Preface

THIS BOOK is based on extensive notes gathered in the village of Long Bow, Lucheng County, Shansi Province, China, during the spring and summer of 1948.* At that time, local land reform, which had already been in progress for two years, was under investigation by a work team dispatched jointly by the People's Government and the Communist Party Committee of Lucheng County. I was attached to this work team as an observer.

The main focus of the book is on the conditions which the members of the work team found and the actions which they subsequently led the people of the village to take. But since it would be impossible to understand these conditions or these actions without a review of the revolutionary upheaval that led up to them, and since this upheaval in turn could hardly be understood without some knowledge of the traditional society which brought on and was itself transformed by revolution, a large section of the book (Parts I and II) is devoted to a history of the village.

This history was not easily assembled. The past was reviewed for me by a multitude of people whose memories of what had happened differed somewhat and whose stories contained both contradictions and gaps. Where contradictions could not be resolved or gaps filled in through careful checking and cross-checking, I have had to adopt such interpretations and solutions as seemed most consistent with other known facts. If the history that has thus emerged is not accurate in every detail, its main content and spirit nevertheless portray the truth about Long Bow.

What I have tried to do in the book as a whole is to reveal, through the microcosm of Long Bow Village, something of the essence of the great anti-imperialist, anti-feudal revolution which transformed China in the first half of the twentieth century and unleashed political and social forces so tremendous that they continue to shake not only China but the world.

* The Chinese name for this village is *Changchuang*. *Chang* is a common Chinese surname. It is also a word that means to extend, publish, open or boast. In written Chinese the character for *chang* is made up of 11 brush strokes. The first three comprise the radical *kung* which means bow—the hunter's bow. The last eight comprise the phonetic *chang* or *ch'ang* which means long. It is from these separate elements of the written word rather than from the meaning of the spoken word that I have extracted the designation "Long Bow."

The question naturally arises as to whether Long Bow can be considered a microcosm typical enough to reveal the essence of the Chinese Revolution. Was Long Bow's development universal or unique? The answer can only be that it was something of both.

Throughout rural China the social forces in conflict, the basic problems, the goals and the final outcome of the Revolution were the same. In Long Bow the same classes stood in opposition to each other as stood opposed nationally. United action of all laboring people was as vital to revolutionary victory in Long Bow as it was in the country as a whole. The petty-producer mentality of Long Bow's peasants did not differ in quality from that which characterized the peasants country-wide, and the tendency toward extremism, which in Long Bow grew to alarming proportions, had to be checked wherever peasants moved to divide the land.

At the same time, certain external circumstances, certain internal characteristics, and the specific course of events which shaped Long Bow were unique. For one thing, the village had a sizeable Catholic minority in a country where only one or two million people out of 600 million were Catholics. For another, it contained many families without ancestral roots or ancestral graves in the region. This meant a weak clan structure in a country where clans have traditionally played a very important role. Furthermore, on the edge of an area that was surrounded but never conquered by the Japanese, Long Bow was one of the few villages which the Japanese invaders occupied and fortified.

As a consequence, Long Bow had a very different history from that of the average North China community lying within the wide net of Japanese encirclement during the years 1937–1945. At the same time, its history was very different from that of the great majority of Chinese villages which had never been cut off by Japanese armies and were wrested from Kuomintang rather than Japanese control by the revolutionary armies after 1949.

As an occupied village, Long Bow did not benefit at all from that long period of united resistance, democratic rule, and moderate reform which laid the groundwork for basic changes throughout the Communist-led Base Areas of North China once the Japanese War was over. Nor did Long Bow benefit from that extended period of internal peace that enabled communities in South, Central, and West China to carry out land reform calmly, step by step, in orderly fashion after the Civil War was over. Freed from Japanese control at a turning point in history, 1945, Long Bow leaped perforce from reactionary bastion to revolutionary storm center in the course of a few days. All the changes that subsequently occurred were not only compressed

into a relatively short space of time; they were also warped by the intense pressures of all-out Civil War as wave after wave of Nationalist attacks swept across the highlands of Southeast Shansi. Long Bow was not the only village in China to be transformed under forced draft, but such villages were the exception, not the rule.

In Long Bow the sudden destruction of the power and privileges of the gentry led to rapid social advances, to the release of unprecedented popular energy, to burgeoning enthusiasm, optimism, and popular confidence. It also led to excesses and tragedies. At least a dozen people were beaten to death by angry crowds; some hard-working small holders were wrongly dispossessed; revolutionary leaders at times rode roughshod over their followers. When the land reform team to which I was attached came to the village in 1948, its main job turned out to be righting the wrongs of the immediate past.

Before these wrongs could be righted they had to be exposed. The work team, the village officers, and the majority of the population concentrated for an extended period on what was wrong with past policies and the conduct of individual leaders. They did this, not because the wrongs of the situation outweighed the rights—on the contrary, quite the reverse was true—but because the wrongs constituted a serious obstacle to further progress, an illness that if not cured could become lethal. This book, by reflecting this concentration, gives crimes, mistakes, detours and discouragement more weight than they deserve in any over-all evaluation of Long Bow's development. It thus tips the scale even further toward the exceptional and away from the typical.

When it comes to telling the story of the Chinese Revolution, however, all of these exceptional factors, far from creating obstacles, present very definite advantages. Because contradictions arose in especially acute form in Long Bow and problems tended to etch themselves in very sharp relief, I felt able to observe the revolutionary process more fully and to understand it more deeply than I would have been able to do under more average circumstances and in more average surroundings. But the reader should keep in mind that not many villages in China followed such a tortuous path to liberation or experienced so much pain on the way.

