. Some scholars have highlighted a major shift around the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE) toward a rural market economy and the emergence of households combining “peasant

[1] This article was translated by Matthew Noellert.

farming, craft production, and small-scale commerce" 小农、小工、小商 (Cao, 2007: 105). By the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), there was a clear trend toward rural commercialization and the engagement of peasant households in handicrafts, wage labor, and trade (Li Xiao, 2000:16-17). As a result, scholars generally recognize the development of this rural commercialization as an important driver of what has been called the "Tang-Song transition" (Lin, 2004). This trend continued into the Ming and Qing period (14^{th} – 19^{th} c.), where the expansion of commercial crop production and a more open society accelerated the development of a mixed rural economy. The rural economy of this period was characterized by smallholder households with limited land using their surplus labor to engage in textile production, trade, handicrafts, animal husbandry, and other non-farming occupations, which led to the consolidation of a family-based mixed rural economy. The following Republican period (1912-1949) was a golden age for the development of mixed rural occupations, as the Rural Reconstructionists and provincial governments relied on the expansion of sideline industries to rebuild the deteriorating rural economy. Finally, the recent history of the People's Republic of China (PRC, 1949-present) and the township and village enterprises that began the Chinese miracle in the 1980s-1990s continue to demonstrate the resilience of mixed occupations in China's economic development.

More generally, scholars have used the emergence of mixed occupations to explain the development of family-based rural economies. Alexander Chayanov, a founding father of the theory of "moral economy" (Polanyi, 1957; Chayanov, 1996;

Scott, 1977), recognized the vitality and resilience of the family-based mixed rural economy and believed that this form of rural economy was common throughout India, Japan, China, and other agrarian countries. Based on his experiences in the Russian provinces of Novgorod and Tambov, Chayanov demonstrated that the family farm was a unit of both production and consumption. When the family farm did not have sufficient land or capital to further develop its agricultural production and maximize farm productivity, the family would instead invest its surplus labor in non-farm occupations such as handicrafts and trade. The marginal income from these non-farm occupations would be used to meet consumption needs, and this balance between production, labor, and consumption was what supported the development of family farming in Russia (Chayanov, 1996). James C. Scott further developed this theory of the "moral economy of the peasant" by demonstrating that in Southeast Asia, when a peasant had insufficient land, capital, and opportunities for off-farm employment, "he may have to move into labor-absorbing activities with extremely low returns […] filling the slack agricultural season with petty crafts, trades, or marketing which return very little but are virtually the only outlets for surplus labor" in a "struggle for a subsistence minimum" (Scott, 1977: 13-14). These theories have provided Chinese scholars with a conceptual basis for understanding China's late imperial smallholder peasant economy in terms of overpopulation and land shortage.

Chayanov's basic claims have also found support in Chinese realities. In the logic of the Chinese revolutionary narrative, from the beginning Mao Zedong highlighted

the mixed occupations of peasants. In his Xingguo county investigation, Mao discovered that around 40 percent of peasant households were engaged in both farming and commerce, and most of these were poor peasants practicing petty trade 小商小贩 to supplement their insufficient farm incomes (Mao, 1982: 227-30). According to Mao's analysis, this group of partial self-cultivators and poor peasants comprised an overwhelming number of households, and he identified the "peasant problem" as primarily affecting this group:

> Partial self-cultivators must rent others' land, sell out their labor or engage in petty trade because they only produce half of the food they need each year. A portion of the poor peasants have some implements and cash, but after a year of labor they only receive half [of what they need], so they grow coarse grain, fish, raise livestock, or sell their labor to make a living. (Mao, 1967: 6-7)

Through his investigations of Jiangnan, Fei Xiaotong (2005) believed that China's traditional economic structure was not based on a purely agrarian system, but a "mixed farm-industry" rural economy comprising a mixture of farming, sideline occupations, and handicrafts. Fei saw this mixture, moreover, as a result of an insufficiency of land forcing smallholder peasants to pursue income from non-farm occupations. This economy was also related to the cycles of China's agrarian system. Qiao Qiming's view was similar to Fei Xiaotong's but was more influenced by Malthusian theory and sought to explain China's rural economy in terms of

demography. Qiao believed that the root cause of modern China's poverty was overpopulation and land shortage. One solution to this problem was to develop rural industries and transfer a part of the population from agriculture to industry (Qiao, 1937, 1946). In addition to these scholars, John L. Buck, Li Jinghan, Chen Hansheng, Liu Rongting, and others all to some degree took notice of the prevalence of mixed occupations in late Qing and early Republican rural China.

Philip C. C. Huang takes Chayanov's theories in the context of China a step further by arguing that the intensive production methods of China's smallholder, mixed-occupation economy are one of the primary reasons for the persistence of this traditional agrarian economy in China's modern development. Beginning in the nineteenth century, the North China plain experienced the pressures of ecological decline, population growth, social stratification, increasing land rents, etc., but in the face of these forces of involution and social stratification smallholder family farms were able to survive thanks to their ability to adapt to commercial handicraft production. When income from the family farm was insufficient, the family would apply its slack-season surplus labor and dependent labor to handicrafts for extra support. As a result, instead of being reduced to tenancy, the family would use this sideline income to maintain control over their farming operations (Huang, 1985). Furthermore, Huang's research highlights how the expansion of cotton and silkworm cultivation in the late imperial Yangzi River delta stimulated the expansion of commercialized household handicraft production there. In the context of a family

smallholder economy, the family farm could use its auxiliary labor to out-compete managerial farms because this labor could tolerate below-market wages. As for land rents, a family farm depending on incomes from spare-time and auxiliary labor could also sustain higher land prices than a wage labor-based managerial farm (Huang, 1990). In other words, a family farm relying on family labor in late imperial China could out-compete a wage labor-based managerial farm precisely because engaging in sideline occupations made it possible to afford higher land prices and rents and allowed for higher gross returns than a managerial farm.

In addition to the traditional period, Philip Huang also believes that in the cooperative period after 1949, collective farms were like big families and could, in some ways, be regarded as an expansion of family farms. Family production was mainly maintained in the form of so-called "household sidelines" such as self-retained land (private plots), pig and poultry breeding, and handicrafts. These coexisted alongside collective agriculture until this arrangement was challenged by the emergence of rural industrialization and the rising opportunity costs for family auxiliary and idle labor (Huang, 1990). In the process of modernization, it was also common for peasants to have mixed occupations. According to his recent research, Huang believes that after the Reform and Opening Up, in the wave of market-oriented urbanization and industrialization, peasants' "mixed occupations" have evolved from "agriculture + sideline" to "part-worker, part-peasant" 半工半耕: a combination of farming and non-agricultural wage-labor that has gradually become institutionalized.

In this way, the over-intensified, small-scale, low-income agricultural system and the vicious temporary labor system are tightly intertwined (Huang Zongzhi, 2006). The difference is that family farming has changed from the primary occupation to a "sideline," while working outside has become the main occupation of young and middle-aged people. This structure continues to support China's small family farms, with the family economy as the mainstay, intensive with regard to both labor and capital, and with "family sideline" agriculture characterized by "capitalization without proletarianization." In fact, net income per mu is much higher than that of industrialized capitalist farms, and so family farms are much more highly competitive than the latter (Huang Zongzhi, 2018).

