

VILLAGE SOCIETY IN PREREVOLUTIONARY CHINA

KAZUO FURUSHIMA

I. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VILLAGE AND *GEMEINSCHAFT* IN TRADITIONAL CHINA

GENERALLY SPEAKING, the level of self-sufficiency and *Gemeinschaft* consciousness in the Chinese village before 1949 was considerably lower than that which obtained in the Japanese village of feudal times. But this was not always the case. The inundation of a group of villages, or an entire district, for a period of several months was an event none too rare, and in villages so victimized a surprisingly deep social cohesiveness would manifest itself. Uniting under the leadership of their seniors, villagers would maintain themselves by evacuating their flood-stricken homes for as long as six months, and then return to undertake the reconstruction of the village [1, p. 12]. The custom of temporary migration might be represented, of course, as a rational social response to a periodic breakdown in the rural economy. But the behavior of the villagers in such situations reflected, as well, a remarkable degree of social cohesion among the villagers themselves, who maintained the integrity of their residential units throughout the entire length of the evacuation.

At one time, the opinion prevalent among academic circles in Japan was that the dominant characteristics of the traditional Chinese village were the persistence of a *Gemeinschaft* character in village organization and a well-developed sense of village self-sufficiency. Much of the basis for the *Gemeinschaft* thesis was swept away by the string of studies that appeared during the 1930s and 1940s making use of the evidence produced by field studies undertaken during the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and China (1928-45). But the verification, in these same studies, of such phenomena as the intact migration of villages suggests that the unqualified discounting of village solidarity is no less appropriate than the positive appraisal of the *Gemeinschaft* character of the village common in prerevisionist scholarship. Clearly it is necessary to re-examine the nature of the *Gemeinschaft* in the traditional Chinese village.

In locating the elements which give basic social organization in the Chinese village its uniqueness, we must deal first with the nature of the village as a unit of natural and primary social cohesion. Essentially, the origins of social cohesion in the natural village are, schematically speaking, to be found in social associations based on consanguinity; these associations evolve only later on into topographically defined social units through the mediation of various territorial circumstances. In the feudal stage of historical development, the dominant factor

affecting village structure was territorial control, for which reason the mode of social organization upon which the feudal village was based was a topographically defined one. It was at this feudal stage and as the primary component of feudal social organization that the particular characteristics of the village *Gemeinschaft* first appeared.

From this highly abstract point of view, it would appear that the village forming the primary unit of social organization in traditional China must be characterized as having been incompletely constituted as a topographically defined social group. This does not mean, of course, that the traditional Chinese village was structured entirely by kinship ties. But field studies have brought to light a good number of instances in which one can see kinship organization principles still functioning strongly as part of an inherited tradition. One example of the prominence of consanguinity as an element in village social structure is the high frequency of mono- (or bi- or tri-) surname villages in central and south China [5] [7, p. 190]. Further proof of the importance of kinship rather than topographical organizational principles is supplied by the large number of cases in which the rank system used for classifying generational strata (*pei*) within a single kinship group appears, in fictionalized form (so-called *chiehfang pei* or "vicinage generational ranks"), as an instrument for maintaining social discipline within the village as a whole. Clearly, opportunities permitting a complete transition from kinship-based to topographically integrated village units were inadequate.

Additional proof for this assertion concerning the nature of village social organization is that the traditional Chinese village did not always control a definite territorial unit: that, in other words, village boundaries were not necessarily clearly fixed [4]. Excepting, of course, instances where they were bounded by rivers or other such visible limits, the villages of the North China Plain often had no specific terminus, in the usual sense of the word. The reason for this was that the village held no land or territory particular to itself. Conceptually speaking, the village was not delimited by a topographical boundary. Its existence was, rather, defined as the collective of its inhabitants, as the association of the villagers themselves. Accordingly, if one is required to differentiate one village from another on a territorial basis, the territorial extent of a village would have to be defined as the aggregate of the holdings of its members.

What this might mean in concrete terms was revealed during the course of the postrevolutionary land reforms. In theory, none of the holdings of a village were supposed to be surrounded on all sides by the holdings of another village. But this restriction did not prevent village boundaries themselves from assuming complex and confusing shapes. During the land reform, the chaotic condition of "natural village" boundaries became somewhat of a problem, since, even though "administrative villages" (and not "natural villages") were supposed to serve as the primary units for the expropriation and redistribution of land, the "administrative villages" were, in fact, constituted by amalgamating several "natural" units. One of the problems that had to be resolved before land reform

could be implemented was thus the matter of exchanging land between villages so as to rationalize mutual boundaries.

Thus, even though the concept of the village in prerevolutionary China obviously took into account topographical considerations, ties with specific territory did not necessarily function as a structural determinant; the sense of the village remained exceedingly abstract, equivalent to an association of people. Clearly this was a unique characteristic of the traditional Chinese village.

Assuming that, as we have postulated, ties with specific territory did not necessarily function as a structural determinant, we must next inquire what sort of role this abstractly conceived village was able to play with respect to the various relationships of production. Accepting that the village as *Gemeinschaft* exercised a not inconsiderable function in the production process, it is logical to begin with the question of collective village authority over questions affecting water rights, as far as they concerned agricultural production. This is because, in those parts of the Asian monsoon belt where rice farming is undertaken, the function of supervising the allocation of water reserves for irrigation often constitutes the central function of the *Gemeinschaft*, and the way in which the village organization deals with the problems of water resource management is probably the most straightforward index of the nature of the village.

