# Western Utopias, Missionary Economics, and the Chinese Village

Margherita Zanasi


Journal of World History, Volume 24, Number 2, June 2013, pp. 359-387 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
*DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2013.0036*

# Western Utopias, Missionary Economics, and the Chinese Village*

MARGHERITA ZANASI
*Louisiana State University*

The 1920s and 1930s marked the beginning of an exceptional period for the rural Chinese village. It was at this time that a sustained reformist movement began to gain momentum, motivated by the widespread belief that the decline of China's rural economy was the primary cause of the country's weakness and its inability to resist foreign imperialism and to emerge on the world scene as a powerful modern nation. The Chinese village was thus taken by storm by different groups, each believing it had the solution to China's problems. As the British missionary and economist John Bernard Tayler observed in 1934, "national and provincial authorities, educationalists, and social reformers, agriculturalists and rural economists, bankers and scientists, political parties and the Christian church" all were "playing their part" in rural reconstruction.[1]

Foreign missionaries, economists, agriculturalists, educators, and doctors (involved in public health programs, including treating malaria and eradicating pests) participated in large numbers in this reform movement, representing as diverse a range of trends as did their Chinese counterparts. The nongovernmental economic experts among

* I would like to thank Jerry Bentley, the anonymous reader for the *Journal of World History*, and David Webster for their invaluable comments on this article. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Jonathan Spence, who commented on an earlier version I presented as a paper at an American Historical Association annual meeting.

[1] John Bernard Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction* (Beijing: Department of Economics, Yenching University, 1934), p. 1.

*Journal of World History*, Vol. 24, No. 2

them fell roughly into two main groups: missionaries, on the one hand, and experts sponsored by newly emerging proto-nongovernmental organizations (proto-NGOs) or think tanks, such as the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), on the other. These two groups often overlapped, sharing members or cooperating on specific programs. Their interaction, however, illustrates the slow and uneven process of specialization undergone by rural economics in China as it moved away from its early missionary background toward the academic specialization promoted by the proto-NGOs. For example, most IPR leaders, despite the Christian YMCA origins of the organization, came to vigorously promote a new kind of expert—civilian, academic, and highly specialized—over the missionaries, whom they regarded as generalists.[2] When in 1930 the secretary of research of the IPR, John Bell Condliffe, decided to invite the distinguished Scottish economic historian Richard Henry Tawney to China to investigate rural conditions, his goal was, in the words of Ross Terrill, to "stimulate a fresh approach to Chinese problems, instead of perpetuating the prejudice of the missionary mentality."[3]

Drawing a line of demarcation between the missionaries and "experts" was, however, more complicated than Condliffe thought. An examination of the work of Tayler and Tawney (each a prominent representative of his group) in China reveals two main points. First, some agriculturalist missionaries had academic credentials, and their work could not be dismissed easily. In fact, during his visit to China, Tawney relied extensively on Tayler's surveys of rural industries. Second, both religious and "civilian"/academic experts often came to China with moral and political agendas. In essence, they both tended to approach the Chinese rural village as a reflection of their criticism of Western-style urban industrialization and as an opportunity to experiment with alternative paths to industrialization. Tawney stated his desire "to secure [industrialization's] economic benefits, while avoiding, as far as possible, its social disadvantages."[4] For his part, Tayler echoed that he wanted "to avoid the [moral] evils which arose from the Industrial Revolution in the West."[5] As was the case with many Western advisors

[2] Tomoko Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919–1945* (London: Routledge, 2002); Margherita Zanasi, "Exporting Development: The League of Nations and Republican China," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 1 (2007): 143–169.

[3] Ross Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times: Socialism as Fellowship* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 68.

[4] Richard Henry Tawney, *Land and Labor in China* (1932; Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

[5] John Bernard Tayler, *Farm and Factory in China: Aspects of the Industrial Revolution* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1928), p. 87.

working in China during the late Qing (1850s–1911) and the early Republican (1912–1930s) periods, "China seemed to offer them freedom of maneuver"; in other words, a new opportunity to readdress frustrations suffered at home. This feeling was not limited to the wish "to prove their own significance," but, more broadly, reflected wider political divides in the West.[6] In the case of Tawney and Tayler, it reflected a widespread discontent with the rise of modern industrial capitalism. Fundamentally, both experts saw the Chinese village as an opportunity to realize their socioeconomic utopias, although Tawney's utopia was socialist while Tayler's was Christian.

Tawney and Tayler worked closely with Chinese economists in a circular pattern of knowledge that characterized the Western-Chinese academic network at this time. Both were active participants in the Chinese economic debate and were influenced by the questions that concerned their Chinese colleagues, who, in turn, had mostly been trained in the West or in missionary schools in China. For example, both Tawney and Tayler directly addressed two interconnected issues at the heart of the Chinese discussion of the "rural question," as the agricultural crisis was dubbed: the relationship between the rural economy and urban industrialization, including peasants' migration to the cities and the growing population pressure on agricultural land. Tawney's and Tayler's treatment of these issues, however, illustrates an important moment of transformation in the Western field of economics. It was at this time that Western economists began to distance themselves from the disciplines of ethics and philosophy in an effort to position economics as a scientific discipline with universal and objective values. In other words, it was in the 1920s and 1930s that we find the origins of "the modernist conception of economic method" that was to find its completion with Keynesian economics and to fully mature into the econometrics of the post–World War II period. Economists began to identify the use of religious, moral, or philosophical arguments as antithetical to economics, which instead they perceived as a pure science, separated from other contemporary intellectual trends and from the logic of humanistic/rhetorical reasoning.[7] In this context, Tayler's com-

[6] Jonathan Spence, *To Change China* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 291–292.

[7] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Deirdre N. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 44. McCloskey does not argue that the use of rhetoric makes for bad economics. In fact, she argues that a better understanding of the use of rhetoric in economics would improve the discipline.

bination of religious and economic views and his general reliance on anecdotic, rather than data-driven mathematical, evidence appeared counter to modernist economics.

By presenting the Chinese village as scientific evidence to support their economic utopia, Tawney and Tayler contributed to the development of a second characteristic of postwar modernist economics that would help shape the emerging field of international development: evolutionary economy and its corollary belief in mechanically fixed stages of development. For Tawney and Tayler, entering a Chinese village was like going back in history to the preindustrial West. For this reason, they believed that in China they would be able to correct the industrialization process and to place it on a better, alternative path. The Chinese village, therefore, became both a rhetorical metaphor for evolutionary economics and a scientific proof of its validity.

## John Bernard Tayler and Missionary Economics: "Community" and "Wholeness"

By the early 1930s missionaries dominated the Chinese rural reform movement for two main reasons. First, they had long been involved in famine prevention efforts. For example, the overwhelming majority of members of the China International Famine Relief Commission (CIFRC)—active in northeast China since 1921 in organizing credit cooperative societies—were Christian missionaries. Departing from the previous practice of focusing exclusively on evangelical work, or of following the long-established medical tradition, most of the missionaries at the turn of the twentieth century, influenced by the Social Gospel movement—the religious-reformist movement popular among Protestant groups in the early twentieth century—had come to regard anti-famine work as important charitable work and to believe that economic and social reforms would lay the groundwork for future evangelical inroads.[8] As a result, "a call for agricultural missions" became a hallmark of the second and third decades of the twentieth century. This period witnessed "the arrival of college-trained [missionary] agriculturalists," most famously among them John Lossing Buck and John

[8] Lillian M. Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s–1990s* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); Peter Buck, *American Science and Modern China, 1876–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 43.