He Xuefeng, following Huang's concept of "part-worker, part-peasant, " explains China's economic miracle from a sociological perspective. He believes that the basic feature of the contemporary Chinese peasant family is its mode of reproduction based on the intergenerational division of labor between farming and wage-labor. Since the year 2000, about 80 percent of China's peasant families have involved a structure with children going out to work for a wage and parents staying in the village to farm (He, 2014: 108-110). Such a structure enables older peasants to continue contributing to agriculture, so that China's smallholder economy maintains tenacious vitality (He, 2013: 2-3). Some scholars believe that the explanatory concept of "part-worker, part-peasant" reveals the mechanism and trend of changes in China's rural social structure against the background of industrialization and urbanization (Xia, 2016). Other

scholars believe that since the 1980s, with a continuous increase in family income and unit labor reward, a gradual diversification of agricultural operations, and continued urbanization, a new form of rural households has emerged— the “development-oriented smallholders.” Rural households can finally break out of the involutionary trap of traditional agriculture and attain real development (Zhang Jianlei, 2018).

One of the most salient features of this smallholder peasant economy is the combination of farming and sideline industries in mixed-occupation households. This is both a strategy for subsisting on insufficient land and a rational division of labor within the family, and more closely fits Chayanov’s image of the “moral peasant,” The archives used in this article clearly reflect the ubiquity of mixed-occupation peasant households in central Shanxi in the 1930s and 1940s, especially among land-poor households. The foundation of this economic system was a combined “part-peasant, part-trader” 半耕半商 household unit that farmed in the busy seasons and engaged in small-scale commercial activities in the slack seasons, relying on an intergenerational division of labor. Because this system relied on family labor that was cheaper than hired labor, this gave poor peasant households surplus income that they then used to purchase land. This system thus created a petty trade economy that was more robust and competitive than full-time farming or handicraft households. To better understand this system, this article uses class background registers from fourteen villages in Wenshui county, Shanxi province, to analyze land-population ratios, poor peasant commerce, and the interactions between farming and trade and to

provide a deeper understanding of the nature of socioeconomic change in rural North China (Hu and Zhang, 2017; Zhang Aiming, 2019; Xing, 2018).

Survival Needs: Poor Peasant Commerce

China's "peasant problem" has a long history. Hsiao Kung-chuan pointed out that since the nineteenth century, rural China had been in decline and the peasants had experienced more suffering than any other social class (Hsiao, 2018: 472-77). By the 1930s, official corruption, regime change, frequent natural disasters, and rapid population growth brought the rural crisis to a peak, the rural economy was on the verge of collapse, and most peasants faced bankruptcy. Faced with domestic strife and foreign imperialism, the government was incapable of addressing the rural crisis, and survival became the foremost problem for most peasants. Some migrated to cities to become industrial workers, craftsmen, shop assistants, coolies, etc., peasants in North China fled to the Northeast, and still others who could not find work became soldiers, vagrants, and bandits, further aggravating the social and economic crisis (Xue, 1936). But most peasants tried to settle down, were reluctant to leave their home villages, and trusted in farming as the most basic source of livelihood. At the same time, however, the surplus labor of family farms was devoted to the development of household handicrafts and cotton and silk production, and in slack seasons primary male labor engaged in petty commerce. The government also issued rewards and incentives to encourage peasants to develop sideline industries (Shanxi Provincial

Government Gazette, 1929: 56). As a result, mixed occupations increasingly became a common way of life for poor peasants.

In Shanxi, sideline occupations varied based on regional differences in ecological and farming conditions. In northern Shanxi, where the climate is dry and there is an abundance of alkaline land, many peasants engage in local salt production to supplement their farm incomes (Fu, 1933). In Hunyuan county, where an abundance of grain is produced and the winters are long, an important sideline industry is liquor distillation (Fan, 1934). In southern Shanxi, the more humid climate is ideal for fruit such as apples, persimmons, and apricots. Before Land Reform, many families managed fruit orchards to supplement land and grain shortages (Hu, 2018). In central Shanxi, there is a long history of peasant commerce where families have engaged in trade generation after generation (Liu Rongting, 1935). Henrietta Harrison (2013: 94) has also noted that "in [central Shanxi,] commerce and handicrafts, not agriculture, have dominated the economy for hundreds of years." In this context, the primary sideline occupation of poor peasants in Wenshui county has been small-scale commercial activities, including shopkeeping apprenticeship and itinerant trade, giving rise to a distinctive part-peasant, part-trader economic pattern, combining smallholder cultivation with petty commerce.

High Population-to-Land Ratios

Wenshui county is located in central Shanxi province on the border between the

Taiyuan basin and the Lüliang mountains. The western half of the county is mountainous with poor soil and sparse population, and the economy is highly agricultural and undeveloped. In contrast, the eastern half of the county is a fertile plain with dense population and an active commercial economy.

Overall, Wenshui county is relatively poor, with a dense population and little land. Although the county population remained around 170,000 throughout the Republican period (Kahoku sōgō chōsa kenkyūjo, 1944), Wenshui had one of the highest population densities in central Shanxi. According to a 1935 Ministry of Industry survey, the population density of Wenshui county was 126.81 people per square kilometer, more than five times the provincial average of 21.99 people per square kilometer and almost double that of nearby counties like Pingyao and Qi, which were both around 70 people per square kilometer (Zhou, 1939). Likewise, according to a 1919 survey by the Shanxi provincial government's bureau of statistics, average household landholding in Wenshui was 21 *mu* [1.4 hectares][2] per household, equivalent to that of Taiyuan county and the smallest average landholding in the region (Zheng, 2016). In terms of land per capita, Figure 1 shows the results of a 1935 farm survey by the Shanxi-Suiyuan socioeconomic statistics agency. Here, too, we can see that Wenshui had one of the lowest ratios in the region, 3.6 mu per capita, which was less than one third of the provincial average. Moreover, taking into account the large proportion of mountainous, alkaline, and other poor land conditions in the

[2] Editor's note: 1 mu = 0.0667 hectare.

county, the actual farm productivity per capita would likely have been even lower.