Everyone in the revolutionary ranks learned from the kind of mistakes made in Long Bow at the height of the Civil War and when, in 1949, land reform workers went out from the Taihang Mountains by the tens of thousands to lead the Revolution in South and West China, they were far wiser men and women than they had been when they challenged the local gentry for control of the future at the end of the Japanese War.

The revolutionary process as it unfolded in China included advances and retreats, swings to the Right and swings to the Left, daily, hourly, minute-by-minute accretions and sudden, qualitative changes of state. Above all, the process went deep. It remade not only the material life of the people, but also their consciousness. It was this latter aspect that constituted the special strength of the Revolution and ensured, insofar as anything could, that the changes which it wrought would be both profound and lasting.

Because I have tried to delineate not only dramatic leaps in the life of the people, but also that slow accumulation of small changes without which no leaps could have occurred, I have written a book of considerable length. Along the way I borrowed from the literary arsenal of the novelist, the journalist, the social scientist, and the historian. What I have produced, finally, seems to me to resemble, in spirit and in content, a documentary film. I call it, then, a documentary of revolution in a Chinese village.

In the last analysis, what made such a documentary possible was the involvement of hundreds of people in its creation. Collectively the people of Long Bow, the members of the work team, and the two interpreters who helped me, delved into the past of the community and revealed it in its dynamic, many-faceted complexity.* Hence, the reader will find here, not one man's analysis of a small community in transition, but the community's own self-examination, its own estimate of what happened during the most crucial years of its existence. That examination was characterized by honesty, thoroughness, and depth, because on it would be based not only understanding but action, not only theory but practice—practice that must vitally affect the lives of millions.

The relevance of Long Bow's history to the present day can hardly be overemphasized. The story revolves around the land question. Without understanding the land question one cannot understand the Revolution in China, and without understanding the Revolution in China one cannot understand today's world.

But the impact of the land question on world affairs is not a function of China's specific gravity alone. Who shall own the land? Who shall rule the countryside? These are primary questions in the revolution that is sweeping the whole of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

* The language spoken in Southern Shansi is not pure Mandarin but a dialect. In addition to pronouncing most words in their own local way, Shansi peasants use many words that do not appear in any Chinese dictionary. Even interpreters well versed in Chinese dialects often find themselves at a loss to decipher the details of conversations between peasants. Thus, though I had a working knowledge of Chinese, it would have been impossible for me to follow the meetings without help.

That revolution, far from dying away, is intensifying. Sooner or later, all those countries where agricultural production is a main source of wealth—and the relation between owners and producers a main source of social conflict—will undergo great transformations. An understanding of the issues involved and the solution already applied by one great nation is therefore important. In countries that stand on the verge of land revolution, people are eager to study such lessons. In countries like our own, whose leaders have the capacity to hasten or delay—though not forever to prevent—such transformations in other lands, people *ought* to study them.

Because of these facts, I believe that this book is at least as timely today as it would have been had it come out 18 years ago when I first gathered the raw notes for it in Long Bow Village. What happened in China yesterday may well happen in Brazil, Nigeria, or India tomorrow.

Land reform is on the agenda of mankind.

William Hinton

Fleetwood, Pa.
May, 1966

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Those With Merit Will Get Some
Those Without Merit Will Get Some

Why should the poor and hired peasants lead? The poor and hired peasants should lead because they make up from 50 to 70 percent of the population, are the most numerous, and work the hardest all year long. They plant the land, they build the buildings, they weave the cloth, but they never have enough food to eat, a roof to sleep under, or clothes to wear. Their life is most bitter, they are oppressed and exploited and pushed around. Hence they are the most revolutionary. From birth they are a revolutionary class. Inevitably they are the leaders of the fanshen *movement. This is determined by life itself.*

Proclamation to the Peasants, March 1948
Shansi-Hopei-Honan-Shantung
Border Region Government

A NEW starting point for the work of the team was provided by an announcement explaining the meaning of the Draft Agrarian Law which was sent out by the Party Bureau of the Shansi-Hopei-Honan-Shantung Border Region and printed simultaneously in all the newspapers of that vast area. The announcement was couched in simple terms and outlined, in a few short paragraphs, just what the new law meant for peasants who, in spite of years of effort, had not yet *fanshened.*

Little Li, vice leader of the work team and a surprisingly accomplished orator, introduced the document to Long Bow Village by reading it aloud. As he read he stood at the end of a long loft that made up the second story of the foreign-style house that had once belonged to the absentee landlord and militarist, Chief-of-Staff Hsu. The building was now held as "surplus property" by the village office. Scattered about the loft, seated on bricks, chunks of wood, and an occasional folding stool, all of which had been carried up the steep ladder on the outside wall, sat about 50 or 60 peasants especially selected by the work team as the poorest in the whole community. The men sat in clusters, lit their pipes, smoked, or simply listened

with rapt attention; the women, grouped in their own coteries, worked busily at domestic chores. Some sewed shoe soles, some spun hemp, others wound cotton thread from large reels into balls. The mothers among them kept a watchful eye on their young children, ragged urchins with smudged faces and bare bottoms exposed from behind, who tumbled about among the assembled people, laughed, chased each other, and cried. Small babies, not yet able to walk, sucked at deliciously exposed, milk-swollen breasts or fell asleep in maternal arms blissfully unaware of the historic words that rang through the loft, claiming the power to change their whole lives.