Bernard Tayler.[9] The second reason for the predominance of missionaries in the rural reform movement was their long involvement in developing Western education in China, establishing Christian colleges and universities to spread the gospel along with knowledge. The many Christian-trained Chinese economists and agriculturalists (who had studied in Christian schools in China or abroad) created an impressive network that supported the work of Western agriculturalist missionaries. The Department of Economics at Beijing's Yanqing University, under the directorship of Tayler, and the College of Agriculture and Forestry at the Nanjing University in Nanjing, led by John Lossing Buck, working for the American Presbyterian mission, became major centers of the rural reconstruction movement. Foreign missionaries in the 1930s, therefore, differed greatly from their predecessors. Educators and academics, they dealt with the social sciences and embodied the Christian social reformist spirit of those years. They, however, represented an approach to economics that combined morality with science, an approach that appeared to be deeply flawed to the Western economists who were moving toward modernist methodologies and pursuing the mirage of "ethical neutrality."[10]

Tayler arrived in China in 1906 as a missionary sponsored by the London Missionary Society, a nondenominational missionary society originally inspired by the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English evangelical revival and officially established in 1895 primarily by evangelicals and nonconformists.[11] In 1917 the society asked Tayler to join the faculty of Yanqing University and to establish a department of economics. To prepare him for this challenge, the society sent him back to London for a year (1919–1920) to study at the London School of Economics. When the society could no longer pay his salary, Tayler resigned from Yanqing and moved to Nankai University's Institute of Economics. Tayler's academic background was thus similar to Buck's. Buck had studied agronomy rather than economics and was hired by John Reisner, the dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry at Nanjing University, "with the assumption that Buck could train himself." It was only in 1925 that Buck was able to return to

[9] Randall E. Stross, *The Stubborn Earth: American Agriculturalists on Chinese Soil, 1898–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 92 (see chapter 4 for a detailed overview of the "agricultural missionary" movement in China).

[10] McCloskey, *Rhetoric of Economics*, p. 47.

[11] Richard Lovett, *The History of the London Missionary Society, 1795–1895* (London: H. Frowde, 1899).

Cornell University to pursue a graduate degree in agricultural economics under the supervision of George Warren, a prominent professor of agricultural economics and a pioneer in the field of farm management. Despite Tayler's academic training and the fact that he began to work outside missionary institutions (while Buck's salary continued to be paid by his mission board), Tayler maintained a passion for Christian grassroots development, as evidenced by his position as the secretary of the National Christian Council's Committee on Christianizing Economic Relations.[12]

Tayler's first experience with organizing cooperative societies was in 1921, when he became involved with the CIFRC. He met John Lossing Buck at that time. Buck had just been hired at the University of Nanjing and had been appointed as a member of a committee Tayler chaired.[13] Buck was greatly influenced by that experience and also became deeply committed to the use of cooperative societies, especially those following the German Raiffeisen model, which was particularly popular among missionary agriculturalists because of "its apparent success in combining financial solidity with a Christian spirit."[14]

Buck and Tayler, therefore, shared a combination of genuine academic training and religious calling. Their work as both teachers and researchers was largely secular in nature, and their studies of agricultural and industrial conditions in north China were careful and detailed.[15] Heavily influenced by Warren, and quite isolated from Chinese economists and their pioneering work, Buck remained focused on farm management, aiming at improving economic life in the village by maximizing agricultural production. Tayler, on the other hand, joined a large number of his Chinese colleagues in devoting his energy to the rural industry movement (a rural-based industrial system characterized by small-scale industries organized as cooperative societies and federated into a wider production, credit, and marketing cooperative network). To facilitate the realization of this program, while in Beijing, Tayler established the North China Industrial Service Union

[12] Stross, *Stubborn Earth*, p. 161.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., p. 166.
[15] Buck's competence in agricultural economics has recently come under scrutiny. Randall Stross has identified several important weaknesses in Buck's work. Stross is particularly critical of Buck's survey methodology and his use of economic models and theories based on the American experience, which, Stross argues, suggests that Buck ignored the actual conditions of the Chinese village (ibid., chap. 7). A much more positive assessment of Buck is offered by Paul B. Trescott, *Jingji Xue: The History of the Introduction of Western Economic Ideas into China, 1850–1950* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007).

(NCISU), which later became a joint Yanqing-Nankai, as well as Western-Chinese, venture.[16] Tayler and the NCISU exemplified the close interaction between Western missionaries and Chinese economists that caught the attention of John Bell Condliffe, the secretary of research of the IPR from 1927 to 1933 and professor of economics at Canterbury University in New Zealand, during his 1930 visit to China. At that time, Condliffe commented that "the Missionaries and teachers . . . had seen many of their [Chinese] pupils rise to positions of power in the new China. . . . The American Protestant churches in particular had put an immense effort into hospitals and schools and colleges, as well as evangelism."[17]

Tayler's interest in the rural industry movement was not just the product of his close collaboration with Chinese economists. It also stemmed from his concern about the social problems that accompanied urban industrialization in the West. Tayler explained in his 1928 *Farm and Factory in China: Aspects of the Industrial Revolution*: "we have seen industry causing far-reaching social changes, undermining old institutions, like the joint family and the guild, breaking old village bonds and the connection with the land, creating new situations by bringing the workers into the cities, with their crowded, insanitary conditions, throwing the sexes together in closer and freer intercourse outside the family circle, necessitating a new knowledge of science and medicine and of the art of municipal government, making fresh demands on capacity and character, and calling for new moralities."[18]

It was above all the "fresh demands on . . . character" and the "calling for new moralities" that worried Tayler. Tayler's statement was in line with the general standpoint of the Protestant churches. George Weidman Groff, a pioneer of agricultural missions and dean of the Agricultural College at Canton Christian College (Lingnan University) from 1921 to 1933, declared that "if the cities try to assimilate [the Chinese peasants] as they are now doing, these very cities will become the Sodom and Gomorrah of China." "The Church" should make sure that the peasants "stay where they are."[19]

Groff's assertion that the peasants should "stay where they are" echoed themes of heated controversy in the 1930s over the future of

---

[16] Yung-chen Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 235.

[17] W. L. Holland and Paul F. Hooper, *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations: The Memoirs of William Holland* (Tokyo: Ryukei Shyosha, 1996), p. 451.

[18] Tayler, *Farm and Factory in China*, pp. 84–85.

[19] Stross, *Stubborn Earth*, p. 105.

China's rural population. Economists and rural reformers, both Chinese and foreigners, mostly agreed that China's economic modernization depended upon the resolution of rural poverty, which, in turn, rested on easing population pressure on the land. Agreement among economists, however, ended there. While some saw the peasants as the industrial workers of the future and perceived peasant migration into urban industrial areas as a natural and effective way to reduce the rural population, others opposed urbanization.

