

AN APPROACH TO ASIAN STUDIES FROM THE STANDPOINT OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

by KŌJI IIZUKA

I. THE GEOGRAPHICAL CLASSIFICATION BY PAUL VIDAL DE LA BLACHE

P VIDAL DE LA BLACHE, who died towards the end of the First World War, occupies an important position in the development of modern geography in that his work bridged the gap between human geography and the social and historical sciences. His book *Principes de Géographie Humaine* (Paris, 1921) contains a very suggestive essay entitled "La Ville." It need hardly be said that "l'Inde et l'Extrême-Orient" as treated by P. Vidal de la Blache represents India and the Far East before the First World War, and that in studying those areas the rapid changes which have taken place in world geography since that time must always be taken into account. It is nevertheless useful to consider the three categories based on the characteristics of the geography of the agglomeration in the various countries of the world which P. Vidal de la Blache established in the above-mentioned work.

These are (A) "the regions of recent colonization in America and Australia" in which the "town type" of agglomeration is dominant, (B) Europe, in which agglomerations of the "town type" are found together with rural forms of settlement, and, in contrast to the above two, (C) India and the Far East are characterized as areas in which the "village type" of population distribution is overwhelmingly predominant. (p. 291)

In order to give a satisfactory account of these three categories, it is necessary to transcend the morphology of the agglomeration and to consider the principles which govern economic life in each of these countries or regions. The areas comprised under category (A), although they cannot be described as completely virgin soil, are nevertheless areas in which capitalistic industrial culture has been raised by "pure breeding" in an environment where no culture other than that of the Stone Age existed before. In the areas comprised under category (B)

the heritage of the village feudal economy has been carried over into modern times, and society is a product of the break-up of the village feudal economy under the influence of the development of a capitalist economy. In contrast, if we assume that in the areas comprised under category (C) are areas in which the greater part of social life is still dominated by the village community, this would indicate that in these areas a feudal, or perhaps even pre-feudal, social order and the relations of production supporting such a social order have for certain reasons been preserved in large measure, while the changes which have taken place in the areas comprised under categories (A) and (B) — evolution of capitalism, urbanization, and industrialization — have been prevented.

It is for this reason that the contrast between East and West has been taken up as being a question of a contrast between pre-modern and modern forms of society. However, it is not correct to solve the problem of the existence of these differences by simply declaring them to be due to differences in stages of development. This is so because among the reasons for the preservation of older forms of society there are the historical facts of the subordination of native populations to foreign capitalist powers and the effects of the colonial system. In such situations native ruling classes whose time was running out recovered and strengthened their positions of dominance with the aid of foreign powers. This occurred in China in the course of the suppression of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion, and the same process took place in India after the Mutiny as a direct result of British policy. (See Edward Thompson, *The Making of the Indian Princes* [London, 1943]) Indeed, the saying: "He who takes the lead controls the rest" has never been more crudely justified than during the process of the establishment of the international division of labour.

The countries which took the lead in industrialization stood in the way of those in which industrialization took place later. In the case of Germany, an independent country, and in that of the U.S.A., a country which had to fight to achieve independence, it was necessary to adopt protective policies for the exclusion of British manufactured goods in order that the domestic markets might be brought under the control of national capital. It was found necessary to replace the economic theory of Adam Smith by that of Friedrich List. However, in the case of countries such as India which were deprived of the liberty to resort to the necessary political measures, and of countries such as China whose independence was only nominal, the pressing

need which was felt for policies of protection and tutelage and the possibility of implementation of such policies, were problems of an entirely different dimension. We need scarcely add that in the case of Japan, too, one of the main tasks in diplomacy in the period following the Meiji Restoration was that of escaping from the restrictions imposed by the Unequal Treaties and regaining tariff autonomy.

The following passage occurs in Chester Bowles' *Ambassador's Report* (London, 1954). "The contrast between America's great development under freedom and Asia's lack of development under colonialism rankles in the minds of most Asian leaders. 'You won your independence at about the time we lost ours,' an Indian said to me sadly. Just as England is the leading example of empire in the last two centuries of world history, just as America is the leading example of free, democratic development, so India epitomizes the experience of the colonial nations in Asia and Africa." (p. 49)

Industrial capital of the advanced countries allotted to native influential persons in the colonies and subordinate countries who were acquainted with the economic conditions and commercial customs of their areas the role of *compradors* charged with the duties of selling manufactured goods and collecting local agricultural products and raw materials, and at the same time used every means to prevent local national capital from entering into the sphere of industrial production.

In so far as this policy was successful, the people of Asia were oppressed by a class of landed gentry, merchants, and money-lenders—the kind of local notables whom Sir Frederick J.D. Lugard designated by the name of "natural rulers"—who had succeeded in maintaining a privileged position as the tools of the policy of indirect rule. Thus Asia came to be characterized as an area in which population settlement was "rural" and the dominant form of the agglomeration the "village type."

