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CCAS Statement of Purpose

Critical Asian Studies continues to be inspired by the statement of purpose formulated in 1969 by its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). CCAS ceased to exist as an organization in 1979, but the BCAS board decided in 1993 that the CCAS Statement of Purpose should be published in our journal at least once a year.

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of much of Asia. We reject the legitimacy of this aim, and attempt to change this policy. We recognize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed, 28–30 March 1969
Boston, Massachusetts
Rethinking Colonial Displacement of Koreans in Japan
Dalit Christians and Identity Politics in India
The Cause of the Acute Food Crisis in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
The Kerala Model of Development: Debate and Rejoinder

Volume 30, Number 4 / October - December 1998
The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (ISSN 0007-4810) is a refereed quarterly journal that welcomes unsolicited essays, reviews, translations, interviews, photo essays, and letters about Asia and the Pacific, particularly those that challenge the accepted formulas for understanding the Asia and Pacific regions, the world, and ourselves. Manuscripts should be submitted in quadruplicate and generally should be unpublished and not under consideration for publication elsewhere. For more details on our philosophy and publishing requirements, send for a copy of “Guidelines for BCAS Authors” or visit the BCAS Web site on the Internet: <http://cas.colorado.edu/bcas>.


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- “Engineering the Philippine Uplands: Ethnicity, Gender, and Forest Management under Colonial Rule and Beyond,” by Babette Resurrecion
- “Democratic Compromise in Hong Kong in 1997,” commentary by Alvin Y. So

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Inscribed (Men’s) Bodies, Silent (Women’s) Words: Rethinking Colonial Displacement of Koreans in Japan

This article discusses the socio-historically generated effects of the discourse of decolonization in the case of Korean labor recruits in Japan. During World War II, tens of thousands of Koreans were forcibly brought to Japan by the Japanese military and government as laborers (or kyosei renko, in Japanese). While unreservedly recognizing that the discourse denouncing this violent displacement is indeed a discourse of resistance, the article takes a fresh look at the way in which one legitimate “colonial past” obscures other alternative pasts that may not appear to be central in terms of national-state-focused politics of decolonization. Analyzing the ways in which Korean women have appropriated the experience of male labor recruits, the article proposes that the domination of an “orthodox” version of the past of the oppressed people can create further layers of marginalization within the same group: by not paying attention to references other than those of national liberation—in this case, gender and gender-based exploitation—women are made to speak on behalf of men, rather than themselves. The article emphasizes the need to consider supplementing and revising the male-focused discourse of decolonization.

by Sonia Ryang*

This article addresses a set of issues concerning the body of texts on the labor mobilization forced on Koreans by the Japanese colonial authorities during the Second World War (the forced labor is called Chosenjin kyosei renko in Japanese, or simply kyosei renko). Numerous studies on the topic and testimonies by the survivors of forced labor have appeared in Japanese. Their authors are historians, journalists, writers, teachers, and political activists, both Korean and Japanese, men and women, old and young. This article analyzes kyosei renko testimonies and identifies what kinds of social effects are historically generated in the process of codifying the testimonies as an orthodox way of understanding the colonial past of Koreans in Japan. I am not problematizing the authenticity or verifiability of kyosei renko experiences testified to by Korean labor recruits. Rather, this is a study of the discourse about the violent displacement of a colonized people from the colony to the metropolis, the emergent process of such a discourse, and the socio-historical effects created by this discourse. In this, I am tracing the process and consequences of privileging a particular experience—or memory—as legitimate and authentic as against other experiences. I shall demonstrate that this process has created an additional layer, or layers, of power relations within a displaced group of people, in this case, Koreans in Japan.

All-encompassing Counter-reality

To do the above is to point to a blind spot in research about kyosei renko, in particular, and Japan’s colonial history, in general—namely, the silence and/or silencing of other, marginalized groups of the colonized, notably in this case, women. Korean labor recruits were mainly men and as a result, kyosei renko testimonies have been traditionally articulated from a distinctly gendered perspective. I do not pretend, however, to be capable of presenting a ready-made history of Korean women (as distinct from the history of Korean men) during the kyosei renko period. More often than not, seeing something that has been hidden from us requires a radical alteration of our minds. This article aims to produce such an alteration, if not to offer an all-encompassing historical reality—or counter-reality.

The first of this article’s four parts provides historical, political, and methodological background to the production of kyosei renko discourse. The second part is about kyosei renko testimonies. In the third part, I revisit several particular testimonies and spell out their problematical aspects, seen from a methodological perspective. The fourth part examines women’s experiences that break away from kyosei renko discourse as an authentic colonial experience shared by all the Koreans. I criti-

* This paper has benefited from discussions with Mark Selden, Gavan McCormack, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Thomas Fenton, Philip Taylor, and, indirectly, with Yumi Selden. I am grateful to them for their supportive and insightful comments and suggestions. A preliminary version was presented to the Asian Studies Association in Australia Conference in Melbourne in 1996. Comments and questions in the session were of great help. The Toyota Foundation funded my research and interviews in Japan, for which I am grateful. Finally, I wish also to thank three anonymous readers of BCAS, whose comments were very helpful in revising the earlier version of this article.
cally analyze how women take the kyosei renko experience as a point of departure in representations of their own past.

My focus is on Koreans in Japan and their colonial displacement, not on Koreans who were relocated to places other than Japan under Japanese colonialism or on Koreans in Korea and their colonial experience. The displacement of Koreans to Japan from the colony is significant in that they were taken to the heart of the imperial metropolis. Moreover, the displacement continues to have repercussions on the debate about unsettled colonial issues in the postcolonial present of Korean residents in Japan. For these reasons, I wish to reconsider the kyosei renko discourse in a multi-faceted way.

**On Kyosei Renko Research**

Under Japanese colonial occupation, several million Koreans moved between the colony and the metropolis for one reason or another. Many Korean emigrants were short-term seasonal workers; many others settled, albeit temporarily, in Japanese cities, forming ghettos and slums. Korean laborers are found in Japan as early as 1876, the date of Japan’s opening by means of a Western-style unequal treaty. The 1920 national census recorded 40,755 Korean residents in Japan. The number increased to a little less than 420,000 by 1930, and then to 1.24 million by 1940. When the war ended, there were about 2.4 million Koreans living in Japan, a number rapidly reduced by the postwar repatriation; by 1948, only about 600,000 remained.

In this history of intra-empire migration of Koreans to Japan, kyosei renko stands as a radical break from other forms of Korean displacement, first because of its sheer quantity and second because of its directly forceful manner. The displacement started in the late 1930s when Japan entered the undeclared war against China. Koreans were recruited to work in mines and factories in Japan and subsequently at military bases and construction sites. They were also conscripted into the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy, both as soldiers and civilian employees.

The number of Korean conscripts and labor recruits differs depending on the method of calculation. In a document in 1964, the Japanese Ministry of Justice estimated the total number of recruits prior to 1945 as 635,000. In 1949, a Ministry of Justice researcher estimated the number to be 702,808. Working from Japanese parliamentary papers, Kim Yong-dal, a Korean-Japanese researcher, estimates that from 1939 to December 1944 a total of 634,093 male Koreans were brought to Japan in various labor sectors. As for the military, a total of 257,404 Korean men served in the Japanese army (civilian component inclusive) and 106,782 in the navy throughout the course of the war. The recruitment of women is not recorded in either military or civilian statistics.

Broadly speaking, the entire migration of Koreans to Japan and other areas under Japanese control (such as northeastern China and the Pacific Islands after the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910) can be called “colonial displacement.” However, whether this relocation was forced or not is the subject of complex debate. There were many reasons for Koreans to come to Japan—some involved direct or indirect coercion, while others involved Koreans leaving home voluntarily in search of educational, occupational, or other opportunities.

What is characteristic among the authors of kyosei renko texts is that the notion of “forced labor” is used in a self-consciously political manner. As a consequence, they disregard the voluntary-involuntary distinction. For example, Japanese historian, Hayashi Eitai, one of the most prolific writers of the history of kyosei renko, argues that the notion of “forced labor” should be retained as a polemic and critique, as long as the Japanese government officially maintains its position that the Korean recruits were not “forced,” inasmuch as Korea had officially been annexed to Japan and Koreans therefore were treated as Japanese. The Japanese government refuses to compensate individual victims of former colonial rule including forced laborers. The government insists to this day that the issues of reparations were resolved by its 1965 agreement with the South Korean government. As long as this remains the case, kyosei renko authors insist on calling the Korean displacement “forced labor recruitment” and not voluntary labor relocation. We shall see below an ironical side effect of this basically sound stance.

No compensation was given directly to Korean individuals who had been forcibly taken to Japan. Likewise, Korean conscripts and their bereaved families have been denied not only compensation but also veterans’ pensions because the stipulation is that one must be a Japanese national to receive these benefits—and Koreans in Japan lost their Japanese national-
ity in 1952. Twenty-three Koreans were executed by the Allied forces as Japanese war criminals; 7.2 percent of the total of 3,419 convicted war criminals were people from colonies such as Korea and Taiwan. As of 1989, 5,154 Japanese veterans were receiving disability pensions and 55,731, war bereavement pensions; no Koreans qualified for such benefits. Korean atomic bomb victims who suffered injury from the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were likewise denied compensation by the Japanese government on the basis of nationality criteria, and Korean families whose members had been sent from Japan to places such as Sakhalin, under the war-time mobilization, have received little attention and no money.

Given the unhelpful stance of the Japanese government toward the Korean victims of Japanese colonialism, in general, and kyosei renko, in particular, the testimonies of the Korean survivors are a prime source of evidence for possible legal suits against the Japanese government for colonial compensation. As is evident in Hayashi’s position (cited above), many Japanese researchers take it as their moral mission to “do justice” to those who survived the experience and, of course, to those who did not. Typically, when researchers visit labor recruitment sites, they first visit temples in the area where they pray for the repose of deceased Koreans who had never been given a proper funeral or burial—at times because their place of origin in Korea was unknown. Many Japanese historians involved in kyosei renko research and other writers involved in the investigation of colonial history seem to share a sense of moral responsibility about recording oral data. For example, Honda Katsuichi, a Japanese journalist who conducted extensive interviews with Chinese survivors of Japanese atrocities during the Sino-Japanese War (1937-45), writes as follows:

I am aware that some find it anachronistic for me to write reports [about Chinese survivors of the Japanese violence] twenty-six years after the end of the war. However, I feel that it is precisely because of this time span that we must now do this. Rather than right after Japan’s defeat, now is the time for this kind of investigation. . . . The victims of a massacre can forget the past if they choose to do so. But, for the nation that committed the massacre to forget about it is nothing but a crime.

As for Korean researchers in Japan, their desire to get involved in kyosei renko investigations can be understood at one level as a postcolonial recapturing of their colonial past. The investigations were begun in the early 1960s, for the most part by first-generation Korean writers; at the same time, a North Korea support organization, the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (or Chongryun, the English transliteration of the association’s name in Korean) used its nationwide organizational network to begin its own investigation of kyosei renko.

Kyosei renko research done by Koreans in Japan needs to be understood against the larger picture of efforts to come to terms with their colonial past during the process of decolonization. Pak Kyong-sik, a historian who pioneered this research, writes as follows:

The forced recruitment of Koreans, which was a brutal component of an aggressive war that revealed the naked tusks of Japanese militarism, emerged in the final stage of Japanese colonial rule of Korea. . . . When I think about how many Korean lives were sacrificed in mining and in the constructions of roads, airfields, and railways, my heart is assaulted with pangs. Japanese must think seriously about this problem of Koreans, for the sake of Japanese themselves.

They should teach about [the forced recruitment of Koreans] in history education. . . . It is important to understand how much Korean people suffered under the Japanese imperialism.

Furthermore, the time-lag between earlier investigations in the 1960s and research conducted in the 1990s needs to be stressed since the consequences of half a century of Japanese diaspora in Japan inevitably conditions the difference in experiences between the first generation of Korean immigrants and the later, Japan-born generations. For younger Korean researchers, kyosei renko research is partly an attempt to redefine their in-Japaness. Japan-born Korean historian Yang T’ae-ho’s writings about his stance vis-à-vis kyosei renko research reflect a delicate shift from Pak Kyong-sik’s position:

Kyosei renko is a phenomenon that covers a wide range and its research is becoming more serious over time. . . . This study [referring to Pak, Yamada, and Yang’s Chosenjin Kyosei Renko Rom bun Shusei] demonstrates what an unspeakable suffering Koreans experienced and at the same time it shows that these Koreans helped build the basis for [today’s] Japanese society. . . . In other words, without a doubt, Koreans played a part in Japanese history. Because of this, this is a book about the history of Koreans; simultaneously, it constitutes an indispensable part of the local history [of Japan]. I intend this book to be a requiem for Korean victims and also to make a mutual memory for Japanese and Koreans who will continue to share Japanese society as their living space.

Whereas the first-generation Pak counterpoises Japanese/Japan and Koreans/Korea, the Japan-born Yang takes a more interactional approach, situating the history of the forced recruitment of Koreans within the wider Japanese historical experience. In Pak’s approach, Korea and Japan are juxtaposed in a nation-to-nation diagram, with Korea denouncing Japan as the party responsible for its pain and demanding repentance and repayment. The clear-cut rupture between Japan and Korea suggests the need for solidarity and Japanese self-education precisely because Pak regards the two nations to be non-connectable alien entities. Yang’s argument, by contrast, is written from the perspective of Koreans who were born after the direct colonial experience and who continue to live in Japan. In Yang’s approach, the nation-state level of concern is rather weak and the configurational arrangement of Korean experience and Japanese history takes the form of combination and continuity, as can be seen in his locating the history of Koreans in Japan inside Japan’s modern history. For the second-generation Yang, kyosei renko is a “requiem for the victims”; the first-generation Pak, by contrast, still lives with ongoing pain and rage perceived at the national level.

This is not to say that Pak’s rage is unjustifiable, even though neither he nor second-generation Koreans such as Yang experienced kyosei renko personally. For Pak, the historical memory of kyosei renko is kept alive by his own effort, lest the colonial past of Koreans be buried forever by the Japanese government. As Salman Rushdie has remarked, the fight for memory is a political struggle. Pak’s desire to “have kyosei renko recorded” is precisely of this nature. As for Yang, although the sense of injury is undeniably present, his approach is forward-looking and future-oriented. Yang was born and grew up in Japan and he regards his own future and that of other second-generation Koreans to be rooted in Japanese soil. For him, the politics of remembering takes a different turn from that of the first generation; for him, it is as important to work out a future for Koreans
I stress here that post-war oral history of Japan has been mainly the methodological property of leftist scholarship. Historians and writers, both Korean and Japanese, who visit Korean survivors of kyosei renko and try to listen to their life histories, are by and large practitioners of the history of the oppressed, recording the suffering of the people at the grassroots level and inscribing the words of the colonized, whose victimhood is not acknowledged in official records. The Kyosei renko oral documentation project is, in this sense, fundamentally an anti-colonial, anti-establishment practice.

From Colonized Bodies to the Politics of Decolonization

In this section, I turn to the actual testimonies of Korean men who were brought to Japan by kyosei renko. According to these testimonies, Korean colonial government officers under the Japanese governor-general, as well as the heads of local villages in Korea, were directly involved in labor-force recruitment, selecting men of a certain age to be sent to Japan and elsewhere. In most cases, the laborers regarded recruitment as the equivalent of military service and understood its refusal as a serious offense. Toward the end of the Pacific War, labor-force recruitment became more frequent and the degree of coercion intensified. In extreme cases, peasants were captured abruptly while working in their fields or they were hunted down from the roadside. Many Korean men who had moved to Japan in search of work were conscripted for war-related labor service in Japan. Korean recruits were assigned to home-front production, including mining and military-related tasks such as airfield construction and ammunition production. According to Kim Yong-dal’s calculations for the years 1939 to 1944, a total of 320,148 Korean men worked in Japan in coal mining, 61,409 in metal mining, 129,664 in construction and civil engineering, and 122,872 in manufacturing and machine industries.

The worst cases involved the experiences of Korean men who were recruited toward the final stage of the Pacific War when the government became keenly aware of its labor shortage. The first thing the workers were subjected to at work sites in Japan was the obligation to learn basic technical Japanese words such as numbers and political codes that were the order of the day, including expressions of loyalty to the Japanese emperor. The latter was emphasized in order to heighten morale in the interest of boosting production. The harder part, however, was bodily affliction, as can be seen in the following testimony:

It was several days prior to the Oriental New Year’s Day that I was taken forcefully to the Chikuhoku mine in Fukuoka prefecture [Japan]. I was seventeen then and caught [by the officers] as I was loading a bundle of firewood onto our cow in my home village. . . . When we got off the lorry, we were told to line up in a double queue. A Japanese supervisor yelled “Number!” Because he spoke in Japanese, we could not understand him, and we stood in silence. Then, a [Korean] man who was standing in the front line was bashed with a club. I heard a sharp sound and then saw him fall down on the ground, soaked in his own blood.

According to An Ryon-han, on the day of his arrival a total of seventy Korean men were flogged because they did not understand instructions given in Japanese.

Testimonies abound with similar stories. Hayashi Eidai reconstructs the case of Sim Jae-hwan who was recruited to a mine in Nagasaki in 1943:

Typically, when researchers visit labor recruitment sites, they first visit temples in the area where they pray for the repose of deceased Koreans who had never been given a proper funeral or burial—at times because their place of origin in Korea was unknown. (Photo: The uncollected remains of Korean workers left in Hoko temple, in an unspecified location. Credit: Hayashi Eidai, Kesareta Chosongin Kyosei Renko no Kiroku: Kanyu Renrakusen to Kasho no Kofo tachi [Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1989]. Reproduced with permission.)

in Japan as it is to remember the past. In this sense, Yang's approach is not so much nation-oriented, he focuses on kyosei renko as the past of Koreans in Japan, rather than the past of the particular government that represents the Korean nation today. If the first generation representation of kyosei renko is seen as the deprivation of national dignity—and if this defines the colonial “roots” of Koreans in Japan, following Paul Gilroy's formula—then the ongoing search for kyosei renko history by the younger generations born in Japan is to identify the “routes” by which “Koreans-in-Japan-ness” is delivered.

On the whole, kyosei renko testimonies have come principally from the Korean labor recruits themselves; Japanese who were involved—as supervisors or workers—have contributed very little information about their firsthand experiences. For example, over the period of nearly two decades, Hayashi Eidai interviewed more than three hundred individuals, but he notes that “the Japanese persons who were directly involved in the kyosei renko business tended to resort to excuses saying that Koreans had been Japanese nationals at that time and therefore it was natural that they were mobilized or that it could not have been helped because it was wartime.”

Hayashi emphasizes that no Japanese school textbook of history deals with the issue of the wartime mobilization of Koreans. (This is no longer so. The topic is covered in recently published primary school social studies textbooks, which include coverage of history.)
Having been fed with rotten beans, [Korean miners] suffered from diarrhea for days... As soon as they got out of the pit, they would drop in a faint on the ground because of fatigue caused by malnutrition and severe dehydration. If they were on sick leave, Japanese supervisors would come ransacking the dormitory, saying, “Korean miners are deliberately sabotaging us!” [The sick miners] would be beaten with a wooden sword. When Sim Jae-hwan was on sick leave, the supervisor came... and he took Sim to the Labor Control Department [LCD]. Every Korean miner knew what it meant to be summoned to the LCD. In the past, they had heard screams of “Algo!” [denoting pain] coming from the LCD office all night long and had seen bodies carried away from the office... When Sim was taken to the LCD... he was first beaten with a wooden sword about ten times or so. After that he was unable to remain standing. Several men grabbed him, tied his feet, and then hung him upside down.31

Sim Jae-hwan was beaten all the while he was in captivity. Sim recalls that after about his thirtieth whipping, he almost lost consciousness. Sim was released after a week, but many others ended their lives then and there at the LCD.

Korean laborers were routinely punished for “laziness,” but the harshest punishment was reserved for those who tried to escape the labor camp altogether. Numerous witnesses testify to the fact that captured transgressors were tortured and sometimes executed in public, so as to create a sense of mass terror as a warning to everyone else. Apart from deliberate punishments, there were also accidents. Some laborers lost arms or legs, some were burned, some were gassed, and some were crippled with mental disorders. Time and again, horrendous scenes of bloodshed and beating are mentioned in the recollections. Occurrences of lynching and torture by Japanese work supervisors are recalled as decisive points of reference in the colonial experience of these Korean men.

The horror of corporal punishment in the form of violence and torture has become a cause for public rage in modern history. Testimonies of holocaust, genocide, torture, and abuse registered in recent human history are profoundly distressing and disturbing to those who read them, because as Zygmunt Bauman writes, bodily violence destabilizes “the care which is taken not to invade that most private of spaces, to avoid bodily contact, to abide by the culturally prescribed bodily distance, and the trained disgust and repulsion we feel whenever we see or hear of that sacred space being trespassed on.”32

Many former laborers dwell on bodily suffering precisely in order to touch this moment of horror. The pain inscribed in the body as cuts, scars, burns, marks, bruises, deformation, disability, loss of body parts such as fingers and limbs, chronic illness, and long-term maladies is, through the act of giving testimony, appropriated by the former recruits as the key to recapturing their sacred space being trespassed on.32

In the testimonies, the storytellers emphasize that the bodily pain that they experienced was not just personal. Rather, the torture they suffered was the torture that the Korean nation suffered under the Japanese; the violence they endured was the violence that Koreans as a whole endured. In kyosei renko discourse, individual bodies are no longer confined within personal boundaries; they form a collective body of the colonized.

The act of speaking up about bodily pain in this way becomes socially meaningful; it enables personal pasts to mesh together to form a wider political experience of collectivity for Koreans in general and, more specifically, Koreans in Japan. This is because in the eyes of the testifier, describing the violence is part of a broader process of decolonization and the postcolonial redefinition of colonial experience. Their colonized bodies become the material form through which they convey the unspoken-injuries of the colonial experience to their listeners. In this process, their bodies speak for themselves. It is no coincidence that many published testimonies contain photos of interviewees showing the scars on various parts of their bodies. The moment that the kyosei renko laborers speak up and reveal their bodies beyond the private boundaries of personal history—exposing their tortured, scarred, exploited bodies to the camera—their bodies are no longer personal property in a strict sense.

