

## The Role of People's Communes in the Modernization of the Chinese Rural Landscape

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# The Role of People's Communes in the Modernization of the Chinese Rural Landscape

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## Introduction

China began to modernize as a response to challenges from the West in the 19th Century. Yet modernization in terms of industrialization and urbanization together with the necessary infrastructure such as transportation, education and social welfare only affected a few large cities along the coast or accessible waterways. The vast agricultural hinterland was hardly touched. Until 1949 it was still shackled by feudalism, tradition and absolute poverty. The rural sector had practically no means to fight against natural disasters, diseases, pests and illiteracy. In short it was a stagnant and degrading situation.

Today the rural landscape has been completely changed. Mechanical pumps, irrigation works, schools, clinics, hospitals and factories are common features in all communes. The people are now provided with the basic needs in life i.e. food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education and burial. For the first time in the long history of China is the strangle hold of tradition, superstition and illiteracy utterly broken. People are confident of themselves and of their future. The rural landscape is thus transformed not only in physical terms but even more so in spirit. A new society and a new man have emerged in China.

The theme of this paper is to study how the commune system works and in so doing hope to dispel some of the misgivings and wrong conceptions about the system. In brief the communes play the following roles in the rural modernization process:

- (a) mobilization of the unemployed and underemployed labour force for improving the land, building dykes and dams, digging irrigation channels, constructing roads and cultivating the land more intensively
- (b) diversification of economic activities from forestry, fisheries to animal husbandry within the agricultural sector and to small industries using agricultural raw materials
- (c) accumulation of capital for future developments
- (d) provision of essential social services particularly in the field of education and health and promoting social welfare

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- (e) allowing planning at grass root level with emphasis on maximum exploitation of local resources to meet local needs
- (f) to accelerate the evolution of a classless society in which social inequalities are reduced to a minimum and there is a high level of political and ideological consciousness and a deep concern for the well-being of every citizen.

### **Problems facing the Chinese peasants**

For centuries the Chinese peasants, as peasants in all other countries with an unjust social system, find themselves between the pincers of natural disasters and exploitation by landlords and money-lenders. The common natural disasters are flood and droughts. On top of these are insect pests, which would destroy wholly or partially what might have been a good harvest and diseases which affect the health and well-being of the peasants. In not so serious cases, the farmer's productivity is curtailed. But in serious cases, illness is the beginning of a miserable end, for more often than not a tenant farmer has no ready cash for medical care and has to borrow money from his landlord or a money-lender. From then on he is bogged down in a quagmire of debt, the very high compound interests see to that he remains almost for ever in this situation.

For instance, a farmer takes out a loan of 30 silver dollars. By the time of his death he has not been able to pay back even the interest in full. When the debt is passed on to his son, the principal has already snowballed to 170 silver dollars.<sup>1)</sup>

Floods and droughts have ravaged vast areas in China yearly. According to records North and Central China had almost one drought and one flood every year from 1644 to 1908 and South China one drought and one flood every 3 years.<sup>2)</sup>

Most floods in China are due either to excessive rainfall or to the breaching of dykes. The latter event is especially serious since many rivers particularly those in the north, have so built up their beds by sedimentation that they flow between dykes above the level of surrounding countryside. In flatter areas of the north, flood water covers a huge area and may stay for months. In some districts drainage to the sea may require a year or even three years. In certain locations floodwater remains until it is evaporated. Thus floods not only destroy crops in the fields, delayed drainage may also prevent the next planting. Needless to say millions perished either through drowning, starvation or epidemics.