"Brothers and sisters, peasants of the Border Region," read Little Li with genuine theatrical flourish. "In the course of the past two years our Border Region has carried on a powerful, enthusiastic land reform movement. Already over ten million people have thoroughly *fanshened* but there are still areas with a population of 20 million who have only partially *fanshened* or not *fanshened* at all."

From the nodding heads, the whispered asides, it was obvious that the peasants in the loft counted themselves among the 20 million whose *fanshen* was still incomplete.

"Now everyone must *fanshen.*

"There were some mistakes in the past. Some of our village cadres were landlords; others, even though they weren't landlords, listened to the landlords. Some soldiers' and cadres' relatives were landlords. These were not thoroughly settled with."

Without stopping to analyze whether this was actually true in Long Bow, the peasants accepted the statement with enthusiasm. It implied that there would be further struggles and further "fruits" and that they, as the organized poor peasants, would get these "fruits." They nodded and waited for more.

"Some families got more in the distribution because they were soldiers' relatives, or cadres' relatives. The fruits were distributed according to many systems, according to need, according to membership in the Peasants' Association, according to one's activities in the struggle. This was not fair. Because of this some got a lot, and others got very little."

Here indeed was something to savor. The peasants remembered the early struggles well. Politics rather than class had decided the outcome then. It was traitors and collaborators who had been attacked and those who beat them down who received the wealth. Later movements corrected but never entirely overcame these inequities. Religious prejudice, political suspicion, and a measure of favoritism continued to distort the results.

"That's exactly right," said an old woman who sat close to Ch'i

Yun, never for an instant ceasing to wind thread. "You had to be on the inside to get anything."

"The Draft Agrarian Law is designed to correct all such mistakes," declared Little Li, still reading from the document. "Articles One and Three call for destruction of the feudal system and the creation of a system of 'land to the tiller.'

"What does this mean? It means that no matter who you are, whether you are a county magistrate, a commander-in-chief, or an official of whatever level, if you are a feudal exploiter your property will be confiscated. Nothing will or can protect you."

"Hear that now!"

"That's the way it should be!"

"Nobody can escape this time."

These comments and many others in the same vein emerged at random, like corn popping in a pan.

"Article Six says that property will be distributed according to the number of people in the family. It is very simple—those who are politically suspect will get some, and those who are not politically suspect will get some. Those with merit will get some and those without merit will get some. Landlords will get a share and rich peasants will get a share also. Some middle peasants will give up a little, some will get a little, most will not be touched at all. That which was not equally divided in the past is to be divided. Those who got too little in the past will get more. Those who got too much will give it up. The surplus will be used to fill the holes. Everything will be divided so that everyone will have a fair share."

If the previous paragraphs had aroused enthusiasm, this paragraph sent it bubbling and rippling through the loft. The peasants were beside themselves with delight. Among them were at least a dozen who had been called agents, had received less than equal treatment because of it, and lived in the shadow of further attacks. For them the announcement cleared the sky. Politics, religion, furtive trips to Horse Square, collaboration, past mistakes, quarrels, personal vendettas, the weighing and balancing of thoughts and activities, merits and demerits—all these were declared irrelevant. The only thing that mattered was poverty. If you were poor you would get property—land, tools, livestock, houses.

"Do you understand what I have read?" asked Little Li over the hubbub engendered by his words.

"We understand it very well," said the old woman next to Ch'i Yun. "We only wish we could remember every word of it."

"It couldn't be better," said a man in a ragged jacket. "I myself never *fanshened*."

"Understand it? Of course we do!" declared many voices from all over the loft.

Little Li went on to declare that the poor peasants themselves must right the wrongs and unite with the middle peasants to elect a democratic Village Congress which could then supervise the work of all cadres and recall all those who abused their power. But the main point, the point that impressed the people most, had already been made: *Those with merit will get some and those without merit will get some. Everything will be divided so that everyone will get an equal share.*

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The statement read by Comrade Li, which outlined the coming campaign for the mass of the peasantry, was supplemented by a far more detailed directive which explained to the cadres of the work team just how they were to go about accomplishing their major objectives.

According to this directive, which was issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on February 22, 1948, the villages of the Liberated Areas fell into three basic types. Included in the first type were those in which land reform had been successfully carried out and only minor readjustments and corrections were needed to complete the movement. The second type comprised the villages where equal distribution was more ragged, landlords and rich peasants still owned more and better land than the average and many cadres had received more than their fair share of the "fruits." In the third type were those villages where, in spite of certain efforts at equal distribution, land reform had not been effectively carried out and feudal relations of production still remained dominant.

The first task of the work team was to determine which of these types best characterized the village of Long Bow. In case of doubt, a complete class analysis of the community had to be made and the holdings of the various classes compared. Villages of the first type had to contain not only a majority of *fanshened* peasants (50 to 80 percent of the population) but the per capita holdings of the remaining poor had to be at least equal to two thirds of the per capita holdings of the middle peasants.

To determine the type of any village meant to determine the course of action which must subsequently follow. If the village were of the first or second type, the necessary economic adjustments were to be made as quickly as possible so as not to disrupt the year's production work, and the work team must then concentrate on the democratic reforms which were to usher in a new political life for the whole community.

If the village proved to be of the third type, then the whole Draft Agrarian Law had to be applied from the beginning. A Poor Peasants' League had to be organized, a campaign against the remaining gentry mounted, confiscation of gentry holdings completed, and equal distribution of all confiscated property effected. Only after all this was finished could the democratic reforms be undertaken.