In the old regimes, the power of the sovereign was demonstrated and manifested in the body of the executed, as in the case of Damiens’ ordeal described by Michel Foucault.33 The colonized bodies of Korean men also are in a retrospective spectrum conveying the oppression and dehumanization under colonial rule. By a simple metonym, tortured and scarred bodies are the extension of colonizing power, speaking against the colonizer by using the bodily scars that were inflicted by that very same power. Metaphorically, then, the past colonial injustice was carried in the bodies of Korean men, and this “embodiment” now speaks for decolonization.

Some Problems

The kyosei renko testimonies cited so far have been taken as a positive, powerful appropriation of colonial memory in order to render the present politically meaningful. In this section and in the following, however, I wish to explore problematical aspects of kyosei renko research as it is practiced today. These are divided into (1) a problem concerning the intersection between the personal and the political; (2) a problem of authorial intervention and teleology; and (3) a problem of silencing the non-mainstream group, women in this case. The first and second problems are connected in an intricate manner and therefore, will be discussed together below; the third problem I shall discuss in the section that follows.

The process of personal experience becoming collective politics has a strong parallel in feminist politics. “The Personal Is Political” has been the main slogan for feminists during the latter half of the twentieth century. Marginalization of the personal and the domestic had deprived women of authority and validity, even though they may have enjoyed unofficial power at home.34 Although impregnated with ambiguity and different definitions and degrees of acceptance by liberal, radical, and Marxist feminists, the political redefinition of the personal by women became a key to the initiation of many women into feminist causes. Feminists have tried ever since the 1960s to revise the illusory character of the understanding of the personal as non-political.35

The relation between the personal and the political, with the latter distinctly embodying collective politics, proved to be crucial in understanding not only women’s experience but also the suffering of minorities and other oppressed peoples. The case of kyosei renko discourse is a similar attempt at politicizing the personal experiences and collectivizing private property—body in this case—to be shared as colonial experience.

As a relevant example, let us consider I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala. This “testimony of a Guatemala-
Ian Indian organizer fighting for her people’s civil rights is presented as much more than a self-portrait of one engaged individual; rather, Menc’u’s testimony paints a larger painting of “a collective self engaged in a common struggle.” Rigoberta Menc’u says:

My name is Rigoberta Menc’u. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people. It’s hard for me to remember everything that’s happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.

Rigoberta Menc’u is telling us her personal history, but this is predicated on the broader reality of her community life and on the history of her community. In her study of Menc’u’s testimony, Claudia Salazar argues that her personal narratives are “playing an important role in intervening and inscribing in the historical record the political-cultural trajectories and collective memories of raped/silenced/erased ethnic ‘minorities.’” The same can be said of kyosei renko testimonies: personal narratives that become historical interventions into the politics of representation of colonial relations through their references to scarred, tortured bodies.

What politics the narratives represent, however, should be regarded as open-ended, or at least indeterminate. Here I wish to question the connection between personal narratives and collective politics, more specifically, the politics of anti-colonial national liberation. Addressing this question will lead us to the problem of authorial intervention and teleology, which I mentioned earlier as my second problem.

Assessing Elisabeth Burgos-Debray’s editing of Rigoberta Menc’u’s testimony, Salazar points out the tension between the politics of voices and techniques of textualization:

One could argue that Burgos-Debray’s editorial orchestration in the highly problematic role of Rigoberta’s transparent “double” produces a text that is more informative of her and her readers’ own interpretive agendas than of Rigoberta’s, hence transforming the latter’s testimony into a Western logocentric mirror that reflects our own assumptions about what a narrative by someone like Rigoberta should look like.

Although I do not agree totally with Salazar—for she seems to assume that somehow we can reach a utopian position by letting the oppressed subject (here Menc’u) speak her own words—her point appears to be relevant nevertheless in dealing with the authors of kyosei renko texts, who tend to extend testimonies beyond their scope, or (borrowing from Salazar) who are inclined to make testimonies into what a narrative by people like kyosei renko victims should look like. A clear example of this can be seen in the trend to connect kyosei renko experience with resistance against colonial oppression in the form of the national liberation struggle of Koreans. Thus, Pak Kyong-sik writes:

It is important to clarify the evidence [we have] of forced labor, [namely] training to make Koreans into the emperor’s people, ethnic discrimination, coercive work supervision, and military and police oppression, along with [the evidence we have of] resistance against the forced labor in the form of boycotting, strikes, and “riots.” We find these only in fragments, however; it is necessary to investigate them concretely and systematically. In particular, resistance movements [of recruited workers] should be assessed as part of [Korean] nationalist movements and anti-war movements.

As I suggested earlier, recalling kyosei renko is not a mere act of remembering, but a political action. Nevertheless, it is one thing to identify the discursive action of making testimonies and to recognize the meaningfulness of such an act; it is quite another to inject decolonization discourse in the postcolonial context back into the reconstruction of the “real” and “total” colonial past, understood here as an anti-colonial national-liberation struggle. True, Koreans in Japan had been very vocal and active in the communist movements in pre-war Japan, and, indeed, there are records of several specific occurrences of industrial action waged by miners who had been brought to Japan as a result of kyosei renko. However, there is little justification for equating industrial actions, even highly politicized ones, with anti-colonial national-liberation struggles, since demands for an improvement in particular working conditions, for example, cannot simply be aggregated together to eventually generate a national-liberation struggle.

Recent studies of colonial cultures show that in some unpredictable, yet intricate, ways, colonizer and colonized collaborate structurally to produce the colonial space in which historically specific ethos, sentiment, lifestyle, norms, language, environment, and commonsense—in a word, culture—are created and re-created. (This is not to suggest, though, that the colonized is ever not at a disadvantage.) In the postcolonial politics of national independence, however, ambiguity is often obliterated and instead, a stark opposition between the oppressor and the oppressed emerges, with the former bent on eradicating the latter’s national identity and the latter united in their determination to recover their national independence, as Pak Kyong-sik assumes. One of the consequences of this approach is the reduction of a complex power structure among the colonized to simplistic terms.

While Korean producers of kyosei renko texts are more inclined to talk about the connection between the national-liberation movement and kyosei renko, Japanese writers appear to be more committed to portraying kyosei renko as a part of the international labor struggle and evidence of solidarity between Korean and Japanese workers dominated by the exploitative capitalist and imperialist state. For example, Nagasawa Satoshi, who studies the Joban mines in Fukushima prefecture, Japan, where many Koreans were brought as miners, writes in the beginning of his essay:

Here is my hypothesis: the Korean working class continued to resist Japanese imperialism and monopoly capital under the most horrendous oppression in the wartime period and despite the ethnic exclusion policy and dividing-the-nations policy of Japanese imperialism—the Japanese and Korean working classes share a history of consistently upholding grassroots-level solidarity and friendship. This historical experience of the Japanese and Korean masses led to the active struggle by the Korean working class in Japan soon after the defeat of Japanese imperialism. [This struggle] was supported by and at the same time contributed to the politicization of the Japanese working class.

According to Nagasawa, political authorities recorded many, albeit isolated, cases of resistance waged by Korean miners of Joban during the war.

In January 1940, for example, 430
In this history of intra-empire migration of Koreans to Japan, kyosei renkō stands as a radical break from other forms of Korean displacement, first because of its sheer quantity and second because of its directly forceful manner. (Photo: Pusan marine police station. Korean workers are presumably being checked before being sent to Japan. Credit: Hayashi Eidai, Kasatara Chosa'in Kyosei Renko no Kiniku: Kanju Renrakusen to Kaiso no Kofu tachi [Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1989]. Reproduced with permission.)

Korean miners boycotted work to protest the death of a Korean miner under suspicious circumstances. Closer scrutiny reveals, however, that the list of “resistance” activities includes a mix of incidents, such as assaults on Japanese supervisors (once in 1940, three times in 1942, and once in 1944), one case of seven Korean miners assaulting a Korean interpreter in 1940, and a clash between 200 Korean miners and Japanese miners in 1940. The ambiguous directions that these isolated assaults took—toward a Korean interpreter, for example, and against Japanese miners, not their supervisors—suggests that the picture of daily life in the mines was complex and not accurately captured in a statement such as “the Japanese and Korean working classes share a history of consistently upholding grassroots-level solidarity and friendship.”

In the above example, the assumption of the existence of class or class consciousness under colonialism becomes a pre-determining framework for the continuity between anti-colonial international solidarity and postcolonial anti-imperialist struggle. These—colonial fragmentary “resistances” and postcolonial organized struggles—don’t have to be connected in order for each to be validated; they stand in meaningful categories on their own, without necessarily having to be in continuity. Nagasawa, however, maintains that they ought to be linked in historical continuity.

The assumed connection between kyosei renkō and national liberation struggle and kyosei renkō and the international labor struggle is founded on a teleological inference, and it presupposes the existence of a unified class struggle. Meanwhile, there seem to be insufficient grounds to identify even the formation of a class among Korean miners, let alone a common commitment to national liberation goals or international labor solidarity. In both Pak’s and Nagasawa’s approaches, categories such as class/class consciousness or nation/national identity are thought to pre-exist the everyday practice of miners. Researchers then use these pre-existing forms to collect and organize testimonial evidence, rather than allow the testifiers to manifest their personal dignity by speaking for themselves. Effectively, then, the authorial intervention undermines the validity of the personal experience of the survivors in the name of collectivity.

Silencing Women

Judith Allen argues that “left” historians assume that class identity supersedes gender identity, while Marxist historians privilege the “political.” Both betray a patriarchal attitude, according to Allen. Allen’s criticism is appropriate for Pak and Nagasawa, as well as for the authors of many other kyosei renkō texts. They all assume either the nation (Pak) or class (Nagasawa) as a dominant force. This approach marginalizes or even obliterates non-national, non-class factors, notably gender in the case of kyosei renkō discourse, but other aspects as well, as we shall see below.

During my ethnographical fieldwork in the early 1990s, which involved interviewing more than 120 Koreans in Japan, I encountered many first-generation Korean women. References to the circumstances under which these women moved to Japan from Korea during the colonial period were an important feature of the mini-life histories I collected. Many women cited the experience of kyosei renkō as the main reason for their colonial relocation from Korea to Japan. Upon closer examination, however, it became clear that the relocations resulted from multiple causes, not all of them related to kyosei renkō. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the women I interviewed insisted on kyosei renkō as the cause of their relocation to Japan. Let us see how women talk about this.

The elderly Mrs. Yu, who was born in a southern province of the Korean peninsula:

I cannot forgive colonialism. It is because we were the colonized slaves (singminji noye) of the Japanese that we had to leave our native villages….My husband was taken to the mines toward the end of the war, while I had to go to the countryside with my children for shelter, since shelling was already destroying Tokyo. Even today, Japanese look down on us, whenever an occasion presents itself. They completely forget that it was their colonial policy that brought us here to Japan and made my husband work for their wartime production. We never wanted to come over to this foreign land.

Mrs. Yu moved to Japan, following her father who had already moved there, and settled down with a small but regular income. Her husband, on the other hand, was born in Japan; his family had settled there in the early 1910s. Mrs. Yu and her husband lived together in Japan after they married in 1940; her husband was eventually conscripted into service of the military in a district outside of Tokyo. In Mrs. Yu’s case it is clear that she identifies her husband’s labor service, which was not the direct cause of either his or her relocation from Korea to Japan, as the origin of their displacement.
A clearer case is that of Pae Sun-sin, who married Ro Yong-hun in Korea in the early 1940s. A couple of months after their marriage, a notice was posted in their village advertising jobs in the Japanese ammunition industry. Seeing this as an opportunity to improve their livelihood, because life in their village was very difficult, the newly married couple moved to Japan. Pae Sun-sin states that during the war Ro Yong-hun earned a good living, compared to what they had had in Korea. After the war, the couple considered returning to Korea, but in the end they decided against it, due to the partition of the peninsula and the unsettled situation that followed. Are they kyosei renko victims? Pae Sun-sin declares, “Why, yes, we are. You must know that we all are the victims of colonialism and kangje ryonhaeng [kyosei renko in Korean], Iliche [Japanese imperialism] brought us here forcefully and then mije [U.S. imperialism] divided our country, occupying our native village. We must not forget this past.”

Strictly speaking, neither Mrs. Yu nor Pae Sun-sin had experienced kyosei renko. As I have argued above, it is legitimate in my view to assume a degree of collectivity in the personal experiences of those who suffered from kyosei renko, both corporally and psychologically. But I wonder whether the exclusive reference to kyosei renko made by these women might not be the result of “borrowing” from the past of others—including their husbands—and furthermore, whether this borrowing is undermining their personal politics in the name of the collectivity of Koreans in Japan. I also wonder whether the women focus on kyosei renko because they are not encouraged or given the opportunity to recall their own personal “colonial past” in the face of something that is deemed to rank higher or be more central than their personal life histories.

In the course of my fieldwork, I met more women whose recollections of the past resembled the pattern of Pae Sun-sin’s and Mrs. Yu’s: they either identified themselves with their husband’s experience or more directly resonated with what is written in the kyosei renko testimonies, even though their personal experience came from elsewhere. It may be fair to say that because of its oppressiveness and coercion, kyosei renko is regarded as a most legitimate point of origin for Koreans in Japan for their colonial displacement to Japan. And, because of this legitimacy, it is taken as a most justifiable point from which Koreans in Japan can denounce Japanese imperialism and its colonial rule. In itself, no doubt taking kyosei renko in this way is justified in the politics of decolonization of Koreans in Japan.

Yet the questions remain: What is marginalized when kyosei renko is given such centrality? What is left out when all the colonial experiences of Koreans in Japan are unified in the name of kyosei renko? Whose past is forgotten when kyosei renko is taken to be the all-encompassing “colonial past” for Koreans in Japan? To shift the centrality of kyosei renko is, moreover, not simply to discover alternative past events. It is to uncover the power relations that are obscured by the hegemonic vision of kyosei renko as “our (read national) colonial past” held by Koreans in Japan. In this sense, a mere substitution of writing, say, women’s kyosei renko history would not suffice. As long as such work is done within the central framework of the national and collective, a similar paradigm will continue to be produced. More important is to recognize the gap and deconstruct what has been canonized in the corpus of kyosei renko texts.

For Korean women, leaving home for factories and workplaces in the imperial metropolis had entirely different meanings from the experiences of Korean men. Due to Korea’s patrilineal tradition, men had a place, a home to go back to, and they stood to inherit land and other property, however small; they were entitled to, as well as being burdened by, the traditional lineage succession and the duty of ancestral memorial rituals. By way of contrast, it can be said that women had few obligations and even fewer benefits to lose. Women were traditionally excluded from lineage succession and property inheritance. Of the women who moved to Japan, the experience of colonial displacement was different for those who were married and those who were single, for those who had the means to eke out living and those who did not, for those who had some skill and those who did not, for those who had some knowledge of Japan and those who did not. They all faced different degrees and forms of exploitation by, and exposure to, colonial reality. Bearing these points in mind, if we remember that kyosei renko victims were predominantly men, women's association with this male form of experience becomes an uneasy one, to say the least. It is as if women were given men's political language with which to recall their colonial past. This effectively relegates women's own experiences into the realm of the unremembered and unregistered.

The history of the colonial migration of Korean women to Japan has been written about. For example, Kim Ch’an-jong gives us an account of the history of Kishiwada textile factories in Osaka in the pre-war period, while Kim Yong and Yang Jung-ja, second-generation Korean women in Japan, deliver moving life histories of women divers who moved from Korea to Japan during the colonial period. However, women’s history has not ascended to the hegemonic position occupied by male-focused images of kyosei renko, and existing works on women’s history tend not to take gender-conscious approaches.

**Comfort Women**

In recent years, the issue of comfort women has merited much attention from media in Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and beyond. However, by and large, news and commentary about these women has been marked by government-to-government interactions on compensation issues, reminding us of patriarchal politics in which female gender is ranked in second place, in this case behind national interests. We must ask why so many former comfort women in both Korea and Japan, for example, were silent for decades after the war. Furthermore, why are many of them speaking up now—or more precisely, in the early 1990s, when state-level discussions on this issue were held between the South Korean and Japanese governments—and not before. Was it not because nation-centered discourse has dominated the sphere of colonial reference, relegateing gender-related matters to a secondary place when not ignoring them altogether? Was it not because former comfort women were overtly and covertly regarded as the bearers of a dirty past by governments both of the former colonizer and the colonized, including men and women? Was it not, furthermore, because women themselves were made to internalize such a value system so as not to seek post-traumatic help or any other measures to help them come to terms with their own colonial past, all the while men spoke in public, with no hesitation and a lot of support and sympathy, about the past suffering and humiliation they endured as kyosei renko? How do we account for this, other than calling it a double suffering of women because of (foreign) colonialism and (compatriot) sexual oppression? Although the women I interviewed were not former comfort women, the way in which they identified with kyosei...
renko as their past, rather than with the experience of the comfort women, is indicative of which one of these has secured the legitimate, hegemonic position—even for women themselves.

Women’s experience that is directly related to kyosei renko has yet to be explored. According to Hayashi who is most active in this area, Korean women’s suffering in relation to kyosei renko often took different forms from that of men. Based on interviews carried out in today’s South Korea, Hayashi records that widows who lost their husbands in Japanese military or economic service suffered not only from the loss of their husbands but also, and more significantly, from oppression and abuse inside the home by their in-laws, who regarded the bride as a domestic laborer and tacitly blamed her for the loss of their son.

Below are some excerpts from Hayashi’s study. Although Hayashi’s data do not contain examples from Korean women who continue to live in Japan and although his pen is ultimately directed towards denouncing the Japanese government and its colonial policy tout court, his stories are highly indicative of the extreme complications of the “colonial past,” when we give gender as much importance as nationalism and class exploitation, thereby destabilizing the national-level colonial confrontation.

The first case comes from Mrs. R who was born in Korea and herself never went to Japan. But her story is a window through which to look at how gendered or domestic exploitation is accentuated by colonialism and other “grand-scale” exploitations. Mrs. R was three months into her pregnancy when her husband was conscripted. They had married in what we would now call a love marriage; he was a college student and she was working at a bank where he met her and they fell in love. He was sent to the Japanese railway construction site on the Thai-Burmese border, assigned the position of supervising the POWs and eventually tried as a war criminal after the war. Having served prison sentences in Singapore and Tokyo, Mrs. R’s husband returned to Korea in 1957 to live with Mrs. R and their son who was born in his absence. Seventeen years had passed since they parted when he was conscripted. After they started to live together, however, Mrs. R’s husband was not happy. He was nearly always drunk, handled his son with very little affection, and did not show much attachment to Mrs. R either. Since her husband was out of work and had to be hospitalized three times due to his alcohol-caused sickness, Mrs. R had to work to earn a living for the family. She sold her house, which she had inherited from her own family in Seoul. When her husband got out of the hospital for the third time, he told her that he’d have to go to Japan. This came out of the blue for her. He confessed that he had been married in Japan and had a son in Japan. He left Mrs. R and their son, after living off her hard work for two and a half years. He died soon after he left for Japan. For Mrs. R, according to her own recollection, it was a worse hell after her husband’s return. Her sense of humiliation is complicated due to the undeniable fact that her husband also suffered tremendously from colonial rule. But a simple word “colonialism” cannot explain her emotional loss.

The second case comes from Mrs. K. We will see in Mrs. K’s story that colonialism, war, violence, and discrimination all played a part in dehumanizing her, both inside and outside her family.

Mrs. K was born in Korea, but her family moved to Hiroshima, Japan, when she was a small child. Mrs. K grew up speaking Japanese. When she was 18, she met and eventually married a Korean migrant worker in Hiroshima. In 1945, they were A-bombed. Her family was devastated. Her father’s whereabouts were unknown and her mother began to develop mental illness due to the shock of his loss. Her baby daughter was severely burned—she was all black, paralyzed, only her eyes moved; she died after suffering terribly. She and her husband survived, yet with bad burns and other kinds of injuries and illnesses. Her husband insisted that they return to Korea. His insistence made Mrs. K uncomfortable. Korea was the place where she was born, but she grew up in Hiroshima; she did not even speak Korean; her younger brothers were born and grew up in Japan. Nevertheless, bowing to her husband’s wishes, the family—herself, her brothers, and her mother—decided to go with this option. The reason for her husband’s insistence was that he came from the K clan of southeastern Korea, which is known for its ancient heritage and high rank. When the family returned to Korea, Mrs. K’s in-laws were disappointed by their son’s bride and by the humble status of her family. Mrs. K was very sick. She was covered with open sores and ulcers that emitted pus, blood, and a terrible odor. Her in-laws kept her in a separate building; she was not allowed into the main house to eat with the family, who complained about her smell. Only her husband was given medication. Because she was not able to produce an heir to the family, her husband took concubines to obtain a son. In the end she was “asked” to leave her husband’s family. Although it is no doubt true that Mrs. K’s suffering stemmed from the bombing of Hiroshima, the origin of which can be traced to colonialism, her daily suffering after she went back to Korea intensified due to her illness and her in-laws’ treatment, based on the patrilineal and patriarchal domestic norms.

In the above cases, it is true that the women’s personal pain is ultimately attributable to colonial relations and Japanese imperialism. This is all well and good, but complex edges of day-to-day relations of power, domination, and exploitation are not so simply defined. For, these flow through multiple circuits, including gender, ideology, and traditional values. There, the domains of exploitation multiply—even within large entities such as class or nation—subdividing into local, domestic, generational, and personal. With this vision, “the colonial” is no longer confined to “the national” and “the domestic” is no longer subordinate to “the colonial”; rather than being a constant, “the colonial” here is a variant in measuring the flow of power, its directions, and degrees of oppressiveness, since, for example, the traditional domestic norm can be as exploitative as “the colonial.” Women’s suffering under colonialism was not necessarily directly, immediately, or entirely “colonial” in terms of a crude cause-and-effect logic. Colonial rule came together with sexism and other forms of oppression, incrementally influencing one another, on the one hand, while on the other, some facets of colonial rule brought benefits to women’s lives in the form of more access to education and knowledge. For example, it was under the Japanese that women in Korea became able to initiate divorce.