Drought is often more tragic than flood, for it affects plains and hills alike and often is of wider extent than floods. The province most subject to droughts are Hopei, Honan, Shansi, Shensi and Shantung. In these regions 100 out of 216

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1) *China Reconstructs* (1974): supplement, Vol. 23 No. 1 p. 13

2) Cressey, G.B. (1955): *Land of the 500 Million*, p. 93

greatest droughts in China occur. In 1942-43 a great drought in North China Plain turned vast areas of farmland into barren fields. In Honan alone three million lost their lives.<sup>3)</sup>

But the elements are not always hard on the farmers. Occasionally, good weather conditions ensure good harvests. Yet, the unfortunate thing is that the farmer is not duly rewarded for his labour. Being tenant farmers, or the majority of the peasantry are, they have to pay up to 50-70% of the crop as rent. This means even in good years they have just enough to get by and little is left over for soil or seed improvement or savings. In bad years, including illness and death in the family they are all without exception in debt. Accounts of sales of one's wife or daughters to meet the deadline of repayment of debts are very common in rural China before 1949.<sup>4)</sup>

These two strangle holds of natural disaster and exploitation by landlords and money-lenders keep the majority of the farmers on the poverty line. It is no wonder that numerous peasant revolts have repeatedly occurred in the Chinese history. Of these the more well-known ones are the Tai Ping Rebellion led by Hung Hsiu Chuan in 1851 and Autumn Harvest Revolt in Hunan led by Mao Tse-Tung in 1927. Unfortunately instead of trying to solve the problems of exploitation and the plight of the farmers, the authorities suppressed them ruthlessly as if they were mutineers or bandits.

Apart from a social structure which tends to favour the wealthy, the landed gentry and the bureaucrats at the expense of the farmers, there are basic weakness in the rural economy. These are small farm size and fragmentation. According to Han Suyin less than 20% of the peasantry owned land up to 3 acres, 80% farmed less than 2 acres of which 70% was rented land. Even with good weather conditions and without being exploited such a farm size can never lead to a life of plenty. For comparison the average size was 77 acres in England and 167 in the U.S.A. in 1939. It can be seen that an American or British farmer is far better off materially than his counterpart in China. It is a rule rather than an exception that with a good harvest, a Chinese farmer has just enough provisions for his family and himself and perhaps with a little savings. In bad years he is certain to be in debt. Under such conditions, improvement for tools, seed, irrigation and application of chemical fertilizers are out of the question. Being unable to break the vicious circle,

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3) Chiang Lei (1974): "Three Years' Bad Droughts, Three Years' Fine Crops" *China Reconstructs*, Vol. 23, No. 2 p. 2

4) Spencer, B. (1954): *Desert Hospitality in China*, p. 75-76. In this particular case a young peasant girl of age 14 was offered a price of 20,000 dollars which due to galloping inflation worthed a little more than one shilling. For comparison a simple three course dinner at a Western style hotel in Shanghai cost 250,000 dollars in 1947.

diminishing productivity results.

Fragmentation of land has its root deep in the Chinese tradition *i.e.* the equal division of one's property among one's sons after death. Argument for this practice is that it is a fair way at least in theory to settle family disputes. It mainly affects landlords, wealthy peasants and middle peasants. The poor peasants are all tenant farmers and hence possess no land. Nonetheless, they are most affected since they have to work the land themselves. Fragmentation results in the division of land into tiny plots causing difficulties in management on the one hand and on the other constant disputes over irrigation water and other problems among farmers. Moreover, paths among fields occupying up to 5% of the total arable land, which if there were no fragmentation, can be put to better use.

### **Solutions of agrarian problems by the KMT (Kuo-min-tang)**

All the governments in China before the KMT did practically nothing to solve the problems of the farmers mentioned earlier. It is wishful thinking to expect the landed gentry and the officials who are landlords themselves to initiate reforms at the expense of their own interests.

At the beginning of this century Dr. Sun advocated "land to the tiller" and related land reforms in the Chinese village. His ideas were good and sound in principle. Unfortunately, due to inefficiency, corruption and collusion with the landlords, the KMT failed to carry out the long awaited land reforms on a nationwide basis. Only piecemeal measures were taken in some areas, and even these were much water-downed by the self-interests of the officials who were closely connected with the landlord class. So the bottle might be different the medicine remains the same. From 1911 to 1949, a span of 38 years, the plights of the farmers hardly improved. It is after 1949 that agriculture in China began to see new changes which greatly affect the welfare of the peasants and completely alter the rural landscape.