Whether the situation in the village was good or bad, whether the land reform had been carried out well or poorly, future progress depended upon the quality of the political leadership inside the village and consequently on the quality of the members of the Communist Party branch. It was necessary therefore not only to classify the villages as outlined above but also to classify them according to the kind of Communist Party branch that existed in each. If a nucleus of Communists with reasonably good records existed, then the branch was called Kind I. Such a branch need only be re-educated by means of criticism and self-criticism meetings and encouraged to take a leading role in all future work. If the branch was dominated by landlord or opportunist elements then it was declared Kind II or III. Such a branch must certainly be reorganized, perhaps even dissolved. Political direction of the village must temporarily be turned over to the Committee of the Poor Peasants' League or the Peasants' Association and a new branch constituted only during the course of the reforms.*

The democratic reforms which were to accompany or follow the completion of the land reform program were to consist of:

(1) A re-examination of and reorganization of the Communist Party branch and a critical re-evaluation of the records of all village officials, whether Party or non-Party.

(2) The establishment of a sound Peasants' Association made up of the vast majority of poor and middle peasant families and led by democratically elected officers.

(3) The eventual establishment of a new village government composed of an elected Village Congress, representative of all social strata, and the appointment by this Congress of all village officers, such as the village chairman, the village clerk, the militia captain, the police captain, and the man in charge of public service.

Such in brief was the task that faced the work team in Long Bow. The members had to decide which type the village fell into and what kind of Communist Party branch it contained. On the basis of these estimates suitable organizational steps had to be taken and suitable reforms carried out.

* A Poor Peasants' League was an organization composed only of poor peasants and hired laborers. A Peasants' Association was a much broader organization composed of poor peasants, hired laborers and middle peasants.

Simply to make an accurate estimate of the true state of affairs was a major project. No outsider could hope to possess enough detailed information to decide who were middle peasants, who were poor peasants, and how much each actually held. To gather such information required the active support of all the peasants. First it was necessary that they acquire standards of judgment, and then they must collectively undertake the work of classification and evaluation.

In their haste to get started on more fundamental problems, the work team cadres in Long Bow did not wait until they had completed this arduous task of investigation before they made up their minds about the basic situation in the village. Without consultation among themselves, without taking any formal decision, they assumed that land reform in Long Bow had been stillborn. It followed that the village must be Type III and its Party branch Kind III. All mass organizations remained dissolved, all village cadres remained suspended, all Communist Party members continued to meet in secret session. Long Bow was treated as a village where the whole slate had to be wiped clean and the peasant movement had to be reorganized from the ground up.

The first step in any such reorganization had to be the creation of a new Poor and Hired Peasants' League. But before such a League could even be started, some determination had to be made concerning who were the poor and who the hired. A detailed classification of the whole community therefore became mandatory and the thoroughgoing investigation which the cadres had earlier bypassed crowded all other matters off the agenda after all.

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Self Report, Public Appraisal

For those whose duty it is to give guidance and direction, the most essential method of knowing conditions is that they should, proceeding according to plan, devote their attention to a number of cities and villages and make a comprehensive survey of each of them from the basic viewpoint of Marxism, i.e., by means of class analysis.

Mao Tse-tung, 1941

"THERE ARE seven in my family. Last year, before the marriage of my son I had six."

So spoke Wang Kuei-pao. He was a heavy-set man perhaps 40 years old. Crow's-feet spread from the corners of his eyes. On his weathered face grew a ragged stubble of hair that had never matured into a beard.

"Why speak of last year? Speak of the way it is now. Soon you will have a grandson and that will make eight," said a wit from across the room. He was pressed against the side wall of the hut by the crush of people at the meeting and I could not even see who had spoken, as I myself was pressed against the opposite wall.

Wang, the expectant grandfather, continued his report unperturbed. "I have three and a half acres. I reap about ten bushels to the acre. My son is a teacher in another village. I have no draft animal."

"No doubt you are a poor peasant," said a third voice.

"That's easy. He's a poor peasant. He hasn't even *fanshened*."

"Your family has increased but your land remains the same. In the future you'll have even more mouths to feed." The speakers supported one another.

"Well," said Wang, with a bravado based on the security he felt in being poor. "Go ahead and classify me. Call me a rich peasant if you want to. It doesn't bother me at all."

But everyone agreed. There was not the slightest doubt. Wang Kuei-pao had been a poor peasant all his life and a poor peasant he remained.

A man named Ting-fu followed Wang. He reported three and a

half acres for three people, no livestock, no implements, a broken-down house of three sections, and a shared privy.

"Ting-fu has toiled his whole life through," said one of his neighbors.

"He is the hardest worker in the whole village," said another.

Ting-fu was classed as a poor peasant without further ado.

Thus classification of the classes began in Long Bow.

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The handful of peasants who listened to Wang Kuei-pao and Ting-fu were "basic elements" chosen by the work team as the nucleus of the new Poor Peasants' League—a League which was to remain "provisional" until it assumed its final form. Their primary objective was to find others as poor as themselves who could swell the ranks until the new organization became capable of exerting leverage on the whole community. In the process they would also make a preliminary estimate of the potential allies (middle peasants) among their neighbors and of the "objects of struggle" (rich peasants and landlords) who still lived among them.

The classification method used was called *tzu pao kung yi,* or "self report, public appraisal." The "self report" meant that every family head must appear in person and report his sources of income and his economic position prior to the liberation of the village. "Public appraisal" meant that all members of the Provisional League must discuss each report and decide, by sense-of-the-meeting, on the family's class status.