When my women interviewees took kyosei renko to be their personal experience, it was usually in response to questions I grouped around the issue of colonial past, singminji kwago. When I asked more specific questions, which did not necessarily concern political repertoires of the notion of colonial past, their words took different modes. For example, one woman told me in detail how her business of cardboard box collection worked in a Korean ghetto where she lived before 1945 and how she had to suffer from her alcohol-dependent husband who would drink away her hard-earned money. This could be regarded as part of colonial experience in both time and space. But, she and others like her did not tell me these stories when I asked bluntly about
colonial experience, and it was often only as a result of some kind of contingency or detour that I got to know the more personal past of these Korean women in Japan. In the case of this woman, we were talking about her daughter’s marriage and then she told me about her husband. The same woman used a very different set of terms when referring to the colonial past of Koreans at large.

Many other women told me that they themselves never personally felt discriminated against by Japanese individuals during the colonial period. At the same time, they stated that the more severe, more immediately threatening violence and oppression they encountered came from their Korean husbands at home. And yet, in their representation, they tended to separate personal sufferings from the collective experience of singminji kwago. In the case of many elderly men I interviewed, although they came to Japan as seasonal laborers, frequently migrating between the colony and metropolis—therefore exercising a direct option to come and go on their own—they would still refer to kyosei renko as their cause of colonial displacement.56 What we have here is a process of a particular cluster of discourses emerging as a privileged and legitimate version of collective history with its hegemony being maintained and reinforced through individual utterances at the expense of personal histories.57 And, in this process, the specific experiences of women as daughters, wives, and mothers are painted over with the single color of kyosei renko.

We have walked around an ironical circle. For in the emergence of the shared experience of the colonial past of Koreans in Japan, the personal experience typically inscribed in the victim’s body became political and collective; by the same token, in the collective and hegemonic representation of the colonial past along the lines of kyosei renko, the personal experience of a group of the colonized, in this case mainly women, is suppressed. In past feminist practice, diverse women’s positions were often equated under the name “women” with those of white, college-educated, middle-class, and heterosexual women, thereby excluding the voices of other women. In a similar manner, under the rubric of the “colonial past,” the voices of other colonized Koreans have been suppressed, stories of other colonized bodies have not been written, and Korean women’s colonial experiences still remain in the personal sphere without emancipatory chances. In this process, the complexity of colonial experience, divided and diversified into the multiple factors of gender, class, age, status, and ideologies is reduced to a monocausality of kyosei renko to which the essential origin of Koreans in Japan is traced back.

Monocausality and essentialism are, according to Nicholson and Fraser, the primary targets toward which today’s feminists should assume a critical position.58 As Joan Scott writes, “the appearance of a new identity is not inevitable or determined, not something that was always there simply waiting to be expressed, not something that will always exist in the form it was given in a particular political movement or at a particular historical moment.”59 Here “a new identity” is the one that emerged in the process of reclaiming oppressive colonial experience by using the scarred, tortured body against the colonizer, while as Scott continues, it is subjected to ongoing self-redefinition. So, if for feminists it was necessary to recognize the voices of black women, women of color, and Third World women, it is also necessary for Koreans in Japan to recognize positions of alternative voices which may not conform to the hegemonic notion of a colonial past invested in the kyosei renko experience. Without such recognition, what Elizabeth Grosz in the following takes to be a warning for today’s feminist practice would form an appropriate criticism of discourse on the colonial displacement of Koreans in Japan.

The same sorts of questions that were once directed by (white, usually middle-class) feminists to traditional male texts and masculine disciplines can now, perhaps more alarmingly and disappointingly, be raised about feminist theory’s own intellectual and political self-representations and policing tactics.60

In kyosei renko texts, the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist stance of nationalist history is imposing itself “imperialistically” on its female participants, representing them inclusively within male discourse and hence, tacitly policing them against deviation from mainstream “colonial past,” which is an effective, if not intended, form of domination.

The notion of kyosei renko, thus, cannot be used as an all-encompassing explanation for colonial displacement and the colonial past of Koreans in Japan. In this connection, what Stuart Hall suggests with regard to the complex notion of “the black” is relevant. He writes: “You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject.”61 There were many incidences of exploitation, violence, and even murder inflicted on Koreans by Koreans during the colonial period, in general, and in the process of labor force recruitment and in actual labor sites, in particular.62 Colonial displacement, in other words, cannot be explained in a monocausal fashion by blaming everything on kyosei renko.

No doubt it is important to retain the kyosei renko research, especially given the fact that proper colonial compensation has not been made by the Japanese government. At the same time, however, it is important that we expand the parameters of our studies of the colonial past beyond a simple opposition of colonialism and anti-colonialism. Such an exercise would be timely in the light of the recent spate of academic discourse on postcoloniality. In his discussion on postcolonial recapturing of colonial history, Gyan Prakash suggests that we destabilize the colonial polarities, divided between the colonizer and the colonized, by looking for heterogeneous sources of knowledge. Anti-colonial nationalisms often resonated with the colonial paradigm of a dichotomy, clearly divided between the colonizer and the colonized. But as Prakash observes, “neither the position of the peasant subalterns nor their religious ideology and modes of resistance could be accommodated easily in the nationalist discourse.”63

If Prakash and other like-minded historians of colonialism can be taken to be proposing a new position—one that critically transcends the anti-colonial decolonization without necessarily belittling nationalism—then following this, we can also try tracing and reassessing the colonial experience of Korean women in Japan in their postcolonial present in a context in which the nexus of relations of power can be given due attention—relations that may or may not take an outright anti-colonial, nationalist form. So, if colonial terror needs to be problematized, as manifested in scarred, tortured bodies, then domestic terror—wife and child abuse, for instance—also needs to be discussed. At least two directions can be suggested: (1) to recognize the complexity of colonial experience, which may lead to a picture that does not conform to the one in the mind of nationalists who see only national-liberation struggles or other forms of anti-colonial re-

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sistance in colonial history; (2) to adopt a multivocal approach that identifies the colonial experiences and colonial pasts of differentially positioned persons, especially women. This effort may result in dissolving monocausal explanations of colonial displacement—such as *kyosei renko*—and lead us to a more meaningful use of memories of oppression, without silencing marginalized voices in the process.

**Notes**


2. Comfort women (see note 11 below) and other female recruitments are not well documented. We shall see that, however, women appropriated men's *kyosei renko* discourse as their own experience.

3. Koreans who came to Japan were generally uneducated and unskilled and, hence, engaged in menial jobs and remained more or less day laborers. They were recorded by the Japanese media as uncivilized, unhygienic, filthy, indolent, morally corrupt, violent, barbaric, quarrelsome, selfish, dishonest, untrustworthy, and the like. In other words, the popular image of Koreans in Japan was of paupers and beggars, problem-makers and trouble-lovers, hooligans and political misfits, imbeciles and savages, in a word, the unwanted drags of the society. See Michael Weiner, *The Origins of the Korean Community in Japan: 1910-1923* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), chap. 4, for more details.


11. The recruitment of Koreans occupied an important strategic position in securing the human resources for the Japanese armed forces and wartime labor supply. Whereas both men and women were recruited for labor, women's recruitment was also marked by sexual exploitation. As can be seen in the recent rise of literature dealing with Korean women who had been forcefully made to work as prostitutes for Japanese soldiers, sometimes dragged down to the military fronts in Southeast Asia and the Pacific only to be cast off or executed there when the Japanese military came to the sense of its defeat. Sympathetic and scholastic accounts of the issue of forced prostitution carried out under the coercion of the Japanese military are available. It is only recently that the Japanese government acknowledged that it had indeed been directly involved with recruiting prostitutes from Korea for the Japanese army as comfort women; it had insisted for a long time that the women were recruited privately and the government had nothing to do with it. See Suzuki Yoko, *Chosenjin Jugun Ianfu* (Korean prostitutes for the Japanese army) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1991), and Suzuki Yoko, *Jugun Ianfu, Naissen Kekkon* (Army prostitutes and Japan-Korean "marriage") (Tokyo: Miraiha, 1992). Nishino Rumiko, *Jugun Ianfu*; *Moto Heishitachi no Shogen* (Army prostitutes: Testimonies of former soldiers) (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 1992), and Yun Jong-ok et al., *Chosenjin Josei ga mita Ianfu Mondai* ("The comfort women question" seen by Korean women) (Tokyo: Sanichbo Shobo, 1992), for example, record the cases of Korean women victims reflecting the voices of younger Japanese (Nishino) and Korean (Yun and her co-authors) women. For a recent account in Japanese, see Ueno Chizuko, *Jugun Ianfu Mondai o megute* (On the comfort women issue), *Nashonarizumu to Jinda* (Nationalism and gender), Ueno Chizuko (Tokyo: Seibosha, 1998), pp. 97-144.


14. Since Koreans were one-sidedly deprived of Japanese nationality by the effect of the 1952 San Francisco Treaty between the United States and Japan, any legal rights or benefits that have the nationality clause as a prerequisite are beyond the reach of Korean individuals in Japan.

15. Utsunomiya, *Naze Chosenjin ga Senpan ni rattanaka* (Why were Koreans made war criminals? War responsibility of the Japanese state and trials of war criminals), in *Zainichi Kankoku Chosenjin no Sengo Hosho* (Post-war compensations...
CCAS Statement of Purpose

The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (BCAS) continues to be inspired by the original 1969 statement of purpose of its parent organization, the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). The BCAS board thus decided in March 1993 that even though CCAS has not existed since 1979, the Bulletin should publish the CCAS statement of purpose at least once a year:

We first came together in opposition to the brutal aggression of the United States in Vietnam and to the complicity or silence of our profession with regard to that policy. Those in the field of Asian studies bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession. We are concerned about the present unwillingness of specialists to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring American domination of Korea and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that the present structure of the profession has often perverted scholarship and alienated many people in the field.

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars seeks to develop a humane and knowledgeable understanding of Asian societies and their efforts to maintain cultural integrity and to confront such problems as poverty, oppression, and imperialism. We realize that to be students of other peoples, we must first understand our relations to them.

CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia, which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism. Our organization is designed to function as a catalyst, a communications network for both Asian and Western scholars, a provider of central resources for local chapters, and a community for the development of anti-imperialist research.

Passed 28–30 March 1969, Boston, Massachusetts

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40. Ibid., p. 99. Original emphasis.

41. I do not agree with parts of Salazar’s study of Rigoberta, especially with her methodology. Salazar criticizes Burgos-Debray’s use of the first person “I” in the title as well as in the text. She effectively suggests that such a method is deceptive, since it “conjurizes up an image of an exotic, mystified Other” out of Rigoberta’s struggle. However, Salazar is not showing an effective alternative to this “I.” On the contrary, in her article, she herself explicitly relies on Rigoberta’s “I” (which is, indeed, Burgos-Debray’s “I” according to Salazar’s logic) in order to validate her point by suggesting that the testimony speaks better for itself without editorial intervention. If Rigoberta’s words are heavily orchestrated by the editorial intervention, in order to secure the place in the bookstore shelves of (presumably) the western world, how can she herself rely on Rigoberta’s words as counter-example, which is, according to Salazar, Burgos-Debray’s creation? She corners herself in a dead-end: she axes Burgos-Debray’s “I” while she herself is demonstrating that she would need this “I” to criticize Burgos-Debray.

42. Pak Kyong-sik, “Chosenjin Kyosei Renko” (Forced recruitment of Koreans) in Pak Kyong-sik, Yamada Shoji, and Yang T’ae-ho, *Chosenjin Kyosei Renko Rompun Shusei*, p. 18.


47. Ibid., pp. 190-91.

48. Ibid.


50. All the names of individuals are fictitious for the reason of protecting privacy. The names that I quote from other authors are those that appear in print.

51. I am not against the reconstruction of alternative history. For example, see Hayashi Eidai records that soon after the war, as a retaliation, Koremn miners in a mine in Nagasaki lunched Korenam headmen in front of their families and then, “to terminate his lineage,” murdered all the family members. See Hayashi, *Chizu ni nai Ariran Toge: Kyosei Renko no Ashiato o tadori Tabi*, pp. 112-13.

52. I discuss the aspects of women’s relation to political language, which has been constructed in the postcolonial process of political division within Koreans in Japan in a separate paper. See Sonia Ryang, “Nationalism and Violence: The Myth of a ‘Korean’ People in Japanese Nativism,” *Asia and the Pacific Outlook* 133, no. 36 (1997): 2261-2272.


54. See Hayashi Eidai, *Tsuma tachin Movie Kyosei Renko*.

55. Stories are taken from ibid., pp. 22-34 and pp. 143-160. The abridging is my wording with slight editing and additional interpretation.

56. Statistically speaking, as of August 1945, there were about 102,198 Korean men in mining. See Nagasawa Satoshi, “Senjika Joban Tanden ni okeru Chosenjin Kofu no Rodo to Tatakai,” p. 157. Given that mining is the sector where the forced labor recruits were most concentrated and given that the total Korean population in Japan at that time was 2.4 million, it is likely that as of 1945, the proportion of Koreans in Japan who had actually experienced *kyosei renko* was small.

57. Elizabeth Tonkin suggests that “oral narratives be seen as social actions” and “audiences and tellers develop conventions which cue ‘a horizon of expectation’” (Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], p. 97). Tonkin’s suggestion is highly relevant to oral testimonies of *kyosei renko* in that a more significant importance resides in its act of speaking up for publication, than in verifying the “truth” about *kyosei renko*. In this sense, it may be safe to say that my interviewees identified me to be the one who shares the horizon of expectation with them, given that I am also a Korean born in Japan to Korean parents, a descendant of the colonized. See Sonia Ryang, *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1997). On the topic of the relations of interviews, see Kamala Visweswaran, “Betrayal: An Analysis in Three Acts,” in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 90-109.


62. For example, see Hayashi Eidai records that soon after the war, as a retaliation, Koremn miners in a mine in Nagasaki lunched Korenam headmen in front of their families and then, “to terminate his lineage,” murdered all the family members. See Hayashi, *Chizu ni nai Ariran Toge: Kyosei Renko no Ashiato o tadori Tabi*, pp. 112-13.

Dalit Christians and Identity Politics in India

Since the 1970s increasing numbers of those who used to be known as "untouchables" or "harijans" have rejected these terms in favor of the name "dalit." Besides adopting a new name dalits are also asserting an alternative form of identity. The majority of the 20 million-strong Indian Christian community shares this social background. Since the middle of the 1980s many Christians have begun to assert their dalit identity. One consequence of this has been an increasing level of activism among the Indian Christian churches. The churches have been mounting an energetic campaign to have the Dalit Christians included on the Scheduled Caste list. This list determines access to the central government affirmative action schemes. This has occurred at a time when identity has become an important basis for political mobilization in India and conventional models of progressive politics based on class alliances have been called into question. However, using the specific case of the Dalit Christians, this article argues that certain forms of identity politics can assist the development of progressive politics in India.

by Andrew K. J. Wyatt

Since August 1990, Dalit Christians have campaigned vigorously to secure their inclusion in government affirmative action schemes. This is not a new demand but it has to be seen in a different light given the interest in identity politics among many Indian Christians.

Issues pertaining to identity have dominated Indian politics since the mid-1980s. The most obvious form of identity politics has been associated with the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has endeavored to fuse national and religious identity in the popular consciousness. Although the BJP may have dominated the headlines, tribal movements, women's organizations, and anti-caste movements have also used identity as a central part of their mobilization strategy. These groups have either reasserted older identity patterns or have redefined their identity over a relatively short period of time. In what follows it will become clear that changes within the Indian Christian community are in keeping with this latter trend. On a theoretical level it has often been assumed that this form of identity politics is retrograde and an obstacle in the way of progressive political alliances, which, if they have anything to do with identity at all, should emphasize class consciousness. Indian society is complex and highly differentiated. Therefore it is unsurprising that attachment to regional, religious, and caste identities remains strong. In such circumstances it is has been difficult for leftist movements to form meaningful political alliances based on class. Some Indian writers, such as Ram Manohar Lohia, have responded creatively to this complexity and investigated ways in which such identities could be used as a basis for a progressive form of political mobilization.

The case of the Dalit Christians illustrates how identities shift and how identity politics can contribute to progressive politics in India. As many ordinary Indian Christians have become aware of their "dalit" identity the disaffection with their social situation has fed into an unprecedented level of political activity among the Indian Christian churches.

Who Are the Dalit Christians?

People of a dalit background who converted to Christianity in large numbers during the period of British colonial rule numerically dominate the Indian Christian churches. Indian Christians constitute 2.5 percent of the total population. It is usually assumed that at least two-thirds of the 20 million Christians in India could be described as dalits. Dalit Christians were not included in the official figure of 138 million people of untouchable backgrounds recorded in the 1991 census.

The term "dalit" has become an increasingly popular way of referring to those outside of the caste system who were formerly known as untouchables. However the term should not be taken as a simple synonym for the word "untouchable." This is because people who refer to themselves as dalits are asserting a new form of identity. Literally translated, "dalit" means "crushed" or "oppressed." It is a name chosen by those to whom it refers and is a direct rejection of all other labels—derogatory or otherwise—that have been imposed by others. Use of the name is an indication of assertiveness because just as dalits no longer accept the names foisted on them they will also not passively accept the oppressive social role given to them. The term "dalit" is recognized as a badge of militancy; it is also an attempt to transcend the various local caste identities that have often inhibited united political action by the various untouchable communities, as will be seen later.

The term began to be used widely in this fashion during the 1970s but it did not come into immediate use among Christians. The implications of a new perception of identity began to be
At various points prior to independence, the British had not properly reviewed while the constitution was being drafted. The constitution was incorporated into a schedule appended to the constitution and so the term “Scheduled Castes” came into usage. This decision has proved to be flawed for a number of reasons. The original list was effectively an electoral register and did not identify groups according to socioeconomic status. Moreover, the approach used by census officials was not consistent as they received little guidance as to how they should identify groups as untouchable.

The socioeconomic disadvantage caused by untouchability has not gone unrecognized by the Indian government. The inequality of untouchability was recognized in the Indian Constitution, which was drawn up after independence in 1947. Untouchability was proscribed and the principle of compensatory discrimination to ameliorate the conditions of the former untouchables was enshrined in the constitution. Schemes operated by the colonial government were expanded and added to by the new government of independent India.

The procedure of identifying those who were eligible was not properly reviewed while the constitution was being drafted. At various points prior to independence, the British had established representative bodies in an attempt to head off calls for complete independence. As part of this “reform” strategy they operated a controversial system of separate franchises to ensure representation for the religious minorities and the Untouchables. These franchises did not find a place in the new Indian Constitution. However the list of caste groups used by the British to identify the electorate of untouchables was adopted by the new government as the means of determining who was eligible for compensatory discrimination. The list, with minor adjustments, was incorporated into a schedule appended to the constitution and so the term “Scheduled Castes” came into usage. This decision has proved to be flawed for a number of reasons. The original list was effectively an electoral register and did not identify groups according to socioeconomic status. Moreover, the approach used by census officials was not consistent as they received little guidance as to how they should identify groups as untouchable. (There is still some debate as to the appropriate-ness of including certain caste groups and not others.) In the end, the revised list did not include Untouchables of Christian or Muslim background because they were included in separate religious electorates, with discrete electoral rolls, during the 1930s. The result is that Dalit Christians are denied the Scheduled Caste status given to other former untouchables in the Indian Constitution.

The compensatory discrimination schemes open to members of the Scheduled Castes are usually referred to as “reservations.” These reservations guarantee a quota of jobs in central
government employment to applicants from the Scheduled Castes. They also provide school and college scholarships as well as quotas of college and university places. Scheduled Caste status is also the basis on which funding is allocated to development schemes designed to speed the eradication of untouchability. Dalit Christians are frustrated because they suffer the social burden of untouchability while remaining excluded from policies intended to relieve their condition. The accumulated grievances of the Dalit Christians have been directed into political activity as the assertiveness associated with dalit identity has spread within the churches. However it should be noted that the theme of identity is integral to the question of religious conversion and as such has a long historical association with the Indian Christian churches.

Conversion to Christianity did not simply mean a change of religious affiliation. Religious conversion has been a relatively common response to untouchability and it could be interpreted, on one level, as an act of social protest against a caste milieu that was stratified and socially stultifying. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism in 1956 was the most famous example of conversion as social protest. Some historians have argued that conversion to Christianity offered an opportunity for Untouchables to assume an alternative religious identity that offered social equality in ways that were not necessarily related to their material advancement. This historical theme has been developed by some, generally those of a conservative theological persuasion, who argue that while identity is the central concern of Dalit Christians it is not a concern that should be resolved in the public arena of national politics. They argue that while the case for Scheduled Caste reservations may be legally plausible it is a distraction from the real needs of the dalits. They criticize reservations as a shallow response to untouchability and it could be interpreted, on one level, as an act of social protest against a caste milieu that was stratified and socially stultifying. Critics do not disregard the material aspect of dalit deprivation, but they argue that the primary need is for psychological well-being, personal dignity, and a sense of self-worth. These can best be developed in a community environment shaped by a humanistic religious ethos. This position is largely consistent with the views of other reformers, within various Indian religious traditions, who have eschewed a political approach.

Dalit Theology

Dalit theology, which emerged in the early 1980s, does not reject this approach completely, but it does place a much heavier emphasis on the material needs of the Dalit Christians. As one writer puts it

What these poor village Christians are searching for even today is how to earn their daily bread, how to overcome their life situation of oppression, poverty, suffering, injustice, illiteracy, and denial of identity. Now, Indian Christian theology or any other theology has failed, and continues to ignore these issues, which for the majority of Christians and other Indians are questions of survival.

Thus dalit theologians are highly critical of earlier formulations of Christian theology in India. These are rejected as appropriate theological models because they concentrate exclusively on the spiritual dimension of life. In contrast dalit theology is an explicitly political theology that seeks to reinterpret faith in terms of the experience of ordinary Dalit Christians. In doing so it draws heavily on the dalit ideology that has been developed by the wider dalit movement—without reference to the Christian churches. The worldview and explanation of the caste system promoted by dalit activists are incorporated into dalit theology.

In common with liberation theology dalit theology begins by reflecting on the situation in which the dalits find themselves and then asks what implications this has for religious faith. The methodological process of dalit theology begins with the assertion of dalit identity. The core of this identity is a shared experience of suffering and oppression.