### **Reorganization of rural China by the communist**

The agricultural policy of China after 1949 has three main objectives:

- (a) to control and improve the rural environment so as to increase production in agriculture
- (b) guarantee the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education and burial facilities to all farmers
- (c) a higher standard of living for all.

The first step the People's Government did to bring about these objectives was to transform fundamentally the basic structure of the rural society. The means

to this end was land reform during 1949–1952.

Land reform was carried out in all red bases or communist territories before 1949 and proved to be successful. From 1949–1952 this was operated on a nation-wide scale and with much publicity and thoroughness. In brief the landlords were brought to trial in mass meetings and their lands and properties redistributed. But only those who had committed serious crimes were liquidated, the rest were just reduced to original farmers and had to earn their livings through labour like everyone else.

The Western press reported that countless millions of landlords were killed in the land reforms. This is, of course, gross exaggeration. The fact is most of the landlords survived the revolution.<sup>5)</sup> Naturally in a series of revolutionary floods that swept across the length and breadth of China, extremities were inevitable. To put the whole situation in its correct perspective it should be pointed out that the KMT killed 12,000 workers in a space of 3 weeks in 1946 in Shanghai alone or 100,000 communist sympathisers were slaughtered in a single province of Kiangsi.<sup>6)</sup> Yet these facts were conveniently overlooked by most of the Western press. Looking back it is true to say that the landlords have not died in vain, for their liquidation enabled the setting up of a new agricultural society in China.

As arable lands were limited, those without lands were given the means of production such as ploughs and draft animals. Then a situation arose in which some farmers had land but without the means of production and *vice versa*. It is here the education value of land reform become apparent and is overlooked by anti-communist critics. The farmers were made to realise that to get rid of the landlords and to have their own land or means of production would not improve their lot, unless a united front was organized to tackle their problems.

### Collectivisation

This led to the formation of mutual aid teams comprising of 6 to 16 households in 1953. Here labour, farm animals, farm tools were pooled together to make the maximum use of the meagre resources while retaining individual ownership of land and means of production. Later these were expanded into elementary co-operatives and advanced cooperatives. In 1957, 740,000 advanced cooperatives existed. A significant change in this structure was that individual ownership was abolished and owners of land or means of production become joint owners or members of a cooperative on an equal basis. Payment was determined by work-days or work points which vary according to the nature of work. The number of

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5) Hinton, W. (1972): *Turning Points in China*, p. 29

6) Buchanan, K. (1970): *The Transformation of the Chinese Earth*, p. 120

households increased from 32 to 168 in an advanced cooperative. Fields were then large enough to be effectively ploughed by animal or tractors and could be better managed. Also there was sufficient manpower to tackle projects like construction of irrigation canals, drainage channels or small dams. All these were beyond the capacity of elementary cooperatives, let alone individual farmers.

### **People's communes**

In 1958 the year of the Great Leap Forward, a significant step forward was made in Chinese agriculture. This was the formation of people's communes all over China. In fact this movement began spontaneously in the merging of certain collectives in Honan province. 18 months before the communes became an official programme in 1958. In six months 26,000 communes were set up. By 1962 these having been found to be too large, were divided into 74,000 communes.

Communes vary greatly in size, from a few thousand people to as many as 50,000. They also differ greatly in wealth those in the high rainfall and more fertile areas being several times better off than those in poor lands with low rainfall.

A commune is an economic, social and political unit collectively owned and run by the people. It not only organizes agriculture and other production, but also caters to the educational, medical, welfare and cultural needs of its inhabitants.

There are three levels of organization within a commune: the commune itself, production brigades and production teams, with the production team as the basic accounting unit. A commune is managed by a committee, whereas production brigades and production teams are headed by leaders, all elected by the masses. A production team owns and manages its land, draft animals, small farm machinery and organizes the labour input of its members. It handles its income distribution independently, bears its losses and keeps most of the profits.

Undertakings beyond the capital and manpower resources of a production team becomes the responsibility of the production brigades. These include small reservoirs and other small water conservation projects, workshops processing farm and sideline products, orchards, schools and health centers.