In a sense, the traditional Chinese village exhibited a wide range of variation in the way in which it exercised the function of irrigation resource management. Between the villages of central and south China—especially those of Fukien and Kwangtung provinces—armed brawls (*hsiehtou*) were a frequent occurrence; though the issues over which villages fought each other were many, a prominent *casus belli* was competition over water resources [7, p. 192]. But in cases where the contending villages tended to be organized along lineage lines, water rights controversies showed a tendency to escalate into more serious confrontations in which rival clans would be pitted one against the other. In such instances, the fact that the exclusive control of water rights was the object of the contenders, coupled with the fact that the village itself was the unit of organization for the struggle, strongly suggests that what made such “armed brawls” possible was the existence of *Gemeinschaft* relationships within the villages. Unfortunately, a dearth of documentation concerning the management and control of water rights within villages which participated in this kind of rivalry over irrigation resources makes a more thoroughgoing analysis impossible.

A rather different mode of management of irrigation and drainage operations will be found in the villages of the Yangtze estuary (i.e., northern Chekiang and southern Kiangsu provinces), where we witness these collective problems being handled by a topographically defined association of villagers holding land within the same “enclosure” (*wei*).¹ To be sure, the focus of the “enclosure” association’s efforts varies according to specific topographical circumstances. In the western reaches of the Yangtze estuary, near Lake T’ai, where most of the land

¹ The *wei* or “enclosure” is a naturally formed aggregate of holdings enclosed by a common irrigation and drainage “creek.”

lies below sea level, collective organization is mostly mobilized to effect drainage from the fields during the rainy season, while in the eastern parts of the estuary, where the water table is relatively deeper, the chief function of the *wei* group is to pump in water for irrigation. Such differences notwithstanding, we may safely say that the management of water resources is a collective problem of the "enclosure" association.

In contradistinction to the village organizations of Kwangtung and Fukien, however, the *wei* collectives of Kiangsu and Chekiang did not undertake to secure for themselves, as topographically defined associations, a kind of control over water rights which would give them uncontested authority over specific resources. Rather, the object of the association was to mobilize collective labor resources. Of course, in performing this function, the *wei* association could not ignore questions of property, such as arose, for example, in connection with the use of the *lungku-ch'ê*² or other heavy-duty farming implements. But it seems unlikely that such issues were of sufficient weight to affect the functions of the village in a decisive way.

For instances of topographically defined *Gemeinschaft* associations actually being shaped by the pressures of having to establish rights to an entire system of water resources and to manage the use of these resources, we must look to yet another part of China: the North China Plain. Here we will find an organization for the integrated management of water resources—known as the "lock," or *cha*³—which functioned quite independently of the village. To be sure, we will also find cases of villages serving as the lower-level units of water-management associations underneath the umbrella of a larger organization designed to superintend the exploitation of comparatively extensive irrigation systems. But such cases were the exception rather than the rule: normally, water-management organizations and village groups were quite distinct.

Other instances of such a separation between village collectives and organizations created to attend to production-related water resources are to be found in the drainage areas of several tributaries of the Yellow River in Shansi Province [11]. To take one example, we can observe cases in which, in the initial stages of irrigation development, the village association was itself the unit of organization, and water resource control a function of the village *Gemeinschaft*. After a while, however, water control had become the responsibility of an authority independent of the village collective, which assumed the right to impose a so-called "water rent" having no relation whatsoever to land ownership or usufruct considerations. Inevitably, the creation of such an independent system of water management gave rise to private property rights centering on irrigation management, and to an open market in which these rights were exchanged.

This sort of functional autonomy of water resources management from the

² The *lungku-ch'ê* ("dragon-bone" pump) was a device used for transferring water from a lower to higher level of rice paddy.

³ While the term *cha* means, literally, a "dam" or "water gate," in the context quoted it apparently refers to the aggregate of water channels and reservoirs affected by the manipulation of one particular "lock."

village *Gemeinschaft*, and its crystallization into an independent authority, seems to have been a characteristic aspect of irrigation control in traditional China. Water resources management, under such circumstances, was not a particularly decisive aspect of the village *Gemeinschaft*. Even in the organization of production, in other words, the traditional Chinese village seems to have been seriously flawed as a topographically discrete entity.

This is not to say, of course, that we can never observe a clear case of the village *Gemeinschaft* functioning in the realm of production. An instance of precisely this kind of functioning is the custom of mounting crop-guards (*k'anch'ing*) that was prevalent in the villages of the North China Plain [4]. It was commonly the case, in north China, that villages would consist of concentrated clusters of residences, surrounded by mud walls for defense against attack, and unharvested crops in the outlying fields would be subject to considerable danger from crop-robbers. To meet this danger, the north China village would mobilize itself, as a *Gemeinschaft*, to provide collective protection for unharvested crops—hence the *k'anch'ing* practice. But even in this instance, with the village collective serving as the primary unit of organization, it would not be possible to describe the enterprise in question as involving production activity on a *Gemeinschaft* basis, for the organization is only one of collective labor for a short and fixed period for crop policing on the eve of the harvest. Such labor was not directly functional for production, even if it was necessary for internal and external village defense, and certainly was not tied to productive activity, in the sense of ordering the production process. Furthermore, the large number of cases that have been observed of villages entrusting crop-guard responsibilities once met by *Gemeinschaft* organization to paid laborers show very well how village institutions not connected to the production process inevitably evolve further and further from a role supportive of village cohesion.