The focus of the theology is the rejection and alienation from caste society that dalits have experienced. Thus it draws on “dalit peoples’ languages and expressions, their stories and songs of suffering...their values, proverbs, folk lore myths and so on to interpret their history and culture, and to articulate a faith to live by and act on.” Dalit theology encourages a political reading of the Bible. This is a radical departure as Indian churches have usually considered Scripture to be a resource to be used in worship and in personal devotion. Dalit writers draw attention to the passages from the gospels and the Old Testament prophets that call for liberation from oppression. They pay particular attention to Jesus’ identification with the poor and oppressed and insist that he has special sympathy for the dalits. Nirmal develops this theme even further. He links Isaiah’s description of Jesus as a suffering servant with the social conditions experienced by dalits in India and claims that “Jesus Christ whose followers we are was himself a dalit.” Others remind readers that the term “dalit” is rooted in words that suggest the meanings “broken,” “crushed,” and “oppressed.” These meanings resonate with many passages in the Old Testament prophets. By drawing attention to these passages dalit theologians provide new readings of familiar passages. Poverty is more than economic deprivation; it also has to be understood in terms of the agony of being born into conditions of social isolation, discrimination, and humiliation. Dalit theology takes a comprehensive view of the plight of dalits; its primary purpose is “the liberation of the dalits from their socio-economic and political bondage.”

This perspective is applied to the church and Indian society as a whole. Dalit Christians are encouraged to reclaim their rightful place inside the church—with a variety of implications. Dalit Christians are keen that the churches should reflect their presence and not just the dominant influence of upper-caste Christians. The most common demand is that the churches should employ more dalits. Other demands call for religious processes to be rerouted through dalit neighborhoods. Dalit theology has been sensitive to the fact that those who suffer most as a result of being dalits are very often the women of the community. Dalit women suffer the depredations of upper-caste men as well as abuse in their homes and alienation within their churches. Women are encouraged to reflect on their experience and to assert themselves in the struggle to overcome the patriarchal domination that is a commonplace part of the life of dalit women.

The main theological achievement of dalit theology has been a methodological one: its argument is that Christian theology should be reassessed from a dalit perspective. But much of this project has yet to be completed. One potential implication of accepting the identity shift from Christian to Dalit Christian is that a more syncretic approach should be adopted—one that combines the traditions of other dalit groups with Christian forms. Some writers have begun to investigate this possibility while others maintain a more ambiguous position. As dalit theology is a recent development it is only to be expected that it...
is not as highly developed as Latin American liberation theology. The literature generated by dalit theologians is still relatively limited in size and in the areas of religious doctrine to which it has been applied. Nevertheless the significance of dalit theology for the Indian Christian churches should not be understated.

The political implications of dalit theology are much more concrete. The theological activity encouraged by dalit theology serves as a form of conscientization as Dalit Christians reflect on the social and political implications of their faith. The development of dalit theology has inspired a renewed campaign for the extension of Scheduled Caste reservations to Dalit Christians who were excluded by the wording of the 1950 Constitution. The campaign has encouraged the participation of large numbers of ordinary Christians. This was a significant development as the church hierarchies have not generally encouraged involvement in mass political activity of this nature. The immediate catalyst for this political activity was the decision, by the then National Front government in May 1990, to grant Scheduled Caste status to the followers of Ambedkar who converted to Buddhism.26

Dalit Christians Renew Their Campaign

Since 1990 Dalit Christian activists have engaged in a prolonged campaign to have the Indian Constitution amended to put them on an equal footing with dalits of other religious backgrounds. The elimination of this constitutional anomaly has practical implications that go beyond the intrinsic virtue of equality under the law. Activists point out that if Dalit Christians are granted Scheduled Caste status it will assist the development of an economically marginalized community. However, many also consider it a human rights issue.27 Sections of the legislation on untouchability make provisions for the protection of the former untouchables against caste-related atrocities. As Dalit Christians do not have Scheduled Caste status they are not afforded this protection when they are victimized because of their social status.

A number of major rallies have been held in Delhi to attract publicity and to persuade legislators of the necessity for action. The first rally drew an estimated 100,000 supporters to the capital on 17 August 1990.28 Following the election of a new minority Congress government in 1991, the movement had to rebuild its momentum. Two private members’ bills were tabled in Parliament by supportive M.P.’s. In order to increase the likelihood of these bills becoming law a series of senior church figures lobbied the prime minister and the relevant cabinet ministers.29 Although these meetings were considered to have been productive, the government proved unwilling to act on the legislation. In a move that must have been calculated to fail, the government made an attempt to introduce the legislation without parliamentary approval just before the 1996 general election. Unsurprisingly the president declined to sign the necessary decree.30

Following the 1996 election thirteen parties joined the United Front coalition and formed a minority government. The Dalit Christians were promised Scheduled Caste status in the Common Minimum Programme agreed to by the coalition parties. Within just a few months of entering office the government appeared to have second thoughts on the matter.31 Dalit Christian activists did not give up the struggle, however; they continued to apply pressure on the government. On 27 November 1996 a group of 500 prominent church leaders and Christian intellectuals participated in a sit-in protest and a number were subjected to a symbolic arrest as they tried to make their way to the parliament buildings.32 In March 1997 the parliamentary affairs minister Srikant Jena promised that a bill would be passed to satisfy the demands of the Dalit Christians during the next legislative session.33 However this pledge was not fulfilled as the United Front government struggled to stay in office. The Congress Party withdrew support from the United Front government at the end of November and another general election was held in
February 1998. No party secured a majority and the BJP was only able to form a government with the help of a number of smaller regional parties. The BJP has strongly opposed the Dalit Christian cause in the past and it can be safely assumed that the new government will not act on the matter.

Joining the Wider Dalit Movement

The emergence of dalit theology and the campaign for Scheduled Caste status have strengthened the links between Dalit Christians and the wider dalit community. This has been facilitated in part by the work of the Dalit Solidarity Programme funded by the World Council of Churches. Dalit Christian leaders have worked closely with Scheduled Caste politicians when lobbying the government. The ideology of the wider dalit movement is an important element of dalit theology and it is common for Christian theologians to embody this thinking as a key assumption in their writing. When people describe themselves as "Dalit" Christians, rather than as any other sort of Christian, it indicates that they have begun to reconstruct their identity with reference to material previously considered to be outside of their religious traditions. This can also be interpreted as a sign that Christians who refer to themselves as dalits are coming closer to the dalit mainstream. This is a move toward a new form of identity and not simply a return to an old caste allegiance. Indian Christians can usually trace their ancestry back to a particular caste group and their social practices are often related to that ancestral group. However, when they claim to be dalits, they are including themselves within a much wider identity formation than the Jati, which was the kinship group of their grandparents' generation. This is important for all dalits and not just Christians because distinctions are often observed between various untouchable castes. A sense of community has existed in the past but it is in the telling of the story, the evoking of a common past, that one is able to use the form "we." A central aim of dalit assertion is in the telling of the story, the evoking of a common past, that one is able to use the term "we." This can also be interpreted as a sign that Christians who refer to themselves as dalits are coming closer to the dalit mainstream. This is a move toward a new form of identity and not simply a return to an old caste allegiance. Indian Christians can usually trace their ancestry back to a particular caste group and their social practices are often related to that ancestral group. However, when they claim to be dalits, they are including themselves within a much wider identity formation than the Jati, which was the kinship group of their grandparents' generation. This is important for all dalits and not just Christians because distinctions are often observed between various untouchable castes.

Another sign of proximity to the dalit movement has been the re-evaluation of existing histories of the Indian Christian churches in order to emphasize the dalit origins of the majority of the Christian community. This history allows Christian dalits to claim to have shared in the alienation caused by the caste system and so possess a vital part of the dalit identity—the part that is shaped by the common experience of suffering and degradation. This is an important part of the process of creating the "imagined community" described by Benedict Anderson. The story suggests the community has existed in the past but it is in the telling of the story, the evoking of a common past, that a community is able to use the form "we." A central aim of dalit theology is to restore to an alienated community a sense of history, which it desperately lacks. All of these developments suggest that a new political alliance between Dalit Christians and the wider dalit movement is possible.

Although the basic direction has been established, the process is far from complete. A number of potential obstacles remain to be negotiated. It is far from certain that all Dalit Christians think of themselves as dalits or for that matter that all dalits consider themselves to be dalits. The wavering support for Dalit Christian reservations offered by Scheduled Caste M.P.'s following the 1996 election, threatens to jeopardize the sense of unity that is being fostered between Dalit Christians and the wider dalit community. The project of developing a sense of dalit identity across all the regions of India is not yet complete. In the electoral arena the dalit movement is divided and in few states it has enjoyed a degree of influence commensurate with the size of its community. In ideological terms the progress made by Dalit Christian activists would be undermined if the dalit movement does not adopt an inclusive understanding of dalit identity.

Building a Wider Progressive Movement

Dalit Christians are a small minority and are of marginal significance to electoral politics in India. This does not justify their exclusion from the Scheduled Caste list. Nor should their electoral marginality obscure the interesting questions raised by their experience. The most important of these is how left-progressive politics should respond to the new forms of identity that are being asserted. The Dalit Christian movement is part of a wider process of change in Indian politics. Dalit Christians illustrate how social identities can be modified over a relatively short period of time. Others have argued that in India communities based on one form of social identity are never completely stable. They are subject to modification as other forms of identity suggest an alternative basis on which a community might be constructed. The consequence of these shifting identities is that Indian politics continues to fragment and old class-based strategies are shown to be lacking. This has been especially true of electoral politics but identity politics also has implications for other forms of mobilization. The emergence of movements concerned with dalit assertion, gender issues, and tribal rights demonstrates the progressive possibilities of identity politics. However other developments have not been so positive. This is demonstrated by the decline of the traditional Left in the face of new political alliances. The electoral success of the LJP has been confined to several regional bastions, but it used to be able to count on a certain following across the country as a whole. This background support is receding as its former followers succumb to the identity-based appeals of other parties. The BJP has successfully undermined established political coalitions with an appeal to the religious sentiment of the majority of the electorate that overarches other forms of identity. Hindu nationalism calls on Indians to unite around their common religious heritage and avoid the divisions created by class and caste. (It would be a mistake to overstate the effectiveness of this strategy, however, because the BJP has never gained more than 25 percent of the vote in a national election.) Regional identity has also been successfully invoked to mobilize voters, especially in the south and the northeast of the country. The parties that have been most successful—in states such as Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu—have taken a populist line and emphasized their sensitivity to local cultural issues. Overt appeals to caste identity have also become more common in recent years. The links between the Samajwadi Party and the Yadavs in the state of Uttar Pradesh are examples of this approach. The use of religious, regional, and caste identities has severely hampered attempts by the Left to organize along class lines. The positive side of this development is that Indian political forces on the right are not immune to the vagaries of identity shifts. It is likely that the BJP will not be able to assert its hegemony as other parties countermobilize along other planes of cultural and social identity.

The challenge before those who favor Left and progressive politics in India is how to organize in a milieu that privileges...
identity politics over class politics. So far the parties of the Left have firmly opposed the politics of religious nationalism. However they have been prepared to compromise with some of the regional parties. This strategy has had uneven results with the 1998 election seriously weakening this "third force." The progressive credentials of some of the regional parties were never certain and they are now even more open to question as some of them have deserted the center Left United Front and allied themselves with the BJP. The logic of proximity ought to mean that the parties of the Left should extend their horizon and ally with the progressive identity-based movements discussed earlier. It is certainly the case that the women, tribal people, and dalits are among the most marginal socio-economic groups in India. Following the electoral setbacks in March 1998 there exists an opportunity for progressive elements to build an alternative-identity-based strategy and to reexamine the possibility of new forms of grass roots politics. When constructing the necessary popular alliances the Indian Left has to recognize the significance of alternative forms of oppression. Lohia recognized that "for left-radical politics to acquire transformative potential it had to address itself to variegated situations of inequalities ranging from gender and caste to class-based inequalities which were historically and socially manifested quite differently in India from those in Western societies."43

An acknowledgment of the social fissures represented by caste identity is one such approach. The difficulty with caste is that it encompasses horizontal and vertical social divisions. It has been observed that caste correlates quite closely with class.44 In other words members of the same caste group tend to share the same economic circumstances. However the correlation is far from absolute as there will always be some that have not shared in the prosperity or poverty of the majority of their fellow caste members. It is also the case that while members of different caste groups may share the same economic position they may be socially differentiated from one another by their caste status. Organizing class-based politics becomes difficult when some of the poor feel closer affiliation to the wealthier members of their caste than they do to others who share the same economic outlook. This class solidarity is most painfully absent when members of different caste groups who are regarded as untouchable observe distinctions between one other. There is a need to reconstitute class politics in a fashion consistent with Indian conditions. This can be done by emphasizing that economic inequality can be heavily influenced by the caste system. Promoting dalit identity helps to do this because it highlights the oppression associated with caste. It demonstrates how caste discrimination can severely limit the economic opportunities of certain groups.

The stigma of untouchability has made it extraordinarily difficult for dalits to take up new occupations and to improve their standard of living. Addressing the vertical nature of relationships among groups scarred by untouchability, the dalit movement repudiates these distinctions and aims to generate solidarity among those who are oppressed by the caste system. Instead of identifying themselves as members of a subcaste, dalit identity encourages dalits to think of themselves as part of a national movement opposed to caste oppression.45 Dalit ideology has been accepted as the basis for movements working for change at the local level. The assertion of dalit identity has altered the pattern of electoral politics in a number of regions. The enthusiasm for tribal rights and gender issues also presages significant social change in Indian society. If the parties of the Left can accept the autonomous status of dalit organizations, tribal groups, and women's movements, the current interest in identity politics could be channeled into a wider political alliance.

It would be disingenuous to suggest that building such a movement is a simple task. Mutual suspicion and fears of infiltration troubled earlier attempts at cooperation between progressive elements.46 Potential constituents may fear that they will lose the opportunity to advance the interests of their group if they are submerged in a larger alliance. This is especially true of the social contradictions that define the relationship between the dalits and the more prosperous sections of the middle peasantry who come from lower-caste backgrounds. There is the related problem of how to unite dalits with those of lower-caste backgrounds who should be class allies but are in an antagonistic relationship with dalits because of caste differences.47 Another difficulty is raised by the compulsions of electoral politics. The mainstream Left remains committed to an electoral strategy and the parties appealing to regional identity are a stronger electoral force than alternative identity-based movements. The populist inclinations of the regional parties may run contrary to the needs of those at the margins of society. However, the discomforting of the regional parties in the 1998 election may have created an opportunity for compromise and realignment. The unprecedented
victories of the BJP outside of its traditional strongholds in the north and west may also serve to concentrate minds. Above all the formation of a BJP government at the center makes the formation of a credible popular alternative a necessity.

Conclusion

There are many Dalit Christian activists who are alive to the possibility of an alternative progressive alliance. This is revealed in the writings on dalit theology that emphasize an inclusive definition of dalit identity. Saral Chatterji, the current director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, who was associated with the Lohia socialists during the 1960s, has been influential among those promoting the cause of the Dalit Christians. He has argued that a broad interpretation of dalit identity should become the basis of dalit theology. 44 In his view the term should refer not only to those who are oppressed by the caste system, but also to other indigent sections of Indian society. Whether or not such an alliance will become a reality remains an open question. If it emerges Dalit Christians will only be a small part of the movement. Even so the political efforts of Dalit Christians in recent years are an encouraging sign for the general state of Indian politics. The political concerns of wealthier Indian Christians have not been allowed to obscure the claims of ordinary Dalit Christians.

The decision made by many Indian Christians to identify themselves with the dalit movement rather than to engage too deeply with the politics of secularism is a significant one. It proves that although identity has become a significant means of political mobilization it does not necessarily lead to the narrow communalization of politics associated with the religious nationalism of the BJP. Instead dalit ideology has shown that far from being a threat to the political system, but also to other indigent sections of Indian society. Whether or not such an alliance will become a reality remains an open question. If it emerges Dalit Christians will only be a small part of the movement. Even so the political efforts of Dalit Christians in recent years are an encouraging sign for the general state of Indian politics. The political concerns of wealthier Indian Christians have not been allowed to obscure the claims of ordinary Dalit Christians.

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Notes

1. Christophe Jaffrelot presents a comprehensive account of this movement in The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s (London: C. Hurst, 1996).


3. I have not entered into the debate over whether identity is based on primordial characteristics or is subject to instrumental manipulation by political elites because much of the literature is concerned with ethnic identity and I do not consider caste to fall into that category. Some have suggested that the aggregation of caste groupings, such as the Yadavs, can be understood as a form of ethnic identity. I remain unconvinced because the link between the exclusive possession of a piece of territory and the ethnic group is missing. The case of the Dalit Christians does have parallels with the instrumentalist interpretation of ethnic identity as one can observe a metamorphosis as Christians become Dalit Christians. Dalit identity is a new form of identity that is linked to, but has outgrown, caste ties. It remains underdeveloped as the dalit elite is not in a strong position to advance the interests of the community. See Sudhir Kakar, "The Construction of a New Hindu Identity," in Unravelling the Nation: Sectarian Conflict and India's Secular Identity, ed. Kaushik Basu and Sanjay Subrahmanymay (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996), pp. 211-12, M. S. A. Rao, "Some Conceptual Issues in the Study of Caste, Class, Ethnicity and Dominance," in Dominance and State Power in Modern India, vol. 1, ed. F. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 38-39; Ramashray Roy and Vijay Singh, "The Harijan Elite at the Crossroads: Results from a Survey," in Politics of Positive Discrimination: A Cross National Perspective, ed. Subrata Mitra (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1990), pp. 120-21.

4. This contrasts with the practical conduct of politics. There is evidence that identity has been a part of the electoral strategy of the Left over a long period. In the state of Andhra Pradesh, during the 1960s, the Communist Party fielded candidates knowing their caste background would make them more appealing to the voters. However, the Left, in general, has not been prepared to modify its theoretical position that caste is a superstructural consideration. A. P. Burnabas and Subhash C. Mehta, Caste in Changing India (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1965), p. 61.

5. Caste is a hierarchical system of kinship networks. It is driven by notions of ritual purity that, among other things, result in the exclusion of members of polluting groups. The varna system of classification sorts caste groups into four categories: the priestly Brahmin castes, the Kshatriya ruler/warrior castes, the Vaisya merchant castes, and the artisan Sudra castes. The reality is considerably more complex as the caste system is structured according to the rules observed by several thousand subcastes known as jat. The assumptions relating to pollution do not function in a linear fashion and, as one might expect in a country this size of India, social practice is subject to regional variation. Declan Quigley explores many of these issues in more depth in his book The Interpretation of Caste (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).


9. While the influence of Latin American liberation theology through the curriculum of various Indian theological colleges is apparent, dalit theology has much more in common with North American Black theology. For example the oppression associated with race can be analyzed in a similar way to that associated with caste. See Professor Anilloss, “Dalits of India and Dalit Theology” (lecture given at the University of Bristol, 5 March 1997); James Cone, God of the Oppressed (London: SPCK, 1977).
14. Ibid., p. 27.
29. Father Stan Lourduvassery, Secretary of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Commission for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, interview with the author, New Delhi, 29 March 1994.
33. “Bill on Dalit Christians to Be Passed,” Asian Age, 6 March 1997, p. 4.
34. Ipe Joseph, Dalit Solidarity Programme Report: Four Regional Consultations (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994).
35. This has been a problem in Maharashtra where the pre-eminence of the Mahars has been resented by other untouchable castes. In Uttar Pradesh, groups like the Balmikis have resented the dominance of the Jats but have little choice but to join with them and back the Bahujan Samaj Party. Sudha Pai and J. Singh, “Politisation of Dalits and Most Backward Castes: Study of Social Conflict and Political Preferences in Four Villages of Meerut District,” Economic and Political Weekly, no. 23 (1997): 1357.
40. In the 1998 election the BJP gained 25 percent of the vote. Its alliance partners secured another 11.2 percent of the vote. It is difficult to be certain that the vote for the BJP’s allies was also a vote for the BJP. Yogendra Yadav and Alistair McMillan, “How India Voted,” India Today International (16 March 1998), p. 29.
43. Sheth, “Ram Manohar Lohia on Caste, Class and Gender in Indian Politics,” p. 2.
45. Some activists have attempted to supplement the idea of a dalit movement with a wider notion of a Dalitbahujan people. The term “bahujan,” literally translated as majority, is used to refer to all those Indians who are not members of the elite two-born castes and who constitute 85 percent of the population. However this term has yet to gain popularity. Kanche Iliaiah, Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hinduva Philosophy (Calcutta, 1996), pp. viii.

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The Cause of the Acute Food Crisis in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

This article shows that despite geographic and demographic obstacles, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) had achieved a considerable degree of self-reliance in economic development by the late 1970s and was nearly self-sufficient in food grain production until the mid-1980s. However, the DPRK’s economy became highly strained and increasingly vulnerable to external shocks due to its failure to make a changeover from extensive to intensive sources for its economic development, its rigid central planning system and huge defense expenditures as DPRK-Soviet and DPRK-China relations deteriorated in the post-1960 period. Moreover, this article shows that the structure of the DPRK’s economy compounds its economic plight. Pursuing a self-reliant development strategy, the DPRK regime has promoted a comprehensive and integrated national economy in which each sector of the economy is closely interlinked while the foreign trade sector has been reduced to a minimum. The insular nature of the DPRK’s economy makes it prone to negative ripple effects and vicious cycles of economic downturns whenever a shock, whether internal or external, is introduced into the system. Seen in this light, the weather-related natural disasters of the mid-1990s were not the major cause of acute food shortages. Rather the cause of hunger lies in the deeply rooted structural problems of the DPRK’s economy.

by Phillip Hookon Park

In 1995, severe flooding, caused by torrential rains from July to August, swept through the western and northern regions of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, hereafter). According to official DPRK government reports, more than 140 counties in twelve provinces were affected by the floods. Over 400,000 hectares of arable land were damaged just before harvest time and nearly 500,000 were made homeless. Under-scoring the urgency of the situation, north Korea revealed to aid agencies in Pyongyang that 134 children had died of malnutrition so far in the country’s food crisis.1 Returning to the United States after a four-day tour of north Korea in April 1997, U.S. congressman Tony Hall declared that “North Korea is rapidly descending into a hell of severe famine.”2

North Korea has claimed a total self-sufficiency in food production since the end of the 1960s. Many outside observers have agreed with the north Korean claim. According to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s assessment, for example, north Korea had made substantial progress in agriculture during the 1970s and the country was judged to be nearly self-sufficient in grain supplies since the average annual growth rate of grain production was 5.4 percent, well above the 3 percent average growth in population.3 John Merrill, a long-time observer of north Korea and an official of the U.S. Department of State, agreed with the CIA’s assessment adding that,

The north Koreans pay considerable attention to the agricultural sector, and it is an area in which they have had some success. The World Bank estimates that North Korean agricultural production exceeds the basic nutritional requirement by over a quarter, although this figure may have dropped in recent years. There have been reports of food shortages and cuts in rations, but this probably reflects other problems—such as distribution and bad weather—rather than serious deficiencies in the agricultural sector itself. In general, the agricultural sector has pulled its weight, generating some export earnings and maintaining reasonably good growth.4

So, what happened to north Korean agriculture in the late 1980s and the 1990s? The DPRK government has repeatedly blamed weather-related natural disasters for recent crop failures. There is little doubt that two consecutive years of devastating floods did cause extensive damage to agriculture and to the country’s agricultural infrastructure.