It would no doubt be a vain endeavour to attempt to determine what must be the result of competition between traditional handicrafts and modern mechanized industry in producing articles of the same kind, or of kinds which might be substituted for one another. However, it is dangerous to over-simplify this problem. The handicraft industries of the agricultural villages producing consumption goods prescribed by local traditional custom and preferences, or instruments of production suitable to the natural conditions of the locality, are able to keep a close hold on local demand, and do not easily give way before the products of urban or foreign mechanized industry. Again,

if it were the case that handicraft industries decayed as soon as the products of mechanized industries were introduced, it would not have been necessary for Indian weavers to suffer the cruel fate of having their hands cut off, nor for China to have gone through the Opium War. The fact was that in their acquisition of markets in the underdeveloped countries the advanced industrial countries frequently found that artillery support was required.

In pre-war China it was said that everyone went clad in Japanese cotton cloth dyed blue with German chemical dyes. Again, a characteristic of the economic geography of the tropical colonial territories was an excessive tendency to monoculture, and, as a consequence, the economies of these areas were immediately affected by demand fluctuations in the world market and suffered from instability. We shall refer to this latter question later. For the present, we need scarcely emphasize the fact that "rural" and "village-dwelling" Asia is already an organic and indispensable part of the structure of the money economy or commercial economy which has developed on a world scale.

However, if we look at the peasants of Asia we will find (and this was the case in Japan, too, before the Land Reform) that the fact that agricultural produce is dealt in as a commodity current in the commercial economy does not necessarily mean that the cultivators are engaged in commercial production with the aim of changing their produce into money or making a commercial profit. In places where the feudal landlord system has not been interfered with the peasant cultivators must work to the limits of their strength to produce sufficient agricultural produce to pay the high rents in kind which their landlords demand, and it is more usual for the remainder of the peasants' produce to be insufficient for their own domestic consumption than for the opposite to be the case. When agricultural produce enters the commercial economy only after being collected by landlords, the cultivating serfs or tenants cannot be said to be engaged in commercial production.

When a Land Reform was "sent down from Heaven" by the powers that be in South Viet-Nam (for the usual reason that it was an indispensable pre-condition for "democratization") it was found that the supply of rice to the market at once became much worse and there was double the need for imports of food, with the result that the foreign exchange situation became all the more strained. We would expect that the peasants would be pleased with the fact that they had been freed from the heavy burden of rents in kind, but for

peasants who neither wish to send their children to universities, nor aspire to buy electric refrigerators—to state the matter more fundamentally, for peasants whose attitude to living is not that of trying to make a profit but of being content with one's station and knowing sufficiency—for these peasants the Land Reform meant nothing more than that they would now have to work only half as much in order to make a living. I have not read any official reports on this Land Reform, but it is probable that this supposition is justified in fact. There have been examples in Latin America of Land Reforms whose results were contrary to expectations. In Latin America, Land Reform did not mean the growth of the economically independent peasant.

II. A MOSAIC OF CLOSED RURAL COMMUNITIES

The empires of antiquity arose as a result of conquerors requiring local chieftains to acknowledge their sovereignty, and the Emperor who headed such a political group was literally a "King of Kings." The rise and fall of dynasties and the changing combinations of power among the ruling classes exercised no fundamental influence on the village community as the territorial unit which constituted the basic social organism in these empires. Even under feudalism, the period during which the last stage of subsistence economy was reached, the rule of the feudal lords remained in a parasitic and dependent relation to the economy of the village and did not break up the basic structure of society represented in the village as a territorial unit. Nor was this all, since the way of self-preservation for the feudal order lay in taking every possible measure to prevent the penetration of a commercial economy which would result in the break-up of the subsistence economy. Among the feudal lords of Europe, the partitioning or seizure of territories was not the occasion of any arbitrary definition of boundaries. It appears that throughout all such reorganizations of political subordination the principle of following the clearly defined boundaries which demarcated the territories of the basic social units was always observed. (See, for example, G. Dupont-Ferrier, *La Formation de l'Etat français et l'Unité française* [Paris, 1929]) Although an arbitrary division of territory—for example, a division of territory along the 38th north parallel—might be made as a temporary or last-resort measure in newly developed countries such as 19th-century America, such a thing was out of the question in any of the countries with a long

history.

Sir Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell, who appears to have been an experienced colonial official of the British Empire, has left the following passage in his record of observations made in the Dutch East Indies in 1926, *Foreign Colonial Administration in the Far East* (London, 1928). The village has long been the basic unit of administration in the Dutch East Indies. As much as 90 per cent of the population lives in the neatly-kept little villages which are dotted all over the country, and draws its livelihood from the land which surrounds them. The village is an independent body, possessing its own headman and council of elders, and is not bound to its neighbouring villages except by feelings of loyalty to a common chief. In such small, closed social groups formed on a geographical basis, associations based on kinship are of particular importance. At this point there arises the question of familism. Daniel Harrison Kulp, the author of *Country Life in South China; The Sociology of Familism* (New York, 1925), a study based on an on-the-spot survey found that it is the village which forms the background to China. No more need be said by way of a general characterization of the social structure of pre-war Asia.

However, it is not correct to suppose that this condition is peculiar to Asia. We should draw attention to the fact that Asia has been kept in this state even in the period of modern capitalism. And it goes without saying that Europe also was once a "rural" and "village-dwelling" Europe. There can be no objection, either in historical fact or in theory, to our treating the feudal society of mediaeval Europe as being a mosaic of closed rural communities. If I may speak at this point of my own personal experience, when I spoke to my acquaintances in the Historical Section at the ANZAAS Asian Studies Symposium held in Adelaide in 1958, of all the points I made it was this point which seemed to have produced a deep impression. The fact that they evinced some degree of embarrassment when I made this point was probably due to the fact that, although they had emancipated themselves from the bondage of that view of world history in which Europe is accorded a central place, my words had made them conscious of the inadmissibility of their predilection that Europe should always be treated as a special case.