Examples such as the above suggest that the traditional Chinese village was of a character quite distinct from that of the village which served as the vehicle of *Gemeinschaft* authority. As opposed to the latter type of village, in which concrete, topographically defined bonds are strong enough to impose the village, as a collective, within the production process, and permit it to function as a self-contained locus of authority therein, the traditional Chinese village seemed to possess only an extremely intangible existence as an association of human beings. It was doubtless a consequence of this abstract quality of the Chinese village that we nowhere can discover the existence of anything like a commons with access limited to village members.

Given a natural village of the dimensions we have so far described, we shall next want to see what sort of significance for the lives of the farmers—particularly as they are enmeshed with the village *Gemeinschaft*—the introduction of politically imposed administrative villages might have, were such administrative villages to be set up upon the foundations of the pre-existing natural villages. Generally speaking, such administrative villages were created from several—often as many as ten or more—natural villages, with the predictable result that much larger areas would be encompassed by the administrative village than had been

by the natural one. However, in the case of the traditional Chinese village, this expansion in compass seems to have had little if any impact upon the life of the villagers. In the case of administrative villages being formed of natural villages which were topographically integrated to the extent that the village collective played a role in control over the land or over the production process, one would naturally expect that the imposition of administrative borders would have to be made with some sort of concession to the pre-existing pattern of topographical integration; but in the case of the traditional Chinese village, defined only as an abstract association of people, the imposition of a broader-compassed administrative village could not be expected to affect the life of the farmer by altering any of the pre-existing relationships between specific villages and specific territory. Consequently, the functioning of the administrative village was confined exclusively to meeting the administrative needs of the central authority, for which the administrative village fulfilled the role of base-level administrative unit. In concrete terms, the administrative village served only as a unit of land tax (*t'ienfu*), surtax, and corvée assessment, and, of course, as the primary unit for the policing of the countryside in the interests of rural control. True, the organization of *t'uanlien* ("police") and *paochia* ("communal responsibility") functions often gave the appearance of serving the needs of self-government, based upon the natural village as the primary unit; but in reality, *t'uanlien* and *paochia* were no more than the base-level appendages of a system of rural control imposed from above. This in spite of the persistence of the ideal, at least in connection with the institution of *paochia*, of the system functioning upon the foundations of a gerontocratic and self-governing social order in the natural (*Gemeinschaft*) village [6]. As a result, it would appear that almost no role at all was played by the village *Gemeinschaft* in shaping or structuring the organization of the administrative village.

If, then, the natural village in traditional China was only flimsily integrated as a topographical entity, and the administrative village generally did not function as the nucleus of a topographically discrete collective larger than the natural village, then we will next want to know if there was indeed any institution, apart from these two, which might have served to define a specifically parochial social unit. In this connection, the first phenomenon that merits consideration is the rural markets where produce was exchanged, and the territorial circumference described by such marketing areas. Normally the areas which were served by one marketing town (*shihchi*) would include several—occasionally as many as ten or more—villages. In the various parts of north China, for example, a common marketing town would serve about five thousand rural households, and would in effect be a kind of rural city (*chênshih*). Needless to say the names given to such marketing towns varied from place to place, though the terms *chên*, *chi*, and *hsü* are most common. Apparently the greater part of these marketing towns developed from primitive village markets for the exchange of goods by the direct producers which were held regularly once or twice during each third part of the month. As these village markets developed into full-fledged

marketing towns, however, they eventually came to choose their own market days and became independent units in the marketing process. In addition to selling their own produce at the market, farmers would there purchase everyday necessities. Marketing towns also functioned as the basic medium for expediting the flow of manufactured products from urban factories and from abroad into the countryside. To be sure, we will find, in connection with the marketing of bale cotton or cotton yarn or cloth for instance, that sometimes marketing towns specializing as marketing centers for such special products (cotton marketing towns, in this case) will appear in areas where the local agriculture was dominated by one specialized crop. But whatever the actual form, marketing towns fulfilled an extremely important role in the daily life of the rural population.

Of course, even in the period before modern Western capitalism began to make itself felt as an influence within China, the marketing town did not entirely monopolize the role of bridging the gap between the village and the outside world. Hand-weavers and other varieties of itinerant craftsmen regularly circulated throughout the countryside in the practice of their trades, and peddlers (*hsiaofan*) hawked their small bundles of wares from household to household in the villages. Nevertheless, the marketing town was the basic unit of contact with the world outside of the villages.

What this meant for village cohesiveness was that the predictably strong exclusive and self-sustaining quality of the personally defined village association was mitigated, if not actually reversed, by the counter-parochial influence of the marketing town in daily life. In a sense, the presence of the marketing town actually served to expand the concrete territorial scope of the village to a scale corresponding to the area served by the marketing town. Within the radius of villages served by the marketing town, we will find that both a common farming calendar and a common system of weights and measures (developed in connection with the exchange and sale of farm produce) were generally in use. In addition, the marketing town's service area acted as the unit within which a kind of local division of labor was organized. The area within which itinerant workers usually circulated, for instance, was the area served by one marketing town. And permanent enterprises located in the marketing town, such as farm-tool smithies, were generally of a size in proportion to the rural population served by the marketing towns in which they operated.

A marketing town service area was not, of course, constructed along *Gemeinschaft* lines. But as the unit within which a division of labor was established, such an area did actually encompass a kind of topographically discrete society of a self-contained character, with its own particular customs.