The floods undoubtedly contributed to an already rapidly deteriorating food-supply situation, but they did not cause the crisis. According to estimates by the Crop and Food Assessment Mission of the Food and Agriculture Organization/World Food Programme (FAO/WFP), production of paddy (unmilled rice) and corn was estimated at 8.1 million tons in 1989, a year considered to be a normal year. However, by 1993, this figure had fallen to 6.64 million tons (see table 1 below).

Since 1993 was a year before the adverse weather started, we must look elsewhere to explain the fall (approximately 18 percent) in cereal production between 1989 and 1993. According to the official north Korea data, the average growth rate for grain
production steadily decreased during the First Seven Year Plan (1961-1967).\(^3\) This trend indicates that the current acute food shortage problem could be attributed to policies inherent in the structure of north Korean agriculture.

This paper investigates the structural problem of the DPRK agricultural sector. It begins by reviewing some of the important aspects of the structure and policies of north Korean agriculture. It then investigates the causes of the food shortage problem. As a result of adopting a self-reliant development strategy, all sectors of the north Korean economy are closely interlinked. Hence, our focus of discussion will center around the overall structural problem of the north Korean economy, covering the industrial and the agricultural sectors as well as the external trade sector.

**Summary of Agriculture and Its Place in the DPRK Economy**

There are basically three significant characteristics of north Korean agriculture. First, the geographical limitations: north Korea has limited arable land; only 20 percent of the country’s land, or about 2 million hectares, can be cultivated. Furthermore, due to the unfavorable climate, crops can only be grown from May to October.

Second, a labor shortage that is due to the massive exodus (approximately 1 to 2 million people) to south Korea before and during the Korean War and the additional loss of more than a million lives during the war. In addition, according to Eberstadt and Banister’s analysis, some 21 percent of the male population between the ages of 16 and 54 is in the military, exacerbating the chronic labor shortage. In the early stages of north Korea’s economic development, the labor shortage was more pronounced in the agricultural sector than in the industrial sector because the rapid industrialization movement pulled a large number of workers out of the rural areas during the Three and Five Year Plans (1953-1960).\(^6\)

Third, pursuing its self-reliant development strategy, north Korea adopted a policy of self-sufficiency in food production. Given these geographical constraints, demographic factors, and policy preferences, north Korea’s only viable and realistic option to increase food production was to intensify agricultural development, to demand more output from each worker and each hectare of land through increased use of chemicals, electricity, machinery, and irrigation.

Through this policy of intensification of agricultural development, north Korea made substantial progress in resource development in agriculture from 1953. By the late 1970s, north Korean agriculture was highly mechanized (6 to 7 tractors per 100 hectares), fertilizer application was probably among the highest in the world (1.5 tons of chemical fertilizer per hectare), and irrigation projects were extensive (more than 1,700 reservoirs throughout the country, watered 1.4 million hectares of fields with an irrigation network of 40,000 kilometers).\(^7\)

Based on these advances in resource development in agriculture, north Korea was able to achieve big advances in food production; our analysis shows that north Korea met its domestic food consumption needs until the mid 1980s.\(^8\) However, as the government stressed four aspects of agricultural modernization (irrigation, mechanization, intensive use of chemicals, and electrification), north Korean agriculture became even more capital intensive and, consequently, energy dependent. Thus, in order to sustain the high growth in agriculture, industry had to supply adequate amounts of inputs such as tractors, fuels, and chemical fertilizers to the agricultural sector. Similarly, the agricultural sector had to furnish industry with sufficient food and other wage goods to insure industrial development. The high degree of interdependency between agriculture and industry implied that one sector’s failure to provide adequate inputs to the other was likely to trigger a cycle of vicious economic downturns. Moreover, the insular nature of the north Korean economy (foreign trade comprised only 15 percent of the total GNP) meant that once the cycle of economic downturns started recovery would be extremely difficult as the country could not take advantage of foreign trade to alleviate the economic bottle-necks and absorb the shocks.

With north Korean agricultural development so dependent on constant support and aid from the industrial sector, industry had to deliver a net capital contribution for agricultural development in order to

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>1989 Crop</th>
<th>1993 Crop</th>
<th>1995 Crop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prod. (000 tons)</td>
<td>Yield (kg/ha)</td>
<td>Prod. (000 tons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy*</td>
<td>3900</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>3440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>4200</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>3200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total/Avg.</td>
<td>8100</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>6640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** The FAO/WFP mission used 650,000 hectares for the area of paddy under cultivation (including reclaimed tidal areas) and 700,000 hectares for the area of maize under cultivation for 1989 and 1993 estimates. Based on discussions with DPRK government officials and its own field visits and analysis of the areas (river delta) where the major effects of flooding were felt, the mission calculated the area of total paddy loss to be 106,900 hectares and the loss of maize to be 94,700 hectares. Hence, the loss of production of paddy and maize due to the 1995 floods is based on mission estimates of area affected by floods and the expected yields for that year. In the mission’s estimation, the loss has been deducted from the normal weather scenario production to arrive at the domestic level of cereals available in 1995.

*Paddy indicates unmilled rice; hence, when we calculate total food availability, 30 percent should be discounted from paddy production. For milled rice, production of rice was as follows: 2,730,000 tons in 1989, 2,408,000 tons in 1993, and 1,806,000 tons in 1995. Accordingly, the total food availability from grains was 6,930,000 tons in 1989, 5,608,000 tons in 1993, and 4,155,000 tons in 1995.

**Source:** Office of the Agricultural Commissions (the DPRK) and the FAO/WFP mission estimates.
maintain the high growth rate in food production. Yet, the north Korean economy, especially the industrial sector, has shown signs of slowing growth since the early 1960s (see table 2 above). This slowdown in the industrial sector causes ripple effects in the agricultural sector.

The next section provides explanations for stagnation and decline in the industrial sector and consequently in agricultural production in north Korea.

**Causes of the Decline in Agricultural Production**

Like many other developing countries, the DPRK relied on an extensive growth strategy in the initial stages of its economic development. However, a growth strategy based on predominantly extensive sources cannot be continued indefinitely since the components of extensive growth such as labor, capital, and land are not available in unlimited quantities. Therefore, the next stage of development should rely on intensive sources, such as technological innovations. During the First Seven Year Plan (1961-1970), north Korea attempted to shift its growth source from extensive to intensive. However, the adoption of an intensive growth strategy was hindered by two shortcomings of centrally planned economies, namely, the need for massive military spending and the failure to import advanced technologies from the West. These two shortcomings caused north Korea to fall back on extensive sources of growth. As a consequence, north Korea’s economic problems, especially in the industrial sector, worsened. There were no effective means to alleviate the deeply rooted problems in the economy, such as outdated technologies, low industrial productivity, and a shortage of capital investment. Agriculture, in turn, was adversely affected because it did not receive sufficient inputs from the industrial sector.

**Extensive source of growth**

Extensive-based growth strategies, as noted above, are based on quantitative increases in labor, capital, and land. More specifically, pure extensive growth can be based either on more labor being combined with the existing means of production (capital, land), or on more labor being combined with an increased means of production. In socialist countries, the top leaders’ drive to achieve fast growth and catch up with more advanced economies has often pushed the extensive strategies to extremes. This has resulted in excessive targets being imposed by the central planner and by a system of moral and material incentives that is based on reaching and exceeding targets and on a disregard for quality or efficiency in production.

Extensive growth is not necessarily inefficient. In the course of national economic development, there is a stage at which extensive growth can be viable and effective. But economic growth under an extensive growth strategy cannot be sustained for a long period of time because a country has limited quantities of labor, capital, and land. Moreover, the practice of pushing extensive growth to the extreme is likely to result in waste and eventually in a stagnant economy. Two major sources of waste are generally seen to be a poor incentive structure and a misguided system of information distribution.

Incentive structures in most socialist countries have been implemented in such a way that they have encouraged the waste of resources. First, the state honored enterprises and awarded bonuses to the personnel of enterprises based on the quantitative fulfillment and over-fulfillment of the planned quotas with little regard to quality or efficiency. Thus, enterprises in socialist economies have had little incentive to improve quality but have had a strong incentive to expand production at any cost.

As a matter of fact, there has hardly been any incentive for enterprises to economize. In some industries, the value of output was used as a basis for incentive payments. As a consequence, it was in the interest of enterprises to use the most expensive materials in production. However, since the central planners did not have reliable information on enterprise capacity, they used a simple method that was based on the ratchet principle to set targets and quotas, i.e., they simply increased plan targets each year. Enterprises, in turn, hoarded labor, spare parts for equipment, and material inputs, in order to ensure their ability to cope with the authorities’ planned targets.

Hoarding of labor became particularly rampant and a serious problem in the socialist economies for several reasons. First, since the planners tended to set production targets and quotas above realistic enterprise capacities, the enterprises hired extra labor to fulfill the high targets and quotas.

Second, as industrialization progressed, enterprises demanded more skilled workers. But, they were not available in adequate numbers because they could not be trained quickly enough. Hence enterprises hired more unskilled workers in place of skilled workers, a practice that continued to sacrifice quality for quantity.

Third, the uneven spread of the work load during the year and the enterprises’ attempts to fulfill the plan target by “rushing” at the end of each period also encouraged the practice of labor hoarding, accentuating the labor shortage problem. Moreover, the socialist strategy of giving investment priority to heavy industries, combined with the unreliable supply system, resulted in enterprise managers hoarding of reserves as a logical precaution against unexpected shocks. In some settings, concealed surplus capacities existed side by side with widespread shortages of both producer and consumer goods. As a result of this waste, most socialist countries suffered economic setbacks in the 1960s and their economic growth rates declined. A sub-optimal structure of production, increasing higher social costs, and stagnation in technological progress were common among these countries.

The DPRK emphasized and encouraged one particular aspect of extensive growth in pursuit of its self-reliant development strategy. This was mass mobilization. The concept of mass mobilization was in harmony with late president Kim Il Sung’s belief that human initiative was the key to success in all great endeavors and that the conditions arousing the greatest initiatives were those that promised the greatest success. Therefore, exten-

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<tbody>
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<td>Growth per year</td>
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<td>7.5%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2


sive sources, such as mass mobilization to increase production, became the most important feature of the DPRK’s economic development. Chief among them was the Chollima movement, which entailed a total mobilization of labor and the use of all other available means of production with the common aim of reaching the goals of the Five Year Plan (1957-1960). In 1959, the campaign moved into the “Chollima work team movement” stage, with the work team being the operational unit in production drives. One year later, the Chollima movement included 3,481 work teams and 69,978 workers. According to official north Korean data, almost all workers were participating in at least one production boost campaign by the end of 1959.11

As the mass mobilization movement to boost production proceeded, some typical problems associated with socialist extensive growth strategies became evident in north Korea. For instance, north Korea’s chronic labor shortage worsened as enterprises hoarded reserves of labor. (The practice of hoarding was not limited to labor but was prevalent in all aspects of the economy in north Korea.) During the 1950s and 1960s, Kim Il Sung repeatedly criticized the enterprises’ tendency to hoard reserves. The fact that he had to voice this criticism over and over again is an indication that the practice of hoarding reserves was deeply engrained in the economy. Kim said to the officials in charge of the planning sector in 1969, “Nowadays, there is a general tendency for industrial executives to draft a plan which envisages the production of a smaller amount than the control figures and with more material and manpower than those estimated by control figures.”12 The situation seems to have continued into the 1970s as is apparent in the following 1973 criticism Kim directed at the ministries and general bureau.

The chief drawback of the present materials supply system is that it makes it impossible for the state to control and guide the work of material supply in a uniform way. Today the ministries and general bureau, with only their own interests at heart, keep bigger stocks of materials than they need and yet do not report this to the General Material Supply Bureau. And they are unwilling to carry out the instructions of this bureau to hand over surplus materials to other branches.13

The widespread practice of hoarding intensified the problem of bottlenecks and the uncertainty of receiving material and equipment. As a result, each enterprise tried to conceal surplus capacities without considering the needs of related enterprises. This, in turn, disrupted overall planning and caused the waste of valuable resources. Kim Il Sung repeatedly complained that the entire state suffered because factories did not share stockpiles of excess materials with other factories. For instance, Kim pointed to the Hwanghae Iron Works, which met all of its production goals and won praise and many bonuses in 1965, while the Kangsan Steel Plant on the opposite side of the river failed to fulfill its production plan of seamless tubes because Hwanghae Iron Works did not supply material soon enough.14 Many other examples can be cited in Kim’s speeches. For example, in his speech at the conclusion of an enlarged meeting of the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party (KWP) in 1973, Kim said,

Factories and enterprises obtain as much labor and materials as possible without due consideration and then waste them, or keep machines and other production facilities standing idle without using them efficiently. The Haeju Trailer Farm Machine Factory had a good gear cutting machine, but its utilization rate was no more than 20 percent because there was little work for it to do. Meanwhile, the nearby Haeju Tractor Parts Factory had great difficulty in making parts because it had no such machine. If they had been capitalists, they would have done everything to get work and keep the machine operating so as not to run it at a loss.15

In the framework of the highly integrated north Korean economy, a shortage in one sector has a direct ripple effect in other sectors. For instance, officials in Kaechon County planned that teams engaged in crop production would also produce two tons of meat per team by developing animal husbandry. However, they could not operate the fodder crushers even though many were in storage at factories. The fodder crushers lacked electric motors, which had not been manufactured due to a short supply of silicon steel sheets.16

Distorted incentive structures in which quantity was rewarded with no regard to quality has been another source of waste in socialist economies. It seems that this problem was also prevalent in the north Korean economy. For instance, it was reported that the Hwanghae Iron Works did not produce sheet steel according to their plan. Instead, it manufactured a lot of plate steel, which is easier to make. The enterprise was not
punished or penalized for obstructing production at the machine factories that depended on them for sheet steel. Instead, the workers were paid their full wages and given bonuses for exceeding planned output targets.\(^1\)

Preoccupation with meeting targets also resulted in wasteful and negligent use of state property. Some officials and workers in factories and enterprises considered their duties fulfilled once they had carried out their own production assignments; they did not care about the damage to and waste of state property. For instance, according to a report from students of Kim Chaek University of Technology, who went to light industry factories to assist them, one textile mill did not use suitable oil on the machines and equipment that it had imported at the cost of enormous amounts of foreign currency. The consequence was that the bearings, whose life span was supposed to be five years, were damaged in less than two years.\(^2\)

In the 1960s, when reconstruction was completed in the post-Korean War years, the DPRK economy had to shift from extensive growth to intensive growth. Bottlenecked sectors increased inefficiencies throughout the economy and waste and stagnation associated with the extensive growth strategy intensified. As a result, economic setbacks occurred. According to government estimates, the growth of the DPRK’s GNP plunged from 20.9 percent a year during the Five Year Plan (1957-1961) to 7.5 percent a year during the First Seven Year Plan (1961-1970).\(^3\)

The government realized that further growth had to come from raising productivity through improved technology and greater efficiency at the micro level. Hence, the regime relaxed its central control and introduced measures to increase material incentives in industrial operation. These measures included the decentralization of industrial management by emphasizing local industries and introducing independent accounting along with the internal accounting system.\(^4\)

Although the north Korean government claimed that these measures solved many of the country’s incentive problems, they were largely unsuccessful for two reasons. First, the independent accounting system could not work properly given the fact that north Korea’s enterprises were not subject to liquidation. In fact, the authorities normally did not apply sanctions against these enterprises that did not perform well. Instead, the authorities were obliged to bail out such enterprises by giving them subsidies, making tax concessions, allowing new credits, etc. In such a paternalistic system, it is doubtful that independent and internal accounting systems could function well. Second, accurate planning, which was an essential prerequisite for ensuring the proper workings of an independent and internal accounting system, became increasingly difficult as the size of the DPRK’s economy grew. In addition, due to the distorted incentive structure, it was

the general tendency of most enterprises to underrate their production capacities when sending their returns to the State Planning Commission. They did so in order to qualify for the highest possible allocations of resources and to be assigned the lowest possible targets. On the other hand, central planners arbitrarily imposed higher targets. Under this faulty planning system, it is doubtful that the independent and internal accounting systems could function as intended.

It appears that the waste and stagnation of the early 1960s convinced the north Korean leadership of the need for activating intensive sources of growth. For instance, the regime’s policy of strengthening local industries and the implementation of an independent and internal accounting system were clear indications of the regime’s effort to abandon over-centralized planning and management in favor of greater independence of enterprises and to promote responsibility and initiative. By implementing an independent and internal accounting system, the regime hoped to promote the minimization of costs and the maximization of net value. It also hoped to increase production by accepting surplus (or profit) as a criterion of enterprise performance. However, due to inadequate information, a poor incentive system, and the practice of paternalism, those measures could not function properly.

Besides the above-mentioned shortcomings of the economic system other factors made adoption of intensive sources of growth difficult.

First, national defense expenditures escalated in the years after the military coup d’etat in south Korea (1961), the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), and heightened U.S. military involvement in Vietnam (1965-). Second, there was a sharp drop in foreign aid especially from the Soviet Union during 1963 and 1964 at the peak of the Sino-Soviet dispute. Third, a succession of natural disasters resulted in poor harvests and a shortage of food grains. Hence, the regime had to extend the Seven Year Plan (1961-67) to a de facto Ten Year Plan (1961-1970).

Among the many factors that contributed to economic setbacks during the Seven Year Plan, the sudden and drastic increase in military spending seems to have been especially harmful to the north Korean economy. The intensification of cold-war tensions on the Korean peninsula and in other parts of the world, combined with weakening solidarity among the communist bloc nations, compelled the government to divert a greater amount of national resources to defense.

Furthermore, Soviet military aid, which was guaranteed in the 1961 Korea-Soviet treaty, diminished and then was shut off entirely for several years as a consequence of north Korea’s refusal to side with the Soviet Union during the Sino-Soviet dispute. Hence, the share of defense spending in the DPRK’s
Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that north Korea's machinery imports from the Organization for
beginning of the 1970s in order to expand industrial output and
developed countries such as Western Europe and Japan from the
more pragmatic policies. Kim II Sung's speech in 1967 demon­
strates this changing attitude toward foreign trade in the north
Korean leadership.

In addition, the deterioration of DPRK-Soviet and DPRK-
China relations contributed to a reduction in Soviet and Chinese
aid to the DPRK and compounded the capital shortage problem
in the north Korean economy. On average, aid from the Soviet
Union decreased from $244.64 million per year between 1954
and 1960 to $42.45 million per year between 1961 and 1970.
Economic aid from China during the First Seven Year Plan also
decreased considerably as political relations between the DPRK
and China deteriorated rapidly during China's Cultural Revolu­
tion. The DPRK had criticized China for its hard-line policies
during the Cultural Revolution, and the Red Guard in China
reportedly attacked Kim Il Sung as a "fat revisionist." As a
consequence, Chinese aid to the DPRK decreased from an over­
all amount of $137.5 million during the Five Year Plan (1957-
1960) to just $29 million during the First Seven Year Plan

The DPRK could have alleviated the shortage of capital and
overcome its technological deficiencies by engaging in external
trade. In fact, since the beginning of the 1970s when aid from the
Soviet Union declined substantially, the foreign trade policy of
the DPRK underwent substantial changes. Before the beginning
of the 1970s, the north Korean regime showed an aversion to
foreign trade for basically two reasons. First, the regime feared
dependence on other countries, especially developed capitalist
countries, which it viewed as imperialist. Second, the regime was
reluctant to introduce the international market variable into their
planning process because it could not be controlled independently.