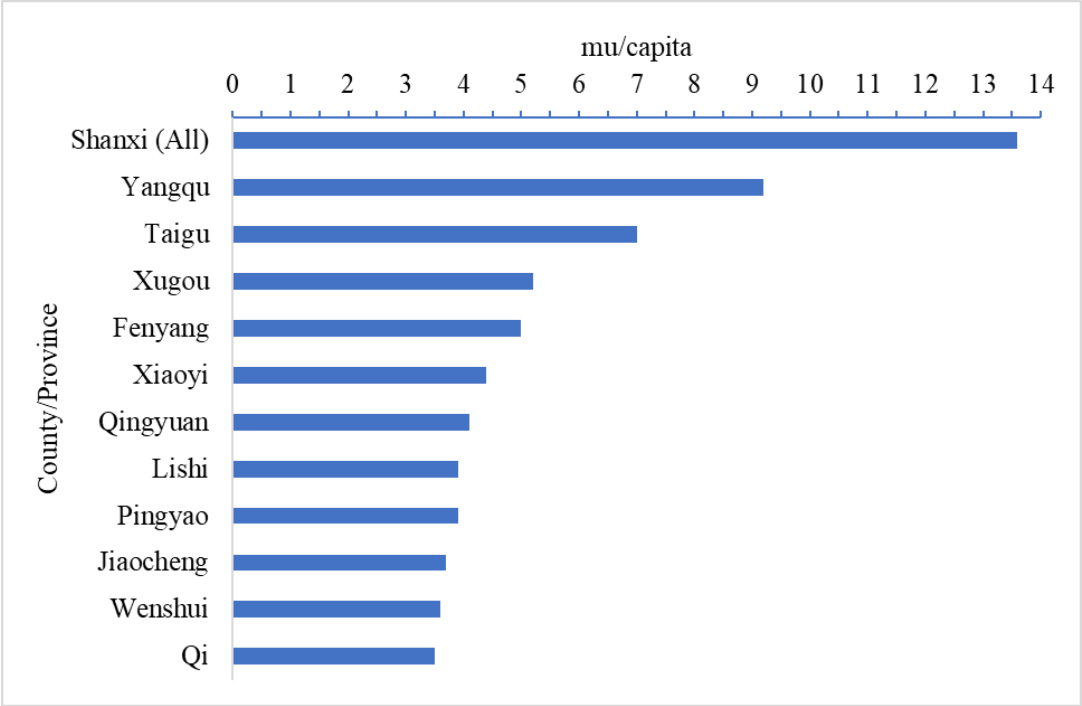

Figure 1. Land Per Capita in Central Shanxi, by County, 1935

Source: Jinsui Social Economic Survey and Statistics Office, 1935: 5-39.

Various sources have estimated that the minimum subsistence level in northern Chinese agriculture requires at least 5 mu of land per capita. Most scholars agree with the conclusion of a 1941 economic survey from North China that "in northern agricultural areas, the minimum area of land required to sustain life is about 5 mu per capita, or 25 *mu* for an average household of five" (Li Jinzheng, 2008, 2012). On the low side, Philip Huang estimated that a smallholder household in the North China plain required at least 15 mu of land to survive, or 3-4 mu per capita (Huang Zongzhi,

2000a: 301). On the high side, William Hinton estimated that in southeastern Shanxi the minimum subsistence level was 6 mu per capita (Hinton, 1980: 29). In relatively prosperous southwestern Shanxi, moreover, a county gazetteer mentions that 4-5 mu is enough to feed one person in a good year, but is insufficient for any dependents or to survive a famine year (Gazetteer of Xie County, 1968: 卷3). In comparison, the land in Wenshui county is not as productive as in the North China plain or southwestern Shanxi, and it is unlikely that anything below 5 mu would be sufficient. Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, the fact that the average land per capita in Wenshui was only 3.6 mu suggests that few peasant households would have been physically able to survive on their landholding alone.

The precariousness of farming is even more striking when we break down the population by class status. Table 1 summarizes the population and landholding of different class categories on the eve of Land Reform (c. 1948) in fourteen select villages, as recorded in Wenshui's class background registers. Here we can see that a full two-thirds of farming households – classified as lower-middle and poor peasants – possessed less than 11 mu per household and less than 3 mu per capita. In contrast, the top 10 percent of households – classified as upper-middle and rich peasants and landlords – all possessed over 5 mu per capita and averaged more than double the village average of 3.2 mu per capita. These numbers alone demonstrate that two thirds of farming households in Wenshui must have engaged in other occupations to fulfill basic subsistence needs.

Table 1. Population and Landholding in Fourteen Villages in Wenshui County before Land Reform, by Class Category

Class Category	Households %	Population %	Land %	mu/household	mu/capita
Hired laborer	1.6	1.9	0.1	0.4	0.1
Poor peasant	45.7	41.1	26.8	7.0	2.1
Lower-middle Peasant	20.9	20.8	19.6	11.2	3.0
Middle peasant	21.7	24.6	29.2	16.0	3.8
Upper-middle peasant	5.4	6.3	9.7	21.4	5.0
Rich peasant	2.6	3.2	8.1	36.7	8.2
Landlord	2.0	2.1	6.5	38.6	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	11.9	3.2
N	3,516	13,043	41,843.7		

Source: Author's calculations based on Wenshui County Class Background Registers (1966).

In terms of grain production, it is also clear that only about one fifth of

households in Wenshui would have been able to feed themselves on farming incomes alone. According to statistics compiled in 1919, Wenshui county's average grain productivity per mu was 9.65 *dou*, approximately 120 *jin* [71.6 kilograms],[3] which at that time was the equivalent of 2.04 yuan cash income per mu (Zheng, 2016: 57). Other sources from 1933 and 1941 suggest that this productivity remained around 110-130 jin per mu throughout the Republican era (Shanxi Provincial Government Secretariat, 1933: 86; Statistics Office of Shanxi Provincial Office Secretariat 1942: 19-71). Using the higher value of 130 jin per mu, we can estimate that on the eve of Land Reform in Wenshui the average per capita grain income was 416 jin, with poorer peasant households harvesting around 200-400 jin per person and richer peasant and landlord households harvesting from 500 to 1,300 jin per person. Peng Nansheng (1999) estimated that in a traditional agrarian society like early twentieth-century China, a peasant needed to harvest around 1,000 jin of grain for basic survival. Taking into account differences in demography and consumption patterns, we could assume that 600-700 jin may have been sufficient in Wenshui, but even at this level only some households categorized as "middle peasant" or wealthier (assuming some middle peasants owned closer to 5 mu per capita), or about 20 percent of households, would have produced enough food to feed themselves.

Most peasants also had to pay rent and taxes, which would have reduced their net

[3] Editor's note: The traditional jin 斤 (sometimes translated as "catty") used at that time was defined as equivalent to 596.8 grams (Quandu Fa, 1915: 85-94). Since 1930 this has been redefined as equivalent to 500 grams, now known as a "market jin" 市斤 in contrast with the "metric jin" 公斤, i.e. kilogram.

income even further. According to a 1919 survey by the Shanxi provincial government's bureau of statistics, Wenshui's average annual income per mu was 2.04 yuan, or an average of 42 yuan per household. An average household paid annual rental fees of 6 yuan and taxes of 5 yuan, which would leave a net household income of only 31 yuan, but this same survey also estimated average household consumption to be as much as 47 yuan (Zheng, 2016). According to a similar survey seven years later in 1926, rural household costs of living had almost doubled to 83.15 yuan, which included living expenses for clothing (9.11 yuan), food (30.13 yuan), housing (2.79 yuan), fuel (7.4 yuan), health care (2.74 yuan), education (7.55 yuan), tools (4.65 yuan), leisure/entertainment (10.49 yuan), and other one-time expenditures (8.28 yuan), not to mention rent and taxes (Zheng, 2016). Although a number of these items suggest rising standards of living, few if any households in Wenshui would have been able to afford these expenses on farming alone.