Most of the economists at the Nankai Institute of Economics, where Tayler worked, believed that the solution to the rural crisis rested not in urbanization, but in creating alternative sources of income in the village so that the peasant population would not have to rely exclusively on agriculture for its livelihood. The director of research at the institute, the American-trained economist Fang Xianting, was a major proponent of this view and a staunch advocate of rural industries. Fang promoted a Chinese path to economic modernity that was an alternative to Western-style urban industrialization. China, he reasoned, should avoid as much as possible industrial concentration in the urban coastal areas. Instead, it should focus on modernizing small-scale rural industries, traditionally an important aspect of China's rural economy, through the development of industrial cooperative societies organized into large federations. This organization would allow rural industries access to technology, credit, and marketing techniques, resources that would otherwise be available only to large-scale industries. Rural industries were thus not in contradiction to modernization but instead constituted an alternative path to economic development that would reflect China's distinctive characteristics while avoiding the social evils experienced by the industrialized West.[20]

Tayler was in complete agreement with this plan, sharing with Fang a genuine desire to create better conditions for workers and to avoid the squalor of urban poverty. He was, however, motivated by different considerations. Fang perceived rural industrialization as a critique of the Westernization represented by the cosmopolitanism of Shanghai and other treaty ports and as a means to preserve a Chinese identity. Tayler, instead, saw rural industrialization as a means to protect the

[20] Margherita Zanasi, "Far from the Treaty Ports: Fang Xianting and Rural Modernity in 1930s China," *Modern China* 30, no. 1 (2004): 113–146; Fang Xianting (H. D. Fong), "Rural Industries in China's Reconstruction," *Monthly Bulletin on Economic China* 7, no. 11 (1934); and Fang Xianting, "Zhongguo zhi hezuo yundong," in *Zhongguo jingji yanjiu*, ed. Fang Xianting, Nankai daxue jingji suo congshu (1934; repr., Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1938).

peasants from the corrupting influences of the city—very much in the spirit of "Christianizing the social order," the mission that lay at the heart of the Christian social reformist movement of this period.[21] Tayler focused in particular on the preservation of those characteristics of China's rural society that he believed had the potential to foster Christian morals and to offer a "special contribution to the civilization of the future," which would be based on community and wholeness.[22]

Protecting small rural communities from nationwide industrialization and urbanization trends became Tayler's main goal. "The impinging of a larger life upon a small or isolated community," he bemoaned, "weakens local loyalties, the sense of fellowship and co-operation; it saps the vitality of old customs and often robs old forms of culture of their quality and significance." The opening up of village life to wider external socioeconomic and cultural networks, Tayler believed, also led to new opportunities from which only a few could benefit. The gap between the rich and poor would thus grow, fostering resentment and the possibility of class struggle. The newly found "ease of living" could become "useless or pernicious," since it would not be accompanied by a "corresponding moral advance." Finally, the "introduction of new articles of consumption or new conditions of living, which demand a higher degree of self-control and knowledge . . . can only lead to thriftlessness and improvidence if not to intemperance."[23]

Tayler's work in China was generally consistent with the policies of the Christian missionary churches. His desire to avoid the deterioration of community spirit and the inherent "wholeness" of communities reflected the feeling among various missionary organizations that churches had "failed to understand the evil of industrialization when it happened in the West." As Lucius Chaping Porter of the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada argued, they now had an opportunity to redress the problem in China, which found itself at that crucial stage of development that had proved treacherous for the West.[24]

A second concern of Tayler's also resonated with the main objectives of the churches: avoiding class confrontation and promoting Christian humanitarian relationships between labor and capital. Cooperative

[21] See, e.g., Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912).
[22] Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction*, pp. 1–2.
[23] Ibid., p. 6.
[24] Lucius Chaping Porter, *China's Challenge to Christianity* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1924), pp. 58, 61.

societies were perceived as helpful in this context, although always to be complemented by moral exhortations to landowners and peasants. When it met in Beijing in 1922, the World's Student Christian Federation concluded that "cooperation should be the principle of all economic development, that economic efficiency should seek the good of society and not the selfish interests of individuals, and that neither private nor group ownership of capital is absolute, but that all possessions are a trust from the community."[25] Because of these qualities, cooperative societies were deemed capable of defusing tension between classes and preventing direct confrontation.

The rural communities Tayler wished to protect from industrialization, however, existed more in his utopian vision than in reality: Chinese rural communities were often ridden with blatant socioeconomic inequality and tensions, as well as non-Christian beliefs and traditions. In other words, the spirit and essence of the Chinese rural "community," including its assumed "wholeness," often departed widely from Tayler's concept of Christian relationships. The village that Tayler and other missionary reformers wanted to "preserve" would have actually required deep transformation and restructuring since it never existed in China. Tayler attempted to overcome this obstacle by claiming, with unwarranted optimism, that Confucianism was an agent for a humanitarian and democratic social relationship that could easily be reshaped into Christian humanitarianism. Tayler also saw the Chinese peasant family as a site of genuine economic collaboration and skillful division of labor and, in general, romanticized aspects of mutual aid activities that, while indeed fostering the coming together of village members in the late imperial period, were, in fact, often characterized by exploitative hierarchy or tended to spin off into bullying militia groups and banditry.

The gap between Tayler's utopian vision and the social and religious conditions in rural China is probably best highlighted by his description of the ideal Chinese village, a description that reveals his attempt at recasting rural China into the Christian vision of the religious Western farmer and of the Social Gospel.[26] In Tayler's mind, a combination of educational and productive activities would generate industrious, studious, and religious Chinese peasants, similar to "a Scotch ploughman in the fields with a Greek Testament open on his plough . . . or the village cobbler who . . . led the modern Protestant missionary movement,

[25] Ibid., pp. 58–61.
[26] Trescott, *Jingji Xue*, p. 169.

but promoted the scientific study of botany."[27] In another instance, Tayler declared that his model for the Chinese village was based on the communities of the rural United States that consisted of "several neighborhoods, little groups of farmsteads with perhaps a school or church; and a village which is the real center of the community life." In China, Tayler suggested, rural communities should similarly "embrace a group of villages, playing the part of the neighborhoods, clustering round a market town as the center of the whole group." These small rural communities would become sites for genuine forms of "human cooperation" and sincere "human expression." "The musically gifted," Tayler suggested, could be "brought together in suitable ways [to] cultivate their special talents in association with one another and then through various channels make the art they have developed minister to the enjoyment of their neighbours and the larger community." These ideal communities would also serve as the foundation for a new kind of economic development that would guard against the Industrial Revolution's destruction of community spirit and "wholeness."[28] Tayler's work, therefore, was precariously balanced between, on the one hand, modernist scientific observations of the conditions prevalent in the Chinese village that were published in specialized studies such as his 1932 *The Hopei Pottery Industry and the Problem of Modernisation*, in which statistics figured prominently, and, on the other, rhetorical metaphors in support of a vision of Christian economic relations that was influenced by the evangelical Social Gospel movement and that had little in common with the majority of rural China.[29]