Everyone knew that these classification proceedings could transform the Draft Agrarian Law from a general declaration of purpose into a concrete reality. Decisions concerning class status would eventually determine the future of every family. Those classed as poor peasants could expect to gain prestige as members of the new Poor Peasants' League and to acquire prosperity by coming into enough worldly goods to make them new middle peasants. Those classed as rich peasants could expect expropriation of all their surplus property, leaving them with only enough to earn a living like any other *fan-shened* peasant. Anyone classified as a landlord faced complete expropriation and then the return of enough property to live on. The classification, in other words, could not be regarded as an academic matter, as a mere nose count, as a census. It laid the basis for economic and social action that affected every family and every individual in the most fundamental way.

Because this was so the peasants took an extraordinary interest in

the classification meetings and gathered without complaint, day after day, to listen, report, discuss, and judge.

It soon became obvious that every family wanted to be classed as far down the scale as possible. To be called a middle peasant meant to receive nothing. Only those classed as poor peasants could expect to gain. Therefore every family wanted to be classed as poor, and every family head, no matter how poor, tried to minimize what his family had possessed prior to liberation and deprecate what the family had received since.

For the minority at the upper end of the scale, downgrading was even more vital. All the prosperous peasants were fearful lest they be shoved over the line into the rich-peasant category and lose out. Even the middle-peasant category included an upper group, the well-to-do, who could legitimately be asked to give up something. Those who feared that they owned enough to be called well-to-do wanted no part of any such condition and fought hard to convince their neighbors that they really had no surplus, that they were simply average middle peasants.

Since everyone wanted to be downgraded, since "poverty was best," I expected the final result of the classification to be a general shift downward. But this was not the case, and the reason for it was quite simple. The preliminary classification was undertaken by a group of families already designated by the work team as poor. It was in their interest to place others in higher brackets for two obvious reasons—in the first place, unless some families were classed as landlords, rich peasants, or well-to-do middle peasants there would be no property to distribute; in the second place, if there were large numbers of families classed as poor, whatever "struggle fruits" materialized would have to be spread thin. Clearly, the fewer families there were on the sharing end, the more each family would be likely to get.

The two contradictory trends, the desire on the part of all those being classed to be downgraded, and the desire on the part of those doing the classing to upgrade everyone else, tended to cancel each other out. In the course of the reports and appraisals the true situation of each family tended to be revealed.

For this happy result, credit must also be given to the method of discussion employed, a method that enabled every individual to talk over each case. This method was known as *ke ts'ao,* a word that literally means "ferment" and finds its American equivalent in the "buzz session." After each family presented its report, the chairman called out, *"Ke ts'ao, ke ts'ao."* Then all those who were sitting together in those natural clusters formed as people came to the meeting fell to discussing the case. They continued to discuss it until they more

or less agreed. As agreement was reached in various parts of the room, the hum of voices gradually died down. Then the chairman called out, *"Pao kao, pao kao!"* (report, report).

A spokesman for each group, designated on the spur of the moment by those who sat around him, then expressed the consensus arrived at by his companions in the course of their "ferment." If the opinions of the scattered groups did not coincide, the chairman tried to clarify the differences, review the facts in the case, and ask the family under consideration to report in greater detail. Then he called for another *ke ts'ao* and repeated this process until a real sense-of-the-meeting was reached. No votes were taken. To decide such matters by a vote meant to impose the will of the majority on the will of the minority, with all the hard feeling that such an imposition was sure to cause. Objectively, the work team felt, any family must stand somewhere in the scale. A real understanding of the family's condition should enable the peasant judges to place the family in its proper niche. To vote meant to admit defeat, to make a subjective rather than an objective decision. When no sense-of-the-meeting could be reached, the cadres advised putting off the classification until further study of the standards and further investigation of the facts clarified the whole picture.

The complete lack of facilities for any form of large gathering established ideal conditions for the informal *ke ts'ao* discussions that characterized Long Bow meetings. Instead of coming together in a room equipped with rows of chairs, such as would be found in any Western meeting hall, the peasants had to gather in some empty loft, some abandoned room, some quiet portion of the street, or in the largest of their private homes. Each had of necessity to bring his or her own private seat—usually a brick, a block, or a little stool made of wood and string—and sit down wherever the company proved most congenial. The groups that crystallized in this way formed natural discussion circles that made it possible for any meeting to switch to a "buzz session" without the least rearrangement or disturbance. Thus everyone had a chance to participate and express opinions whether or not he or she actually spoke to the gathering as a whole. This system enabled shy people to speak first in small groups and gradually build up confidence to the point where they were willing to stand up and talk before the multitude. Truth was well served by such an arrangement because what one person forgot another was sure to remember. The collective proved wiser than any individual, and in the end a consensus of the participants emerged.

For Ch'i Yun and myself these meetings served as a window opening on the inner life of the village. The peasants, who had seemed on

first acquaintance to constitute a fairly homogeneous mass—poverty-stricken yet energetic, ignorant yet shrewd, quarrelsome yet good humored, suspicious yet hospitable—turned out to be a most varied collection of individuals. Each possessed marked originality, and each faced problems peculiar to his or her situation that often obscured the general problem of livelihood, the overriding necessity to *fanshen*.

With a "well bottom" view of the world still limiting their vision, most peasants found it hard to separate their personal problems from the basic economic situation that was the root of their misery. They tended to concentrate on traits of character, unresolved feuds, past insults, and other peripheral issues to the neglect of the true criterion for determining class status—their own relation to the means of production.