While in Europe, or, more accurately, in a handful of countries in western Europe, this mosaic of village-dwelling societies developed and dissolved in its own way and in accordance with its own laws to produce a more open, individualistic, modern bourgeois society, in Asia

this state of society has persisted up to the present day. This is the point on which Asia and Europe differ, this is the point which constitutes the apparent peculiarity of Asia. The persistence of an old form of society—the so-called “stagnation of Oriental society”—was largely the work of colonialism, and in the light of this inescapable fact we should not be too much surprised to discover that, at the present day, the society of Asia still finds its village-dwelling and familial bonds of association to be half an encumbrance and half a source of confidence and support.

It may be thought necessary, however, to add the following remarks in respect to the traditional form of irrigated agriculture practised in monsoon Asia. It is of course true that this question has now been so thoroughly discussed that very little can be said about the subject that is not a restatement of the opinions put forward by various writers. I shall therefore fulfil my obligation to discuss this question by quoting a few lines from *La Campagne* (Paris, 1956) written by Pierre George, who is a second-generation pupil of Vidal de la Blache. “Except for a few areas in China and Japan, the village is the predominant form of settlement to the exclusion of any other type. It corresponds to the very strong organization of the rural community accompanying, besides the factors of collective discipline necessitated by the irrigation system, a solid ensemble of traditions of living in a close-knit social group. The daily work of the people of these communities, in the closely-defined sense of the term, is performed by members of the same family. Although there is no patriarchal structure such as that found in Africa, the collective character of the community is extremely strong. It is upheld by traditions of a religious and peasant character, and the characteristically collective nature of the community is to be seen in all the principal celebrations held throughout the agricultural year. Although collective forms of labour organization are not always to be found in these communities, mutual aid is the rule. Religious associations and organs of local self-government constitute a strong political structure, the character of which has often been described as democratic.” (Paragraph 4, “Villages d’Extrême-Orient,” pp. 180–181.)

It would be uncharitable to blame George for saying only that the democratic character of the political structure in these communities has often been described and reserving his own opinion of the matter. But the fact is that it would be better to emend his sentence to read, “. . . a strong political structure which has often, but wrongly, been described as democratic.” Unless we make this emendation, our view

of the matter can only be that of outside observers, and we shall be unable to understand the village society from within as it is understood by J.H. Boeke (to whose work we shall refer later). We shall become incapable of understanding why such minute social groups (whose nature is frequently obscured by the use of the commodious conventional term, 'the village community') should provide such favourable conditions for the rule of "bosses," and why common villagers are forced to close their eyes to all manner of irrationalities in their own communities.

Lafcadio Hearn refers to this question in his book entitled *Japan: An Attempt at Interpretation* (London, 1904) (Japanese version entitled *Shinkoku Nippon* [Japan, the Land of the Gods]), when he says "The truth is that the extraordinary capacity of the Japanese for communal organization is the strongest possible evidence of their unfitness for any modern democratic form of government." (p. 278) Lafcadio Hearn seems to have adopted the sociology represented by Herbert Spencer's organic evolutionism. This type of sociology deals only with the successive stages of evolutionary progress which particular social organisms pass through, and includes no doctrine about the mechanics of the evolution which take place within the society or of revolutionary changes in society which could be denoted by the biological term 'metamorphosis.' This was probably inevitable in a person living at the time when Lafcadio Hearn was writing, but at all events we must be impressed by his penetrating insight into the Japanese rural society of the Meiji Era.

According to J.H. Boeke, the author of *Dorp en Desa* (Leiden, 1934), the only essential element in a classification of types of village is "classification according to the 'spirit' which rules the village economy. From this it follows that there are only two types of village—the pre-capitalist village and the capitalist village." (p. 15) The break-up of the village economy is said to be due to the penetration of capitalism into the village, and in the Occidental countries the result of this process is said to be the replacement of the older village by a village converted to capitalism, while in "colonial societies" or "Oriental countries" the village economy is merely "dismembered, shaken to its foundations, deformed" and sacrificed unilaterally, so that no new form of living is built up and the community is full of internal contradictions. On the other hand, "America, that is, the parts of America inhabited by Europeans, has never had any experience of a village economy." (p. 20) If we compare the history of rural society in Ame-

rica with the history of the village in Europe, "we will at once be struck by the absence of historical character in the American agricultural village," (p. 20) which, by reason of its origins, is devoid of those attributes which characterize a village community. Thus we see that the leading scholars, Vidal de la Blache and Boeke, are in fundamental agreement.

Nevertheless, although we feel that we may agree with, and even admire, the conclusions reached by these authors, the generally accepted view of the village contains elements which we find difficult to accept.