The "wholeness" of the rural community, and its Christian moral fabric, was also a great concern for John Lossing Buck. Buck linked the idea of wholeness to maximizing land productivity. He also sought to expand the cooperative organization of the village to encompass recreational life as a means for keeping peasants away from gambling and other immoral and wasteful activities during times of idleness. In Buck's view, "not only does idleness diminish the income but it is also the chief cause of gambling and often leads to quarrelling and sometimes immorality." Church-organized recreation would offer an effective solution to this problem.[30] While Buck used Christian recreation

[27] Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction*, p. 21.
[28] Ibid., pp. 6, 8, 10.
[29] John Bernard Tayler, *The Hopei Pottery Industry and the Problem of Modernisation* (Beijing: Yenching University, 1932).
[30] As quoted in Stross, *Stubborn Earth*, p. 165.

as a tool for achieving his economic goals of farm management and land utilization, Tayler made this idealized village life the heart of his utopian vision of China's modern economic identity. "As the old isolation of the village is gradually broken down, it need not be at the expense of community but as part of a process by which community is both extended and strengthened."[31] Thus, the community spirit fostered in the village would, in Tayler's vision, radiate through the wider economic system and ultimately transform the nation.

Tayler attempted to realize in China the Christian utopian vision of a "rurban" society, a utopia that had proven impossible to realize in England and the United States. In using this term, Tayler referred to *Rural Life*, a book by Charles Josiah Galpin, an American Baptist pastor, university professor, and advisor to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In this book Galpin presented "rurbanism" in opposition to other forms of ruralism that, in his view, condemned the peasants to "remain an inferior class . . . that cannot stand up in a competition with the city in matters where intelligence wins." Galpin's "rurban" communities would blend rural and urban traits in recognition that "the rural population of America is an integral part of the nation, so the open country is an element of the clustered town, and the town is a factor of the land, and the civilization, culture, and development of rural people are to be found in conjunction with town and small city, and not apart." In Galpin's view these rurban communities would be connected through a hierarchy of churches, sparse in the open land areas and more densely located in the larger urban centers. It was, in fact, "the small, weak, pastorless church, poorly located, which tends to surrender agriculture to destructive individualism. It is the strong church, with noble, permanent architecture, properly located, with a capable resident pastor, which unifies agriculture; a unified agriculture, in turn, nurtures the church." In short, the church should create a "movement that would favor agriculture" and initiate "an era of Christian statesmanship" to answer what Galpin perceived to be the moral crisis in rural communities.[32] Inspired by Galpin, Tayler envisioned a China that was neither urban nor rural. In Tayler's vision for China, the rural industrial movement would bring industry to the village, thus preventing extreme urbanization and facilitating the building of a moral Christian dimension of economic life.[33]

---

[31] Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction*, p. 11.
[32] Charles Josiah Galpin, *Rural Life* (New York: Century, 1918), pp. 63–64, 311.
[33] Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction*, pp. 10–13.

Most of Tayler's writings for economic journals, such as *Nankai Social and Economic Quarterly*, and monographs resulting from surveys of specific regional industries focused on practical aspects of rural cooperation and descriptions of China's socioeconomic circumstances; they tended not to differ much from the writings of fellow agriculturalists, both Chinese and foreign.[34] Tayler's enthusiasm for the prospects of rural industries, however, led him to push the possibilities of his plan for federated cooperative societies far beyond what was generally accepted even by a staunch supporter of cooperative societies like Fang Xianting.[35] Tayler's zeal often led him to launch into vaguely argued and overly optimistic overviews of the future economic model he envisioned. The general moralizing tone of some of his writings, together with his inconsistent use of statistical data, must have been a factor that Condliffe had in mind when he decided to introduce a fresh perspective to the debate on China's economic development in order to go beyond "missionary economics."

## Richard Henry Tawney and the IPR: Evolutionary Economics and the Social Science Method

Tawney arrived at Nankai University in December 1930. While there, he worked closely with Franklin He (an American-trained economist and the founder of the Nankai Institute of Economics), Fang Xianting, Tayler, and the group of Nankai economists who would form the Institute of Economics in 1931. Condliffe assigned William L. Holland (a former student of Condliffe's who would succeed him in 1933 as the secretary of research of the IPR) to assist Tawney during his stay at Nankai.[36] The result of this visit was a report for the 1931 Shanghai Conference of the IPR, later published as the monograph *Land and Labor in China* (1932), and a six-part serialized article in the *Manchester Guardian* (1931). *Land and Labor in China* is arguably the most important and enduring result of the research efforts of the IPR and has been regarded as a seminal work in Chinese economic history since its publication in 1932.

[34] E.g., see John Bernard Tayler, "The Possibilities of Rural Industry in China," *Nankai Monthly Bulletin on Economic China* 7, no. 2 (1934); and Tayler, *Hopei Pottery Industry*.

[35] Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction*.

[36] Paul F. Hooper, "The Institute of Pacific Relations and the Origins of Asian and Pacific Studies," *Pacific Affairs* 61, no. 1 (1988): 98–121.

The IPR was established in Honolulu in 1925 as a branch of the local YMCA; its stated mission was to explore the "'fundamental and universal' elements of Christianity that contributed to 'a common basis of understanding and motivation for the Pacific peoples.'"[37] When Condliffe was appointed as secretary of research in 1927, however, the IPR, as Condliffe observed, "was in the process of passing to the control of a group of academics and businessmen," breaking away from its YMCA origins.[38] The IPR leader Edward Carter—who had a liberal Protestant background and was initially closely connected to the YMCA—was one of the most important members to lead this process of laicization and transformation into a full-fledged academic organization. Carter wanted the IPR to distance itself from its YMCA Hawaiian origins and the Honolulu group that wanted it to remain a "low-profile discussion forum of cultural and economic problems."[39] Condliffe had higher expectations for the IPR and criticized the organization's current amateurish practices. He described the methodology employed at IPR conferences as "the curious Y.M.C.A. belief in the sort of discussion method . . . [of] all discussion, on the simplest and most repetitive basis, with little content."[40] Carter and Condliffe, instead, envisioned the IPR as a rigorously academic think tank that would assume increasing influence over the politics of the Pacific basin rather than perpetuating the moralistic and educational style that was preferred by the missionaries. In the early 1930s, believing that the IPR's new academic dimension required closer proximity to academic institutions, they succeeded in moving its headquarters first to Ann Arbor and then to New York.

The IPR came to be staffed mostly with social reformers, some with openly leftist sympathies, including historians such as Karl Wittfogel, who worked on the IPR dynastic history project, and Owen Lattimore, a scholar of Inner Asia and a future "China hand" and advisor to Jiang Jieshi. The IPR was eventually accused of fostering ties with the Communists and became a victim of McCarthyism in the 1950s.[41] From

[37] Ibid., p. 99.

[38] Holland and Hooper, *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations*, p. 430.

[39] Hooper, "Institute of Pacific Relations and the Origins of Asian and Pacific Studies," p. 108.

[40] Holland and Hooper, *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations*, p. 433.

[41] William T. Rowe, "Owen, Lattimore, Asia, and Comparative History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (2007): 759–786; Hooper, "Institute of Pacific Relations and the Origins of Asian and Pacific Studies." Although it survived until 1960, the IPR lost its financial support and academic influence.