The audience, also made up of peasants, was equally subjective. Time and again, Little Li, Ch'i Yun, and the other work team cadres who sat in on the meetings had to bring the discussion around to objective economic facts and warn against classifying some family in the upper brackets because the family head had collaborated with the Japanese, habitually beat his wife, or sided with his wife against his mother.

Yet so strong ran the feeling against exploitation, collaboration, and criminal behavior that sometimes the team cadres themselves were carried away. When this happened, their prestige and eloquence were such that they easily swayed the whole meeting.

30

Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggarman, Thief

The class status of most of the population in the rural areas is clear and can be easily differentiated without much divergence of view. Their class status should first be ascertained. In the case of a small proportion of the people whose class status is unclear and difficult to ascertain and where there is a divergence of view, they should be dealt with later and classified after thorough study and after obtaining instruction from the higher authorities. Impatience in determining the class status of these people must be avoided lest errors should be made which lead to their dissatisfaction. If any mistake is made, it must be corrected.

Liu Shao-ch'i

CHANG CH'I-TS'AI, one of the poorest individuals in the whole village, provided the first stumbling block to that nucleus of poor peasants who set out to classify the whole village in March.

The group had little trouble just so long as they dealt with typical cases. Heads of families had only to make the briefest kind of report before they were unanimously declared to be poor peasants or middle peasants. Consequently, during the first two or three days of the proceedings some 40 families were classed without controversy and most of those who were declared to be poor were invited to participate in classifying those who followed them.

When they got to Ch'i-ts'ai, however, the peasants disagreed sharply. The difficulty stemmed from the fact that he had never owned even a fraction of an acre of land. Furthermore, he had never worked on the land for others. All his life he had labored as a builder of houses. On the wages thus earned he had raised two sons and a daughter. A second daughter he had given away as a child bride during the famine year. After the birth of his fourth child his wife had died.

In the distributions of 1945–1946, Ch'i-ts'ai had received almost five acres of land, a donkey, one third of a cart, and many hundredweight of grain. This was enough to make him a middle peasant in 1948. His neighbors all agreed on that. What they found hard to decide was, what had been his class before liberation?

"His class was bare poor," volunteered several peasants after hearing Chang's report.

"But there is no such class as 'bare poor,' " protested Little Li, the work team cadre sitting in on the meeting. "There are hired laborers who own no land and work for wages on the land of others; there are village workers who also own no land but have skills such as carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, and weaving; but there is no such thing as a class of 'bare poor.' "

The peasants, however, could not conceive of a way of life without land. To live without land was to live in a state of perpetual disaster. Anyone who had no land was "bare poor" and the sooner he acquired land the better. To set up a separate class of people who owned nothing and call them workers did not make sense.

The specific skill possessed by Ch'i-ts'ai also confused the issue. The peasants found it difficult to separate the man from his trade and arrive at the common category "worker." If he was not simply "bare poor," he was a housebuilder. But housebuilders could hardly constitute a class. Could his wife be called a housebuilder too? Could his children be called housebuilders? It seemed that only the person who practiced the trade could be classed according to that trade and hence be called a worker, if worker he had to be. The rest of his family should be something else.

When Little Li repeated his argument the peasants "gave up the gun" and agreed to call Ch'i-ts'ai a village worker, but it was quite clear that very few understood what this meant.

Another worker, Chang Huan-ch'ao, the blacksmith, posed an even greater puzzle. Some peasants wanted to call this hot-tempered, swarthy-complexioned man an exploiter because he did such poor work and charged so much for it.

"He's a middle peasant," said one neatly dressed woman with a reputation as an amorous widow. She spat out the words "middle peasant" as if they bore some sort of stigma. "He's a middle peasant because he earns good money as a blacksmith, and besides his work is no good. Last year he cheated me. He charged me an awful price but the work was no good and even the iron was poor. He exploited me."

"He's not skillful; we all know that," said a grey-bearded elder. "But if you don't want to be exploited by him you can always call in others to do the work. It's different with the landlords. With them you have no choice. You pay rent or you starve. But with Huan-ch'ao, if you don't like his work you can always take your job elsewhere."

"Go ahead, say what you think," said Chang himself, scowling

darkly. "Your opinions are very good and I would be the last to get angry."

"Truth is," said a second widow, "the tools you make are no good. You really should improve your workmanship."

"I accept your criticism," said Huan-ch'ao, desperately trying to hold back his rising temper. He knew that to explode now would land him in the middle-peasant category for sure.

"He's never been a skillful blacksmith," the grey-bearded man said again. "But if you say that for this reason he exploits you, then all blacksmiths must become very gloomy indeed."

Finally Yuan-lung, a young neighbor of Huan-ch'ao's, proposed a solution. "He's a poor peasant," he said with an air of finality. Several pipe-smoking cronies of the speaker hastened to back up this idea, but the women still looked doubtful.

"If you can't decide now, we'll discuss it later," suggested Little Li, but this suggestion won no more support than the other.

The League members finally agreed that since Huan-ch'ao had always owned a little land he should be called a poor peasant. This solution had one added advantage. It avoided the mysterious category of "worker."

In the case posed by Huan-ch'ao the peasants confronted a basic problem of economic theory. Their dispute arose from the obvious fact that the work done by different individuals, whether judged by the quantity or by the quality of the output, is not equal. In spite of this, wages and prices tend to standardize, a reflection of the socially necessary labor time required to turn out any given piece of goods. But to arrive at the concept of socially necessary labor time required a breadth of experience and a level of abstract reasoning that could hardly be expected of the peasants of Long Bow at this time. What they saw was a poor craftsman asking for the same return on his labor as a good craftsman, and this smacked to them of exploitation.