However, in the beginning of the 1970s, the regime began
to realize that a proper utilization of foreign technology, equip­
ment, and capital could be essential in the transition from the
extensive to the intensive stage of development, and it adopted
more pragmatic policies. Kim Il Sung's speech in 1967 demon­
strates this changing attitude toward foreign trade in the north
Korean leadership:

The development of an independent comprehensive economy in our
country through our own effort does not imply that we reject
international economic ties or that we produce everything we need
for ourselves. Every country differs from every other one in its
natural economic conditions in the levels of development of its
productive forces and science and technology at a given stage, and
accordingly, in the variety and quantity of raw material and products
turned out. Under these circumstances, each country should produce
on its own the essentials and those products which are in great
demand, and obtain from foreign countries those which are in slight
demand or in short supply or which cannot be produced at home.23

Accordingly, north Korea increased imports from developed
countries such as Western Europe and Japan from the
beginning of the 1970s in order to expand industrial output and
sustain economic development. This was evidenced by the fact
that north Korea's machinery imports from the Organization for
Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries
increased from 0.6 percent of total imports in 1962 to 12 percent
in 1970. Hard currency imports from Japan and Western Europe,
which stood at $55 million in 1970, also jumped to $725 million
in 1974.24

Nonetheless, the DPRK's efforts to alleviate its capital
productivity problems by importing Western machinery and
technology could not continue and that created additional diffi­
culties in the foreign trade sector. The international oil crisis,
combined with the falling prices of north Korea's major export
commodities, such as semi-finished minerals and metal prod­
ucts, on which the DPRK's hard currency earnings depended,
increased the DPRK's trade deficit with the West and Japan. This
deficit made it more difficult for the country to introduce ad­
vanced technologies from other developed countries. Because of
the debt problem, imports from the industrial countries never
reached the 1974 peak of $724 million.25

Unable to service a growing debt, the DPRK fell into arrears.
Although its creditors continually rescheduled the DPRK's debt,
the multiple defaults on debts held by Western and Japanese
financial institutions left the DPRK cut off from the international
capital market.26

Failing in its attempts to switch from extensive to intensive
sources of growth, the DPRK had no choice but to continue
relying on extensive sources for its economic development.
Continued mass mobilizations became a permanent feature of
north Korean economic policy. In fact, every economic plan
included nation-wide mass mobilizations of one sort or another.
For instance, when the Chollima movement terminated at the end
of the First Seven Year Plan (1961-1970), the Three-Revolution
Team movement (Samdae Sojo Hyuk-myung Un-dong) and the
Three-Revolution Red Flag movement (Samdae Hyuk-myung
Bul-kuen ki Un-dong) were launched in 1973 by the Political
Committee of the KWP and these movements continued through
the Six Year Plan (1971-1976) and part of the Second Seven Year
Plan (1978-1984). The main purpose of these campaigns was to
increase the productivity of workers and peasants by dispatching
young people, mostly college students, to factories and coopera­
tive farms to fight the "conservatism" that was thought to be
prevalent among the workers and peasants and to ignite the
workers' enthusiasm by introducing new socialist work ethics.27

During the Second Seven Year Plan, the regime launched
another nation-wide mass-mobilization campaign, the so-called
"Speed of the Eighties" campaign. Under this campaign, the
workers were exhorted to double their efforts to achieve the
targets of the Second Seven Year Plan ahead of schedule. During
the Third Seven Year Plan (1987-1993), the "Speed of the Nineties"nationwide mass mobilization campaign was launched to
encourage the masses to work vigorously to meet the plan's
targets.

In the initial period of its development, mass mobilization
worked in north Korea's favor. Through mass mobilization, latent
reserves could be tapped and real growth could be achieved. Indeed,
economic growth during the Reconstruction Period of the Three
Year Plan (1954-1956) and the following Five Year Plan (1957-
61) was very rapid. During the two consecutive plans, the aver­
age GNP growth rate were 30.1 and 20.9 percent per year,
respectively.28

Since highly labor-intensive projects dominated during the
initial periods of development, mass mobilizations, political
campaigns, and the like could generate a higher per capita
income as employment opportunities increased faster than the
population. However, this type of extensive growth could not be
sustained because the reservoirs of labor and land became exhausted. In addition, these mass mobilizations ran out of steam because, after a certain critical point, continued substitution of labor for capital produced only a small or near zero marginal output (diminishing returns). Furthermore, the mass mobilizations tended to produce sectoral imbalances and secondary disruptions that intensified planning errors. Continued reliance on extensive sources of growth over an extended period slowed down economic growth and eventually led to stagnation of the economy.

Table 3 (above) shows that the DPRK's growth began to slow down at the beginning of the First Seven Year Plan (1961-1970) and that it became negative by the beginning of the 1990s.

External shocks

Supply Shocks: The major economic shock to the north Korean economy came in 1991 with the demise of the Soviet Union, the DPRK's biggest trading partner. Trade with the Soviet Union accounted for about half of the total trade of the DPRK in the late 1980s. However, in the 1990s, the DPRK's trade with the newly created Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, the former Soviet Union) declined drastically. After the failed coup in August 1991, diplomatic relations between the CIS and the DPRK worsened and the Yeltsin government cut off its economic support and asked the DPRK to trade in hard currency at world prices. In 1991, the volume of the DPRK's trade with the former Soviet Union dropped to less than half the 1990 value. By 1992, the CIS became almost insignificant as a trading partner for the DPRK, accounting for only 4 percent of total export and 13 percent of total import (see table 4 below).

Since the DPRK had relied on the former Soviet Union for approximately a third of its crude oil supply, petroleum products, coking coal, and parts for machinery and equipment, this reduction in the supply of energy and technology was felt throughout the entire DPRK economy.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>-3.7%</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
<td>-7.6%</td>
<td>-4.3%</td>
<td>-1.7%</td>
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Source: "Estimation of North Korean GNP Growth" (Seoul: Bank of Korea, 1995)

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The DPRK's Foreign Trade with USSR/CIS (Unit: $1000)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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Even as early as the First Seven Year Plan (1961-1970), the fuel and energy sectors had become major bottlenecks in the north Korean economy. The government attempted to improve the situation by giving investment priority to extractive, power, and metal industries. Successes must have been meager, however, since each of the DPRK's economic plans gave priority to the modernization and development of extractive, power, and metal industries, without any reference to achievements from the previous plan. For instance, at the end of the First Seven Year Plan, Kim Il Sung pointed to the inadequate supply of fuel and raw materials as the major cause of many other industries' failure to realize their economic potential, and promised to give investment priority to extractive and power industries.

Nearly twenty years later, Kim repeated himself and stressed again the importance of extractive and power industries. At the beginning of the Third Seven Year Plan (1987-1993), he declared: "In carrying out this year's national economic plan, the metal industry, power industry, coal-mining industry, building-materials industry, chemical industry and rail transport sector must lead the other sectors. Only then will all the sectors of national economy be able to attain a high and steady rate of production, and the national economic plan for this year as a whole can be successfully carried out." This mantra-like emphasis on building extractive and power industries indicated that fuel and raw materials were always in short supply.

The bottlenecks in north Korea's fuel and energy sectors are system-specific, according to J. Winiecki. The socialist development strategy gives priority to heavy and manufacturing industries. As a result, Winiecki observes, these industries become overgrown and demand excessive material inputs. This excess demand is compounded by the incentive structure that pushes producers to use more inputs per unit of output than is necessary.

Countries that adopt import substitution and an inward-oriented development strategy usually do not have much incentive to reduce input costs. In contrast, countries that adopt an export-oriented development strategy must learn to reduce input costs in order to remain competitive in the world market.

As the overgrown manufacturing sector creates excess demand for material inputs, demand for investment in extractive industries increases. The demand for investment in extractive industries creates more demand for machinery and equipment for extractive and construction materials. Demand for machinery and equipment, in turn, increases the demand for investment in engineering industries. This then intensifies the bottlenecks in the extractive and energy sectors as they demand more material inputs such as steel, coking coal, and oil to meet the demand for the machinery and the equipment. A vicious circle is created.

The bottlenecks in north Korea's extractive and metal industries caused the structure of the north Korean economy to become increasingly fragile and vulnerable to even minor shocks. Even more devastating was the major shock the country suffered because of drastic declines in the supply of crude oil, petroleum products, coking coal, and parts for machinery and equipment that resulted from the drop in trade with the Soviet Union in 1991 (see table 5 below).

China stepped in and partially offset the withdrawal of Soviet assistance by supplying north Korea with oil and other materials on a concessional basis, but the benefits of this help were short-lived. China soon abandoned the practice of supply-
ing materials on a concessionary basis and required that all transactions with north Korea be on a cash basis at world prices.

Given the high degree of interdependency within domestic industries in north Korea, a setback in one industry caused ripple effects throughout the entire economy. (See tables 6 and 7 below.) Table 6 shows the effects of these external shocks on the energy industry. Compared to 1989, the supply of energy from crude oil, coal, and electricity decreased in 1994 by 39, 72, and 77 percent, respectively (see table 6). Table 7 illustrates the devastating effect that the drastic reduction in energy supply had in many related industries. Steel production, for instance, declined from about 3.2 million tons in 1991 to about 1.7 million tons in 1994, a decrease of 46 percent. In 1989, cement production was 8.9 million tons, but in 1994 it was only 4.3 million tons, a decrease of 51 percent. Chemical fertilizer production was down from 1.7 million tons in 1989 to 1.3 million tons in 1994, a decrease of 23 percent. Major industries stagnated and declined; many factories were reported to be running at no more than 20 to 30 percent of full capacity.32

Let us analyze what the supply shock meant to the agricultural sector. According to the DPRK's official reports, most agricultural work by 1980 was done by machines except for weeding and harvesting (see table 8 below). Hence, in order to maintain agricultural production, industry had to provide the agricultural sector with farming machinery such as tractors, combines, and lorries, as well as other essential agricultural inputs such as chemical fertilizers, fuel, and electricity.

However, when the shock of decreased supplies of crude oil, petroleum products, coking coal, and parts for machinery and equipment hit the fragile and already strained north Korean economy in 1991, the operational capacity of many important input industries for agriculture such as steel, chemical fertilizer, and power industries fell dramatically. As a consequence, during the period 1989 to 1993, the performance of the capital intensive and energy dependent agricultural sector also declined noticeably. A number of industries now function at between 20 to 30 percent of capacity; others have ceased operations entirely.

Once again we note that the characteristics of north Korea's self-reliant development strategy accentuate the country's plight. The high degree of interdependency between the industrial and the agricultural sectors means that a setback in one sector triggers a downward spiral of economic downturn in both. More significantly, given the closed nature of the north Korean economy in which external trade plays only a marginal role, no mechanism exists to stop the vicious cycle once it begins. This helps to explain why total grain production (rice and maize) fell from 8.1 million tons in 1991 to about 1.7 million tons in 1994, a decrease of 46 percent. In 1989, cement production was 8.9 million tons, but in 1994 it was only 4.3 million tons, a decrease of 51 percent. Chemical fertilizer production was down from 1.7 million tons in 1989 to 1.3 million tons in 1994, a decrease of 23 percent. Major industries stagnated and declined; many factories were reported to be running at no more than 20 to 30 percent of full capacity.32

Natural Disasters: Declines in agricultural production, which continued into 1994, 1995, and 1996, were compounded by weather-related natural disasters. In 1995, severe flooding, caused by torrential rains from July to August, swept through the western and northern regions of north Korea. According to the north Korean government, 145 counties and cities in eight provinces (75 percent of the country) were affected by the flooding. The government estimated that 5.2 million people had been affected, and that approximately 500,000 people had lost their homes and been displaced. Flooding also damaged 400,000 hectares of arable land (approximately 25 percent of the total arable land) just before harvest time and damaged hospitals, health centers, water supply and industrial facilities, and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and irrigation systems. The north Korean government estimated that the total financial loss from the flood exceeded US$15 billion. The UN mission team estimated that the food shortage amounted to more than 1 million metric tons of grain.34

In late July 1996, another flood struck the same regions that had been hit by the 1995 flood, causing the death of at least 200 people and leaving 30,000 homeless. The 1996 flood also ravaged critical facilities and infrastructure. According to an official government report, at least 5.3 million people were affected by the flood in 1996 and damages were estimated to be US$1.7 billion. The UN World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) mission team in north Korea reported that the floods caused 117 deaths and placed nearly 2.5 million women and children at serious risk of starvation.35

### Table 5

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Crude Oil</th>
<th>Coking Coal</th>
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<td>506</td>
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### Table 6

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Crude Oil</th>
<th>Coal</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
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### Table 7

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Steel</th>
<th>Cement</th>
<th>Chemical Fertilizer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,900</td>
<td>1,662</td>
</tr>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5,169</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>3,168</td>
<td>4,747</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1,728</td>
<td>4,330</td>
<td>1,318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: "Some Important Economic Indicators of north and south Korea," Reunification Board of Republic of Korea (Seoul), 1995.*
The damage to irrigation structures and agricultural support industries caused by the two consecutive years of flooding (1995 and 1996) reduced domestic supplies of agricultural inputs such as chemical fertilizers, steel, and fuel for machinery. Consequently, crop yields and production fell even further.

An additional problem was related to the extensive terracing that had been done in hilly and mountainous areas in the spirit of the national ideology of self-reliance (Juche). When the flooding destroyed and damaged these areas, erosion and related ecological problems exacerbated the already dire food situation.

The UN mission team estimated that the uncovered import requirement for food in 1996/97 was 1,834,000 metric tons. Constrained by disruptions in the industrial sector and a scarcity of the foreign reserves, the country faced a nationwide famine in the spring of 1997.

The effects of the flooding in 1995 and 1996 were unquestionably severe and widespread. But the present food shortage crisis is not entirely due to adverse weather, as the DPRK reports that the total area for paddy fields never exceeded 6 to 7 tons and 5 to 6 tons. Hence, the FAO's estimates of north Korea's yield per hectare for rice (table 9) appears to be quite high. This is not surprising because, as we have seen, north Korean agriculture is heavily mechanized, fertilizer application is among the highest in the world, and irrigation projects are extensive.

A few organizations have attempted to estimate the quantities of grain production in the DPRK. However, only the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has a continuous time series. The FAO uses the DPRK government's reports on average production of each agricultural item, including rice and total arable land devoted to each crop, to estimate annual agricultural production. Table 9 (above) shows that the yield per hectare for rice appears to be quite high. This is not surprising because, as we have seen, north Korean agriculture is heavily mechanized, fertilizer application is among the highest in the world, and irrigation projects are extensive.

The government of the DPRK claims that it has solved the food problem and that the country has been self-sufficient in food since 1969. To be taken seriously, however, this claim must be supported with relevant data. Yet, the DPRK government does not release economic data on a regular basis and even when it does it publishes only those data that show the success of their economic policies. Thus, it is difficult to test the government's claims of food self-sufficiency using complete and reliable data on grain production.

Table 9 (above) shows that the yield per hectare for rice appears to be quite high. This is not surprising because, as we have seen, north Korean agriculture is heavily mechanized, fertilizer application is among the highest in the world, and irrigation projects are extensive.

An FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission that visited the DPRK in 1996 to review the outcome of the 1996 cereal harvest and to estimate the national import and food aid requirements for the marketing year, confirmed high crop yields. Based on discussions with officials in government ministries and departments and with representatives of UN bilateral agencies based in the DPRK, as well as on their own field visits to important agricultural areas, the FAO/WFP Mission reported that in the 1980s, crop yields in the DPRK were comparatively high. According to the mission report, during most of the 1980s, the average yields of rice and maize were in the order of 6 to 7 tons and 5 to 6 tons. Hence, the FAO's estimates of north Korea's yield per hectare for rice (table 9) appears to be consistent with the mission's findings.

However, these estimates contain some inconsistencies, making it difficult to accept them at face value. For instance, the DPRK reports that the total area for paddy fields never exceeded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area (100 hectares)</th>
<th>Yield/hectare (kg)</th>
<th>Prod. (1000 tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948-52</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>2940</td>
<td>1158</td>
</tr>
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<td>1951-55</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>3410</td>
<td>2463</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>4800</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>6125</td>
<td>4900</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>6173</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>6667</td>
<td>5600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAO Production Year Book (1963-1987)
645,000 hectares, but the FAO used the figure of 723,000 hectares in 1965 when calculating rice production. The FAO later used 350,000 hectares as the total paddy field area for its 1971 estimate of rice production. Considering the DPRK's relentless drive to expand the area of arable land, this drop of 373,000 hectares between 1965 and 1971 appears to be an error. It also seems likely that the FAO used unhusked paddy in its estimate of total rice production. Since only polished rice is distributed among the population, unhusked paddy should not be used in the calculation of rice production. Lee Chae-jin notes that if only polished rice is considered, the total rice production figures would be at least 30 percent lower.39

Taking these factors into account we re-calculate rice production data in Table 10 (below) to show that rice production increased at an average rate of 5.1 percent per annum from 1965 to 1980. Since the average growth rate of agriculture in middle-income countries with market economies was 3.2 percent a year during a relatively similar period (1960-1980)40 the average annual growth rate of rice production in north Korea appears to be high.

In the DPRK, the quantitative rationing system is the tool that permits the government to adjust supply and demand. Norms have been defined for the basic consumption needs in grams per day. These rationing norms have been established for various population groups, initially determined according to their work activity. The ration system has nine levels, the highest providing 900 grams of cereals per day, for coal miners and workers in heavy industry, and the lowest level providing 100 grams, for children in kindergarten. Rations are distributed twice a month.41

Based on the UN recommendation of an average daily intake requirement of 2,200 calories per day, the minimum amount of cereal required to satisfy the daily recommended calories is 615 grams. As of 1985, total rice production of north Korea was approximately 3 million tons. Since the total population in 1985 is estimated to be 18,792,000, the per capita availability of rice is 159 kilograms, or about 435 grams per day. This is 70 percent of the daily cereal amount required in order to maintain the recommended calories. If we assume that the production of maize is doing as well as (or only slightly worse than) the production of rice, then it seems safe to conclude that north Korea has been nearly self-sufficient in grain supplies since the early 1970s.

**Notes**

2. Ibid.
5. According to official DPRK data, the average annual rate of growth of grain production peaked during the 1957-61 period (10.8 percent annually) and fell drastically during the 1961-65 period (-1.6 percent). The growth rate recovered during the 1965-75 period (5.1 percent), but fell steadily afterwards (-0.4 percent during the 1975-79 period and 2.1 percent during the 1979-84 period.
6. This can be evidenced by tempo of urbanization. According to official North Korean data, obtained by Eberstadt, the pace of urbanization was most rapid after the Korean War, from 1953 to 1960. The total urban population grew 20 percent a year from 1953 to 1956 and 12 percent a year in the late 1950s. SeeNicholas Eberstadt and Judith Banister, The Population of North Korea (Berkeley: Institute of East Asia Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1992), p. 28.
8. See the appendix above, p. 32.
10. Ibid.
11. Kim Duk-ho, "Urin nae se jindanjuk Hyunsin ungdong ui Balsang Bajun" (The origin and development of the revolutionary collective movement in our country), in Ryun

**Table 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area* (100 hectares)</th>
<th>Yield/hectare (Kilogram)</th>
<th>Production (unmilled/1000 tons)</th>
<th>Milled Rice (1000 tons)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948-52</td>
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<td>2940</td>
<td>1158</td>
<td>811</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1971</td>
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<td>4000</td>
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<td>1972</td>
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<td>1633</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>612</td>
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<td>2398</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>619</td>
<td>5000</td>
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<td>2167</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>626</td>
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<td>1978</td>
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<td>637</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>6667</td>
<td>4267</td>
<td>2987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Based on FAO Production Year Book (1963-1987).

*Note: We use total paddy fields as total area for rice cultivation. See Kim Woong-keun, et al., eds., Buk-han ui Nong-up Kae-hwang (North Korean agriculture) (Seoul: Korean Rural Research Institute), p. 56. An "interpolation method" has been used to fill in the missing data.*
The government of the DPRK claims that it has solved the food problem and that the country has been self-sufficient in food since 1969...[but] it is difficult to test the government's claims of food self-sufficiency using complete and reliable data on grain production. (Photo: Double crop of beans and maize Credit: © MCC photograph by Kevin King, April 1998. Used with permission.)


33. Please note that these figures include unmilled rice (paddy) not milled rice.


The Kerala Model of Development
A Debate (Part 2)


Historical Roots of Kerala Model and Its Present Crisis
by K. K. George

“You will know about your partner’s fever only if you sleep together.” Malayalees reading the writings on the Kerala model of development emanating from the First World are reminded of this Malayalam proverb. The paper by Joseph Tharamangalam is a refreshing departure from the tenor of writings on Kerala that romanticize its achievements (e.g., works by Franke and Chasin, William Alexander, and Amartya Sen). In 1993, I stated that Kerala’s unique pattern of development was no longer sustainable in the context of Kerala’s economic and fiscal crises, which are systemic in character. To develop a better understanding of the crisis in the model, I argued in favor of reformulating Kerala’s development paradox as a paradox of economic stagnation despite social development and not the other way as Western writers were then formulating the problem. I raised a number of questions: How come Kerala’s social development failed to trigger off economic growth, as had happened in most other countries? Is it due to factors endogenous or exogenous to the Kerala model or to a combination of both? Is it that the state’s social development lacked some vital development inputs? Does the view that Kerala model is anti-growth have any basis? Tharamangalam seeks to provide answers to some of these questions by tracing the political, social, and cultural forces that contributed to the evolution of the model.

The paradoxes pointed out by Tharamangalam and others are not the only paradoxes of development prevalent in Kerala. Kerala’s development pattern belies many other development theories and goes against the experience of many other fast-growing developing countries. For instance, the State had implemented one of the most comprehensive and progressive land reform programs in India. But, instead of boosting agricultural production, stagnation set in the wake of these reforms. Kerala ranks first among the Indian states according to many indices of infrastructure development—physical, financial, and social. But neither industry nor agriculture has been building on this development foundation. The remittances from the migrants working outside Kerala in large numbers have been adding to the stock of capital since the mid-1970s. But this was precisely the period in which Kerala’s development decelerated. Historically, Kerala’s economy had developed strong linkages with international markets. The large scale emigration had strengthened these linkages. With the opening up of the Indian economy, it was natural to expect that this export-oriented state with its historic advantages as well as current links with the outside world would be able to profit from these new opportunities. But I contend that the flow of foreign investments, collaborations, and technology in the wake of the liberalization in the country are by-passing the state.

Kerala’s Achievements Not to Be Exaggerated

Kerala’s achievements should neither be belittled nor be exaggerated. It is true that Kerala has had many successes as compared to other states in India and to many other countries, including some first world countries. But, claims like the one made by Alexander that “extraordinary efficiencies in the use of Earth’s resources characterize the lifestyles of the 29 million citizens of Kerala” are clearly exaggerations. Even Franke and Chasin, great admirers of Kerala model, have been forced to admit that “Kerala faces a major environmental crisis from severe deforestation in Western Ghats, leading to soil erosion there and water logging in low land areas. Polluted rivers and foreign hi-tech offshore fishing operations are reducing the fish catch.” Kerala’s limited economic expansion in the past has been at the expense of nature and its main export items, apart from labor power, have been products of nature without much value added.

* The text of the Tharamangalam article is available on the BCAS Website: http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas/. Note: Page references are to the original printed version of the article unless otherwise noted.
According to Franke and Chasin, the “Kerala model is social justice.” Can a state with 20 percent of its labor force remaining unemployed be complimented for achieving social justice? By no stretch of the imagination can a “money order economy” be judged to be an example of “radical reform as development.” Kerala today depends for its sustenance on remittances of workers including women working in the most exploitative conditions both in India and abroad. Many of the countries in which the migrants work are not champions of political or human rights, as Tharamangalam points out. And the politically conscious citizens of this “radicalized” state find no incongruity in their living on the wages of their children who have to surrender their civic and human rights to eke out a meager living not only for themselves but also for their relatives back home. The dependence of the state on outside employment has come to such a pass that students in Kerala prefer to study any language other than their mother tongue because their ultimate destination is outside the state. A leading Malayalam poet captures this situation well by describing Kerala as a nursery bed from which the children are transplanted as soon as they grow.