1927 until the end of World War II, however, the IPR promoted a rigorous academic approach and attempted to create a progressive academic network in China—which included such prominent Marxist scholars as Chen Hansheng—that would run parallel to the Christian one. During his 1930s visit to China, in fact, Condliffe's impression was that, despite the remarkable academic and political network that the missionaries had established, despite the dominant influence it had established in "Washington and on American campuses . . . in the absence of much American trade of investment," and despite "much sacrifice and service . . . lavished" on it, the China mission, at the end, had been of "little purpose."[42] In other words, as Condliffe commented on another occasion, he believed that "despite all the devotion, sacrifice and skills that went into it, the missionary movement had little impact on China."[43]

The thus-unimpressed Condliffe believed that the IPR should now assume the leadership role the missionaries had enjoyed. It is no surprise, therefore, that he attempted to dilute the "missionary economics" nature of the IPR China program by inviting the participation of a renowned academic personality such as Tawney. In doing so, he was also minimizing the importance of the missionaries' knowledge of China in favor of a more modernist approach based on "objective" surveys. In Holland's words, Condliffe "thought it might be interesting if Tawney could be persuaded to go to China and, without any detailed prior knowledge of China, but using his own knowledge of the early beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, write an impressionistic book about the emergence of modern industry in China and its effects on peasant life and social structure."[44] Tawney's work, therefore, was to constitute scientific proof that early Industrial Revolution Europe could be found in the Chinese village and that an objective economic methodology existed that transcended the knowledge of local culture and language, a belief that remained at the foundation of evolutionary economics and of most post-1940s international development projects.

Tawney himself was more of a socioeconomic historian than an economist and thought of technical economics as "a body of occasionally useful truisms."[45] Tawney mixed historical arguments of an academic nature and political rhetoric with economic analysis and, like

[42] Holland and Hooper, *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations*, p. 451.
[43] Ibid., pp. 451–452.
[44] Ibid., p. 189.
[45] As quoted in Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times*, p. 66.

most 1920s and 1930s economists, including Tayler, did not use mathematics to his advantage, limiting himself to a humanist-style commentary of his statistical data. For these reasons, his methodology would scarcely have been considered modern by later economists who had embraced econometrics at the exclusion of humanist rhetoric.

Although he had first become involved in issues related to industrial labor through a missionary organization (the Christian Social Union) while studying at Oxford, Tawney had gradually become skeptical of the organized church and shifted toward a political understanding of the "social question," as the problems created by industrialization and the social discontent they generated was called at the time. In 1906 Tawney joined the Fabian Society and three years later became a member of the Independent Labour Party. In 1905 Tawney began teaching for the Workers Educational Association (founded in 1903) and soon thereafter became one of its most committed executives. It was therefore as a proponent of ethical socialism and a representative of the scientific academic world that Tawney came to participate in the IPR project.[46]

Tawney had first achieved academic fame with his 1912 book on agrarian problems in sixteenth-century England.[47] It was this expertise that inspired Condliffe to invite Tawney to China, believing that a historian of the preindustrial economy of Europe would bring an important perspective to the debate on the contemporary Chinese economy.[48] This evolutionary approach was common among both missionaries and academic experts. Tayler applauded it in his 1933 review of *Land and Labor in China*.[49] Many believed that, as Lucius Chaping Porter vividly phrased it, "nowhere in the world is it easier than in China to turn back the pages of history and plunge . . . into the quiet rusticity of two thousand years ago."[50] This evolutionary approach did not imply a completely negative view of rural China. Porter's writings, in fact, shared in the widespread unrealistic image of an idyllic "rustic" life colored by a nostalgia for preindustrial days—nostalgia being "an essential companion of every significant social change, transformation,

[46] Ibid.; Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China*.

[47] Richard Henry Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912; New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

[48] Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times*, p. 68.

[49] John Bernard Tayler, "Review of *Land and Labour in China*," *Economic Journal* 43, no. 170 (1933): 306–312.

[50] Porter, *China's Challenge to Christianity*, p. 72.

transition, revolution." In the words of Christopher Lasch, "progress implied nostalgia as its mirror image."[51]

Nostalgia and idealization of premodern agricultural life were also at the heart of a new trend, critical of aspects of the Industrial Revolution, that looked toward the supposed ancient wisdom of the East for solutions. An example of this trend is the 1911 book *Farmers of Forty Centuries; or, Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan*, written by Franklin Hiram King, the inventor of the cylindrical tower silo and the father of "soil physics." King's book, written after a nine-month trip to East Asia, reflected both his enthusiasm for the places he had visited and his growing dissatisfaction with modern agricultural techniques in the United States. King had been forced to resign from the U.S. Bureau of Soil of the Department of Agriculture because his belief that heavy use of chemical fertilizer had negative effects on crops clashed with the bureau's official policy. In this polemical context, King argued that East Asian agriculture had succeeded for centuries (forty, according to his calculations) in the two tasks crucial for the economic future of the modern world: sustaining high population density and maintaining the fertility of the soil. The West, therefore, should learn from East Asia and return to a more natural kind of agriculture.[52] King's views, although now justified by recent assessments of agricultural sustainability, also clashed with those of many contemporary Chinese economists and agriculturalists, who were engaged in the effort to bring chemical fertilizers to China to repair what they described as an exhausted earth with declining productivity due to centuries of intensive cultivation. This view was also embraced by Tawney and continued to be supported by more recent scholars, although an assessment of levels of land productivity should ultimately rest on local conditions, taking into consideration the wide variations between north and south China.[53] King thus shared with Tayler the desire to use a utopian East Asia to turn the clock back on the Western process of economic development and to create the opportunity to start afresh, avoiding the mistakes that had plagued economic development in the West, although Tayler was concerned with Christian socioeconomic relations while King focused on the preservation of natural soil nutrients.

[51] Mitja Velikonja. "Lost in Transition: Nostalgia for Socialism in Post-Socialist Countries." *East European Politics and Societies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 535–551, 538; and Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 92.

[52] F. H. King, *Farmers of Forty Centuries; or, Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan* (Madison, Wis.: Mrs. F. H. King, 1911).

[53] See, e.g., Li, *Fighting Famine in North China*, pp. 87, 75.

On the other hand, Tawney's evolutionary approach to understanding China's economy signaled the transformation of impressionistic and metaphorical evolutionary observations driven by morality and nostalgia into a supposedly science-based version of evolutionary economics. Tawney did not idealize the past or aspire to harness local cultural or socioeconomic traditions, although, like Tayler, Tawney took with him to China a scathing critique of Western-style industrialism and a desire to realize a model of economic development that was better than the one that had emerged in the West. Tawney had discussed his idea of a "functional society" at length in his 1920 book *The Acquisitive Society*, more than ten years before his attention came to be focused on China.[54] In this respect Tawney's work also needs to be placed into a polemical and utopian context. In *The Acquisitive Society* Tawney forcefully denounced liberal capitalism. Philosophical developments in the West, he argued, had lost sight of the fact that industry was originally meant to improve society by raising its standard of living. "Industrialism," the worshiping of production regardless of its costs to society, had thus come to characterize the "acquisitive" industrialized West. Children, for example, were taken out of school in order to work in factories and to increase production, thus damaging the education system, which was one of the aspects of society that industrialization was supposed to improve. Tawney advocated a return to industry's original goals and the realization of a "functional society" in which economic activities and rights, including property rights, were regulated by the principle of "social function" (their value as "service" for the entire community).