Closely linked to the special character of Chinese feudalism, these two aspects of Chinese rural society—on the one hand, a type of village cohesion strongly emphasizing the abstract cohesion of people, as seen in the natural village; on the other hand, a type of independence as a self-enclosed, topographically-discrete parochial social unit centered around the marketing town—merit attention as the principle shaping influences in the traditional Chinese landholding system.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF POWER IN RURAL SOCIETY

The structure of power in traditional Chinese rural society exhibited a distinct and unique character very much appropriate to the nature of the traditional Chinese village as a unit of parochial society. One of the fundamental forces which served to shape the character of this structure of power was the form of bureaucratic state authority that dominated China since the rise of the autocratic imperial state. In contradistinction to the decentralized form of territorial control that existed at the lower levels of Western European feudalism, the state apparatus developed by the bureaucratic imperium of traditional China was focused upon an absolutist ruler at the top, whose authority extended in an unchallenged pyramidal fashion to the very roots of society. The monopolistic bureaucratic state centered about the absolutist authority of the emperor was, of course, eliminated after the breakdown of the Ch'ing imperium. But the local warlord satrapies that replaced it exhibited a kind of authority structure that reflected the continued existence of the same principles of government that had been orthodox during the imperial phase.

One of the fundamental aspects of the traditional political structure was that the foundations of local control were not rested directly upon an indigenously constituted political order. One of the most rigidly enforced rules of the traditional bureaucracy (the so-called "rule of avoidance") was that local officials could not hold office in their home district [9]. Personnel selected for office through the examination system would naturally be appointed to provincial posts at the first stages of their careers, where they would commonly serve at the lowest levels of the bureaucracy (as district magistrates, etc.); but the districts to which they were appointed could not be the ones in which they had been born. For a political structure controlling such an enormous territorial expanse, and dependent upon the efforts of such an enormous variety of administrators, as the traditional Chinese imperium, the strict enforcement of a rule which forbade the appointment of local officials to posts in precisely the area with which they, as natives, were likely to be most familiar therefore most competent as administrators would not seem to have been to the advantage of efficient government. Yet there were no exceptions. Nor was this rule devised to cover the special circumstances that existed during the training period of newly appointed bureaucrats; it was, in fact, a practice made necessary by the character of the centralized bureaucratic state.

Regarded from this perspective, it will be clear that the origin of the "rule of avoidance" system was the essential incompatibility of the centralized bureaucratic state with the centrifugal effect that would be generated by permitting ties to form between the bureaucratic structure and local political forces whose power was based upon control of the land. The same concern to frustrate the dispersion of power that underlay the "rule of avoidance" also motivated the central government to limit the terms of appointment of provincial officers to two years, lest a result similar to that which could be expected if a man served in his home

district be produced as a consequence of too long a bureaucratic association with the same area [9]. This latter practice was enforced even more rigidly than the "rule of avoidance"; from the mid-Ch'ing onward, even the two-year appointee became rare, and the upper limit in terms of appointment actually shrunk to sixteen months. As was the case with the "rule of avoidance," the frequent shifts of provincial officers to which the strict enforcement of the short-tenure rule gave rise was doubtless disadvantageous from the point of view of administrative efficiency. This being the case, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the obsession with forestalling the dispersion of power away from the central authority, as reflected in the procedures observed in making local appointments, was often of more force than the need to maintain efficient government in shaping the institutions of the traditional Chinese empire.

Another consequence of the domination of the political order by a superimposed and bureaucratic state was that, at least in concept, no differences in status were recognized other than that which separated the emperor as absolute ruler from his absolutely ruled subjects. As a result, even though the bureaucracy as a whole was a manifestation of the imperial authority, the men who comprised it did not enjoy a status superior to that of the people. In terms of their social origins, the bureaucrats were recruited from the people through the examination system, and were therefore simply a part of the people. Of course, in terms of actual social conditions, the bureaucrats constituted a discrete and privileged social elite. But it was an elite which was not described by any special distinction in terms of status. Accordingly, a system of differentiated social ranks, such we might find in Western European feudalism, did not exist within the bureaucratic political order in China, at least conceptually speaking. This aspect of the traditional Chinese state was, to be sure, in accordance with the structural principles of the bureaucratic order; but, in a mere total way, it owed its origins to the special character of the landlord system upon which the bureaucratic order was constructed.

Another structural principle of the absolutist, superimposed, and bureaucratic state was that political control should be extended directly to the people without any intermediation. The state-assessed and state-collected taxation system, through which both land and labor taxes were levied, brought the authority of the state into direct contact with the people. The people themselves were registered as "common," "artisan," "salt-producing," etc. households (*minhu*, *chianghu*, *tsaohu*) and kept under tight cadastral control for purposes of taxation. The imperial control system was, in other words, a bureaucratic one, focused upon the imperial authority at the top of the structure, and filtering down, through a pyramidlike chain of command, to the base-level administrative unit (the *hsien*, or district), where the government actually confronted the people themselves. However, looking at the system from the bottom up, the people themselves were formed into *Gemeinschaft* groupings upon which was maintained the self-governing village order. From the official point of view, even, these village *Gemeinschaft* systems were recognized as an institutionalized part of the political order. As we might expect, the dual elements of bureaucratic

control and village self-government were not easily reconciled in the conceptual sphere.