Dimensions of the Crisis

The crisis in the Kerala economy and the resultant fiscal crisis are now spilling over to other sectors including its social sectors. As a result, Kerala is finding it difficult to maintain even its earlier achievements. In addition, it has also to contend with some “success-induced second generation problems.”

Some of Kerala’s achievements are comparable to those of advanced countries. But the gains have brought with them some of the advanced countries’ problems—without the resources others have to solve them. For instance, the mass schooling that the state had been able to provide has generated increased demand for higher education and technical education. The state does not have the wherewithal to meet these relatively more capital intensive demands. Similarly, prolonged life expectancy has led to increased demands for health care facilities of a capital intensive nature. Today, Malayalees are forced to migrate not only for employment, but also for higher education and better health care. Demographic transition also has increased the demand for social security for the elderly. But the state with its lagging economy and meager revenue has been unable to meet these demands.

Kerala has taken a number of initiatives not only in social development but also in providing physical and financial infrastructure. But the results of these initiatives have been more quantitative than qualitative. In the education sector, for example, mass literacy and mass school enrollment have been achieved. But the quality of education and its relevance to the state’s economy has been neglected. Higher education, particularly research, has never been given high priority.
Consider, as well:

- The state has brought down the death rates, but Kerala’s morbidity rates continue to be among the highest in India. This is understandable as the nutritional intake of Malayalees, dependent on food imports (despite the subsidized public distribution system) is totally inadequate.
- The total road network in the state is quite long, but the length of state and national highways is very small. Moreover, the state’s railway and port systems are technologically backward, resulting in longer transit and turnaround time.
- Electricity has reached every village, but the quality of service is abysmally poor. The state has widely spread the butter as thinly as possible to satisfy the calls from as many contending social groups as possible for more schools, colleges, hospitals, and roads.

The Changing Role of the State

Many writers on Kerala have over emphasized the role of the state in the Kerala model of development. But the majority of the schools, colleges, and hospitals were actually started by private and local initiatives aided and supported, no doubt, by the state. Even today, private schools and hospitals outnumber state owned institutions. In agro-processing industries and commercial agriculture, it was the private sector that played the major role. The princely state of Travancore (one of the three constituent regions of present-day Kerala) stood first among the princely states in total corporate paid up capital, a clear indication of the strength of its private sector. State activity aided and supported these private initiatives, no doubt, and it also started a few units on its own. Thus, it was as a result of all these initiatives—public and private—that Kerala’s per capita income reached above the national average levels at the time of India’s independence.

The Peter Evans study quoted by Tharamangalam talks about the embedded autonomy of the redistributive state of Kerala with the “mobilised groups” resulting in a welfare state. But this is a more recent phenomenon. In the earlier stage of Kerala’s development, dating back to the pre-independence period, the embedded autonomy of the state was not only in relation to the mobilized groups but also in relation to capital—aagrarian, mercantile, and industrial. The state in Kerala then was as much developmental as redistributive. And this was the period of economic expansion that permitted later social development. The adversary relationship between capital and state, backed by mobilized groups, as will be seen later, developed mostly after independence. This resulted in the state extending its dominance and controls over private capital not only in economic sectors, but also in social sectors. The state also tried to assume a direct entrepreneurial role in a number of fields. Excessive state controls led to the drying up of initiatives and killed the spirit of innovation, as Tharamangalam suggests, and to the diversion of investments to low priority but less regulated fields.

State control was not confined to the private sector. Faith in the government as an omnipotent and omnipotent organization resulted in the extension of its role to autonomous institutions like universities, cooperatives, local bodies, and even to the academies of writers and artists. But instead of correcting perceived evils, the highly centralized, bureaucratic, over-politicized system of controls stifled all initiatives. State intervention soon degenerated into state interference in the day-to-day functioning of the “autonomous institutions”—the keystones of a pluralized democratic society.

The state had bitten off more than it could chew, given its limited financial resources and its lack of the management expertise needed to run these institutions. Even if it had all of these, some of the mobilized groups backing the state would not have permitted their more effective utilization. This result can be seen in the state-owned enterprises that perenniably show a loss. In the educational sector, government-run schools and colleges show very poor results. As a result, the demand for schools that are unregulated and unaided by the state is increasing despite the very high fees they charge. The state with its limited resources finds it difficult to resist the rising demand to establish even more unregulated and unaided professional colleges.

In the health care field, the Kerala model is slowing drifting towards a U.S. model as a result of the state’s failure to manage well and fund adequately the state’s own hospitals. The number of beds in the state sector increased from 36,000 to 38,000 between 1986 and 1996, but the aggregate bed strength in the private hospitals jumped from 49,000 to 67,500. Besides, the private sector had outpaced the state sector in acquisition of medical technologies. The result is over-medicalization, cost escalation, and the marginalization of the poor. In spite of the demand, more sophisticated care, involving support services and team work from professionals, has been rare in coming in the state. Therefore, those who can afford it migrate to neighboring states to meet more complex medical needs. Kerala’s medical system is not trusted even by the most ardent champions of the public system of health care. Recently, the Chief Minister of the present Left Democratic Front government himself preferred to go to a neighboring state for his cataract operation.

The inefficiencies of the state’s apparatus—arising out of an over-centralized, over-politicized, and corrupt bureaucracy—have been the bane of Kerala, retarding its development. The government machinery, the most basic infrastructure, has today become not only dysfunctional but also counter-productive. And the state, which has become a prisoner of conflicting pulls and pressures from one or more mobilized groups, has neither the will nor the ability to tune up the state’s apparatus.

The state in Kerala, despite assuming enormous powers and responsibilities, is in fact a very soft state, highly vulnerable to all sorts of pressures from a large number of interest groups, not all of whose demands are conducive to the state’s development. The genesis of the soft state can in fact be traced to the very forces that led to the development of Kerala model.

Broadly, these forces can be grouped into two. The first is the forces unleashed by the social reform movements in different castes and communities that soon consolidated themselves into pressure groups. Some of these formed their own political parties—open or disguised—that had to be accommodated in the two coalition governments that alternately ruled the state. The second set of forces came from the workers and peasants’ movements organized first under the banner of the political left. Other political parties including the rightist ones soon realized the political advantages of unions and started competing with the leftists in organizing the workers and the peasants. Because of
the influence of one or more of these different forces, the state has become increasingly reactive rather than pro-active.

Changing Role of Trade Unions

Nossiter has described Kerala as “a degenerate form of feudalism in which managerial barons, their retainers and marauding contractors pillaged the public treasury.” One can now safely add trade unions to this list. The trade union movement has had many legitimate and well-deserved successes in the state and has contributed to the evolution of the Kerala model. But when they lost their traditional enemies, with the introduction of a land ceiling as part of the land reforms, trade unions in agriculture began to pit themselves against small farmers. In the absence of large-scale units in the state, trade unions turned their attention to petty producers in industry and to other small unorganized service providers. In this, the advantage often lay with the trade unions organized under the banner of one or more political parties and supported by the government. One of the major successes of the trade unions was in the field of white collar unionism, where they ranged themselves against the government, universities, state sector units, cooperatives, and the like. The connivance of the state and the support of the political parties ensured that they would not face much resistance.

The unbridled strides made by the trade unions had a number of consequences for economic development. They could raise wages disproportionate to productivity gains in many sectors. The withholding of the supply of labor by educated youngsters in the casual labor market (a phenomenon discussed below) and the large-scale out-migration of labor also helped push up wages in many sectors. The increased demand for labor in many sectors, generated by remittances from outside the state, also helped. One escape route for the capital in this situation could have been the introduction of technology, which would have led to loss of jobs. This was blocked by the unions, again with the active support of the state. The consequence in agriculture was the diversion of land from labor intensive crops like food grains to non-labor intensive cash crops. Another consequence was that farmers left their land fallow. What the trade unions gained in the form of higher wages was lost due to the loss of employment opportunities.

Almost the same developments took place in the labor intensive traditional industries that dominated the state’s industrial sector. Here again, higher wages together with successful resistance against technology led to migration of these industries to neighboring states. In the government and service providing sectors, resistance to technology took the shape of resistance against computers, reorganization, and rationalization of procedures. Törnquist and Tharakan observe that “Even ‘innocent’ rationalizations were thus undermined. Certain unions even defended much of the centralization and specialization within public administration, probably because some of their bargaining power is built on it. Individual members and politicians as well, often resisted attempts at reforming state government and administration, reforms which might have made it less easy to use various public positions for private ends.” Structural readjustment is a dirty term in Kerala, not only because of its association with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), but also because of its potential to upset so many apple carts.

The unions have been successful in sustaining a large number of restrictive practices. In the absence of increases in employment, the trade unions in desperation “resorted to not just a short term but a short sighted strategy of protecting the insiders not unknown in trade union history.” This “closed shop” policy led to the development of a rentier behavior within segments of unionized labor that had successfully secured the right to allocate jobs to its members. Accountability was another casualty of the “unresisted” trade union movement. Neither carrot nor stick nor higher socialist values could motivate large segments of labor in Kerala. One joke going round in the state is that many workers think that the non-creation of surplus value is the best way to resist exploitation.

As seen earlier, Kerala’s trade unions, in the absence of large scale industrialization, had to be pitted against petty producers, traders, and service providers, who were relatively unorganized and had less staying power in a confrontation with labor. But soon they too organized along militant trade union lines. Many of the leaders of these organizations were drawn from activists in students unions and political organizations, who had drifted to the tertiary sector because that was the only sector that was growing. These organizations, though initially organized to fight labor soon turned even against the government. Successful battles were fought to foil government’s attempts to collect taxes and to prevent food adulteration. Having tasted success, they soon developed into cartels. While the union of workers fragmented the labor market, the union of traders fragmented the product market. Today, in Kerala we have not only minimum wages fixed by the state and the trade unions but also minimum prices and profit margins dictated by these cartels. The soft state is in no position to confront this cartelization tendency because these organizations and their members are contributors of political party funds.

Changing Role of Religious and Political Groups

The other set of forces that have made the state soft are the communal forces that have to be accommodated directly or indirectly in the coalition governments that have become a fixture in Kerala’s state system. As in many other fields, Kerala is said to lead India in this respect as well. At present, there are eighteen political parties, many of them organized to represent special interest groups or religious groups. For their own survival, coalition governments have to accommodate some of these minor parties because their pressure tactics cannot be resisted. Communalization of politics has come to such a pass that no political party ever takes the risk of putting up a candidate belonging to a community that is in a minority in an electoral constituency. The reasons for this phenomenon, again, have to be traced to the state’s history. As Tharamangalam points out, the first social and political mobilizations in the state were led by castes and communities. For some time, as George Mathew has argued, the communal road in the past appeared to lead to secular politics. Now secular parties are traveling the same road, but in the opposite direction.

Mass agitations spilling over into the streets have been another feature of the political scene in Kerala. This again is a relic of the mass mobilization strategies that contributed to the development of the Kerala model. But today’s mass mobilizations are only caricatures of the past. No longer focused on any major agenda, the mobilizations have become simply ritualistic. Often, these agitations are in favor of maintaining the status quo. In recent times, Kerala has proved its capacity for “mass mobilizations” even without the masses. The disruption of civil society as a result of these “mass actions” in the streets—un-re-
sisted by the soft state (very often actually aided and abetted by the government)—has been stopped recently by the judiciary.

Another characteristic of Kerala’s politics is the patron-client relationship or “collective and individual clientelism” between the citizen and the political parties, their leaders, and the government. Kerala claims credit for abolishing the patron client relationship in agrarian and labor relations. But this is coming back in a much more broad-based form now. People join political parties not only out of ideological considerations but also to acquire state patronage in the form of jobs, loans, housing sites, and even a ration card. Help from politicians is also necessary for getting decisions made by the slow-moving government machinery. In fact, the support of a political group is essential even for enforcing a citizen’s civil rights.

No More New Agendas

The Kerala model is grinding to a halt because the social and political groups, having fulfilled their original agenda, now have no new agendas. Society as a whole has lost its capacity to set collective goals. There are no more big dreams. The old change agents like the Christian church and their missionary organizations, social reform movements in various caste groups, trade unions, and political parties are now acting merely as pressure groups either to defend the status quo or to extract the maximum possible share out of a cake that is not increasing in size.

Why is it that these social groups and political formations have failed to identify any new agenda items? We have no clear answers yet. It appears that many of these groups have not been able to comprehend fully the dynamic forces released by the implementation of the older agendas. Nor have they been able to handle the second-generation problems that followed in the wake of their earlier successes. Many of them are no longer sure about their constituencies.

Excessive politicization is one of the major reasons why development is retarded in Kerala society today. The state, along with most of its autonomous institutions, has become “party property.” Autonomous movements and intellectual life have not been immune to the influence of narrow party politics. The machinery of the government as also those of the autonomous institutions has become highly partisan, not in a larger sense but in a narrow sense. These organizations have become arenas of either electoral politics or palace politics. Appointments to the Public Service Commission (the body that recruits government employees), the judiciary, university bodies, and so forth, are made on the basis of party or religious/caste considerations.

Intellectuals have not contributed much to the resurgence of Kerala’s economy and society. The intellectual life of the state, which is very narrowly circumscribed, is characterized principally by the dominance of the arts, literature, and cinema. Kerala’s citizens do not consider the social sciences, the physical and natural sciences, technology, and the like to be intellectual pursuits. Consequently, these intellectual pursuits are not given much social recognition. In fact, scientists and technologists are not making a significant contribution to the intellectual life of Kerala society. This is due to the fact that not much new knowledge is being generated in the under-funded and over-controlled university system. As a result, the state has to depend upon outside experts to fill its top government jobs, advisory bodies, and research and development institutions. Here, history seems to have come full circle. It may be recalled that the first protest movement organized in the state was directed against the dominance in government service of Tamil Brahmans from the neighboring state.

Political polarization and fragmentation is another characteristic of the intellectual life of Kerala. Intellectuals are forced to make compromises for recognition and patronage from government, political parties, religious groups, and caste formations. There is no forum or space for independent thinking in the state. A degree of mental slavery has come to be accepted by many intellectuals as a price for survival at home. Consequently, most of the fresh thinking on Kerala has come from Malayalees settled outside the state.

Tharamangalam has commented favorably on the exceptionally high readership of newspapers and magazines in Kerala. The contribution of the media to Kerala’s intellectual life and discourse is debatable. Though there are a number of dailies and magazines, a handful of them account for the bulk of the readership. What is more, almost all of them have carved out their own niche in political or religious or caste groups. Political news predominates, followed by news about literary and artistic events. Serious issues are seldom raised or discussed by the media. What is purveyed is nothing but “junk food news.” News and events are trivialized by publishers and editors who claim to be giving readers what they want. The newspapers are full of stories of people and events that are grossly over reported, sensationalized, and hyped out of proportion to their significance. Differentiating between tabloids and the so-called mainstream forms of media is difficult.

The media in Kerala no longer facilitates dialogue. The political polarization of society has ensured this. Dialogue takes place only among the “believers.” Children very often join the students’ wing of a political party or a religious group, then graduate into the youth wings, and emerge finally as life-long members. Even the major newspapers in Kerala have formed their students’ forums. Members of a particular group read the same newspapers, attend the same meetings of their own group, and listen to speeches by their own intellectuals.

Some of the value systems imbibed by the “awakened masses” in Kerala are paradoxically feudal value systems. A disdain for manual work and a preference for white-collar work have been noticed among the educated youngsters of Kerala. This preference partly explains the paradox of labor scarcity in the rural casual labor markets despite higher wages. It takes shop assistants, mobile sales agents, and honorary caretakers in child care centers a month to earn what agricultural workers can very often earn in fewer than ten days. Still the educated youth prefer these jobs, thus constituting the labor supply for casual work in construction, agriculture, and other blue collar sectors of Kerala’s economy. As a result, we have the paradox of large-scale immigration of labor from neighboring states while, at the same time, the state’s unemployment rate is three to five times the all-India levels.

Another undesirable change in the value system of Malayalees is the shift from independence to dependence. Dependence on government, political parties, and relatives working in the Middle East have replaced independence. The values of consumerist society have also permeated the society. This is due in part, to the demonstration effects of the migrants to the Arabian Gulf countries and is made possible by their remittances. The undue influence of the media on the Malayalee mind too has helped in spreading these values.

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Following Tharamangalam, I have confined my discussion in this response largely to the endogenous factors that have led to the crisis in the Kerala model. Several exogenous factors have also played a part. The large volume of remittances from migrant laborers, despite all their advantages, has distorted the economy and social life in Kerala in ways that have not yet been fully assessed. Another factor (argued elsewhere) is the failure of the federal government to formulate an appropriate strategy of economic growth based on each state’s peculiar resource endowments. The present economic crisis is also the result of the highly centralized federal-state economic and financial relationship that deprives the individual states of their taxing powers and decision-making autonomy in economic matters. Kerala’s plight is also the result of the highly centralized Indian planning system, which does not ensure balanced growth among the regions, while discouraging individual states from following alternative development paths. Finally, Kerala’s fragmented polity stands in the way of the state being able to formulate and articulate its collective goals. As a result, the state is unable to confront the federal government with a strong statement of its rights.

Notes
2. K.K. George, Limits to Kerala Model of Development (Thiruvananthapuram, Centre for Development Studies, 1993).
5. Alexander, “Exceptional Kerala.”
8. George, Limits to Kerala Model and “Whither Kerala Model?”
14. Ibid. See also Kannan, “Political Economy of Labor and Development in Kerala.”

* * *

Kerala “Model”—What Does It Signify?
by M. P. Parameswaran

Let me begin this response to Joseph Tharamangalam’s paper with a few statements. First, the expression “Kerala model” is inappropriate, because a model is one consciously built up and worthy of being emulated or discarded. A more appropriate expression would be “Kerala experience,” from which something can be learned. The elements of what is known as the Kerala model are not the products of any direct modeling. Second, social development and economic growth are not directly correlatable categories. They require a political ideology as a mediator. Enough has been written about the “perils of economic growth without social development.” Third, there is nothing new or original in Tharamangalam’s criticism of the state of Kerala’s economy. Discerning and concerned social scientists and social activists have pointed out every one of these problems more than two decades ago.

It is wrong to uphold Kerala as a model for poor countries; but it could be that Kerala is a beacon for the affluent countries. For, the Kerala experience clearly shows that to achieve comparative levels of human development, the “third world” countries need not aspire to the levels of wastage and plunder of natural resources of which the “first world” nations seem so proud. The high achievements of Kerala in education and health, the basic parameters used for human development comparisons, have not been solely due to the efforts of the Communist Party, though radical political movements have played an important role. Its foundations were laid by the social reform and educational movements of the nineteenth century and enhanced by the cultural movements of the twentieth century. Peasant movements, land reforms, and the Communist Party have, however, played a crucial role in the transition process. However, the communists were late in accepting that all is not going well on the economic front.

For the past two decades or more, social scientists, economists, and others have been aware of the fact that the achievements of Kerala rest on a weak economic foundation—an almost static industrial sector and a shrinking agricultural sector. Many of them have argued as Joseph Tharamangalam is doing today, “What is worse, these economic problems appear to be inherent in the model....” Many of them advised the Kerala government to reduce its spending on education and health and to privatize both. However, none of the political parties could make such a decision. The people of Kerala knew better. Kerala’s agricultural stagnation and industrial backwardness cannot be attributed to public expenditure in social development at the expense of public investment in agriculture and industry.

Kerala started its economic modernization with an initial handicap: with plantation-based industries, on the one hand, and electricity-guzzling industries, on the other. Even the traditional agricultural sector was dominated by perennial crops that claimed more than two-thirds of the cultivated area. Because of the high startup costs, perennial crops cannot be easily uprooted and replanted to meet the vagaries of the market. Further, the major portion of state investment in the agricultural sector went for the construction of large- and medium-sized irrigation dams with cost overruns of 1,000 to 2,500 percent and time overruns of decades. The irrigation canals associated with these projects accentuated the already acute problems of drainage.
As far as industrialization is concerned, Kerala is deficient in resources—not only in minerals, but also in energy. It has no coal, oil, or gas. Firewood accounts for 80 to 90 percent of its heat energy requirements. Electrical energy requirements are met solely with hydropower. Even though as early as 1975 it was pointed out that Kerala would experience power shortages by 1982 unless steps were taken to build thermal stations and import fossil fuels from other states to run them, politicians, bureaucrats, and vested interests of the industrial lobby, which has been enjoying almost zero-cost electricity, blocked the necessary investments. This is one of the main reasons for the industrial stagnation in Kerala—not the spending on education and health, as suggested by Tharamangalam.

There are other constraints on the development of agriculture and industry in Kerala. They arise, as Tharamangalam has pointed out, partly from the increasing apathy towards physical labor and the expectations of white collar/government jobs. Fear about labor union militancy is another factor, though the actual percentages of work days lost in Kerala is less than that in most other states. Perhaps more important than the above is the total insensitivity, often complicity, of the bureaucracy. The political leadership has shown a singular failure in dealing with situations such as these, especially in dealing with the energy crisis.

The negative attitude towards physical labor is the cause of educated employment, on the one hand, and the shortage of manual labor, on the other. Uneducated unemployment is comparatively small. This reflects on the character and quality of education imparted in Kerala schools, rather than on overinvestment by the state in education. There is a real shortage of agricultural and construction labor. In recent years, up to a million manual laborers have migrated to Kerala from the neighboring states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Tharamangalam (p. 28) warns the admirers of the Kerala model that "...Kerala would have sunk into widespread poverty long ago...[but for]...very substantial remittances by Malayalees outside Kerala...and also by the state's rapid decrease in population growth." He does not ask how such a demographic transition could take place. Others have asked and found answers: the very factors—investment in education and health care—that Tharamangalam cites as the culprits responsible for Kerala's lack of growth. The remittances from Malayalees abroad have been estimated by various researchers at between 25 percent to 40 percent of the SDP (State Domestic Product). Even taking the higher figure, the total per capita income comes to only about $420 per annum. A substantial percentage of the foreign remittances goes for house construction, and not for food or clothing. The entire state of Kerala looks more like an American city suburb. Table 1 (below) gives some comparisons between Kerala and the United States.