Tawney believed that China had the opportunity to avoid falling into an "acquisitive" style of industrialization, and he went to China motivated by a sense of urgency since he feared that the Chinese—who "had fallen in love with industrialization exactly when the West is losing its enthusiasm"—would blindly replicate it and create the same "social evils" the industrialized West had experienced. Tawney's idea that China could embark on a different developmental path was based on his reasoning that "man does not step down the same stream twice." Consequently, the industrialization process could never be the same at different times in history.[55] Tawney's evolutionary approach in *Land and Labor in China* was problematized by his recognition that contemporary China was inevitably different from the West because of

[54] Richard Henry Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920).

[55] Richard Henry Tawney, "A Visit to China, Part IV," *Manchester Guardian*, 21 May 1931.

its different history and that circumstantial variations did not necessarily imply inferiority. "The hackneyed reference to the Middle Ages is sadly overworked, and leaves a good deal unsaid. It is misleading, indeed, both in principle and in detail. On the one hand, it implies a comparison of stages of development, as though the Chinese version of civilization, instead of differing in kind from the European, were merely less mature. On the other hand, it ignores the sharp contrasts between them, not only . . . in spirit and quality, but in circumstances and environment."[56]

Differences, Tawney insisted, were not "the expression of permanent characteristics" and did not "support the theory that certain peoples are naturally qualified for success in the economic arts, and others unfitted for it."[57] While these statements rejected negative racial categorization linked to social Darwinism, they were not intended to dispute the validity of using a ladder of progress; rather, they pushed for a more nuanced and less racially essentialist interpretation of it. In a true modernist and postcolonial fashion they shifted the attention away from cultural issues to what were supposed to be actual, and more scientifically assessable, conditions on the ground. China, for Tawney, was indeed "static" in comparison with "the more mobile economy of the West." "Techniques and economic structure of seven-eighths of China" indeed recalled, "though with significant differences, the conditions which existed in Europe in the fifteenth century."[58] In Holland's words, "to Tawney, familiar with conditions in 17th century Europe, [Chinese factories] seemed an almost visible recreation of the workshop conditions and primitive factory life in the West at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution."[59]

In other words, China was not incapable of modernization. Differences, mostly circumstantial, had prevented it from experiencing the exceptional changes that had characterized Europe in the recent past. Tawney stressed that it was only in recent history that Europe had begun to experience a series of dramatic and rapid changes, thus becoming an exception in comparison to the rest of the world, which had continued to move along at the usual pace. The question to be answered, Tawney reasoned, was not "why the economic life of China has not changed more, but why that of the West has changed so much."[60] The idea of

[56] Tawney, *Land and Labor in China*, p. 18.
[57] Ibid., p. 19.
[58] Ibid., p. 18.
[59] Holland and Hooper, *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations*, p. 7.
[60] Tawney, *Land and Labor in China*, p. 20.

the exceptionality of the European Industrial Revolution had all but disappeared with the advent of twentieth-century-style economics. At this time Marxist historical determinism and econometric and mathematical methodologies developed the idea of mechanical and objective stages of development that made it impossible to accept the possibility of alternative models. The idea of European exceptionalism, however, has reemerged recently, following critiques of economics as an exact science and of its general Eurocentrism.[61]

Because of his important insight on European exceptionalism, Tawney believed that although China was not limited by any cultural deficiency and had the opportunity to catch up with the West, no historical determinism condemned it to an identical experience as Europe. Because the "stream" of time had not stood still, China, in its inevitable march toward industrial progress, had the opportunity to jump directly into a variation of the industrialization process that would avoid the mistakes of the West and follow more closely the principle of "functionality."[62]

Unlike Tayler and other foreign experts, Tawney never looked for a distinctive Chinese identity or for cultural elements that could produce a Sinicized model of industrialization. Even when discussing local characteristics, Tawney focused on factors such as natural resources, cheap labor, and "manual skills" with the sole purpose of pacing the various stages of industrialization or shifting emphasis from one industry to the other to better adapt to local circumstances. He never, however, mapped out an industrial development with "Chinese characteristics."[63] Tawney also never looked with nostalgia, as Tayler did, to real or imagined social values of the preindustrial Chinese village. His evolutionary, or stage-of-development, approach more strictly adhered to social science principles and more closely anticipated post-1940s models of economic development. For Tawney, industrialization remained an objective (not influenced by culture) and universal process, which could be improved but remained valid worldwide and did not reflect the identity of any specific country. China did not have special qualities from which the world should learn. In other words, his vision of a "functional society," a perfected version of Western-style industrializa-

[61] For the debate on European exceptionalism, see, among others, Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[62] Tawney, *Land and Labor in China*.

[63] Ibid., pp. 133–137.

tion, was a universal model that required only secondary local adaptations. The universality of the model, however, did not imply Marxist-style predetermined stages, and a country like China could just skip the errors made in the industrialized West and proceed directly toward the realization of a functional society.

During his visit to China, Tawney wanted to test the assertion he had made almost ten years earlier: "the conflict between the economic outlook of East and West . . . finds a parallel contrast between medieval and modern economic ideas."[64] After his visit, he was satisfied that, despite some differences (including population, availability of uncultivated land, geographical conditions, and philosophy), in the most important aspects this was the case. China was indeed experiencing a similar "phase of civilization," standing at a crossroad that resembled the one England had faced in the sixteenth century. At that time England had just eliminated its "medieval debris" (such as complicated customary tenures, internal trade barriers, and open fields) and was experiencing new economic possibilities created by improved communications and new technologies.[65] As a result, small landowner peasants had prospered. Later, however, the development of industrial agriculture and the emergence of big landholdings drove small peasant owners off the land and forced them to move to towns, where they became destitute.[66] According to Tawney, currently China was also intent on eliminating its "medieval debris," improving its communication system, and adopting new technologies. As new economic opportunities emerged, Tawney argued, China had the chance to avoid the excessive concentration of land and capital that had taken place in England. In Tawney's frequent historical references, a society of small peasant proprietors—such as that of post–ancien régime France's "universal and equal citizenship . . . with its five million peasant proprietors"—was always preferable to the organized inequality of Industrial Revolution England. Like most foreign agriculturalists working in China, Tawney thus pursued the dream of a rural society formed by small peasant owners, at a time when agricultural efficiency was identified with industrial farming.

The idea of a rural China of small peasant owners was common among most economists operating in China, including Fang Xianting,

[64] Richard Henry Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study*, Holland Memorial Lectures, 1922 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962), p. 274; Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times*, p. 68.

[65] Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, p. 81.

[66] Tawney, *Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 15.