The family histories recorded in Wenshui's class background registers provide many examples of what life was like for ordinary peasants in this world before Land Reform. In Haojiabao village, which was home to many landless hired laborers, one individual grew up in a family of seven with 10 mu of land, and their main income came from the father's hiring out. In 1927, their mother passed away and their father was crippled and unable to work anymore, so they had to sell their house and all of their land. As life became more trying, they also sold one of their children, and the individual left the village to work as a hired laborer in neighboring counties until he

returned home to receive land and a house in Land Reform (Haojiabao Village Class Background Registers [hereafter CBR], 1966: Production Team 2, File 2). In Xiaoyi village, one individual was a third-generation hired laborer from a landless family. His grandfather engaged in petty commerce for a living, and his father also engaged in petty commerce and hiring out. After his father passed away in 1941, they sold his older sister into a neighboring village as a child bride, his older brother went to work as a shop assistant in Tianjin, and his mother took care of the rest of the family through odd jobs and begging (Xiaoyi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 4, File 2). Even for middle peasants who had more land, life was still trying. Before Land Reform, one middle peasant in Xibei'an village had a family of three and 21 mu of land, but even with seven mu per capita the man had to work as a day laborer for others and later moved far away to the Northeast to work as a shop assistant before returning home in 1948 on the eve of Land Reform (Xibei'an Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 1, File 27).

Early twentieth-century Shanxi was characterized by high population-land ratios and insufficient land, and Wenshui County had one of the highest population densities in the province. As Xing Long describes Shanxi of the time, "the relations between human and material reproduction were severely out of balance, and with the existing level of development the available land was already incapable of supporting a large proportion of the local population" (Xing, 1986: 91-94). As we have seen above, average per capita land was in fact already below the minimum subsistence level, and

increasingly unequal distribution of land, heavy taxes, and rising costs of living over the course of the Republican era only made matters worse. Driven by survival, the surplus labor in poor peasant households generally took on commercial activities outside of agriculture. In Wenshui, over half of the families in a village engaged in at least one commercial activity as a family sideline, thus forming the part-peasant, part-trader economic structure.

The Structure of the "Part-Peasant, Part-Trader" Economy

As described above, by the early twentieth century the population-to-land ratio in Wenshui had already increased beyond the ability of arable land to support the local population. This particularly affected poor households such as hired laborers, poor peasants, and lower-middle peasants. They would not have been able to survive on agriculture alone. Most scholars take for granted that China was a quintessential agrarian economy in which land was the primary means of production and only in the most desperate of times were peasants forced to give up their ancestral farms to pursue handicrafts and commerce (Hsiao, 2018: 479-80). Xing Long has also noted that off-farm employment was a primary outlet for population pressure on the land (Xing, 2000).

In central Shanxi, commerce was the primary sideline occupation of peasants. From 1926-1928, Qiao Qiming (1932) carried out an investigation in a village in Qingyuan county and found that nearly half of the 143 village households engaged in

off-farm employment, while half of men aged 10 to 39 worked in commercial occupations (Qiao, 1932). Another investigation from 1935 found a similar situation in Qi, Taigu, and Pingyao counties (Liu Rongting, 1935). The same can be said about Wenshui, where, especially among poor households, the mixed occupations of part-peasants, part-traders were ubiquitous.

In addition to insufficient land, a more open social and political atmosphere also encouraged peasants to engage in commerce. Traditionally in China, as in most other countries, merchants were discriminated against and commerce was seen as a low-status occupation. The late Qing reforms beginning in the early 1900s, however, called for the establishment of a Ministry of Commerce and promulgated a series of measures to encourage commercial and industrial development. In 1904, the Qing government promulgated regulations on establishing chambers of commerce to institutionalize commercial organizations and protect private trade. These policies marked the beginning of a new era of commercial development (Zhu, 2011: 39). The Republican government after 1912 continued most of these policies and further enhanced and protected the interests of merchant commerce. In Shanxi, the provincial governor Yan Xishan (1937) implemented policies to rejuvenate commerce and industry to "save the nation." Representatives of the Shanxi Rural Reconstruction movement such as Huang Liquan and Liu Rongting actively promoted rural sideline industries and the integration of household commerce, handicrafts, and agriculture as the best solution to rural poverty. Around the same time, over 2 million migrants were

moving into Shanxi, and because of their lack of access to land, they also played an important role in the development of rural commerce and industry (Zhang Aiming, 2019). Together with the development of more modern transportation and commercial markets, all of these changes helped make commerce an attractive occupation.

To gain a deeper understanding of mixed occupations and Wenshui's rural economy, this article explores the occupation information recorded in the class background registers of over 3,500 households in fourteen villages in Wenshui county. These registers record detailed multi-generational economic data for each individual household, including the occupations of grandparents, parents, household heads and their spouses, and children. In this analysis we only use the occupations that household members held before Land Reform, but for each household we include all such recorded occupations of all household members, much like a household résumé or work history. This means that if one household member engaged in petty trade for one year before Land Reform, then we consider that household to be partly commercial. Since these registers are retrospective, there is of course some selection bias in what types of occupations are recorded, but we assume the fact that an occupation was recorded signifies that the household head felt that it played an important role in the household's livelihood.

Based on this analysis, less than 15 percent of households were "pure" peasant farmers before Land Reform. Table 2 summarizes the results for all 3,500 households in our data. In addition to the 15 percent self-cultivating households, another nearly

25 percent of households hired out as agricultural laborers and can therefore also be considered purely agrarian. Therefore, more than 60 percent of households engaged in off-farm sideline occupations. And the complexity of this household economy involved more than just farm and off-farm occupations. For example, in one poor peasant household in Xiyiting village, the grandfather practiced medicine in addition to farming, later the father worked as a teacher in the county seat in addition to farming, and the son worked as a silversmith apprentice in a neighboring county before returning to the village to farm and engage in petty trade (Xiyiting Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 1, File 19). Other households traded in coal or produced and sold local salt in addition to farming (Yadi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 2, File 22). Understanding the pervasiveness of this part-peasant, part-trader household production model is crucial for understanding the nature of China's rural economy.

Table 2. Household Occupational Histories in Fourteen Villages of Wenshui County before Land Reform

Household Occupation	Class Category							
	Total	Hired Laborer	Poor Peasant	Lower-Middle Peasant	Middle Peasant	Upper-Middle Peasant	Rich Peasant	Landlord
Farming	488	1	169	93	205	15	2	3
Farm+handicrafts	170	1	96	36	28	9		
Farm+workers	16		13	1	2			
Farm+soldier	32		20	7	5			
Hired farm labor	79				25	29	17	8
Farm+other	33	1	12	4	11	3	2	
Hired farm labor+other	14			2	3	6	2	1
Farm+employed labor	666	7	454	181	23			1
Farm+employed labor+soldier	7		3	4				
Farm+employed labor+handicrafts	48		33	12	3			
Employed labor	85	14	67	4				

Soldier	10	1	6	3				
Other	28	4	22	1	1			
Farm+shop asst.	384		169	101	106	8		
Farm+shop asst. +petty trade	48		22	15	8	2	1	
Farm+shop asst. +merchant	83		18	15	39	8	1	2
Farm+shop asst. +other	19		6	8	5			
Farm+petty trade	163	2	95	32	33	1		
Farm+petty trade +merchant	20		4	5	9	2		
Farm+petty trade +other	11		3	1	6	1		
Farm+merchant	389		87	84	163	35	10	10
Farm+merchant+other	23		5	3	11		2	2
Farm+employed labor+shop asst.	126	1	78	42	5			
Farm+employed labor+petty trade	159	3	94	50	12			
Farm+employed labor+shop asst.+petty trade	13		10	2	1			

Farm+employed labor+merchant	37		20	16	1			
Hired farm labor+shop asst.	19			1	4	11	2	1
Hired farm labor+shop asst.+merchant	8				4	2	1	1
Hired farm labor+merchant	193		1	3	46	53	50	40
Employed labor+shop asst.	20	3	14	3				
Employed labor+petty trade	35	3	29	2	1			
Employed labor+shop asst.+merchant	4		1			3		
Employed labor+merchant	8		8					
Shop asst.	37	9	21	3	1	1	2	
Petty trade	16	6	9		1			
Shop asst.+petty trade	9	1	8					
Shop asst.+merchant	7		4	1		1	1	
Merchant	9		6	1	1			1
Total	3516	57	1607	736	763	190	93	70

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: 1) Hired farm labor included monthly, short-term, and long-term labor.
2) Merchants received dividends from ownership of shares of shops or carried out bulk transport.