Tasks beyond the capacities of production brigades are then managed by the whole commune. Among these are tractor stations, hydro-electric power installations, irrigation and drainage works, farm machinery manufacture and repair shops, forest farms, stud farms, experimental farms, middle schools and hospitals.

### **Income distribution**

The question of income distribution has always been a puzzle to economists and China-watchers in the West. How can people be happy with a meagre income?

How can people be made to work without adequate material incentive? How equitable can the distribution of income be since not every one is of the same skill and doing the same job? They believe that these are questions no satisfactory answers could be found. However, those who have seen the communes at work are convinced that these are no longer problems.<sup>7)</sup>

Since the production team is the basic accounting unit, income is distributed at this level. In so doing the interests of the state, the collective (i.e. the team) and the individual are taken into consideration. There are virtually hundreds of thousands of production teams in China and it can be certain that variations exist in the pattern of income distribution. However, these variations do not invalidate the general picture. Of the total gross income about 5-7% is set for agricultural tax, 24% to cover production and management costs, 15% is set for public accumulation funds which consist of reserve and welfare funds, and 57% is distributed among the members. This also includes the distribution of grains. Therefore one is paid both in cash and in kind. Those unable to work due to old age or sickness are taken care of by the welfare fund and are given free grains. The principle is that no one in the production team should be allowed to starve due to physical hardship.

It has often been said that such a system can only encourage laziness. But it is surprising to find how much people have learned to be self-reliant and unless there is absolute necessity for help, they will not ask for it. In the case of Tachai brigade, members purposely declined to accept any outside aids. They ardently applied the belief: Man's will, not heaven decides, and overcome tremendous difficulties. They have since become the model of agriculture in China and Tachai spirit the ideal all other communes attempt to emulate. On the other hand, since members of a production team are so well acquainted with one another, any pretentious case of hardship will soon be found out. As material incentive is minimal, there are no unwholesome competition between individuals in the way we understand it in the West. In practice, there is much give and take. Exchange of knowledge is free in every sense of the word. The old and the experienced teach the young, the strong helps the weak. This is true at all level, communes, brigades, production teams and individual alike. There is only one objective and that is a better future for all.

An understanding of how work is being evaluated is essential to the question of income distribution. Formerly each item of work was given a certain value. For instance, a certain number of work days' pay for each job. During the years 1963-65 this system developed into a piece work scheme. The task of evaluation

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7) Myrdal, J. and Kessle, G. (1973): *China: The Revolution Continued*, chapter 11, p. 79-83

Hinton, W. (1972): *op. cit.* chapter 6, p. 87-104



and distribution fell into the hands of cadres. This led to favoritism and opportunism. As there was a bonus paid when the planned production was exceeded, people were enticed to lower the planned target for production and obtained extra income in this manner. This self-interest was against the interest of the commune and certain people could siphon off part of the money for investment for personal gains.

However, after the Great Cultural Revolution of 1966 a new system of income distribution was introduced whereby all members whether working or not, should enjoy basic security in the form of grain. Income from work was additional to this basic guarantee.

But people's ability and attitudes to work differ. This has to be taken into account at the general meeting when the value of work is decided. In this evaluation physical strength is not the only criterion, but other factors such as experience, thriftiness with collective property and political awareness also. The evaluation is not made by any committee or group of experts, but the masses. At the meeting each person gives his own assessment of his work points, which are then accepted or adjusted by the meeting after thorough discussions.

It is clear, if this system is to be workable, members of production teams, production brigades and communes must not place their own interests above those of others. It is here that we realize the slogans 'serve the people' 'be self-less' are not merely empty words, but have immense education value.

### **Mobilization of labour**

An age-old problem facing Chinese agriculture has been unemployment and underemployment. This was inevitable because of the small size of the farm-holdings and the pressure of population on land. As a result there was not enough work in the rural sector to absorb an increasing population. People hence drifted into large cities such as Shanghai, Hankow and Canton to seek employment, creating slums and numerous social problems. A common sight in pre-1949 China was the omnipresence of beggars in the Chinese cities.