Franklin He, and Tayler. This idea, however, seemed to contradict the other equally common belief that Chinese agriculture suffered from extreme fragmentation of landholdings. How many *mu* constituted the right landholding for the new Chinese farmer became the subject of much study and debate in order to determine the perfect size for the farm of the owner peasant and thus to find an elusive balance between land and population.[67] Tawney agreed that the smallness of the agricultural plots combined with the increasing population pressure on the land constituted the main problem of China's rural economy. In *Land and Labor in China* Tawney summarizes the main concerns with respect to this issue that had circulated in China for almost a decade. The large rural population and the smallness of plots had produced innovative and efficient cultivation techniques capable of generating high yields at a time when Europe was still at a primitive agricultural stage. These techniques, however, had also led Chinese agriculture into a vicious circle that essentially prevented further modernization. Only reorganization of land tenure (a problem Tawney recognized to be particularly complex, delicate, and slow to remedy) and technological innovation (mostly fertilizers and new seed varieties) could break this cycle. In his lucid and organized narrative, Tawney was the first to offer a complete and detailed description of the dynamics that would later come to be identified with the "high-level equilibrium trap."[68]

In addressing the issue of the unfavorable population-to-land ratio, Tawney had no qualms about urbanization per se and did not aspire to ruralize Chinese industry. He understood the "evils" of Western-style industrialization mainly in terms of poverty, poor working conditions, child labor, and lack of education (problems that also concerned Tayler). Not surprisingly, Tawney was not concerned, however, with intemperance, "throwing the sexes together," and "fresh demands on . . . character," which were central to Tayler's vision of Christian economic relations. While he supported Tayler's plan for rural industries, he did so primarily because of its use of cooperative societies rather

[67] One *mu* is roughly equivalent to one-sixth of an acre. The quest for the perfect size of the Chinese farm inspired most of the work of Buck (e.g., John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China; A Study of 16,786 Farms in 168 Localities, and 38,256 Farm Families in Twenty-two Provinces in China, 1929–1933* [New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1964]) as well as that of many Nankai economists.

[68] Although this phenomenon had been discussed since the 1930s, the "high-level equilibrium trap" terminology emerged only in the early 1970s, when the concept was reintroduced by Mark Elvin (Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past: A Social and Economic Interpretation* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press 1973]).

than for its moral Christian intentions or for keeping the peasants on the land. Even in the case of cooperative societies, in fact, his perspective differed from Tayler's. Tawney, a member of the Fabian Society, had long been a supporter of cooperative societies, which in his 1920 *The Acquisitive Society* he described as being aimed "not at profit, but at service" and at raising "the whole level of social life" and thus as being an integral element of a "functional society" and an economic organization that could mitigate the excesses of the "acquisitive" nature of liberal capitalism.[69] Tawney's main reason for not favoring a massive "movement into manufactures of persons now employed in agriculture" was not an anti-urbanist bias but the belief that this migration would do nothing to solve the population problem.[70] Tawney pointed out that the first effect of industrialization in an agricultural country was "a rapid increase in population" due to a decrease in death rate and an increase in birth rate. It was only with higher standards of living that the population would begin to decline.

Tawney, therefore, argued for three integrated solutions to the population problem: "emigration, development of alternative sources of livelihood, and the deliberate limitation of the size of families." The last solution was a key element in Tawney's developmental paradigm, since it would ease population pressure on the land without relying exclusively on massive urban migration, which would lead to poverty for and exploitation of an ever-expanding urban subproletariat. At the same time it allowed Tawney to avoid unrealistic expectations for the "rurbanization" of industrialization. Population control was never sought by Tayler (or by Fang) since it would run counter to his Christian beliefs (for Fang, the idea ran counter to the Chinese family culture).

Tawney's external position vis-à-vis the issues of Christian socio-economic relations and China's distinctive economic identity is exemplified in the fact that he found it "difficult to be patient" with the Chinese controversy on rural and urban industrialization. "Whether . . . urban poverty may not be preferable to the life of many villages in China, is a matter of opinion. . . . But the fact that peasants are starving in Shansi or Kansu is not a reason why factory operatives should be sweated in Shanghai or Tientsin."[71] This dismissal of the problem grated on Tayler, who, in his otherwise appreciative review of *Land and Labor in China*, politely observed that Tawney had concluded his

[69] Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, p. 125; and Tawney, *Land and Labor in China*, p. 81.
[70] Tawney, *Land and Labor in China*, p. 141.
[71] Ibid., p. 143.

chapter on land tenure "with somewhat brief reference to population and relief that may be expected from migration and industrialization." Tayler proceeded to correct Tawney's oversight by devoting two long paragraphs of the review to the issue.[72] Tayler did not remark that what mattered to Tawney was that, either way (through urban or rural industrialization), the standard of living and the working conditions of workers and peasants should be protected. Tawney's concern remained fixed on improving standards of living and realizing a "functional society" rather than on preserving China's identity or promoting Christian socioeconomic relations.[73]

Tawney's academic style was a better fit for Condliffe's idea of the kind of research the IPR should produce. This was not simply a matter of Tawney's lack of religious references; Tawney's general methodology and reliance on the kind of statistical data featured in *Land and Labor in China*—which had actually been collected by the Chinese economists at Nankai, thus solidifying the Western-Chinese network of knowledge and expertise—appealed to Condliffe's sensibilities. In the 1930s, in fact, Condliffe also closely collaborated with Buck, granting him a large portion of the IPR's research funds and sponsoring the publication of *Chinese Farm Economy* (1930) and *Land Utilization in China* (1937). When visiting China in the 1930s, Condliffe "was immediately impressed with both Buck's work at Nanking and Ho's work at Nankai. Those two centers thus became the focal points of the IPR's research support in China for the next several years." His enthusiasms for these two organizations rested above all on his belief that the collection of data carried out by both Nankai and Nanjing was "perhaps the most important job to be done at the moment in China where there were almost no accurate economic data."[74] Condliffe considered Buck—who was much more restrained in his use of evangelical language than Tayler—a skillful researcher and placed him among the "scholars" in his scathing evaluation of missionaries in China: "There were, of course, some bigots preaching an alien gospel whose theology had little appeal to the Chinese—apparently the least religious people in the world. There were also the small-town pious folk unable to distinguish between the Christian teaching and

[72] Tayler, "Review of *Land and Labor in China*," p. 308. Tayler's review, while mostly positive, tends to use *Land and Labor in China* to support his own vision of the model Chinese community.

[73] Tawney, *Acquisitive Society*, pp. 141, 104, 143.

[74] Holland and Hooper, *Remembering the Institute of Pacific Relations*, pp. 192, 447.

the folkways of their origins. Narrow and limited as they were, with mixed and confused motivations, they loved and served China. There were also missionary scholars and statesmen of uncommon knowledge and understanding."[75]

Condliffe had a low opinion of most missionaries, especially when they identified local "folkways" with proto-Christian sentiment—a problem that indeed afflicted Tayler. Condliffe, however, understood that not all missionaries were the same. Side by side with Salvationists, other missionaries, who were inspired by the newly emerging Social Gospel movement, such as Tayler and Buck, appeared to him to have more "knowledge and understanding." This insight on diverse missionary strands operating in China, combined with his pro-academic bias, allowed him to embrace missionaries like Buck, who, in his eyes, possessed the qualifications of an academic scholar. His final aspiration, however, was to lead the IPR China project away from religious influences and toward more up-to-date, scientific approaches such as Tawney's. Tawney himself, however, stood in the middle of an important period of methodological transition in the field of economics. The use of political rhetoric, rather than econometrics, for interpreting statistical data would soon be considered a breach of academic objectivity. At the same time, the fields of "economic history" and "economics" were emerging as two sharply different entities, making *Land and Labor in China* a seminal book for economic historians but methodologically obsolete for economists.