The actual foundation of this autocratic, absolutist, and bureaucratic political order was the landholding system. Of course, as has been already pointed out, the traditional Chinese bureaucratic state was not directly founded upon a control of the land in theory. But in practice this was the case. What gave the traditional Chinese landlord system its particular character was the nature of landholding rights which was, on the whole, comprised within the traditional Chinese concept of proprietary rights, a concept which, in a way almost modern, had developed as an independent and abstract entity at a very early stage of history. Unlike the concept of proprietorship in feudal society, according to which control of the land was seen as an aspect of political control, the Chinese notion of land ownership in traditional China ranked land ownership as a subspecies of independent proprietary rights in general, and recognized it as an abstract privilege. Accordingly, even in cases of compounded proprietorship (*it'ien liangchu*), we will find no traces of a consciousness of "superior" and "inferior" proprietorship such as existed when proprietary rights were shared between the manor and the peasant. Both "surface" and "subsoil" rights, in the Chinese compound proprietorship situation, were alike species of the same form of private ownership, and this would continue to be the case even were ownership rights further compounded. In the Pearl River valley of Kwangtung Province, for example, cases of tri- and even quadri-compounded land ownership have been discovered, with no evidence of such overlapping levels of proprietorship being paralleled by any discriminations of rank or servile dependancy [7, p. 290]. More than any other single factor, it was the particular character of this precociously developed concept of land ownership as an abstract and private right which was responsible for the nature of landholding in traditional China.

What the development of this modern conception of landholding meant in practice was that the sale, allotment, and mortgaging of land could be accomplished with a high degree of freedom, as a result of which the alternating concentration and dispersion of landed property were often repeated themes in the social history of traditional China. The instability of property accumulation was further augmented by the universality of partible inheritance practices. In the classic model of decentralized feudalism, based upon the direct control of the land, it was common for the feudal classes to adopt a system of primogeniture or non-partible inheritance to help maintain their own economic position. But in traditional China, such systems were not resorted to. The prevalence of a partible inheritance system decisively abetted the dispersion of landed property; in conjunction with the unhampered land market, it guaranteed a permanent instability in the level of accumulation of estates.

Making its appearance against a social background in which the ownership of land had, since times immemorial, been established as an abstract and private privilege, and in which, as a result, estates were highly unstable, the landlord system in traditional China left no room for the establishment of a feudal class

order based upon the institution of a socially systematized status order. This is not to imply, of course, that between landlord and peasant there were no distinctions of status at all. Between great landlords and their tenants there often obtained relationships which were very nearly like those which could be expected in a status-defined class order. But such relationships never became institutionalized on an extensive scale, nor could they serve as the immediate foundations for political control.

By the same token, the centralized bureaucracy, which was the system of legitimate authority, and the landholding hierarchy were not, in a fundamental sense, directly linked. Naturally, in the bureaucratic state, the bureaucratic himself was in a particularly advantageous position to accumulate an estate. But that was not at all the same thing as the direct intervention of the bureaucracy qua bureaucracy in private landholding.

Landlord-tenant relationships within such a system of landlordism naturally had no manorial coloration, at least as far as the landholding system in general was concerned. The landlord-tenant relationship was a strictly economic one, centering about a discrete and specific piece of property. In actuality, of course, the landlord-tenant connection did not always seem, from the tenant farmer's point of view, to be confined to an economic relationship between equals, especially when the landlord held a great deal of property. At least formally speaking, though, the relationship was contractual, and therefore based upon an assumed status equality between the contracting parties. Furthermore, the relationship was not unilaterally shaped by the situation of the landlord as a landed proprietor; of importance as well was the mode of consciousness of the peasant. For example, under the terms of a kind of sharecropping (*fentsu*) common in north China, the tenant was dependent upon the landowner for all of his means of production—including tools and seed, as well as the land itself—and normally received only two- or three-tenths of the harvest. But even in such a typical sharecropping situation, the landlord-tenant relationship was conceived by the peasant as a form of cooperation between the landlord, who provided the means of production, and the peasant, who provided the raw labor power. Perhaps a comparison is in order with the "joint-stock" (*hoku*) mode of entrepreneurial organization in traditional China, within which business was carried on the basis of an egalitarian relationship between the provider(s) of capital (*t'saiku*) and the manager (*shenku*). Yet, in the case of the landlord-tenant relationship, the essential dependency of the latter upon the former was quite apparent. The gap between the conceptual understanding of the landlord-peasant relationship and its actual dynamic served to further complicate tenurial relationships, as well as the character of landholding itself.

In its economic aspects the traditional landlord-tenant relationship was, its formal institutional character notwithstanding, supported by a level of rent extraction comparable with that we might expect under feudalism. Generally speaking, kind rents predominated, and were normally assessed at half of the harvest. In cases of sharecropping, however, the landlord commonly took 60 or 70 per

cent—in some cases as much as 80 per cent! Even when rents were collected in currency, the assessment was normally based upon commutation of kind-rent obligations, and landlords normally computed the commuted quotas according to the preharvest value of the crop, even though the tenant had to obtain the stipulated amount of currency by selling his crop in a much deflated postharvest market. And, in addition to the commuted principal rent, the tenant was obliged both to pay a variety of security deposits and by-rents in currency and kind, and to supply his labor services (on an emergency basis) at the arbitrary demand of his landlord.

Such were the economic realities of the landlord-tenant relationship. To be sure, this highly exploitative form of landlord-tenant relationship always appeared in the form of a direct and specific bond, chiefly because of the abstract nature of the concept of landholding, and because of the absence of a socially systematized form of personal, manorial authority. But, precisely for this reason, the extraction of high-quota rents was achieved through the manipulation of a direct and violence-prone variety of control.

Nor must we imagine that, because the control system was direct and violent, it was erratic or peripheral to the social order. Rather, its roots were firmly sunk in the structure of rural control peculiar to traditional China. In simplest terms, landlordism was structurally linked to the bureaucratic control system; it was a system of gentry-landlord control.