This part-peasant, part-trader production model exhibited two major variants. The most common was engaging in petty trade or larger merchant activities. As shown in Table 2, over one third of households did this. These two types of commerce include everything from owning shares in a commercial enterprise, or being a proprietor or manager, to peddling wares during agricultural slack seasons. As an example of the latter, a poor peasant in Wuliang village farmed his 9.5 mu of land in the busy sessions, and then after the fall harvest traveled around with a cart selling peanuts and fruits (Wuliang Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 4, File 11). In Fenqu village, two lower-middle peasant brothers made a living by peddling wares and after 1933 ran a small general store. In 1947, after serving in the army, they returned to the village to farm, peddle wares, and sell vegetables and tofu (Fenqu Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 5, File 29).

After commerce, the next most common sideline for peasants was shopkeeping apprenticeship. Another 15 percent of households in Wenshui did this. In Xiaoyi village, for example, one middle peasant left home at age 19 to become an apprentice and spent the next 30 years as a shop assistant in a half dozen melon seed and peanut shops in Beijing. In the 1940s he earned an annual income of 60 yuan, and his other

family members farmed his household's 20 mu of land. In 1945 their household was divided, and he received 5 mu of land that he had relatives cultivate for him (Xiaoyi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 11, File 20). In Nanxindian village, another middle peasant's father apprenticed in nearby counties, returned home to farm for two years, and then in 1937 went to Baotou in present-day Inner Mongolia to work in grain shops and fur shops. By 1942 he earned an annual income of 250 yuan and his family no longer farmed, but in 1952 his family returned to the village to farm (Nanxindian Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 5, File 17).

It is not difficult to understand why the phenomenon of the part-peasant, part-trader system was concentrated among the rural poor. Families wealthier than "middle peasants" had sufficient means of production and capital. Agriculture alone was amply sufficient to ensure their survival, so they generally did not need to resort to sideline enterprises. Even when they did so, it was not out of desperation but simply to increase the consumption level of family members. Those households classified as "poor peasants" were different, however, being forced to leave their villages for the cities to make money just to ensure survival. In this way, they supplemented their meager agricultural incomes in order to purchase food and clothing for family members.

Therefore, as shown in Figure 2, it is important to distinguish between the commercial activities of different classes of households. The proportion of petty traders and shop assistants increased among lower class categories (over 60 percent of

"Non-Farm Only" hired laborers were also petty traders and shop assistants), while the proportion of larger merchant activities greatly increased among higher class categories, reaching nearly 80 percent of landlord households. On the one hand, lower-middle peasants and below had more surplus labor and often had to look farther for opportunities to employ it. On the other hand, upper-middle peasants and above had surplus property that they could invest in more lucrative commercial enterprises (or vice versa). Theoretically speaking, therefore, the commercial activities of lower class categories fit more closely into the "moral peasant" model of an involutionary subsistence economy, while the commercial activities of higher class categories fit into the "rational peasant" model of a more "modern" economy (Huang Zongzhi, 2000b: 107-8; Wang Jingyu, 2002: 244-51). In the following section we will examine the former subsistence model in more detail, before returning in the conclusion to discuss the larger implications of this dual, mixed rural economy.

Figure 2. Household Occupational Histories in 14 Villages in Wenshui County before Land Reform, by Class

Source: See Table 1.

The Formation of Petty Commerce in a Subsistence-Based Economy

There were two major structural features of Wenshui's family farm economy that encouraged mixed occupations. First, the majority of poor peasant households had surplus labor as a result of insufficient landholding and skewed male-to-female sex ratios. Because family labor could not be dismissed or laid off, a common solution was to send off young men to apprentice in trade while women and the elderly stayed home to do the farming. As mentioned earlier, this resulted in an intergenerational,

gendered, and rational division of labor within the household and over the course of a household's life cycle.

Second, the agricultural cycle in North China had a relatively long slack season that created periods of surplus labor, especially in the winter. When annual farm production did not provide enough income to support the household through the winter, the family farm would use the winter slack season to engage in petty trade and supplement their household income. At the same time, however, some households engaged in so much petty trade that they ended up having to ask friends and relatives to help farm their miniscule plots of land, and if they could earn any surplus income, they would use it to purchase additional land. In this way, even among the poorest households, commerce was ultimately used to reinforce agriculture in a mutually interdependent mixed economy.

Trading in the Slack Season

A distinctive feature of agriculture is its highly variable labor requirements over the course of the production cycle. Agricultural production can be divided into a growing season, when average temperatures over 5°C make plant growth possible, and a slack season, when average temperatures below 0°C make plant growth impossible. In North China, the average growing season is 220 days, the slack season 110 (Liu Guangming, 1998: 132). Moreover, during the growing season there are also significant slack periods between the main tasks of planting, fertilizing, irrigating, and

harvesting. According to a 1937 survey by the Agronomics Department of Jinling University, Nanjing, a single average "farm worker" 农工 in Central and North China spent only 119 days out of the year in agricultural production, being unoccupied for most of the remaining two thirds of the year (Shao, 1937: 106-11). Fei Xiaotong similarly noted that, north of the Yangzi River, farm work was highly seasonal, the slack season extended for two thirds of the year, and the rural economy was characterized by periodic or seasonal unemployment (Fei, 2012: 70). In other words, the bottom line is that in North China, agricultural production traditionally requires only one third of a year's labor, leaving two thirds of the year open to engage in non-farm occupations.

For families of means, this extended slack season was a time of rest, preparation for the next year, and entertainment. Staging local operas, socializing in teahouses, and religious and communal activities helped pass the time for many peasants, while others spent their spare time smoking opium or gambling. For most families, however, income from farming was insufficient, so they had to use the slack season to find other sources of income to feed themselves until the next harvest. In many regions of China, farm households engaged in local handicraft production and value-added agricultural production like cotton and silk spinning, ropemaking, tanning, and weaving (Fei, 2008; Huang Zongzhi, 2000a: 199-204; Huang Zongzhi, 2000b: 44-54). Shao Zhongxiang, a leader of the Rural Reconstruction movement in the 1930s, also encouraged peasants to use the slack season for increasing production, social

development, and education and training as a solution to rural economic problems (Shao, 1937: 106-11).

In Wenshui county, the data reflect how poor peasant households used the slack season to engage in petty trade as a source of supplemental income. Petty trade was one of the most flexible and therefore popular options for peasants, as they could farm one day and engage in trade the next day or whenever they had spare time to peddle some wares. Petty trade was characterized by a wide business area, flexible hours, and the ability to expand social networks and support rural economic needs. Most of the trade goods were peasant necessities like fruits and vegetables, bean sprouts and tofu, meat, farm tools, firewood, and coal.