## Conclusion

The 1930s debate on China's rural question and the reform movement that accompanied it were characterized by a plethora of on-site investigations, reports on rural industries and agricultural production, and attempts to compile meaningful statistics. These efforts were intended to shed light on the reality of the Chinese village, to allow Chinese and foreign economists to understand the peasants' circumstances, and to create scientific knowledge that could lead to effective reforms. In spite of their extensive efforts to learn about rural China, the leaders of the Chinese rural movement tended to impose on villages and peasants visions that often had little to do with the reality of life in rural China

[75] Ibid., pp. 451–452.

or the country's cultural tradition. This was also the case with Tayler, despite his earnest efforts to create a model Chinese village that was "deeply rooted in the heritage of the past and not an external imposition."[76] In looking at China, Tayler and Tawney were more influenced by their discontent with Western industrialization and capitalism—and their aspiration to mold the Chinese peasants into a socioeconomic community that would constitute a living critique of that system—than by what they observed locally. The problem of "external imposition," however, was also common among Chinese reformers, regardless of their political background. Even if they did not share Tayler's and Tawney's frustration with the economic development in England or the United States, most of them had been trained abroad or in missionary colleges in China and had embraced Western-style economics. As a result, their approach to the village rarely differed significantly from those of the foreign experts.

The similarity of approach of most foreign and Chinese economists was not simply a product of the introduction of Western economics into China. The close cooperation between the two groups, fostered by the missionary network and emerging NGOs such as the IPR, also helped cement them.[77] The Nankai Institute of Economics, for example, employed Chinese staff with an American education, as well as foreigners like Tayler, and also hosted visitors like Tawney, creating an environment of mutual influence in which it becomes impossible to say who influenced whom. Nankai scholars like Fang Xianting and Franklin He genuinely believed in Western economic methodologies but at times used them, more or less consciously, as a way to gain authority in the Chinese academic world and to obtain grants from Western institutions. These scholars employed Western approaches to study issues that were considered urgently relevant to China, such as the relationship between industrialization and the village. Their concerns, in turn, influenced Tawney, whose work can be seen as emblematic of this circular dynamic of transnational academic cooperation. In this context the impact of Tayler and Tawney on China's academic circles is hard to gauge and can be understood only within the wider issues of the introduction of Western economics into China, the development of Chinese academic networks, and the emergence

[76] Tayler, *Aspects of Rural Reconstruction*, p. 22.

[77] At this time the Rockefeller Foundation also financially supported the Nankai Institute of Economics (see Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China*, chap. 5).

of a nongovernmental sphere of expertise fostered by both missionaries and proto-NGOs.

Like most foreign experts, Tayler and Tawney also served briefly as advisors to the Chinese Nationalist government. Their impact on national politics, however, was subject to Chinese interests. Those who came "to change China," in the words of Jonathan Spence, realized that the Chinese would not necessarily accept their recommendations wholesale but would selectively adopt only those elements they believed could serve their needs.[78] Those like Tayler who pursued moral or religious agendas were ultimately bound to be frustrated. Nonmissionary academic experts like Tawney, who, despite their ethical political goals, were not in the business of conversion or changing China, represented a different kind of foreign expert, equipped with a new social science approach that was supposed to lead to increased objectivity. The Chinese government used both types of advisors as much to facilitate receiving foreign financial aid as to employ their skills.[79]

Both Tayler and Tawney produced pathbreaking work, and their contributions remain crucial for understanding rural conditions in early and mid twentieth-century China. Their publications, together with those of Buck and other contemporary foreign experts, opened up the field of Chinese economic history in the West. Tawney's *Land and Labor in China*, in particular, became the seminal work in the field, offering the first analyses of Chinese agriculture from the perspective of Western economics, establishing the parameters for the modern debates on China's economic modernization, and anticipating analytical theories—including the dynamics of the "high-level equilibrium trap"—that were to influence scholars for generations to come. *Land and Labor in China* thus draws our attention to the transnational origins of the Western field of Chinese economic history. Tawney was able to draw upon the seminal work of Chinese economists who were using newly emerging Western economic methodology and to make it available in an organized narrative to the English-speaking public, arguably launching the modern field of Chinese economic history in the West. As Jiang Tingfu, prominent historian and editor of the *Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, commented at the time: "Mr. Tawney

[78] Spence, *To Change China*, p. 290.
[79] Zanasi, "Exporting Development."

has put to good use the knowledge of Chinese and foreign scholars. As an accurate summary of existing information the book is already a contribution."[80]

The 1930s marked both the zenith of missionary economics in China and the beginning of its decline. As organizations such as the League of Nations, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the IPR took over the leadership of foreign economic aid,[81] the missionaries saw their authority slowly erode in areas that had previously been their almost exclusive territories. Missionaries and civilian experts, however, cooperated on most occasions and often agreed on the direction that rural reforms should take; they were both, after all, influenced by the same wider trends, such as evolutionary economics, that transcended their belief systems. In addition, the emergence of the social sciences and the urgency that the "social question" was acquiring around the world were factors that influenced both the Christian church and academia. Missionaries sought training in economics and agriculture, and the Social Gospel movement led the Christian church to take a fresh approach to issues of poverty and class. Academics like Tawney, for their part, were gradually becoming more involved in social issues, an area academia had previously ignored.

Within this wider perspective, however, fundamental differences between the missionaries and the academics remained. Moral exhortations for harmony among classes and a general social conservatism (centered on the Christian family, gender relations, and moral values) were always at the heart of the reform programs of agriculturalist missionaries like Tayler. In this respect, they put economics to work for religion in an effort to build the socioeconomic relations they believed would foster the Christian values they revered. Tawney and other socialist and Marxist scholars of the IPR, on the other hand, were concerned primarily with material conditions, and the moral standards they advocated were those of socioeconomic justice (not moral "wholeness") as the people's fundamental right.

Most significantly, *Land and Labor in China* solidified—and gave academic authority to—an approach to the study of the Chinese economy and international development at large based on both evo-

[80] Tayler, "Review of *Land and Labor in China*," p. 307. Jiang immediately added that the value of the book went beyond this and also rested in its placement of "China's problems in the proper world-history perspective, and while doing this [the author] has in no case read Western categories into Chinese life or sentimentalized over China's peculiarities" (ibid.).

[81] Ibid.; Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China*.

lutionary economics and the idea that objective economic knowledge could transcend local culture. These two methodological approaches remained the accepted and unspoken premises of post–World War II developmental economics, which relied more heavily on econometrics and made local culture irrelevant. At the same time, evolutionary economics no longer needed to be theorized and separated from the racially essentialist language of colonialism as Tawney had done. Still highly rhetorical in nature, but confined to the role of an unspoken background assumption, evolutionary economics would remain at the foundation of the discourse on international development through the 1970s.