For a society dependent on agriculture carried on in a monsoon climate in which precipitation varies greatly from season to season the assurance of stability in agriculture has a fatal importance. The theory of "Oriental Despotism" as an explanation of the nature of Oriental society rests on the argument that "despotism" is made necessary by the large-scale irrigation and flood-control works which must be carried out if agricultural production is to be maintained. This theory attempts to explain "Oriental" societies without making any reference to the system of land tenure or the relations of production. This, of course, is a survival of a traditional and ill-fated convention in certain pseudo-academic circles, but the theory is all too easygoing in that it would try to explain away the rise and persistence of anti-democratic regimes by assigning the responsibility to the physical environment. Like the opportunist philosophy of history which permits us to explain away pathological phenomena in modern civilization without making any reference to the antagonisms inherent in a capitalist economy, this theory is not only one which will not disturb those who sit in the seats of power, but is even one which they will find useful in their own interests, and in this sense the theory is assured of some degree of popularity.

The argument that the "communal organization" or the "collective character of the community" is extremely strong, and that it is "upheld by traditions of a religious character," implies that the village is such that, if an individual wishes to be accepted as a member of local society, he must conform to the same pattern as his neighbours. Such a society must be sterile soil for the growth of individual initiative. In such a social environment, anyone who aspires to make innovations of whatever kind—even one who only aspires to make innovations in purely technical matters—will be treated as a heretic, and only those who are able to stand up against this social pressure will succeed as representatives of new movements in their society. Thus, the intelligentsia

who have received a modern education are drawn from the families of the property-owners, the landlords in the village, from the class which may be described as the "village gentlemen." Not only are the more humble members of village society deprived of any opportunity for education, but they are in such a state of isolation that, if they presume to say or do anything which is regarded as heterodox by the influential members of their community, they will be suppressed individually, so that their conduct may be checked before they have gone so far as to make any public manifestation. For this reason we may say that the ostracism or "boycotting" of certain members of a village is practically confined to cases in which the ostracized persons have an economic base sufficient to enable them to rival the established power-holders in the village.

This also serves to explain the fact that the anti-colonial movement arose among the property-owning classes, among the lawyers and other practitioners of the liberal professions, among the native intelligentsia, and not among the lower classes who may be presumed to have suffered most from the oppression of the colonial system. It would seem to be characteristic of this section of society that when these nationalist movements reach the stage of mass upheavals, certain elements appear among them who follow a compromising or moderate line, or retreat to a menshevik secessionist line. This was due to the fact that, although they were members of oppressed races living under colonial regimes, as far as "vested interests" are concerned they are members of a section of society which "had something to lose."

In this way it has also come about that anti-colonial movements have arisen in which the leadership has been assumed by members of the feudal landlord class. On this point there are considerable differences among these nationalist movements, depending on whether a section of society which we may call the 'national bourgeoisie' has developed to a certain extent or whether such a group is absent. In the latter case, the nationalist movement often takes the form of a religious Restoration Movement. This is due to the fact that, while a national bourgeoisie is in a position to think of national liberation on a nation-wide basis, a movement which is of a feudal reactionary character will scarcely be able to find any broad basis for sympathy and unified action providing a vision transcending local society and the clan group, except in the traditional forms of religious belief. It is also due to the fact that religion provides an easy way of producing spiritual unity among a disorderly multitude, and to the fact that the leaders of such feudal

reactionary movements know from repeated historical experience that they can count upon the representatives of the established religious bodies to act as reliable partners of the established secular authorities.

III. A PATCH-WORK OF LOCAL PARTICULARISM

“Because there is so much variety of the communal institutions as soon as we set foot outside our own village we Annamese feel as though we were in China or America.” An Annamese official Tran Than Binh’s view quoted by Vidal de la Blache in his *Principes de Géographie Humaine* (p. 196) expresses very well the social distance which separates villages (even neighbouring villages), the extent to which each village constitutes a microcosmos of its own, the extent to which the inhabitants of these villages are denied any view of a wider society—although such communities in Asia are sometimes lumped together indiscriminately by outside observers as all belonging to the “village type.” J. van der Gelderen, who has long been known as a theorist of the economies of the tropical colonial territories, describing how “even in territory such as Java local differences are still very wide,” says that “the many different territorial levels of economic development might be compared to the unequal contents of a number of small vessels set side by side but unconnected,” (“The Economics of the Tropical Colony,” in *Selected Studies on Indonesia by Dutch Scholar*, Vol. VI; *Indonesian Economics: The Concept of Dualism in Theory and Policy*, The Hague, 1961, p. 127:) and he finds the cause of this situation in a lack of contact with the outside world and a lack of inter-local mutual dependence in economic life. There is no need for us to list the names of the authors who have shown that the societies which are characterized as “village communities” constitute a world which is rich in local colour and conspicuous for individual variety. The situation has been well expressed in the Chinese proverb: “If one travels five *li* one will find that the manners of the people are different; if one travels ten *li* one will find that the standards of measurement are not the same.”