Every village developed their own specialty markets based on their natural competitive advantage. In Xiyiting, for example, traders primarily dealt in tofu. Peasants in this village would trade their grain for soybeans, process them into tofu, and then go from village to village selling it. Out of 53 petty traders in the village, 33 sold tofu (Xiyiting CBR, 1966: Production Team 3, File 2). In contrast, petty traders in Wuliang village primarily dealt in fruits and vegetables. There peasants would use their limited land to grow commercial fruits and vegetables, and then carry them from village to village to sell in exchange for more grain than they could get from just planting it on their land. One poor peasant's father, for example, originally did not own any land and so made a living through a combination of wage labor and selling fruit. After more than a decade he was able to purchase some land and his son was

then able to farm while continuing to trade fruit (Wuliang Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 12, File 4). In Xiaoyi village, traders mostly dealt in meat. Winter was the peak season for consuming meat, and many peasants would raise pigs, goats, and chickens, slaughtering them in the winter to sell to wealthy families. For example, in the slack season one lower-middle peasant sold meat for a butcher shop, where he learned how to butcher animals, and later he was able to sell pork on his own (Xiaoyi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 12, File 25). In Chiyu village, located in a forested mountain area, traders mostly dealt in woven baskets and firewood. In the slack season there, peasants would go into the mountains to cut wood strips for basket-weaving and then sell them in surrounding villages, forming a cultivator-artisan-merchant household economic model (Chiyu Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 3, File 2).

These peasant families used the winter slack season to engage in petty trade, but their income was very limited and their status humble. In the 1930s, a peasant peddler could earn between 30 and 50 yuan a year, which was the bare minimum for survival. "Over-intensification" of agricultural production was thus a common problem in rural North China during the Republican era. For most peasants, “although they had non-agricultural employment, they were still tied to agriculture” (Huang Zongzhi, 2000a: 14-15). In other words, this was a poor peasant economy.

Although petty trade was for the most part a low status occupation regarded by many as a last resort (Mao, 1967: 7), there were also occasional examples of petty

traders moving up in the world. In Chiyu, one middle peasant's grandfather migrated to the village and eked out a living by working in a local coal mine. That man's son (the subject's father) was able to save up some money by selling coal and then used that to buy land in the village. The subject himself expanded the business into also selling cloth, melon seeds, and peanuts, and through hard work was able to purchase three houses and 23 mu of land, moving up from poor to middle peasant status (Chiyu Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 4, File 20). For most, however, petty trade was primarily a means of survival until the next harvest and they were lucky just to make ends meet, let alone save up a surplus.

Shop Assistants

Shop assistants comprised a class of retail workers who typically resided at the shop in which they worked and were therefore colloquially called "live-ins" 住地方 or "wage-eaters" 吃劳金. Sometimes they were classified as a type of "merchant" 商人, for example when they were organized within the chambers of commerce by the Nationalist (Guomindang) government, whereas at other times they were classified as "workers" 工人, as they were in the Communist Party's class system (Zhu, 2010; Ba, 2014). In any case, from the shop assistant's point of view, they saw themselves as merchants in training. Parents sent their children to work as shop assistants because they wanted them to learn how to conduct business, to earn money, and eventually to be promoted to the position of shop manager, or to open their own businesses.

Moreover, in contrast with being a contracted employee, most shop assistants had some kind of kin or social connection with the shop manager and operated in a master-apprentice relationship to pass on business skills and knowledge. In Wenshui over 15 percent of all households had some experience with shopkeeping apprenticeship, making this occupation even more prevalent than itinerant trade. It was most common among the lower classes, although it also played a large role among middle and even upper-middle peasants.

Shopkeeping apprenticeship was generally considered to be a low status occupation. As Mao wrote in 1925, “The shop assistants are employees of small and middle businessmen, supporting their households on meager pay and getting a raise in pay perhaps only once in several years while prices rise every year. If by chance you get into intimate conversation with them, they invariably pour out their endless grievances” (Mao, 1967: 7). Most shop assistants were poor peasants just trying to make ends meet. In contrast with petty traders who worked in the slack seasons or in between farming days, however, shop assistants were more like apprentices and were required to live at the shop all year round, which meant that their families had to give up a part of their farm labor. And in most cases, because of the nature of the working conditions, most shop assistants were young men, which meant that their family had to give up a crucial part of its workforce. Thus, compared to itinerant trade, shopkeeping apprenticeship had a larger effect on farm production. Few poor peasant households were willing to abandon farming completely, simply because it was too

risky to depend solely on wages in an unstable economy, but they were also eager to take advantage of the higher income of a shop assistant. Among the rural poor in Wenshui County, then, an economic pattern centering on the "part-peasant, part-trader" took shape.

In our data from Wenshui we can see how peasant households prioritized a gendered division of labor to maximize the incomes of their male labor. In order both to guarantee agricultural production and to earn extra income, even land-poor families would train boys in the basics of trade, and once they were older they would be sent to work in a relative's shop. One elder resident of Yue village recalled:

> In our village, no matter how much land a family had, as soon as their children grew up they would be sent to Beijing. Young children would learn how to use an abacus. Farming was secondary, not a primary [occupation]. Commerce was more much more profitable than farming. Our entire family, all the boys, were sent to Beijing as soon as we turned fifteen. (Yue Village Fieldnotes, 2019)

In order to send boys to become shop apprentices, poor peasant households increasingly used domestic female and elderly labor to farm the land. This mixed part-peasant, part-trader economy thus relied on a division of labor by gender and generation that was very different from the mixed farm-industry economy described

by Fei Xiaotong and others, in which young men's labor was devoted to farming and other labor was devoted to sideline industries. Instead, Wenshui's practice of sending boys off the farm while other family members farmed is more similar to the peasant-worker production model of the Reform Era after 1978. In one poor peasant household in our data from Yue village, for example, all of the male labor worked off-farm: the father worked in a firecracker shop in Pingyao, and all the male children were shop apprentices in Beijing. The household's 20 mu of land in the village was all farmed by the females of the household (Yue Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 1, File 9).

In the context of Wenshui's rural economy, therefore, this division of labor maximized returns on household labor. Young men's labor was used to maximize household income from off-farm employment, while other labor was used for the less profitable but indispensable job of farming. This division of labor may also help explain why larger extended and stem households were common among poor peasant households in Wenshui. Because each household unit was dependent on this maximization of female and elderly labor in addition to that of young men, household division implied not just dividing up already small amounts of land, but, more importantly, dividing up such mutually interdependent labor allocations.

Another important consequence of the part-peasant, part-trader division of labor by gender and generation was that it often resulted in labor shortages during peak farm seasons. Since poor peasant households could not afford to hire laborers on the

market, they made up for these shortages by relying on relatives and friends to help farm in exchange for small amounts of grain. In Xiaoyi village, for example, one lower-middle peasant worked as a shop assistant in Beijing and his wife accompanied him, so their 17 mu of land in the village was farmed by his mother and younger sister, who were also assisted by other relatives (Xiaoyi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 19, File 16). Similarly, a poor peasant's grandfather worked at a melon seed and peanut shop in Beijing for over 30 years, and the peasant's older brother worked as a shoemaker in Taiyuan, sending home 30 yuan annually. They had 11 mu of land in the village and farmed by exchanging human for draft animal labor, and then after the peasant himself also moved to Beijing, their land was farmed by his brother-in-law (Xiaoyi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 13, File 11). In this way, we can see how poor households even came to rely on non-coresident kin to preserve their part-peasant, part-trader household economy and maximize household income from off-farm employment.