The class which dominated this system of control—the “gentry” (*chinshên*)—was actually constituted by its monopoly of participation in the centralized bureaucratic institutions upon which the absolutist monarchy rested. Specifically it was comprised of officials on leave from their posts or in retirement. In their actual role as a social elite, however, the “gentry” were a wider group than the retired gentry class, and in their ranks were included active officials as well as those scholars who held a provincial degree (*chüjên*) in the examination system. They constituted, as a whole, an actual ruling class which lurked in the background of the bureaucratic control system. And, in terms of social function, they consisted not simply of a status elite (*chinshên*) but also of a landlord elite (*haoshên*) which exercised considerable local influence as a landholding stratum [10]. It was precisely this connection that the gentry enjoyed with the centralized state bureaucracy that set them apart from all other landlord elements, and which accounted for the special character of their position as a privileged social elite within the bureaucratic system.

Rooted in landholding, and at the same time linked with the bureaucratic control system, the gentry were in a position to serve simultaneously as a manpower reserve for the bureaucratic class and as the ruling class exercising actual authority (an authority backed up by the bureaucratic authority) in the villages. Viewed from the point of view of a centralized state concerned to prevent the dispersion of its authority, the “rule of avoidance” system would seem to have functioned to the disadvantage of local interests. But in reality, from the point of view of the local gentry who exercised actual power in the countryside, the

“rule of avoidance” served to prevent excessive meddling by the central authority in the landlord-dominated local political order. The gentry often kept at their disposal legions of toughs which much resembled private armies; and they maintained collection agencies (*tsuchan*) equipped with private detention facilities for the purpose of expediting rent collection, which agencies were publically licensed by the district magistrate. All of which suggests that landlord and bureaucratic authority were inextricably intertwined through the workings of “status” gentry (*chinshên*) and landlord-gentry (*haoshên*) interconnection. At the very epicenter of the direct and violence-prone system of rural control of traditional China, then, we will find the privileged gentry elite.

The structure of power through which the gentry maintained their authority in the countryside was by no means exclusively dependent upon their exercise of a monopoly over the use of violence. Whether within the “self-governing” power structure of the natural village, the state-administered organs located in administrative villages, or the economic-oriented structure of power in the rural marketing towns, the gentry occupied a privileged position. In the first case—that of the self-governing natural village—the gentry monopolized the adjudicative function. The principle that disputes between villagers were to be settled through the arbitration of the village gerontocracy—a principle which underlay the notion of village self-government—was one which the bureaucratic state respected. But such arbitration was actually only a part of a wider adjudicative system within which functioned as well the formal judicial apparatus of the district officer and, of course, the essentially violent direct control system dominated by the local gentry: in practice, arbitration by the village elders amounted to little more than the imposition of the will of the gentry elite. In any event, since villagers wishing to appeal the decision of the arbitrators could not take their case to the district official without the sponsorship of the gentry, the adjudicative authority within the villages was held, in reality if not in name, by the gentry in their role as accomplices of the bureaucratic order. Given such a structure of adjudication within the villages, the gentry exercised an effective monopoly over the settlement of disputes in the countryside.

A comparable situation prevailed within the administrative villages that formed the base termini of state control. The principal function fulfilled by the administrative village within the state control system was the collection of taxes. In practice this made the administrative village responsible for producing a fixed quota of revenues, since the assessment system imposed as part of the bureaucratic order presupposed that the local official was actually a tax farmer. Consequently, the objects of assessment by the state were not the farmers themselves. Even though there was a great reservoir of statutes covering the assessment of households, these statutes apparently were so abstract as to have a minimum influence in practice.

The assessment of taxes, then, was performed on the assumption of a large measure of discretion being available to the local official. Under this system, the local gentry not only were completely exempted from all *corvée* obligations

(a privilege which was theirs by statute as degree-holders) but were also able to use their influence upon the magistrate to have the latter person dispose of his discretionary powers in assessment of the land tax so as to lower their rates below the level borne by the common run of medium and small-scale proprietors. This discretionary power was, at any rate, tacitly manipulated to the advantage of the gentry-landlord in the process of calculating the amount of land for which the gentry were tax-responsible, for the tax registers recorded the size of the gentleman's estate on the basis of the rent quotas which it produced, and not on the basis of the amount of land actually held. As the intermediary stage in this indirect assessment system, the local gentry were in a position to exercise their influence in the tax collection process.

Finally, the local gentry influence made itself felt in the more modern sector of rural society through the monopolistic economic power they exercised in the marketing towns. The marketing town service area, as we have previously remarked, constituted the most extensive topographically discrete unit in rural society, and generally delineated a self-sufficient economic zone for the purposes of the daily life of the rural population. But its origins as a central market for the exchange of produce between farmers made the marketing town susceptible to gangster rule in situations where *Gemeinschaft* discipline in the villages had been eroded. Furthermore, in the late imperial period, as the level of commodity circulation between discrete marketing towns continued to expand, it became common for wealthier landlords to combine landowning with investment in brokerage services connected with inter-village trade, with the result that the monopoly of power within the marketing towns passed into the hands of a kind of hybrid landlord-negotiant class.

This landlord-negotiant class often extended its influence into the countryside through a monopolistic control of usury finance. Thanks to this development, the gentry were able to survive the eroding effect upon their authority in the villages that would have accompanied the expansion of commodity circulation. By the late imperial period, domination of the marketing towns and of village finance had become a major aspect of gentry power. The stake acquired by the gentry in the marketing towns was doubtless responsible for the sustained and actually reinforced pattern of economic self-sufficiency that may be observed within the units of local society that formed about the marketing town.