It has been said that village life in Java (be it in the social, economic, or political spheres) is lived entirely within the *desa*. As to what is meant by the term ‘*desa*,’ dictionaries say that the word is derived from Sanskrit and has the meaning of ‘the country,’ ‘a country,’ ‘a district,’ ‘a region,’ ‘a territory,’ or ‘a domain.’ These are the terms

which are used in a modern centralized state to refer to local societies at different stages of development or to the "Heimat" areas which are attributed to those differing societies. The fact that these differing categories of local societies are denoted in Java by a single word which originally represented the village means that in Java the village was and still is to a large extent the representative form of society, in the highest sense of the word 'representative,' that neighbouring villages are regarded as alien communities, or even foreign countries, and that the *desa* was and still is in itself a self-sufficing microcosmos. The word '*orang*' means 'man,' the word '*tandang*' means 'to wander aside,' and the expression '*orang tandang desa*' means a vagabond or outlaw. That is to say, those who have become separated from the *desa* are outsiders to communal society and are no different from outlaws. We may take this to be additional evidence of the particularistic nature of these communities. Although such persons may be regarded as outlaws, this does not mean that they are criminals who have a history of wrong-doing, but only that they are "men of doubtful origin" who are not to be trusted because there is no one who will stand surety for them. It is in such societies as these that ostracism is not merely a dishonour for the ordinary villager, but a fatal punishment. It is against the background of such a society that we must understand the proverbs: "When in Rome do as the Romans do," and "Burn your boats behind you."

In ancient times, or at a stage when society was all of a *desa*-like character, life was lived on the presupposition of a self-sufficient subsistence economy, and society was based on a combination of agriculture and a set of elementary handicrafts. In this respect we can say that these communities are much less purely agricultural villages in modern societies, especially those in newly developed countries such as America and Australia, where a high degree of social division of labour and differentiation of occupations is presupposed. The village economy in the original sense—the independent and autonomous village economy—can exist only as a survival from the past in a capitalist economy where the lives of the individual members of society might conceivably be related to anyone through the medium of money and articles of commerce.

At this point we would digress to refer to the question of changes in social ethics. As social relations have come to cover a wider range and have become more complex in character, they have transcended the established personal relations of the clan or local community and

have become more free. It has become out-of-date to think of others in terms of a hierarchy of intimacy based on kinship and place of domicile or within the framework of relations of domination and submission represented by superior and inferior statuses. It is the changes which take place at this point in the development of human society, the transformations which occur in the social environment, which lead to the acceptance of the principle that it is Equality and Freedom which control relations between one individual and another. Before this stage is reached, the idea of Equality, if it exists at all, is "Equality before God," a form of Equality which is to be realized only in the next world. In that its priesthood did not take upon itself the task of ridding the world of distinctions of status, we can hardly find any justification for treating Christianity differently from Buddhism or Islam.

If we may now leave the metaphysical world and return to the world of every day, it appears that the Chinese expression 'standard of measurement' (*kuei chü*) in the proverb: "If one travels five *li* one will find that the manners of the people are different; if one travels ten *li* one will find that the standards of measurement are not the same," may be taken to refer both to the norms of conduct in society and to weights and measures. If this interpretation is correct, it will mean that the society to which the proverb refers was a society in which life in each locality was not yet related to life in other localities by established channels of trade, a society as yet far removed from that stage at which it becomes possible to talk of a large-scale domestic market, a society in which local variations in weights and measures are a particular source of trouble in commerce.

Of course, this does not mean that there were no entrepôt merchants carrying on inter-regional trade; indeed it means the very opposite. The geographical sphere of economic activity was subdivided lengthwise and breadthwise by lines of cleavage, and the greater the lack of communications within that sphere, the greater were the opportunities for broker merchants to engage in interesting trade activities which bridged and surmounted these lines of cleavage. It was these merchants who had a monopoly of knowledge of marketing, and in particular they were in an exclusively favourable position as buyers from small-scale producers, as collectors of produce.

It is an interesting subject in human geography or economic history to consider how society proceeded from the stage at which standards of measurement differed in places ten *li* apart to a higher stage of integration under the influence of political or economic necessities

transcending the narrow framework of social relations peculiar to local society. If we may take the example of the size of the measuring-box used in calculating the volume of food-grains in the villages of Malaya, the size of the measuring-box is determined by the quantity of rice-seed required in sowing the local unit area of paddy. There is thus local variation among the customary measures employed by the peasantry resulting from differences in the natural conditions affecting cultivation, and it is said that very fine distinctions are carefully observed in this connection. In the nature of the case, this should be what one would expect. Again, we need not be surprised to find that, after uniformity in the size of the measuring-box has been imposed by political power-holders in the interests of efficient collection of rents in kind, local units of measure other than those established by the authorities have continued in use among the people because they are convenient for the peasants or the domestic merchants.

In pre-war China, the size of the 1 *sheng* measuring-box was comparatively large in the remote areas, and decreased as one approached the centres of commerce. I have heard it said that this decrease in the size of the measuring-box made it possible to have a uniform price for 1 *sheng* of grain by neatly adjusting the costs of transportation and merchants' fees. We might say that we have here a sliding scale of sizes of unit of measurement laid down in the interests of the entrepôt merchant.