An effective way to solve this problem is to vitalize the rural economy by

(a) tapping the huge reservoir of labour or as the Chinese put it, turning labour into capital and utilize it in water conservation and irrigation projects as well as afforestation

(b) diversification into small and medium scale industries to meet the needs of agriculture e.g. fertilizer and processing factories.

The role of the commune is to organize this surplus labour so that it can be deployed when and where it is needed most. Anticomunist critics have termed this well-disciplined labour force as enslaved labour. They maintained without

giving substantial evidence that members of a commune were forced to work 12 to 15 hours a day and live on inferior and insufficient food. There was widespread resentment and resistance. Before joining the commune many peasants burned their farm tools and ate their poultry and other animals as a demonstration of their protest.<sup>8)</sup>

Others have envisaged a series of problems such as organizational, leadership, social, economical and technical confronting the commune system and have serious doubts that these could be solved.<sup>9)</sup>

One attack frequently launched on the system is that it destroys the family as an institution, and with it vanish all the good qualities of a traditional Chinese family. Wives were separated from their husbands so that they could devote more time to collective work. Babies were put in nurseries so that mothers could work in the fields. Mass dining halls were established so as to achieve collectivization of private life.<sup>10)</sup> These are reports compiled from refugee stories or rightwing newspapers based in Hong Kong or Taiwan and are widely circulated in the west.

However, in the opinions of those who know China well, these reports are largely unfounded.<sup>11)</sup> It is important to note that it has never been the intention of the Chinese leadership to antagonise the peasants whose support they urgently seek. Admittedly, the Chinese made mistakes in calculation and in cases carried out their programme with over-enthusiasm e.g. the despatch of huge labour force in the construction of roads and dams, etc. when labour is urgently needed in the fields. While the roads and dams might be finished before schedule, crop harvests to some extent have been affected. But the Chinese were quick to learn from their mistakes and these were rectified with haste, simply because China is so heavily

8) Liu, H.C. (1971): "A Comparison of the People's Commune System on Mainland China and the Land to the tiller program on Taiwan," in *Collected Documents of the First Sino-American Conference on Mainland China*, Institute of International Relations, Republic of China, p. 705

9) Davies, I.G. (1971): "Living Conditions and the Communes", chapter 7, p. 72-85 in Johnston J.A. and Maslyn, W. (ed) *The New China*

10) Mehnert, K. (1964): *Peking and Moscow*, p. 394-395 also Davies (1971): *ibid*, p. 74

11) In the past and especially after Nixon's visit to China a number of scholars and observers in the West were admitted into China. Some of them were even allowed to work in China. Among these are Andrew Watson of Glasgow University, Anna Louise Strong, noted American journalist and Prof. Chiao of Yale University. Their views on the communes are to be found in the following sources: Andrew Watson's comments on family life in a commune in Honan, BBC Lectures on China chaired by Richard Harris, Lecture No. 10; Strong (1974): "Some Closing Comments on Chinese Communes" in Milton, D., Milton, N. and Schurmann F. (ed) *The China Reader: People's China*, p. 27-39

Chiao, H.S. (1973): "Impression of a Visit to China, " *The Seventies*, No. 45 p. 18-25 (article in Chinese)

dependent on agriculture that she could not afford to ignore any deteriorating situation resulting from a wrong policy.

Despite the setbacks and mistakes, it must be said that the commune system is responsible for China's agricultural progress. Water conservation projects have minimized and in some cases totally eliminated the menace of droughts and floods. In fact by 1966 half of the arable land or 60 million hectares have been brought under irrigation, the pre-1949 figure was 10 million.

