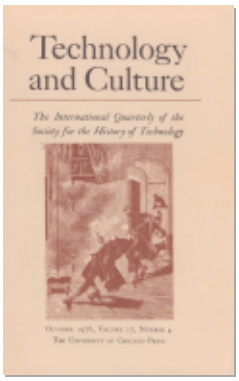
China's Modern Economy in Historical Perspective ed. by Dwight H. Perkins (review)



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faced. Growing difficulties in moving to other towns may imply that conditions in Carmaux were not atypical, but the point is not pursued; and existing studies of glassblowing in Germany and England suggest in fact that the Carmaux case as presented here might be unusual, that technical change, though carefully controlled by manufacturers, was elsewhere more gradually introduced. One has here the classic problem of the local study: how many more do we need to find a generalizable pattern?

And is the pattern indicated even genuinely applicable to Carmaux? In her one stab at generalization, early in the book, Scott notes that mechanization leads artisans to protest. It did in Carmaux, just as it did earlier with unnamed crafts in the July Monarchy. But as to the July Monarchy, this is factually inaccurate. The artisans most enraged in the cities were not being technologically displaced. They were undergoing new pressures at work, suffering from somewhat more impersonal direction; and they *feared* machines. On examination, a similarly subtle condition prevailed in Carmaux. New workers dominated the scene after 1895, but as much because strikers left or were driven out as because new machines ruled the plant; old techniques persisted well after 1900. If only 13 percent of glassworkers marrying in 1895–1906 had fathers in the same trade, down from a peak of 40 percent in 1876–85, this was still a large minority, actually larger than the 11 percent of 1866–76. Fear, not displacement, was the activating force in Carmaux.

Scott presents us all the facts we need but suggests an oversimple interpretation of technological causation. Her focus on a final agony, protest and a largely abortive cooperative, can be misleading, if appealing to intellectual Luddites. Granting the importance of the protest event, the book stands as a mark of the success of adaptation to a new technology, a success enhanced by the gradualness of change. The new workers, if unstudied here, seem to have adjusted. The old workers got out, and their sons fled the trade with honor, usually rising to white-collar positions. If the book's prose leads us to mourn a dying trade, its data suggest a more complex judgment of the impact of ongoing industrial change.

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China's Modern Economy in Historical Perspective. Edited by Dwight H. Perkins. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975. Pp. xiv+302. $13.85.

The nine conference papers collected in this volume probe the nature of modern China's economy within the framework of the

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Chinese historical context. As the editor points out in his introduction, in trying to reach a valid assessment of Chinese economic development, one must not overlook the factors in the complex, highly organized traditional economy that have contributed positively to the modern era, while weighing the continuities and discontinuities of the historical process. Thus, through diverse approaches, the authors of these papers have sought to present a pattern of the internal dynamics of the Chinese economy, and in this they have largely succeeded.

Written with care by specialists in their respective fields, the papers may be divided into three general groups, according to their specific focuses. The largest group consists of technical analyses of the pattern of the Chinese economy in the 20th century: "Surplus and Stagnation in Modern China" (Carl Riskin) and "Growth and Changing Structure of China's Twentieth-Century Economy" (Dwight Perkins); while microanalysis of particular industries is offered in "The Growth of a Modern Cotton Textile Industry and the Competition with Handicrafts" (Kang Chao) and "The Growth of Producer Industries 1900–71" (Thomas C. Rawski). Robert Dernberger's "Role of the Foreigner in China's Economic Development, 1840–1949," deals with an issue that has been much discussed in recent years. The second group of papers consists of two studies of the institutions and practices in the technological and economic networks of traditional times; in "Skills and Resources in Late Traditional China," Mark Elvin discusses the evolutionary pattern of Chinese technology between the 14th and 19th centuries, while the commodity distribution system is investigated by John C. H. Fei in "The Standard Market of Traditional China." The last two chapters of the book, constituting the third segment, are "Cooperation in Traditional Agriculture and Its Implications for Team Farming in the People's Republic of China," by Ramon H. Myers, and "On the Yenan Origins of Current Economic Policies," by Peter Schran, which demonstrate more specifically the link between past practices and contemporary policies.