We can also understand the more complex sharecropping or "shared farming" 半种 practices common in central Shanxi as a strategy for dealing with household labor shortages as poor peasant families increasingly invested their labor in more lucrative commercial occupations. In this type of shared farming arrangement, the landowner and a sharecropper would both invest their labor, tools, and other inputs to farm the land cooperatively, and then split the harvest. For example, the father of one poor peasant household in Xiaoyi village apprenticed in the county seat from a young age,

and then from 1919 he worked at various melon seed and peanut shops in Beijing. In 1942 he had 23 mu of land in the village and his household had 5 members, but they were all dependents. Therefore, he had relatives farm 9 mu of land and then his household dependent labor engaged in shared farming with others to farm the remaining 14 mu (Xiaoyi Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 4, File 21). Relying on relatives and sharecropping were both complex communal economic practices that developed as strategies to take advantage of commercial wages while still maintaining agriculture to help mitigate household economic risk. On the one hand, these practices expanded "involutionary" labor strategies from the household to the extended family and community, while on the other hand they enabled peasant households both to ensure their harvest and to acquire income through commercial activities.

A brief look at the recorded incomes of different occupations in Republican Wenshui clearly demonstrates the rationality of the various strategies that characterized this part-peasant, part-trader economy. Figure 3 compares the annual reported incomes of various occupations reported in Wenshui's household class background registers. All commercial occupations record incomes in yuan cash wages, while farm and hired laborer incomes are recorded in jin (or cattie) of grain. For the sake of comparison, we converted cash incomes into the amount of grain they could purchase. One figure from Liu Dapeng's diary, written in southern Taiyuan in the summer of 1926, estimates that at that time 1 yuan could purchase 20 jin of wheat or 30 jin of millet (Liu Dapeng, 1990: 329-40). Another figure from the Lüliang

gazetteer estimates that in 1930s Wenshui, 1 yuan could purchase 25 jin of wheat, 40 jin of millet, 45 jin of corn, or 50 jin of sorghum (Ren, 1989: 110-11). In Figure 3, we use a median value of 40 jin, since few poor peasants would have used their incomes to purchase valuable wheat for household consumption. The figure clearly shows the attraction of commercial occupations. The average shop assistant's income was twice what a household could earn through farming their own land alone, not to mention higher-skilled non-farm occupations that could yield over four times the amount of farm incomes. Likewise, elderly villagers in Wenshui today still recall that "before [Land Reform], the annual income of working as a shop assistant or clerk was worth three farm laborers" (Yue Village Fieldnotes, 2019).

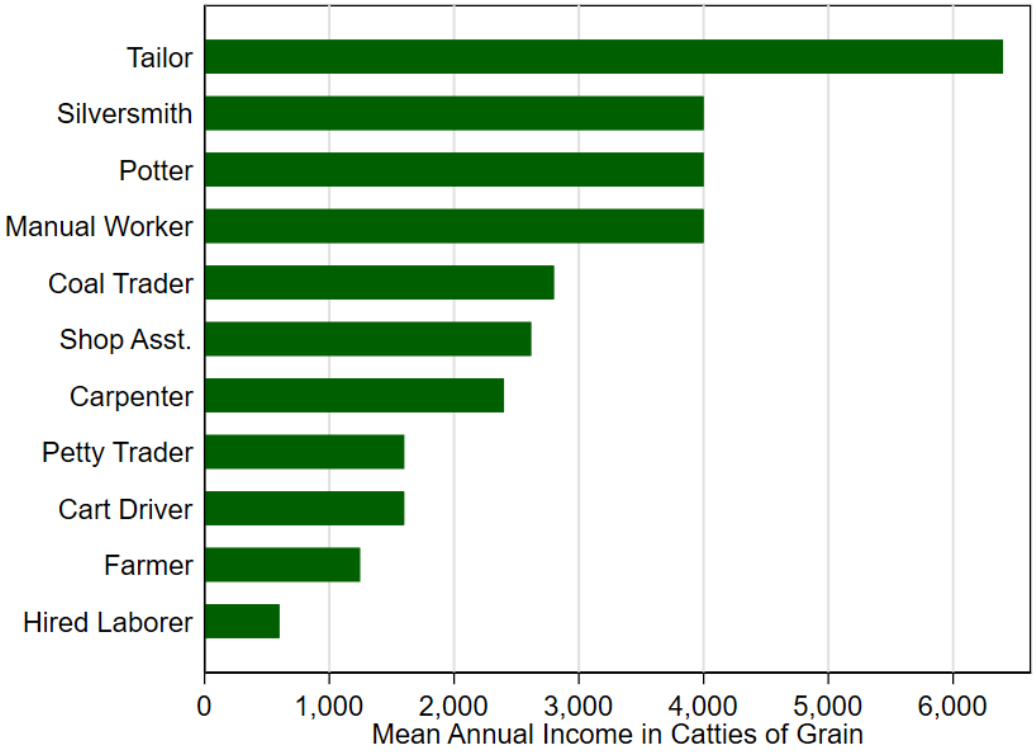

Figure 3. A Sample of Mean Annual Incomes of Occupations in Wenshui County,

1942-1944

Source: See Table 1.

Notes: This figure is restricted to a sample of 32 households that directly record grain and cash incomes ca.1942-1944. Cash incomes are converted to grain equivalents at the rate of 1 yuan = 40 catties (i.e., jin).

The Interdependence of Agriculture and Commerce

The peasant household strategies of diversifying and maximizing household labor described above resulted in a household economy that was intimately dependent on both agricultural production and commercial activities and could not be sustained without one or the other. The meager incomes of itinerant peddlers and shop assistants were not possible without the support from small peasant farms, and the meager incomes of small peasant farms were not possible without the support of off-farm incomes. From the peasants' perspective, in this way they were able to maintain some sense of independent livelihood in an unstable, transitional economy, because as soon as markets were upset or they lost their jobs, they could still be guaranteed some food to eat from their small plots of land back home.

As Wang Xianming has pointed out, even well-to-do peasants were unwilling to completely abandon farming and continued to divide their household labor between agricultural and commercial occupations. Such households that were able to earn significant commercial profits would invest it in land not because they wanted to

make a living off of rent, but because land was a more stable investment and acted like an insurance policy against commercial economic shocks. In practice, even though some well-to-do peasants might completely move out of the village into the city, there are many examples of them returning to the village later (Wang Xianming, 2012). By comparison, poor peasant households were even more dependent on the "insurance" of farming because many of them lived on the threshold of starvation and were therefore more sensitive to economic shocks. As a result, poor peasants were even more desperate to invest their meager commercial profits in land instead of higher-risk commercial enterprises. From a merchant's point of view, this strategy was expressed as, "use commerce to build a fortune, use agriculture to protect it" 以末起家，以本守之 (Wang Jingyu, 2007: 570-72). For most poor peasants without fortunes to protect, however, maximizing labor income was simply an effective strategy for survival.