In the summer of 1957, Professor E. Dobby of the University of Malaya, the author of *Southeast Asia* (London, 1958), who was then in Japan for the Conference of the International Geographical Union, complained to me in the course of conversation that, when he tried to arrive at a figure for total rice production in Malaya, he was perplexed by the lack of uniformity among local units of measurement to which we have referred above. However, this phenomenon is not to be naïvely complained by field surveyors. I would say that this phenomenon is a clear index of the state of the village economy; in this case, of the Malayan village economy, and that it is worthy to be recorded as one of the essential data of regional geography. The outside observer should regard this phenomenon not as an instance of irrational disunity, but as something which embodies a very natural rationality when viewed from the standpoint of the producer. If a compulsory unification of units of measurement were enforced in Malaya (not to mention international arrangements of a similar kind) it might be easier for us outsiders to obtain statistical information, but for the producers

themselves who have to cope with the natural environment, and especially for peasants who live from hand to mouth, such a thing could only be perplexing to a degree.

IV. A HIGH DEGREE OF PASSIVE RESISTANCE

The difference between the economy of that part of Asian society which can be characterized as "village-dwelling" and the foreign elements which have been artificially introduced into Asia as representing the economy of modern capitalism is to be found in the fact that, before all else, Asian society is a society in which small producers aim at the satisfaction of the immediate desires of themselves and their neighbours. We can no longer deny, even if we should wish to do so, that the native economy has been affected by expansion of the capitalist economy and that it is more or less in process of dissolution. However, it is also a fact that some have thought it desirable to maintain that "in place of the restless mobility of Western economic life constantly in search of new techniques, more efficient economic organization, or more rational methods of operation, here deep-rooted tradition prevails, and stability and the repetition of long-familiar processes are striven after." (J. van der Gelderen, p. 117) In places such as Indonesia, it is the *desa* which is the most important unit of production, and such is the solidarity of village society that production is considered as a Social Service institution for mutual support rather than an aggregation of individual economic undertakings. Because the processes of social differentiation have been retarded, economic undertakings have not yet been able to make a place for themselves in society as in modern bourgeois society.

It is also necessary for us to treat with some reserve statements to the effect that mass imports of cheap manufactured goods produced by modern factory industry have altogether swept away the village handicrafts. The fact is that the traditional village industries, which have established themselves with the custom of a few neighbouring villages, are in many cases possessed of strong powers of resistance, firstly because they have kept a close hold on local consumer demand, and secondly because they are dependent in many cases on cheap labour employed during the slack season in agriculture or on domestic work done in peasant households. We cannot make generalizations to the effect that they have all fallen into decay or collapsed all along the

front.

Whatever the truth may be in this matter, we feel strongly that it is a question which should not be treated lightly. Another type of statement which we must treat with reserve is the type of statement which makes out that village society in Asia is a vast repository of concealed unemployment, an inexhaustible pool of cheap labour. These statements are to be treated with reserve because of the fact that, on the small peasant holding, each member of the family contributes in some way to the livelihood of the household. In the busy season every single member of the household is employed to the utmost. We cannot describe simply as "concealed unemployed" those persons who are kept in the rural families in the capacity of emergency collaborators.

In Malaya, the Europeans found suitable soils for their rubber, sugar, coffee, and coco-nut plantations in areas of virgin land. A greater difficulty which beset them was the fact that the economy of the local village communities was a self-sufficient subsistence economy in which the labour of the total population was required in food production, and these communities were thus unsuitable as a source of plantation labour. As a solution to this problem, the managers of the plantations in Malaya imported agricultural labour from abroad. It was principally as the result of the introduction of Indian labourers that the Hevea rubber tree, a native of South America, came to be cultivated by European methods, and before the First World War Malaysians had not undertaken the cultivation of rubber at all. When at length they did take up the cultivation of rubber, they did so, to borrow Dobby's words, more in the spirit of gambling than of agricultural management. In regard to this last point, the activities of the Chinese in Indonesia were instructive. In the cases in which overseas Chinese capital appeared (at least in form) to have been diverted from brokerage to the field of production, it was nevertheless true that, in principle, such investments were of a very speculative character, money being invested in some tin mine or rubber plantation merely with the idea of selling the mine or plantation when the market was favourable.

In village-dwelling Asia, the number of pure wage-labourers—workers who have no means of livelihood except that of selling their labour—is very small. Such workers are practically confined to a certain number of enterprises in the cities. The majority of those who work for Europeans or for other large enterprises own some land of their own, no matter how small it may be. However, the area of individual landownership is small, or, when land is owned on a large scale it is

divided up into tenant holdings which are small enough not to consume all the labour in the tenant households. These village-dwellers therefore work as wage-labourers with the aim of supplementing their family incomes by taking up temporary employment, and they do so on the understanding that they will return to their villages during the busy season in agriculture. In this form of employment we can see the reason for the statements that the Asian village is a pool of cheap labour. However, it is a mistake to suppose that if only wages were raised it would be possible to mobilize as much labour as could be desired. There is a great possibility that, if these workers were enabled to earn in eight days the sum which they had formerly earned in ten, the result would be that they would go out to work on eight days out of ten.

Another question upon which we must pass some comment is the question of monoculture in the various regions of Asia. In Asia, exports are confined to a very restricted range of products, such as rice, sugar, rubber, and tin. These "colonial goods" are subject to great price-fluctuations on the markets. For this reason, it is said that these countries suffer very severe losses in times of trade depression. This statement itself is not incorrect as a characterization of the colonial economy, if we do not fail to take into account the question of rich advanced countries minimizing the shocks of trade depression by sacrificing the poorer and dependent countries. However, the section of the Asian economy which is fatally affected by the blow of depression is not the section which we have described as a subsistence economy. The direct blow falls, as need hardly be said, on those parts of the economy which are connected with production for the market. Inasmuch as this causes an awareness of business instability, it results in the abandonment of production for the market carried on with speculative motives, or in the lapse of employment opportunities which might serve as sources of supplementary income.