III. RURAL CONTROL IN THE IMPERIALIST AGE

So far we have focused our discussion of the peculiarities of the traditional Chinese village upon the internal and traditional factors responsible for its character. But the influence here of foreign capital and imperialism cannot be overlooked. But before anything definitive can be said about rural control in imperialist-dominated China, several historical issues must first be dealt with.

Capitalist influence upon China began, as we all know, with the Opium War, and was a phenomenon chiefly of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

During the initial phase, in keeping with the general condition of colonialist rule throughout the world, the principal aims of the capitalist powers were to uncover new sources of supply for unmanufactured agricultural produce and to develop new markets for capitalist commodities. But in the phase of China's foreign relations, the impact of Western European capitalism was not immediately felt, in a decisive way, by inland rural society. In the cities of the coastal areas, of course, the initiation of inequitable trade privileges for the advanced capitalist nations immediately resulted in an influx of mass-produced capitalist commodities, with the predictable result that competing goods produced by traditional, local industries were swiftly driven from the market places. But at this initial stage, the self-sufficient character of the local social units centered around the marketing town proved sufficiently strong to maintain a stubborn resistance to the penetration of foreign products. To a certain degree, of course, the inappropriateness of certain foreign merchandise for the consumption needs of the Chinese peasant was responsible for the success of this resistance. The cotton cloth normally used in the villages, for instance, was of a coarse and durable character, and woven of heavy yarn, while the imported product was a light cloth woven of light yarn. But the decisive factor in making this resistance possible was the inability of foreign merchants to make inroads into the self-sufficient and parochial marketing towns [8] [3].

Confronted with this stubborn resistance, foreign capital recruited the services of the comprador merchants of the treaty ports, and, through the agency of the latter group, established contact with the landlord-negotiants who monopolized control over the marketing towns. By cementing their influence at both ends of the established domestic marketing system, with compradors as the junction with the international market, and landlord-negotiants as the link with the direct producer, foreign capitalism was able to gain control over marketing towns in the interior and turn them into commodity outlets.

But before a decisive impact upon Chinese rural society was achieved almost a half-century had elapsed since the "opening" of China with the Treaty of Nanking. It was not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century that the disintegration of the ancien régime in the countryside began to advance at a noticeable rate. This phase coincided with the advance of world capitalism to its imperialist stage, marked by the transformation of colonies into markets for exported capital and objects of financial control.

The above sketch of the historical background of the rise of imperialist domination of the Chinese countryside suggests several problems concerning the relationship of the Chinese peasantry and foreign imperialism. To begin with, the imperialist hold over the marketing town markets tended to hamper the formation of a unified national market serving the needs of an indigenous capitalism, and thereby impaired the development of Chinese capitalism. Before a unified internal market could come into existence, the Chinese internal market had become organized as a colonial market, the character of which was greatly determined by the predominating role played within it by the combination of comprador and landlord-negotiant interests.

As we have previously observed, landlord-negotiant domination of the marketing town marketing structure was in essence founded upon the landholding system as it existed before the invasion of foreign capital. In reality, the rural merchants who came to function as landlord-negotiants were, historically speaking, descended from the traditional rural merchants whose existence had been dependent upon the self-sufficient character of the traditional local rural market. Through high-interest finance operations, into which they ventured as a side line to their brokerage activities, these merchants had inevitably come to add the role of landlord to their commercial interests. On the obvious level, the alliance between imperialism and the landlord-negotiant class, secured through the mediation of the compradors, was to become the backbone of the reactionary colonial political system. But an equally important, though less visible, result of this alliance was, paradoxical though it may seem, a reinforcement of the self-sufficient character of the local social units centered upon the marketing towns.

By thus hampering the formation of a unified domestic market serving the needs of a native capitalism, and reinforcing the self-sufficient and parochial character of local rural society, the penetration of imperialist influences in the Chinese economy had the result of isolating the marketing town as a self-sufficient unit, while at the same time linking to the world market through comprador interests. This is not to assert that the local social units thus linked to the world market in a way serving to reinforce their isolated and self-sufficient character were actually economically self-sufficient, or rested upon the foundations of a natural economy, in the textbook sense of the concept. What is meant is rather that, at the village level, the increasing penetration of a commodity economy did not produce an advance in the division of labor serving to widen the framework of local society. Rather, the traditional, gentry-dominated system of rural control was perpetuated, while at the same time made subservient to foreign capital. The result was an atomized internal marketing system very much prey to the exploitation of landlord-negotiant interests. Under the impact of imperialist economic penetration, then, the special character of traditional Chinese rural society was perpetuated within a new framework, retaining the strongly self-sufficient, isolated, and fragmented aspects of the old order, while at the same time linked to the world market and subservient to the imperialist powers.

In such a fashion, then, were imperialist and landlord interests joined together in a new imperialist-dominated rural control system. Naturally, such an alliance could not be maintained without giving rise to some changes in the framework of power by which the local gentry had, up until this point, asserted themselves as a rural ruling class. The traditional gentry-dominated rural control system was a peculiarly Chinese product, which had been fashioned to meet the needs of the traditional landlord system and of the bureaucratic state built about the absolutist authority of the monarchy. Its essence was a systematically-supported direct and violence-monopolizing control apparatus. As a result of the intrusion of imperialist economic forces in the form of an alliance with landlord-negotiant interests, however, market-centered relationships came to assume a wider role within the fabric of the self-sufficient, parochial social unit, with the consequence

that the focus of rural control shifted to the economic domination exercised by the gentry in the marketing towns. Inevitably, this shift led to the erosion of the social foundations upon which the traditional mode of gentry-dominated rural control had rested. Accordingly we find rural control assuming more and more dependence upon the naked use of force. The fact that, in the twentieth century, the rural ruling class was no longer known as "gentry" (*chinshên, haoshên*) but rather as "local bosses" (*t'uhao*) or "wicked literati" (*liehshên*) reflected more than the subjective perspective of peasant activists; it denotes a visible change in the character of the landlord system brought about by its alliance with imperialism and its new role as backbone of rural control in a semicolonial political environment. What the alliance between imperialism and marketing-town landlord-negotiant monopolists came down to, in practice, was a political union between imperialism and the "local bosses" and "wicked literati."