The authors' findings should serve to caution those who might be inclined to pass facile judgment on the progress of developing economies, for two basic requirements of development —technological advancement and the availability of surplus capital —are the underlying themes running through these papers, and China's experience would seem to demonstrate that the transformation from a traditional to a modern economy would of necessity involve the broader aspects in the values, policies, and institutional relationships within the society that go far beyond the mere transfer of technology. The problems that confronted China in its modernization process, for example, included not only that of technological lag but also those that touched the broad questions of the use of surplus capital (provided there was indeed sufficient surplus for sustained development), which in turn impinged on the system of social priorities, and the problem of linkage among foreign capital, urban

industrialization, and transformation of the rural sector of the economy.

The actuality of technological change touched upon several aspects that were partly economic and partly historico-cultural. Improvements in the looms for handweaving of cotton cloth (Chao, pp. 185 ff.), for instance, involved an adoption of new techniques in the early 20th century for the purpose of achieving greater productivity through upgrading existing implements. Yet basically this was but another manifestation of the traditional practice of introducing improvements in the skills and techniques in order to meet a relatively short-range need, an approach characterized by Mark Elvin as "*too* practical" (p. 108, Elvin's italics), so that in the long run it only contributed to inhibiting a technological breakthrough. Even though that approach had been conducive to a large degree of stability in traditional times, in the modern era it could only slow the rate of growth.

It is indeed difficult to pass value judgments on the process of modernization itself. Would it have been more desirable, for example, to encourage the adoption of partially modern techniques, with the implicit continuation of much of the traditional structure, leading to a time-consuming, undirected economic transformation? Or would it be more productive, in terms of the entire economy, to bring about changes by more drastic but coordinated measures such as the policy that brought about a clear-cut decline of the handweaving industry since 1950, in the midst of a total restructuring of not only the economy but of the social system as well? In the case of the latter alternative, to what extent could one consider the ending of traditional techniques "premature elimination" (Chao, p. 201), and what is the precise point at which a technological changeover would be natural because the correct degree of maturity had been reached?

Similarly, institutional continuities are an important factor in considering the pattern of economic change. In the traditional Chinese economy, the local community and the state bureaucracy were ever-present influences bearing upon economic activities and decision making. The development of the producer industries highlights the correlation between government policy and the growth of these industries, which, because of the need for heavy capital investment, were difficult for private efforts to carry out beyond a certain level, and it took nearly half a century for a Chinese sector to arrive at the point where import substitution was within sight (Rawski, p. 205). More government support in this direction could have presented different results. In the agricultural sector, on the other hand, the peasant tradition of cooperation is shown to be a rural heritage from which the policy planners after 1950 drew heavily in implementing team farming (Myers, pp. 274–77).

The seeming diversity of subject matter in this volume serves only to emphasize the importance of looking at a changing economy from a variety of vantage points. Dwight Perkins's introduction, together

with his chapter on "Growth and Changing Structure of China's Twentiety-Century Economy," best sums up the complex issues and their respective places in the industrialization-modernization process, and this volume should prove to be a useful source for reference and comparison to be consulted by serious students of economic change.

E-tu Zen Sun*

Tradition and Adaptation: Life in a Modern Yucatan Maya Village. By Irwin Press. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975. Pp. xi+224; illustrations. $15.00.

This reviewer was conversing not long ago with an old man, a leading citizen in a very small rural community in which I was then conducting research. He had recently retired from the bench of the supreme court of the state, and his lifelong interest in the history and prospects of his home town were evident. A small factory, whose opening had been subsidized by local citizens, had been operating for about a year. It was the largest single employer in the area, providing weekly paychecks for about 400–500 men and women. The judge pointed out that the factory had provided the county's first steady, reasonably secure, nonfarm income that this long-isolated Appalachian area had ever known. Thus the county would be transformed, he thought, as a consequence of so many individuals with their small but certain weekly incomes. Since we were conversing as friends rather than as interviewer and subject, I felt free to express a mild disagreement. While it was true that, as he had observed, local farmers and townspeople for the first time in many years had begun moving out of shacks and into new homes and begun to install indoor plumbing and electricity, the kind of basic changes he envisioned were not immediately probable. Wants and needs long deferred for lack of money were being satisfied. But new values and needs and new means to satisfy them were not developing. Higher aspirations for work, for education, for consumption styles were not appearing. The factory was important in helping local people to overcome the frustrations of a long period of rural poverty, but it was not placing new demands upon the ability levels or life-styles or institutional services of the community.

Press's *Tradition and Adaptation* kept reminding me of the experience above and others like it. It kept reminding me of the principle that in most cases a little innovation is welcomed because it helps to avert the necessity for major changes. A basic theme of this book is

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