If these workers were wage-earners in the strict sense of the word as understood in modern capitalist society, they would have recourse, in such times of trade depression, to the same sources of aid as the workers of western Europe—Salvation Army soup half a century ago, and Unemployment Benefit or some other form of social insurance at the present day. But for peasants, who have not severed all connections with food production although they may have diverted their efforts from subsistence production to production for the market, or for part-time agriculturalists who are also working as wage-earners the way is

open to retreat to food production, and thus to survive the effects of trade depression. By sharing out their poverty among themselves they contrive to survive. Such practices may be described as a form of private social insurance, and they are supported by the traditional way of thinking to which we have already referred—the way of thinking which regards production as a Social Service institution. The result of these circumstances is that village-dwelling Asia is characterized by strong powers of resistance to economic depression.

In the period preceding the world economic depression in the 1930's, the native production of rubber in Indonesia rose rapidly from year to year, and together with the rubber produced on plantations run by Europeans it constituted an important part of the total quantity of rubber which came on to the world market. It was natural that there should have been a corresponding decline in the production of other crops, such as rice and maize. However, there is something which lies concealed in this situation which cannot be seen from the yearly statistical returns. "The monthly export figures indicate clearly that there is a sharp drop in rubber production during the months when the rice is harvested. Moreover, in cases of emergency a new food crop can always be harvested within three months. Hence the people can constantly fall back on their food-crop fields." "This pattern—little investment, few general expenses, and a link with traditional food production—makes such a branch of native economic activity highly elastic: it is excellently adapted to its *milieu*." (J. van der Gelderen, p. 131)

These "farms" might appear to superficial observation to be farm-managements in modern terminology, and to be farm-management endowed with elasticity. But, when viewed from within, they reveal that what happens in time of depression is that production on a scale worthy of the name of a "management" is abandoned and that the agriculturalists retreat to the shelter of a subsistence economy and weather out the storm at the lowest level of subsistence. A tradition of experience extending back to time immemorial which teaches that the authorities are not one's friends in time of need, that no reliance can be placed on public relief measures, has meant that there is no other way than to consolidate the basis for mutual aid in time of emergency along the lines of kinship and local community. It is a form of society in which the individual is inevitably submerged in a specific social group, in which the individual is always being called upon to refrain from self-expression and to adopt the comfortable opinions of those around

him.

The fact that the people of Asia find their village-dwelling and familial bonds of association (to which we may add the restraints of tradition or custom) to be half an encumbrance and half a source of confidence, and support is to be explained as being a product of a historical development of the social environment such as we have described above. Any theoretical argument which would seek to show that this situation is a product of the racial characteristics of the people of Asia, or to show that their receptive and submissive nature is a product of the geographical environment—leaving aside the question of whether it is correct or not to attribute to them a receptive and submissive nature, popular though this notion may be—any such argument is one in which the matters which are of basic importance and the matters which are of secondary importance have been transposed, or, rather, is an argument which would seek to effect this transposition. It need hardly be said that it is not permissible, as a matter of methodology, to shift responsibility from the social environment and its historical development to the natural environment, treating this natural environment in a non-historical manner. Nevertheless, this methodological error is too often overlooked, and this type of argument appears to be more popular than one might expect. We have grounds for thinking that this is due to the fact that this type of argument, by making use of a form of environmentalism which is nothing other than the fatalism of mediaeval Europe decked out in modern dress, performs the function of diverting critical eyes away from any analysis of the social environment.

V. ASIA STANDS OUTSIDE THE SO-CALLED "GENERAL THEORY" OF ECONOMICS

Studies of those regions in Asia and elsewhere which have passed through the modern period in human history as members of the "submerged classes" in matters of politics and economics have brought out the following notable points.

In these studies, as opposed to studies of Western societies which have passed through the process of modernization represented by the success of the Industrial Revolution and the mature development of capitalism, it is shown that society is still closely bound by social constraints which take the form of types of land tenure which might well be characteristic of mediaeval or may be more ancient society,

bodies of religious law, and particularistic and exclusive social relations. These studies also show that these societies have certain conspicuous characteristics prescribed by the colonial system which existed in these territories until very recently, in close connection with these social constraints. Because the differentiation of social functions has not attained maturity in these societies where modernization has been impeded, it will be very difficult for us to carry on our studies of these societies if we observe a mechanical separation of the fields of politics, economics, religion, and the arts, and indeed such a separation will cause our studies to be deformed and sterile. Again, for the same reasons we will not be able to attain a thorough grasp of the structure, mechanisms, and the laws of motion in present-day societies without the support of historical studies which not only cover the period of modern history but go back to fairly remote times. There is no doubt that some division of labour in academic work is indispensable for an improvement in efficiency, but it is necessary to adopt a synthetic approach in studies of these societies since the case is not to be compared with studies of modernized societies.