Ch'i Yun could hardly restrain her chuckles as she explained to me the give and take over Huan-ch'ao, the blacksmith. That a skilled worker could exploit the people who hired him was a startling idea to anyone with a Marxist outlook, and she marveled at the ingenuity of those peasants who had thought it up. She grossly underestimated their inventiveness, however, for on the very next day they found exploitation in an even more unlikely place—in the relation between a widow and her lover.

There lived in the village a lean old peasant named Wang who had long been in love with, or at least was wont to make love to, a rich peasant's widow named Yu Pu-ho. What little of value he possessed or

produced, Wang sooner or later brought to his prosperous and beloved mistress. While his own son and daughter-in-law hired out in order to eat, he skimmed everything edible from his homestead and sacrificed it on the altar of love. If his hen laid an egg, he offered it up. If the eggplant in his dooryard garden produced a firm purple fruit, he brought it around. He even neglected his own land to work long hours on that of the passionate widow.

When Wang's paramour came before the Provisional League, the spokesman for one group of women took the floor at once. "We think she is a double landlord. She exploits hired labor and she exploits her lover. She exploits everything he has, even the eggs from his hens."

At this everyone laughed except the prim black-clad widow herself and Old Wang. The latter, expecting the worst, looked anxiously around the room for some sign of disagreement.

Wang need not have been so concerned. The men did not agree with the women.

"If he's exploited, that's his lookout," shouted a well-groomed youngster from the warmest spot on the *k'ang*. "He wants it that way. What can we do about it?"

The "double landlord" classification was withdrawn.

Some peasants found still a third form of exploitation in the behavior of certain scoundrels or lumpen elements. Just as every Western city has its declassed people, its professional beggars, its small-time racketeers, and skid row derelicts, so every Chinese village once had its *yu min* or rascals, men and women without legitimate means of support, gamblers, "broken shoes" (prostitutes), narcotics peddlers, and drifters. In political tracts and mobilization speeches they rated only occasional mention, but in real life they were very much a part of every village scene.

In Long Bow the most notorious of these *yu min* was Wang T'ao-yuan. Of him people said, *"Hsiang yen pu li k'ou, shou tien pu li shou."* (The cigarette never leaves his lips, the flashlight never leaves his hand.) He had survived the lean years of the occupation on profits from heroin peddling, on brokerage fees earned selling other people's wives, and on the proceeds of the sale of his own wife, a record unsavory enough to have made him an object of universal scorn and hate.

Wang had reformed somewhat after receiving land in the distribution but he still shrank from hard work. Only a few weeks before he appeared to be classified he sent his nephew on a coal-hauling expedition instead of going himself. The temperature that week hovered around zero. The nephew did not know how to care for an animal

in such a frost. As a result, the one donkey owned by the family caught a chill, fell ill, and died.

In spite of all this, the peasants were curiously lenient with Wang T'ao-yuan. His broad comic face and genial disposition seemed to charm them. If nothing else he had always been a good companion. Because he knew how to laugh at himself and to make others laugh too, people found it difficult to stay angry at him for long.

But Cadre Liang, who passionately hated dope and purveyors of dope, was not willing to see T'ao-yuan get off so easily. Ignoring the economic criteria for judging the man's class, he slashed at the criminal nature of his past.

"Perhaps there are some who want to save face for T'ao-yuan," suggested Liang. "They had better think it over. Who led the entire family in smoking poison? If Long Bow had not been liberated they would all have died of starvation. And why did he sell the stuff? Why, in this whole village did no one else sell heroin but he? Let's ask why many an honest laborer among you has not yet *fanshened.* Then compare your condition with his. In the past, there were those who stood higher than the poor peasants. Now, after liberation they still have the upper hand. Why are such people always able to take advantage of every situation? Why? T'ao-yuan should be forced to explain his past."

Responding with alacrity to Liang's suggestion, T'ao-yuan said, "I began smoking heroin in the famine year and everything I had went to pay for it." There was a suggestion of languid sensuality in his stance and a puckish grin came and went on his face as he revealed his amoral past. "When I had nothing left I took my wife to Taiyuan. We were half dead from hunger before I finally found a buyer for her. He gave me six bags of millet. That sealed the deal."

Even to T'ao-yuan this sounded a little brutal so he added a twist to the tale that put the blame where it obviously belonged—on his wife.

"While I was out looking for work I had to leave my wife alone at the inn. She took up with another man. The master of the inn tipped me off and suggested that I get rid of her. He also found the buyer.

"I helped Wang Hsi-nan sell his wife too," continued T'ao-yuan, but once again he cleverly absolved himself. "Hsi-nan suggested it and even sought me out; he came over and over again. His wife was 'white, bright, and lovely,' but she was an idiot. She couldn't cook or sew. She couldn't even wipe her own behind. He got stuck with her and he wanted to get rid of her. He wouldn't stop pestering me so finally I undertook to sell her. I got nothing for my pains. Even after she was delivered I didn't have enough left over to buy heroin. I was

in terrible shape. But Hsi-nan played square. He at least found me some heroin.

"I know it is a bad thing to sell heroin. I exploited others. I preyed on the addicts. But now I have *fanshened.* I received land and property but I do not deserve any such thing. I know my *fanshen* was due to my poor brothers and I must thank them. I wish you would criticize me more."

