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18311) AGRARIAN PROBLEMS IN SOUTHERNMOST CHINA. By Chen Han-seng. (Published for Lingnan University, Canton.) Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Ltd. 1936. (American Edition, LANDLORD AND PEASANT IN CHINA. New York; International Publishers. \$2.00.) 344

THIS valuable addition to the growing body of literature on the Chinese land problem is based on a survey of 152 villages in 38 districts (*hsien*) in the province of Kuangtung, carried out partly by personal investigation on the spot, partly by correspondence. The seven chapters into which it is divided examine from different angles the principal factors determining the economic position of the peasants. They are followed by an appendix containing 35 tables, in which the statistical data yielded by the inquiry are summarized. The result is a thorough, intensive, and, as far as an outsider can judge, a reliable study of the conditions of peasant life over a large part of an important province. No student of Chinese agrarian conditions can afford to neglect Dr. Chen Han-seng's work. 344

The point from which he starts is the contrast between the natural wealth of the region studied and the misery of a large part of the agricultural population. On the one hand, Kuangtung is well endowed with natural resources and has a good system of communications. It is predominantly agricultural—in the region investigated peasant families, including agricultural laborers, account for over four fifths of the total population—and the climate and soil of large parts of it are favorable to the agriculturalists. On the other hand, the standard of life of the mass of its cultivators is shockingly low. In the view of Dr. Chen Han-seng, "the land itself is in danger of losing its wealth-producing qualities, because its productivity can no longer be maintained." Not only so, but, while some of the land under cultivation is running down, "vast tracts of cultivable land are not fully utilized," and grow only the coarse grass used for fuel. Such a situation appears, on the face of it, paradoxical. The purpose of Dr. Chen Han-seng's book is to explain its causes. "Just what are the conditions that make for the decline of agricultural production or prevent its development?" constitutes the theme of the study. 344

The answer, he insists, is to be found less in the technical business aspects of agriculture than in "the social relations in agricultural production." Of these land tenure is the most fundamental, and the four instructive chapters on different aspects of that subject form the backbone of his book. The points which emerge are of considerable interest. Tenancy greatly predominates over ownership: while the proportion of wage-workers is comparatively low, about 10 per cent, that of tenants ranges, apparently, from about 70 to over 90 per cent. (It should be remarked in passing, perhaps, that the Western reader may, unless he keeps his eyes open, be misled by Dr. Chen Han-seng's classification, which counts as "landless" those who lease land without owning it.) A picture of social stratification is given by grouping families according to their command of land, whether owned or rented, and by the degree to which they employ hired labor. The portrait which emerges for ten representative villages selected for special study is of a society in which just over one tenth of the families own one half the land, one fifth own a little more than one quarter, 58.5 per cent own 22.1 per cent, and just under one tenth own no land. The leasing of land is sometimes, no doubt, a sign of prosperity; it may mean that a family has resources to work more land than it owns. More often it appears to be a symptom of land-hunger. The "middle peasants" cultivate more than three times as much land as they own, while the "rich peasants" cultivate only a little more than twice as much. The owner, to survive at all, must get command of additional land at whatever cost. 345

Given the concentration of ownership on the one side, and land-hunger on the other, the exploitation of the poorer peasants is a natural consequence. A good deal of the land appears to be collectively owned, the proportion of "clan land" to the cultivated area ranging, in seventeen districts of eastern Kuangtung, from one fifth to one half. The terms on which land is leased are too various to be summarized, but they seem in almost all the areas investigated to be so onerous as to amount to a system of highly organized exploitation. The landlord, often now apparently an absentee, has the whole machinery of public law and private force on his side. The peasant, since he must get or lease land, by hook or by crook, can be squeezed indefinitely. Hence rents continue to rise, when prices are falling. Not only the whole surplus, but a large part of the cultivator's bare livelihood is skinned off by the landowner. As a result, the peasant falls increasingly into debt, and what the landowner and tax-collector leave, the usurer takes. "We close our survey, then," writes Dr. Chen Han-seng, "upon a note of misery beyond which human experience can hardly go, except in times of catastrophe." (345)