One of the most startling examples of this mass mobilization of labour is the construction of the Red Flag Canal in Honan's Linshien County. The work took 10 years, and involved millions of workers. It entailed cutting through 1250 hilltops, drilling 134 tunnels and building 150 aqueducts. The total length is 2,500 km and it irrigates a total area of 40,000 hectares.<sup>12)</sup>

In loese land soil conservation and land improvement have been carried out under the direction of communes. In Ninghsien county, over 20,000 hectares of trees and grass were planted on barren slopes. In the past ten years, the county completed 32,000 hectares of strip and terraced fields and checked soil erosion over 890 sq. km.<sup>13)</sup>

### **Rural industrialization**

In line with the policy of 'walking on two legs' and to achieve self-reliance and self-sufficiency as economic units, small and medium size industries are developed in the communes. In the early stages much emphases were given on the production of iron and steel from 'backyard furnaces'. China-watchers in Hong Kong were quick to report the poor quality of the products and the resultant wastage. They predicted on economical grounds the inevitable collapse of the programme. It is important to note that the Chinese never meant to produce high quality steel by this crude means. Their aims are:

- (a) to involve the peasants in the active participation of rural industrialization
- (b) to teach and show the peasants they can produce some simple yet useful farmtools themselves and therefore install the spirit of self-reliance and confidence among them.

The education values of these backyard furnaces thus far out-weigh their economic significance. They actually marked the dawning of industrialization in rural China.

Since the 1960s significant advances in rural industries have been made, both

12) *China Reconstructs* (1974): vol. 23, No. 8 p. 17

13) *China Reconstructs* (1974): Vol. 23, No. 4 p. 24

in terms of range and quality. In general, three kinds of local industry exist. The first category includes industries which produce iron and steel, cement, chemical fertilizers, energy and machinery. The second category comprises of agricultural machinery repair and manufacturing. The third category is made up of plants processing agricultural and side-line products such as flour milling, oil pressing, cotton ginning and yarn spinning.

A concrete example is the setting up of a small paper mill with a daily production of two tons of brown wrapping paper in Tsunhua County, Hopei Province in 1971.<sup>14)</sup> Straw from rice, wheat and sorghum sticks were used as raw materials. Straw had been replaced by bricks and cement as material for local buildings, and alternative uses had to be found so as to eliminate waste. In this instance the principle of maximum exploitation of local resources to meet local needs has been put into practice.

#### Education and social services

However, communes are more than economic and political units. Within the communes are schools, technical institutes, hospitals and health clinics to cater for the welfare and educational needs of their members. According to Han Suyin literacy before 1949 in the countryside was at its highest five per cent. Today, no person under 40 in the communes is illiterate. This means that well over sixty per cent of the total population of rural China has now become literate. In 1949 no peasant knew anything about scientific experimentation, in 1966 a pool of six million peasant-scientists not only know about soil and seed improvement but could carry out experiments, hold conferences and pass on their knowledge at scientific meetings.<sup>15)</sup>

Before 1949 only a few could receive medical attention when became ill. Western medicine was almost unheard of. Complications in child birth would certainly mean death for the mother.<sup>16)</sup> Now the presence of "barefoot doctors" ensures that every member of a commune will be given proper medical attention. Serious cases will be attended by specialists at very low cost. Due to increasing knowledge in sanitation mosquitoes and flies have almost been exterminated. In fact the significance of "barefoot doctors" in the curing and prevention of diseases in rural China can hardly be overstressed. What is even more important is that the communes are not only centres where these medical services are freely

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14) Sigurdson, J. (1972): "Rural Industry - A Traveller's View", *China Quarterly*, No. 50, p. 315-332

15) Han, Suyin (1970): *China in the year 2001*, p. 49

16) ———, (1968): *Birdless Summer China: Autobiography and History*, p. 161

available, but also training grounds for thousands of barefoot doctors of the future.<sup>17)</sup> As a result the countryside is a much healthier environment to live in and work. All these social benefits are not reflected in the GNP. For this reason China-watchers who only attempt to see China in terms of income per capita, or tons of steel produced refuse to concede that China has made tremendous advances since the Great Leap Forward. To be sure China's production or consumption per capita will always be small, because of her huge population. China still has a long way to go compared with leading Western industrial powers. But we must judge China in terms of developing nations and even more important in terms of her past. Then we shall realize that China has achieved more in less than 25 years than what she has been able to in centuries.