It sometimes took decades for a poor peasant household to save up enough money to buy land. In Xiyiting village at the beginning of the Republican era around 1914, one poor peasant owned 3 mu of land and began working as a hired laborer at age 13. From the age of 20, he began selling meat, first working for someone else and then later opening his own butcher shop with a partner. Eventually he saved up enough money and bought 12 mu of land (Xiyiting Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 2, File 17). For some households it might even take multiple generations of commercial activities to save up some money. In Yue village, for example, the story of one poor

peasant household began with a landless and house-less grandfather who rented land and worked as a hired laborer and petty trader his whole life. His father, with a family of five, was able to save up enough money to buy 3.8 mu of land and also had to sharecrop another 20 mu to support his family. In 1931, his two grandsons were able to move to Beijing to apprentice in grain shops. Only after 1962, when the two grandsons were earning a combined monthly income of 10 yuan, were they able to purchase another 6.2 mu of land (Yue Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 2, File 19). Other families relied on sending all the male labor they could spare into commerce. One poor family in Fenqu village sold off all of their land (4 mu) while the grandfather, father, and two sons all went to work as shop assistants in Suiyuan, Outer Mongolia, and the Northeast. After over two decades of working away from home, the sons finally saved up enough money to buy 7 mu of land and moved back to the village in 1948 (Fenqu Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 7, File 3).

In the context of Republican China's national economy, having some land to fall back on was an indispensable safety net. In the turbulent twilight of the Qing dynasty and the transition to the Republic, Shanxi's entire merchant economy was in decline and all levels of the regional economy were affected. Beginning in the 1920s, moreover, war and the global financial crisis only further damaged the economy, and by 1930 Shanxi's currency had collapsed, prices had skyrocketed, and businesses had started to go bankrupt (Industrial and Commercial Semimonthly, 1934: 96-7). Even a well-off literatus and merchant like Liu Dapeng, who managed a coal mine in

Taiyuan, was in the end forced to abandon commerce and return to his home village to live off his family's land (Harrison, 2013: 94-113). For the coup de grâce, Japan occupied Wenshui county in 1938 and took control over the economy, leaving only a few businesses in operation (Report on the Evolution and Current Situation of Industry and Commerce in Chengguan, Wenshui, 1949). As a result, most shop assistants in the county seat were forced to return to farming in their home villages. Family histories in Wenshui are also full of stories of shop assistants returning home to farm after the Japanese invaded their place of work (Wuliang Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 4, File 36; Xinbao Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 4, File 12; Yongle Village CBR, 1966: Production Team 9, File 7). These developments only further reinforced in peasants' minds the importance of keeping some land to fall back on.

Ultimately, although most peasant households in Republican era Wenshui pursued the higher income obtainable through commercial activities, few ever abandoned farming altogether to become urban proletarians. Aside from that necessary for basic household consumption, poor peasant-traders invested almost all of their surplus income into land because that was all they could afford. Practitioners of such small-scale commercial activities in the countryside thus remained "peasant-traders" 农商, with no fundamental change to their identity in relation to the traditional four occupations of "gentry, peasant, artisan, and merchant" 士农工商. They conducted trade without breaking away from the soil of their villages, agriculture, or the land.

Conclusion

As an important manifestation of the market economy, commercial activities are one of the core contents of classical liberalism and neoliberal economics. Classical liberalism advocates free competition and free markets, calling for the reduction of government regulation of economic activities and for compliance with the principle of profit maximization. Neoliberalism goes further by opposing any form of government intervention, attempting to create a universal, highly integrated, and purely competitive market economy.

Neoliberal theory also attempts to use the concept of "market economy" to explain smallholding peasant economies. Theodore Schultz, a classical economics theorist, believes that the economic behavior of traditional peasants is similar to that of entrepreneurs who seek to maximize profits, claiming it is a purely competitive type of resource allocation according to market mechanisms. Therefore, all the commercial activities of small-scale peasants can be regarded as comprising a monetized economy of households that are both consumption units and production units under very developed market conditions that tend to be fully competitive (Schultz, 2006: 32-46). Samuel L. Popkin further clarified the "rational" behavior of peasants in his study of political behavior in rural Vietnam. Peasants there prioritized the welfare of their own families over moral values or the interests of larger-scale collectives. Their choices included commercial activities, made in pursuit of their own

best interests after weighing the pros and cons (Popkin, 1979: 30-31).The definition of *shangye* 商业 ("commerce") in the *Cihai* dictionary is, "The exchange of things for the purpose of profit" (Shu, 1981: 601). Obviously, in the view of formalists, commerce conforms to Schultz's and Popkins' description of "rational" smallholders. Commerce must be the pursuit of maximization of profits and personal interests, and it is a purely competitive market behavior. But obviously, they could not imagine the persistence of the "part-peasant, part-trader" economic model in China.

The archives of Wenshui county in central Shanxi show that not all commercial activities conducted by peasants conform to the ideals of a profitable and purely competitive market economy, as imagined by neoliberalism. Peasants of different classes and economic foundations had completely different commercial behavior. For example, the "large commodity" system of Shanxi merchants' cross-regional, cross-industry chain operations formed a complete commercial system in terms of supply, sales, marketing, management, and dividends. Their commerce was typical market behavior, solely for profit. For poor peasant households with little land, working in multiple occupations was a survival strategy that represented a more rational or efficient allocation of household labor. They did not consider the profits or the amount of labor costs. Although they lacked competitiveness, they effectively made up for the lack of agricultural income, more closely fitting Chayanov's and Scott's image of the "moral peasant." As a means of earning a living with little land, under the combined pressure of inadequate employment and survival opportunities, poor peasants had to

engage in high-cost, low-paying commercial activities outside of agriculture, forming the economic pattern characterized by the figure of the part-peasant, part-trader. These incomes were mainly used to meet household consumption needs, striking a balance between drudgery and the satisfaction of personal needs.

In central Shanxi in the 1930s and 1940s, the economic pattern of the part-peasant, part-trader among the rural poor was characterized by the following practices: (1) Many able-bodied men farmed during the busy seasons and worked as petty traders in the slack seasons. Using the seasonality and periodicity of the agricultural production system, the labor resources in the family were deployed reasonably, and the auxiliary income earned during the agricultural slack period maintained the peasants' self-cultivation of the land. (2) Other men engaged in off-farm commercial occupations year-round, and female and elderly family members farmed the land, often with the help of other relatives and neighbors. This represented a rational gendered and intergenerational allocation of labor that undercut labor market prices to maximize household income. Because family-assisted labor was cheaper than hired workers, it was difficult for managerial farming to have room to survive, thus consolidating the development of family farms. (3) Any surplus income from commerce, after satisfying basic consumption needs, was used to purchase more land as subsistence insurance against the vagaries of the commercial economy. These mixed practices of mutually supporting agriculture and commerce developed into a robust and competitive part-peasant, part-trader economic system.

The part-peasant, part-trader system was a “commodities” circulation system and a “marginal income” labor system, relying on the cheapest “circulation” method, and poor peasant families with no other way out provided it with low-cost surplus labor. At the same time, because of the inconvenience of transportation and the irregularity of markets, the village had a high demand for itinerant peddlers, so the part-peasant, part-trader system had a stubborn vitality. In a sense, in this economic model, commercial profit was not proportional to labor input. The continuous investment of household surplus labor did not bring a significant increase in profits, instead reaching a “critical point” after which it would come to a standstill and possibly lead to “involution.”

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