"How do you feel about the death of your donkey?" asked a neighbor.

"I borrowed BRC 200,000* to buy the little bastard. Now it is dead. You can imagine yourself how I feel," said Wang, and he began to weep right there in front of the whole group.

"How do you feel about selling your wife?" asked several women.

Wang T'ao-yuan made no answer. He only wept more despondently.

"Well, you sold her, and now you weep about it!"

"No," said Wang. "I am not weeping for my bartered wife. I am weeping for my dead donkey."

To punish him they classed him as a middle peasant, but even this did not satisfy the women. "He ought to be classed as a landlord's running dog," said several. But they said it in a whisper because the men, on the whole, sympathized with Wang.

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Disagreements over the class status of various Long Bow residents pointed up the need for accurate standards of comparison. In preparatory conferences the work team cadres had studied such standards. Now, as the problems of differentiation grew more and more complicated, they introduced them to the peasants of the Provisional League.

The standards they introduced were roughly the same as those adopted by the Communist Party of China in 1933 when the first "Land to the Tiller" policy was carried out in the old revolutionary base at Juichin, Kiangsi.** Most of the poor peasants, after two years of campaigning, understood the standards fairly well, but as they applied them the deficiencies of the relatively simple concepts of 1933 became more and more apparent.

The Juichin standards, it turned out, were strong in defining the center of gravity of each rural class, that pole which determined the special nature of its typical members and their special relationship

* BRC (Border Region Currency): 1000 BRC = U.S. $1.00

** These standards are given in full in the basic definitions of Appendix C.

to the means of production. The standards were weak, however, in defining exact boundary lines between the classes. They lacked the precision necessary to distinguish between the many borderline, atypical cases that showed up so frequently in real life.

By far the most important dividing line was that between the middle peasants and the rich peasants. The Draft Agrarian Law of 1947 had made this the great divide between friend and enemy, between the people and their oppressors, between revolution and counter-revolution. It was absolutely essential that this line be clear and unequivocal. Yet here the Juichin documents were most ambiguous. In describing middle peasants the document said, "Some of the middle peasants practice a *small* amount of exploitation, but such exploitation is not of a *constant* character and the income therefrom does not constitute their *main* means of livelihood."

Anyone using these standards would have to know exactly what *small, constant,* and *main* meant in order to carry out the intent of the law.

In regard to the difference between poor peasants and middle peasants the same kind of difficulty arose. On this dividing line the Juichin document stated, "In general middle peasants need not sell their labor power but poor peasants have to sell their labor power for limited periods." Another sentence indicated that even middle peasants sometimes did sell their labor power. In order to make a precise determination, one would have to know what was meant by *in general* and *limited periods.*

As classification progressed, both the cadres and the peasants in Long Bow keenly felt the need for something more precise. This need was met, in part at least, by a set of supplementary regulations issued by the Central Committee in the fall of 1947. On the dividing line between middle and rich peasants these regulations stated that an income received from exploitation that was less than 15 percent of the gross was *small* and hence permissible for a middle peasant. Anything over that was considered *large* and enough to put the family over the line into the rich peasant category.

On the dividing line between middle and poor peasants, the regulations made clear that the labor power sold by middle peasants was mainly surplus labor power or the labor power of the children and old folks. Any family that consistently sold the labor power of its able-bodied adult members must ordinarily be classed as poor.

Another keenly felt need was for some definite base period. Was one to consider the present status of the family, the status several years back, or the status in the light of several generations? When left to themselves, the peasants of Long Bow tended to go back two

and even three generations. This was in accord with habits deeply ingrained in the Chinese people, habits which had much precedent in the culture of the past. Under the old imperial examination system, for example, candidates had to prove not only that they themselves were not representatives of some barred category (boatman, actor, prostitute, or other "wandering" type) but also that their parents and grandparents were free of any such taint. Settlers in Shantung whose parents or grandparents had migrated from Hopei still regarded themselves as Hopei people.

This concept of hereditary social status helped to explain the wide support given to the campaign against "feudal tails" which had so sharpened the struggle and broadened the revolutionary target in 1946. Yet such a concept could hardly be said to conform to conditions of modern life. The disintegration of traditional Chinese society under the impact of foreign conquest, commercial dumping, dynastic decline, civil war and famine had introduced such a mobility into social relations (most of it downward) that it was no longer realistic to think of tracing back even five years, not to mention a few generations.

In view of these facts, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party added to the supplementary regulations a section which strictly defined the base period to be used in making a determination of class status. In areas liberated after 1945 it was to be the three years prior to the liberation of the village. For the Fifth District of Lucheng County this meant the years 1943-1945. Each family was to be judged according to its economic position during those three years alone. The fact that a family had once been very wealthy, rented out land, or hired many laborers, made no difference to its class status if, during the three years of the base period, its able-bodied members earned their own living or a major portion of it by their own labor. Likewise, the fact that a man had once been a poor peasant made no difference at all if, during the base period, he had collected rents, hired laborers, or loaned out money at usurious interest rates.

By the same token, inherited wealth possessed by families who labored for a living during the base period could not be touched. It mattered not in the least what the source of any family's wealth might be. If the able-bodied members of that family earned their living by the sweat of their brow during the three years prior to the liberation of their village, they themselves were not rich peasants or landlords and could not legally be attacked or deprived of any property.

In brief, the reforms called for in the Draft Agrarian Law were to be based on class status, not class origin, on current means of livelihood, not on past privilege or past penury.