### Modernization of the human landscape

Even the harsh critics would have to admit that the Chinese have succeeded in controlling and improving their physical environment. But modernization is much more than the building of dams, schools, clinics and hospitals. These superficial features will degenerate and cease to function properly if there are no fundamental changes at grass roots levels. In other words there must be changes in people's outlook and relationship towards the society and as individuals. That is why Mao Tse-tung insists on putting politics in command. Unless man learns to be selfless, self-reliant and believes that material immensity is not the only goal in life, it is difficult to stop capitalism from creeping in by the back door, thus preventing China from becoming a real socialist nation.

In the 19th Century man was still to a large extent at the mercy of Nature and diseases. In addition certain groups of men were at the mercy of other groups because of feudalism and exploitation. In the 20th Century man through scientific inventions is far less a victim of Nature. But he is less successful against an unjust social system, because some ethnic groups most benefit from such a system are doing everything possible to maintain the status quo. Therefore, a society can be modern in terms of facilities available, but degenerating in spirit. The Colony of Hong Kong is a good example.<sup>18)</sup> On the other hand a society can be modern in spirit but apparently lacking in modern facilities. China perhaps is one of the

17) Yu Yang, (1974): "An Army of New Doctors," *China Reconstructs* vol. 23, No. 4, p. 7-10. In Yungfu County of Kwangsi province there are 222 barefoot doctors and 1600 health workers to 180,000 peasants, giving a ratio of one doctor per 900 inhabitants. This figure compares favourably with that for certain parts of Western Australia. For instance at Kambalda, a mining town in the Eastern Goldfields, there is only one doctor to 5,000 inhabitants. (The West Australian, August 27, 1974)

18) SUM, K.S. (1973): "Hong Kong - Anatomy of a Crown Colony," *Gazette*, Western Australian Institute of Technology, vol. 6, No. 10 p. 35-40

few countries that befit this category.

In terms of income per capita, or calories intake per day or consumer goods per household, China's ranking must be low compared with many nations. But in terms of other social advancement such as guaranteeing the basic needs in life, elimination of vice crime, vandalism, violence and equality between the sexes China is far ahead than many countries. For the first time in China's long history is the shackle of exploitation, poverty, illiteracy and backwardness utterly broken. With this new liberation come the search for identity and the birth of a new spirit. The Chinese today have a new sense of unity and purpose which were absent in pre-1949 China. They understand what socialism can do for their country, and are striving hard to achieve this objective. The road to this goal is full of obstacles as evidenced from the three-anti, five-anti campaigns and more recently the Cultural Revolution. But they are confident of their correct approach, and they believe their society can be and will be completely transformed.

### Conclusions

Despite the existence of private plots and limited free market in rural China, it cannot be denied that the communes have succeeded in solving China's major agrarian problems. They have stood the test of time especially the critical years of 1959-61. When China experienced severe floods and droughts. Today China is the only country with a huge population in the Third World that is self sufficient in food. In fact China's food production reported to be increasing at 4% per annum, is still ahead of her population growth which is 2%.<sup>19)</sup> The Chinese countryside is liberated from sufferings caused by diseases, natural disasters, inflation and exploitation. With increasing production of chemical fertilizers, the agriculture foundation will be strengthened even further. From 1962 onwards there is no evidence of malnutrition and famine in China,<sup>20)</sup> despite rumours and speculations from China-watchers in Hong Kong. It is apparent that the commune system has resuscitated and modernized China. For this reason it will remain a permanent feature of the Chinese rural landscape in the years to come.

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19) Perkins, D.H. (1973): "Looking Inside China. An Economic Reappraisal", *Problems of Communism*, vol. 22, May/June p. 4

20) see Dr. Wilder Penfield's interview of March 10, 1963 published in *Yale Reports* quoted in Chang Hsin-Hai (1965) *America and China*, p. 32-33 Dr. Penfield is one of Canada's leading neurologists, who visited China shortly before 1963.