Not only are historical studies necessary for the understanding of social reality, but it is necessary for us not to turn our backs on the present state of affairs when studying history, notwithstanding the fact that history is apt to be regarded as consisting of matters which are entirely dead and gone. As we follow the development of new situations, we become aware of facts which are alien to the working hypotheses which we have employed hitherto. Rather than saying that we become aware of new problems, it would be more accurate to say that we become aware that we have been neglecting certain important problems. We discover that we must re-examine certain things which we thought we had understood. Such cases are of frequent occurrence.

Studies of Asia or of a certain region in Asia, as opposed to mere manipulation of abstract general theory, must give very serious consideration to interdisciplinary collaboration if they are to have any concrete content. In this respect, the established academic research institutions and the programmes of higher education are not particularly praiseworthy. The advancement of Asian studies requires some organization which will transcend the autonomy of the university Faculties—an autonomy which has frequently degenerated into sectionalism.

Studies of Asia and of other non-Western countries are beset by yet another problem. The subjects which at present enjoy citizenship

in academic circles are the social and historical sciences in the forms in which they have grown in Western countries, and these subjects have developed, first and foremost, along the lines which were of interest to the advanced countries, and have been designed to satisfy the academic and practical demands of these countries. It is thought *a priori* that the process through which the modern capitalist society of the West has developed is the orthodox model for the development of human society in general, and that all other countries should pass through a similar process of development. Yet, to take one example, is it really possible for us to apply to the underdeveloped countries of today the forms of economic theory which were adequate and effective in analysing the societies of the advanced capitalist countries? It is very doubtful whether these forms of economic theory can serve the purposes of underdeveloped countries which have remained in the position of poor relations of the advanced countries while the latter have passed through a period of high-momentum development and prosperity.

In 1957, a Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal, published a book entitled *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions*. Throughout this work the author is concerned to show that the economic theories of the advanced countries, being designed for use in these countries, are inadequate in dealing with the problems of economic development in the underdeveloped countries, and to explain why this is so. In November, 1958, Professor P.C. Mahalanobis of India said in the course of a lecture given at the Faculty of Economics in the University of Tokyo: "I am a statistician, not an economist, and since I am not an economist I need not bother about the existing body of economic theory. I think that this is all the better for the success of the Indian Economic Development Plan." Myrdal's book is not very satisfactory because it does not give special attention to differences in social structure, in price systems, and in the nature of the available capital. Besides a complete criticism of, and challenge to, the existing body of theory has yet to appear. Nevertheless, it is a healthy sign that such a critical work has been produced by a distinguished scholar who is in the tradition of orthodox economics.

Myrdal is by no means the first author who has called upon established economics to reflect critically on its predilections. As long ago as the early 1830's we have an example in the outstanding economist Richard Jones (1780-1855), the author of *An Essay on the Distribution of Wealth and the Sources of Taxation* (London, 1831). The academic

world in general, however, completely ignored Jones's criticism of Ricardo and Malthus.

In 1962, Radhakamal Mukerjee of Lucknow University published his *Rural Economy of India*, in which he drew attention to the fact that Western economic theory which presupposes that all economic behaviour is that of a "homo economicus" is inapplicable to the rural economy. In 1927, J. Van der Gelderen, in his *Voorezingen over Tropisch koloniale Staatshuishoudkunde*, drew attention to the point that tropical colonial society is a heterogeneous society, and has a dual structure, one part of which can be treated with the tools of general economic theory while another part can not. The theories of "plural economy" associated with the name of J.S. Furnivall which were current some ten years after that date are a continuation of this view.

The fact that van der Gelderen views the question from the standpoint of considering how far the economy of Asia can be analysed in terms of general theory and how the operation of the pure theory is impeded by a number of extra-economic elements in the situation and by various forms of resistance, shows that in dealing with these territories he consistently takes the position of the colony-owning suzerain state. A great gulf separates van der Gelderen from Myrdal, a pupil of Wicksell, who, after the Second World War, came to doubt the universal applicability of the body of economic theory which had hitherto been regarded as constituting the general theory and pure theory of economics, and embarked on fundamental criticism which pointed out that the so-called general theory was in fact the product of predilections peculiar to a handful of advanced capitalist countries and might be found to be applicable only to these countries.

This does not mean, of course, that Myrdal's work is typical of the reactions to the new situation which came into being after the Second World War which have occurred among the economic theoreticians of the advanced countries. Those who represent the Western type of reactions are, for example, gentlemen such as Maurice Zinkin, the author of *Development for Free Asia* (London, 1956), who is kind enough to advise Asians not to fret themselves over industrialization but to concentrate their efforts on community projects and the rebuilding of the rural economy, or those who wish to persuade Asians, in the manner of the "Social Economists" (Boeke, Furnivall, etc.) that it is important to hold fast to the state of mind which knows sufficiency, since industrialization is out of the question; at all events these gentlemen are not "heretics." The French have a proverb, "Une hirondelle

ne fait pas printemps." For the present, those in the West who echo Myrdal's opinions may be exceptional. However, the reality of the Asian countries will continue to stand as proof that an approach different from that employed in studies of westernized countries is required in Asian studies. This fact presents all students of the social and human sciences with a task of self-criticism in the field of methodology. And this is not a task which can be lightly set aside.

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