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So much for the author's account of the facts. No one not intimately acquainted with the region studied can say whether the picture is overdrawn, or not. If it is not—and the evidence presented suggests that it is not—then rural society in China, or in this part of China, is crumbling at the bottom. No stable state can be built on such foundations, and the case for some serious policy of land reform, already unanswerable, is once more reinforced. What that policy should be, Dr. Chen Han-seng does not indicate. He dismisses, quite rightly, the view which he ascribes to "many foreign writers"—they must surely be half-witted—that existing holdings are not too small. At the same time, he rejects as "unrealistic" the idea that "farming might again prosper in China with the introduction of farming enterprise on a large scale, commercially organized," and, here again, his skepticism seems not unjustified. He describes as "futile" any "isolated reforms" of the marketing system, of the machinery of credit, of the techniques of production, even of the land system itself, if pursued separately without regard to the totality of influences which impinge upon the life of the farm community; and I, at any rate, am not tempted to dispute his verdict. I cannot help feeling, however, some slight regret that, since the author foretells disaster "unless the agrarian problem is reasonably well solved," some hint of the solution should not have been given. Academic detachment has, doubtless, its merits, but, after all, the object of social investigation is, or should be, action. All readers of Dr. Chen Han-seng's volume will be grateful for what he has already given them. They may be permitted to hope, however, that he will find the opportunity to tell them in some subsequent work what plan of action might be undertaken to change the conditions which he convincingly describes. 346

R. H. TAWNEY
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(378) OUTLINE OF CHINESE ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY. (In Russian.) By M. E. Kazanin. Moscow and Leningrad: Government Printing Office. 1935. pp. 227. 4 rubles. 215

SINCE scientific investigations of China are rare, compared with those of other countries, one does not expect any economic geography on China, at the present stage, to be completely satisfactory. Obviously it is in this light that Mr. Kazanin's book must be reviewed. In contrast with several recent studies of the same subject, this book is a concise account, representing a selected compilation of publications relating to Chinese economic geography up to about 1933. It falls into five parts, physical geography, population, communication, agriculture and industry, preceded by a long introduction. The introduction includes a brief historical survey of the relative strength of foreign capital investment and of international imperialism in China in general, and also brief accounts of Sino-Japanese relations up to the summer of 1935 and of China's internal politics since 1925. 215

More than ten regions are discussed on the basis of physical geographical conditions. These regions include the Lower Yangtze, the Central Yangtze, the Loess region, the Pearl Delta, and the Kweichow and Yunnan plateaus. Parallel to these, national regions have been chosen, namely, Inner Mongolia, southwestern China, Sinkiang, western China and Tibet, besides north and central China. Special regions for both agriculture and industry have been defined for purposes of clarification. Such divisions do not seem to reveal any new geographic knowledge, though they facilitate the appraisal of past work. 216

In the section on industry, two aspects are dealt with which are often neglected by the usual run of writers on this subject. The working and living conditions of industrial employees are described, and a short account of the labor movement is included. The author further brings out the colonial character of Chinese industrial development itself.

The book is not entirely free from small errors. Population figures in a few cases are erroneous. Some of the important sketch maps bear no mention of sources nor of the necessary dates. In the arrangement of the bibliographical lists, no particular order is adopted, and in a few cases the reference is incomplete. 216

There are a few major omissions in the subject matter of the book which may be noted. Considering the importance of opium production in China, it seems strange that there is no better map than that on page 153, and that no effort has been made to discuss the opium question in connection with transportation. Currency problems have not been dealt with—a matter of special significance in China where the exchange rate between silver and copper varies in certain definite regions. While the author, towards the close of the introduction, accounts for the different Soviet regions in China, readers wishing to learn of accomplishments in the former central Soviet region of Kiangsi, particularly in communications, agriculture and industry, will be disappointed. It is to be hoped that these gaps will be filled when the book is revised. But as it stands, this remains the best concise and handy introduction to the study of Chinese economy yet available. 216

CHEN HAN-SENG
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地理学入门书译