The primary mode of imperialist control over the rural economy, then, was through an alliance with the compradors, "local bosses," and "wicked literati." In some cases, however, it took the form of direct capital investments, as was the instance with the production of tobacco financed in Shantung Province by the British-American Tobacco Trust. But even in such colonial enterprises as this, in which direct investment was made in the Chinese countryside, the scheme of operations involved more than a simple preharvest broker's loan to the peasants calculated to guarantee the fulfilment of promised quotas by making them dependent on the trust for seeds, fertilizers, tools, and other means of production. By developing ties with local landlord elements, the organizers of the enterprise provided themselves with a means of control over the peasantry more direct than that of economic incentive. In Chinese rural society on the eve of the Revolution, then, we will observe a structure of exploitative power forged by imperialism in coalition with the "local bosses" and "wicked literati," and other elements whose power had traditional social foundations.

Under the rule of this unlikely cabal, any surplus created by an increment in marketable production within rural society was immediately absorbed, in the form of profits, by the combination of landlord-negotiants and parasitic landlords who held a monopolistic control over rural marketing and finance. Following the penetration of imperialist economic forces, the disintegration of traditional rural society was accelerated, and weavers and other itinerant craftsmen who had hitherto eked out a living by circulating between the villages of a handful of isolated communities lost their livelihoods, the victims of the influx of foreign goods into the marketing towns. The Boxer Rebellion of the early twentieth century broke out among the improverished peasants of north China, rallying to the propaganda of die-hard jingoism; but it is significant that the itinerant craftsmen were also well represented in the ranks of the rebels [2].

The disintegration of rural society naturally affected farm management as well. Although available documentary evidence on the condition of Chinese agriculture in the period since the late nineteenth century is fragmentary, it is sufficient to confirm that the overall trends were a continuing contraction in the scale of farming enterprise, and a persistent movement in the direction of

decline and collapse. Farm as an economic enterprise offered no possibility of growth; the only existing route to prosperity was successful entry into the ranks of the parasitic landlord class, and even this opportunity became more remote with the passage of every year. As the situation worsened, smaller farmers were reduced to penury and the number of poor peasants swelled to enormous proportions, while many peasants were forced to abandon farming altogether and seek their livelihoods as poor migrants in the cities. By the 1920s, China's countryside had subsided into a condition of chronic depression.

To sum up, the central position of the rural question and of rural class conflict within the Chinese Revolution was very much in accord with the unique character of Chinese rural society in the prerevolutionary period. It was largely on account of that character that rural antagonisms finally exploded into a nation-wide anti-landlord peasant movement beginning in the early 1920s, a movement which spread "like a prairie-fire" and soon evolved into full-fledged revolutionary struggle; that the Chinese Revolution came to be focused, in a non-Leninist way, on peasant struggle, the principle object of which was a revolution in the distribution of land; and that the cause of democratic reform itself came to be in essence inseparable from that of resistance to imperialism.

REFERENCES

1. AMANO, M. *Shina nōson zakki* [Random notes on the Chinese village] (Tokyo: Seikatsusha, 1942).
2. EGUCHI, B. "Giwadan-jiken no igi ni tsuite" [On the significance of the Boxer Rebellion], *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, No. 150 (March 1951).
3. ETŌ, S. "Mitcheru hōkokusho ni tsuite" [On the Mitchell report], *Tōyō bunka*, No. 20 (January 1956).
4. HATADA, T. "Kyū-Chūgoku sonraku no kyōdōtai-teki seikaku ni tsuite no kentō—mura no tochi to mura no hito" [On the *Gemeinschaft* character of the traditional Chinese village: village land and village members], *Tokyo Toritsu-daigaku Jimbun-gakubu Jimbun gakuho*, No. 51 (1966).
5. KULP, D. H. *Country Life in South China: The Sociology of Familism* (New York: Columbia University, 1925).
6. MATSUMOTO, Y. *Shina chihō jichi hattatsu-shi* [A history of the development of regional self-government in China], ed. S. Wada (Tokyo: Chūkaminokoku hōsei kenkyūkai, 1939).
7. NIIDA, N. *Chūgoku hōsei-shi* [A history of Chinese legal institutions] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1952).
8. OYAMA, M. "Shin-matsu Chūgoku ni okeru gaikoku menseihin no ryūnyū" [The influx of foreign cotton goods in the late Ch'ing], *Kindai Chūgoku kenkyū*, No. 4 (1960).
9. Rinji Taiwan kyūkan chōsakai., ed. *Shinkoku gyōsei-hō* [Ch'ing administrative law], Vol. 2 (1910; reprint ed., Tokyo: Daiian, 1965).
10. TACHIBANA, S. *Shina shakai kenkyū* [Studies in Chinese society] (Tokyo: Nihon hyōronsha, 1936).
11. TOYOSHIMA, S. "Chūgoku seihoku-bu ni okeru suiri kyōdōtai ni tsuite" [The irrigation cooperatives of northwest China], *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, November 1956.