Kerala's achievements in literacy, education, life expectancy, death, infant mortality rate, etc. could not have been achieved without investment in education and health care.

"Popular movements and democratic initiatives for total literacy and local self-government—laudable and necessary as they are—cannot compensate for economic growth, at least within the framework of the world system in which Kerala is embedded," says Tharamangalam (p. 31). Here we have the crux of his framework and worldview. He accepts the world system as it exists and doesn't want to question it. Kerala is trying to fight it. There is no justification for him to assume that these movements are intended to "compensate for economic growth." It is actually the other way round, to accelerate economic growth. But on what pattern? The long-cherished Soviet model has lost most of its attraction. Tharamangalam apparently advises Kerala to accept and welcome the "world system," to go global—lock, stock and barrel. Subconsciously agreeing with T. J. Nossiter that Kerala is "a form of degenerate feudalism in which managerial barons, their retainers, and marauding contractors pilaged the public treasury," and drawing from Peter Evans's comparison between the redistributive state of Kerala, and its mirror image, the "developmental" or "growth" states of East Asia, Tharamangalam arrives at two conclusions: "First, state intervention in institutions of civil society such as education and industry severely constrains their autonomy and rationality. Second, the state's contribution to economic growth is so little that Kerala can be characterized as a 'no-growth' if not an 'anti-growth' state" (p. 31). This is an uncharitable way, or perhaps an un-understanding way, of looking at the problems faced by Kerala.

Tharamangalam apparently recommends that Kerala follow the Southeast and East Asian path to development. (In any case, it cannot follow the European path.) He prefers that Kerala transfer the "embedded autonomy" relationship the state has at present with "mobilized groups," to "industrial groups," i.e., to immobilize people, to encourage industrial vampires. This goes against the developing, albeit slowly, world consciousness that more "growth" without distributive justice and even unlimited growth is neither sustainable nor desirable.

That Kerala is sitting on a very precarious economic base has long been acknowledged. However, the argument that its life style is intrinsically unsustainable goes against all meaningful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Selected Indicators: Kerala and USA, 1993-95</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area in Thousands of Square Miles</td>
<td>15,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population in Millions (1995)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita availability of land in acres (1995)</td>
<td>0.32(e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income in U. S. dollars (1993)</td>
<td>420(h)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy percent</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth</td>
<td>72(b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crude death rate per thousand (1993)</td>
<td>6(g)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infant mortality rate per thousand (1995)</td>
<td>13(d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fertility Rate (1995)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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ceeds, they will see that an initial exponential growth curve
resources towards economic reconstruction based on a new
development consciousness. If the Kerala experiment suc­
Welcome an end to wars and a relief from the necessity of
so-called “national security.” Then they could direct all their
complete transition to renewable resources, both energy and
The SQL can be expressed in terms of:
Social quality: an all-round continuous reduction in rates of
mug, general crime, suicide, reduction in consumption of
narcotics and alcohol, lower rates of child abuse, and lower
expenditures on police and the military.
Cultural quality: high levels of education, high rates of reading,
high participation in cultural and sports activities.
Participation quality: high degree of individual participation in
economic activities leading to a continuous decrease in income
inequalities; and a high level of individual political participation
in managing the affairs of the society through democratic
decimalization.
Let me hasten to add that this is not the Kerala model about
which Tharamangalam and others are speaking, but a vision
extracted out of the Kerala experience so far. It can be a model
for the entire world, for all countries, developing and developed.
The present euphoria in the developed world in the victory of the
anarchic market economy over Soviet-style non-democratic cen­
tralized planning is transient; it cannot live long. The environ­
ment is breaking down, eco-catastrophes and weather vagaries
are on the increase. Not only that, the anarchy of finance capital
is generating unpredictable economic tornadoes in the world
capitalist system. Even the strongest economies may be uprooted
one day or another.
It is unfortunate that Tharamangalam could not see the
efforts, though presently not totally effective, of the various
popular movements in Kerala that offer the possibility of bringing
sanity to human society. Will Kerala succeed in its efforts?
Those who want it to succeed are welcome to join. Success will
benefit all of humanity. Failure may benefit a small minority for
the time being, but not forever.

Notes
1. K. N. S. Nair and M. P. Parameswaran, Wealth of Kerala (Trivandrum:
Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, 1975); T. M. Thomas Isaac, Kerala:
Land and People (Trivandrum: Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, 1985)
(both in Malayalam); and a host of literature cited and not cited by
Tharamangalam.
2. M. P. Parameswaran, Industrialisation of Kerala and Electricity
(Trivandrum: Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, 1975) (in Malayalam).
3. Alan Weisman, Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World. (White

The industrialized, developed nations cannot imagine a
world without wars. Their entire economies would collapse;
people would lose all their human characteristics and would run
amuck. The developing countries, on the other hand, would
welcome an end to wars and a relief from the necessity of
so-called “national security.” Then they could direct all their
resources towards economic reconstruction based on a new
development consciousness. If the Kerala experiment suc­
cceeds, they will see that an initial exponential growth curve
can be later consciously turned into an asymptotic one: an
S-curve of development.
The nations of the developed world would hopefully learn
from this and restructure their economies to human scales. The
human species may learn to conceive development in human
parameters, such as the physical quality of life (PQL) and spiri­
tual quality of life (SQL). I offer below a brief overview of how
these parameters might be understood.
The PQL can be expressed in terms of:
- Biological well being: High effective life expectancy, meaning
  long life expectancy at birth with lowest possible morbidity
  during that expected lifetime.
- Liberation from heavy physical labor with decreasing energy
  input requirements.
- Sustainable use of natural resources, including at first a de­
creasing throughput of nonrenewable resources and later a
  complete transition to renewable resources, both energy and
  materials.

The SQL can be expressed in terms of:
- Social quality: an all-round continuous reduction in rates of
  murder, general crime, suicide, reduction in consumption of
  narcotics and alcohol, lower rates of child abuse, and lower
  expenditures on police and the military.
- Cultural quality: high levels of education, high rates of reading,
  high participation in cultural and sports activities.
- Participation quality: high degree of individual participation in
  economic activities leading to a continuous decrease in income
  inequalities; and a high level of individual political participation
  in managing the affairs of the society through democratic
decimalization.

Unfortunately, Tharamangalam has not been able to under­
stand the real significance of the various popular movements—
the Kerala People’s Science Movement, the literacy and educa­
tion movements, the movement for participatory and decentral­
ized democracy—that have been active in Kerala for the past two
decades or so. Inheriting an “embedded economy extremely well
suited to accomplishing a transformative project aimed at in­
creased levels of welfare,” the people and the various popular
movements in Kerala are trying to give sustainable and stable
foundation to it through strengthening the economy, not relying
on large industrial capital—foreign or Indian—but relying on
local resources both human and material. The attempt is to make
the local economy strong enough to be able to withstand the
onslaughters of the global economy, to make small not only beautiful
but also powerful, to realize effective participation of
the people in managing the affairs of society, to make democracy
really a government by the people and not by the industrialists
and the underworld—in short, to create a model for a “fourth
world” in place of the earlier second world (current and former
socialist countries), a post-capitalist society of the twenty-first
century. It is an attempt to redefine human development, a
struggle to restructure human society, a Gaviotas experiment on
a much larger scale.³

The industrialized, developed nations cannot imagine a
world without wars. Their entire economies would collapse;
people would lose all their human characteristics and would run
amuck. The developing countries, on the other hand, would
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development consciousness. If the Kerala experiment suc­
cceeds, they will see that an initial exponential growth curve
Beyond Romanticism: Remarkable Popular Reorganizing
by Olle Törnquist

Joseph Tharamangalam’s essay raises many important points, and I agree with several of them. In fact, a major conclusion from my own research in the mid-1980s was precisely that left politics in favor of social and economic development had reached a dead-end. I object, however, to his analysis of the popular attempts that, since the late 1980s, have been breaking new ground from below; and especially to his reference (in his footnote 51) to my own (in co-operation with P. K. Michael Tharanak) results from studying those attempts.

Tharamangalam would have it that our “conclusion is that even this ‘exciting new project’ and ‘fresh start’ have been failures.” This is not correct! Quite the contrary, the result from my studies (for which possible weaknesses Tharanak is not responsible) is that those initiatives proved very imaginative, relevant, and dynamic. So many activists were really trying out and demonstrating various ways in which people themselves, democratically, could do away with the new forms of patronage and promote the revitalization of civil society, politics, the social and economic ethic, productive initiatives, local cooperation, and much more that Tharamangalam himself also talks about—talks about but has been unable to identify any other social and political force that has even come to think of a better democratic alternative. What I contended to be problematic—at least till the mid-1990s—was the insufficient politics of those impressive initiatives. For lack of space, let me only summarize what I see to be the common denominators.

Initiatives with Insufficient Politics

First, in the social setting of Kerala—marked by the expansion of petty capitalist relations after the land reform and with incoming migrant money from the Gulf—there did not seem to be widespread interest among the many dispersed farmers in the movements’ ideas about joint democratic control and management of land and other resources to improve production. Despite the campaigns, no powerful social movement (like the one for land reform) came forward.

Second, most of the non-party development alternatives that were suggested made little if any sense within the logic of the institutional and political-cum-economic interests of the public administration and the established leftist movements and parties—except when such activities formed part of the Left Front government’s top-down development policies. Activists were politically isolated, therefore, and left without necessary measures such as a consistent democratic decentralization.

Third, the reformists themselves found it difficult to explicitly politicize their development actions (by which is not necessarily meant to party-politicize). Or perhaps they were incapable of, or uninterested in, so doing. The reformists (besides first linking up with, and then suffering from the fall of, the leftist government in mid-1991) rather restricted themselves to creating preconditions for major social and political forces to move forward—which the latter did not do.

Fourth, analytical reductionism and/or political considerations prevented the reformists from dealing with the origins of such problems, including the multiplicity of socio-economic interests and conflicts, plus their links with vested interests within the obstructive logic of established politics, conservative as well as leftist.

To sum up, there was basically a lack of convergence of fragmented issues, groups, and actions because in the last instance the renewal-oriented groups could not master the politics of promoting this, while the established parties and institutions abstained from promoting it.

Activists, however, have learned their lesson. Most of the campaigns could not be sustained when the Left Front lost the elections in 1991. But after some time reformists managed instead to turn a decentralization scheme imposed by New Delhi against the dubious ways in which the new Congress-led Kerala state government tried to undermine the same. Hence, the reformists succeeded also in getting the opposition Left Front politicians, who used to be hesitant while in office, to jump on the bandwagon and to commit themselves to more consistent decentralization, if and when voted back in office.

Interestingly, this neither caused the Left Front to really use the 1995 panchayat elections to develop local demands, initiatives, and visions, nor gave decentralization and local development top priority in the Assembly elections in 1996. Such an orientation, quite obviously, called instead for alternative forces and pressure from below. But now (as compared to the previous campaign period until 1991) this pressure was rapidly and skillfully facilitated. Once the Left had won the elections and the late communist patriarch E. M. S. Namboodiripad insisted on consistent decentralization, scholarly as well as politically very able activists managed to get access to the state planning board, to use years of experiences from KSSP (Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad or People’s Science Movement) projects to immediately launch a well prepared massive popular campaign for planning from below, and to simultaneously have leading politicians promise proudly that no longer would only a few percent of the state development budget go to all panchayats that seriously involve themselves in the program, but between 35 percent and 40 percent.

Hence there is new space for the previously contained popular efforts—but only thanks to elections, political pressure, and to government intervention. The local governments have gotten some real powers (and many fresh politicians have been elected, particularly women). The centralized parties must produce results in the new development arenas, which give some elbow room for reformists. Supported by reformist experts local governments may alter the centralized and compartmentalized administration, try to coordinate various measures on the district, block, and village levels, and most importantly facilitate the coming together of the myriad of dispersed voluntary associations (and the fragmented social capital that they have come to nourish) for joint societal efforts. The earlier kind of popular movement campaigns may be more institutionalized and legitimate (including from a democratic point of view) when carried out in mutually respectful cooperation with elected local governments. Anglo-Saxon scholars might talk of associative democracy. In Scandinavia we may recall “the good old” cooperation between popular movements and governments at various levels that currently so fashionable civil society and social capital theorists tend to forget about.

At any rate, many obstacles are still ahead in Kerala. I am particularly worried that since late 1996 politicians and bureaucrats with factional and personal vested interests may cause the
impressive planning from below to not be followed up rapidly and efficiently enough by new laws and regulations and an equally impressive campaign to institutionalize both the fruitful efforts and new or reformed political and administrative rules and organs—to thus facilitate local cooperation and government, so that the panchayats and the many voluntary organizations are able to really implement all the local projects now planned and approved. Yet, a politically further developed society of citizens stands a good chance of taking crucial steps ahead. Tharamangalam is right in saying we should not romanticize Kerala but wrong when not pointing to the persistent need and efforts at popular reorganization.

Notes
2. Due to a printing error when the articles were published in Economic and Political Weekly it was not clearly indicated that they were written with P. K. Michael Tharakan, whose positive contribution cannot be overstated but who did not share the full responsibility for the approach, data collection, analysis, and formulations. See the initial footnote with the articles.
4. The loss was mainly due to special sympathies with just assassinated Rajiv Gandhi’s Congress Party.
5. Local authorities, in addition to the municipalities, on district, block and village level.

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Economics as if People Mattered:
The Kerala Case

by William M. Alexander

In “The Perils of Social Development without Economic Development” Joseph Tharamangalam correctly tells us that “analysts and policy makers in Kerala have been engaged in a soul-searching self-analysis and self-criticism that has often sunk into the depths of despondency and despair.” Kerala is correctly described as both a wonder of humanity and an economic debacle. Finding Kerala an economic debacle, Tharamangalam displays an academic loyalty to the nineteenth-century dogmas and twentieth-century successes of Western economists, Adam Smith and Karl Marx.

A review of the evidence of “prolonged economic stagnation and even decelerating growth,” following economist K. K. George, is introduced, noting that “These economic problems appear to be inherent in the model, and not anomalies that can be easily overcome.” George describes a government responding to the demands of a politically sophisticated electorate and explains how the Kerala government’s successes in social development contribute to fiscal failure. “Kerala does not receive its share [of central government transfers] for social development since it is seen as having reached the national targets.” Tharamangalam argues that George’s evidence denies the possibility of a “choice in favor of human development and quality of life over economic growth.” I disagree.

Learnings from Experience

Twenty years ago as a university professor, I might have written the same. Since I retired, however, I have learned more. My first genuine learning experience—as I began my field studies in Kerala ten years ago—was an encounter with the venerable scholar serving as secretary of an old-line Kerala organization promoting the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. This scholarly man, who spoke meticulous English, looked directly at me, listening carefully as I talked. Trying to help me see something beyond the limits of my academic vision, he sought common ground assuring me that I must have read the books of Fritz Capra. I had not. Capra taught about the small group of physicists who were forced to reject Newtonian physics—still the basis for most teaching about physics—in order to reach to atomic physics. Theory, no matter how fundamental, did not explain the phenomenon observed.

My Capra lesson was learned in Kerala. Theory, when it seems to explain what is happening, is an essential guide for observation. What if my economic theory does not explain what I perceive? For years I had wondered why Fritz Schumacher’s classic work Small Is Beautiful was so famous. Suddenly I grasped the insight contained in the book’s subtitle: Economics as if Humans Mattered. Home from Kerala, I attended a large professional conference in San Francisco. We were listening to an important invited speaker, Hazel Henderson. In the middle of her talk, she paused, gazed out over her vast audience, and wistfully asked, “Do you know why politicians say such silly things?” We expectantly waited as she paused again. “Because politicians listen to economists.” The crowd roared approval. I wondered why, and then realized this audience knew in its gut that the “magic of the marketplace” was no more than a useful rule-of-thumb, guiding and defining first-world twentieth-century successes. Standard economics, like Newtonian physics, is still useful. But neither is a suitable goal for human success.

Joseph Tharamangalam has described the plain evidence of the good life in Kerala. Theory does not contradict evidence. Contradictory theory is either wrong or does not apply. After long self-indoctrination, thirty-three years of political science lecturing based on academic economic theory, I desperately needed a paradigm shift before I could comprehend the Kerala evidence plainly before my eyes. Tharamangalad’s finding is correct within standard economic theory; he and I have found different human goals. I do not expect the Kerala experience to rewrite economic theory, but a Kerala caveat will certainly be added.

By not honoring economic theory as a viable human goal in our consideration of the Kerala phenomenon, I have rejected the thesis and set aside much of the Tharamangalam analysis. I wish to quote a pair of items from his concluding paragraphs where I find particularly strong agreement. Tharamangalam advises us that “Economists cite…as explanations for Kerala’s dismal economic performance: insufficient natural resources, structural distortions, low investment, and lack of entrepreneur­ship.” I further agree as he explains that “what appears to be a noble and radical defiance of the global capitalist model… in
favor of equity and quality of life—may, in fact, have deeply conservative roots.” These conservative roots are genuinely human, not materialist.

Abnormal India

I draw attention to our shared understandings because they apply with equal force in the whole of India. Kerala is a small state (more people than Canada) within the powerful culture and huge population of India. The Malayalam speaking people are—by every criteria of history, culture, and economy—Indians. Nevertheless, as Tharamangalam explains so well, human life in Kerala is vastly superior to life in all-India on every known life-quality measure. Why? We are distracted by outdated economic paradigms and fail to see something. What? The differences in sex ratios—and, most necessary, the causes of these differences.

The unusual, may I say abnormally-low, ratios of females to males in the populations of North India were noted in the British census reports of 1831. The contrasting normal sex ratios characteristic of Kerala were also early noted (1871) by British officers in census reports for the Indian princely states that were to become Kerala. The sex ratio in Kerala favored females and has regularly increased with the life expectancy increases of both males and females—a mirror image of population growth in high-consumption societies throughout the world. Not only were there fewer females than males in all-India, but increasing female deprivation has reduced the survival rates of females relative to males at each twentieth-century census.

In addition to asking my kind readers to put aside the “economic debacle of Kerala” scenario, I must now ask, in an analysis of population growth problems, that India be viewed as abnormal, and Kerala as normal and humanly rational in a self-interest meaning.

Sex Ratios: From the earliest census in India, there have been fewer females than males in the whole population and the proportion of females has regularly declined. Today, the proportion of females in India is lower than in other third-world countries, excepting only Pakistan. And in that part of India that has become Kerala there have been more females than males in the population from the earliest census. In addition the proportion of females in Kerala has continued to increase to levels regarded as normal in high-consumption societies.

Worldwide policy makers are concerned with the taintness of the Indian demographic transition, and ask why Barbara Miller has looked at Indian population growth, exclusive of Kerala, and provides us with a tool to see the cause of India’s abnormality (the declining female-to-male ratios especially in those locations where the birth rates remain stubbornly high). The measurable key to this phenomenon may be called a fatal daughter syndrome with negative (social psychological) impacts on the capacity and contributions of females to the creation of the life-quality levels necessary to encourage small-family choices.

Family Structures: Important differences in the Indian heartland, contrasted to Kerala, may be seen by analogy in the family structures of two leading land-owning castes, the Rajputs of North India and the Nayars of Kerala. Rajput family patterns are emulated in much of India, and the Nayar family structures are imitated in Kerala. Rajput family structure appears rather like an extremely-rigid characterization of the upper level of the middle class in Victorian England, an essential background in many twentieth-century romantic novels. The contrasting family structure of the Nayars is more difficult for Western scholars to perceive. Robin Jeffrey provides the most-readable account of Nayar family structure, its effect on Nayar females, and the maintenance of female responsibility throughout all Hindu castes and the large Muslim and Christian communities of Kerala.

In anthropological terms, the Rajput joint families are patriarchal and patrilocal contrasted to the matrilocality and the matriarchy of the Nayar joint families. Most obvious to the Western reader is the empowered female sexuality in matri-locality contrasted to the suppression of female sexual power in patri-locality. A Nayar female lives her whole life with the immediate support of her close blood relatives. Matrilineality and the associated joint-family ownership of property in the Nayar taravads accentuates the female status and power.

Consider the population-growth effects of the differences in the expression of female sexuality among the Rajputs and the Nayars within their respective class hierarchies. Among the highest classes of the Nayars, a special marriage custom called sambandham allows a few daughters of the highest classes to enter into marriages with sons of the ritually exalted Brahmins of Kerala called Nambudiris. Going down the Nayar class hierarchy at each step a potential for a few daughters to marry up was created. In addition, Nayar permission to not marry at all further reduced the number of brides on the marriage market. Daughters available for marriage were valuable family assets—a potential for improvement of the status of each family up the Nayar hierarchy.

Son Preference: With no status utility for daughters at the top of the Rajput class hierarchy and no allowance for non-marriage, the Rajput class-improving strategy became “more sons.” Families with wealth, impoverished themselves by paying large dowries to marry their daughters up. Ranking families could replenish their wealth by accepting the daughters and dowries from families lower in the class hierarchy. At each level of the hierarchy from the top to the bottom, the perceived status solution was more sons. Among the Rajputs and their social imitators the more-sons solution long ago became a strategy of “fewer daughters.”

The effect of the fewer-daughters strategy of the Rajputs may be noted first in the ratio of females to males in the surviving populations of Indian states that emulate the Rajput family patterns. In addition, the effect of the fewer-daughters strategy is further revealed in the abnormally high death rates of Rajput girls ages 0 to 10, as contrasted to the death rates of Rajput boys of the same age. This abnormally high death rate for girls found in lesser degrees throughout India (excepting Kerala) accounts for the abnormal long-time decline in the Indian ratio of females to males. This Rajput solution to a perceived excess-daughter problem, when emulated by other communities and other localities throughout India (excepting Kerala), is a fundamental cause for the sluggish decline of birth rates in India.

Accepting this difference in the female to male ratio, India versus Kerala, as an indicator of the effect of family structure differences and allowed female sexuality, we might then expect the creation of life quality in Kerala (and the declining fertility) to have been an equally long-time process. Some life quality improvements, such as education, can be located in Kerala in the nineteenth century, but real improvements in life expectancy, infant mortality rates, and fertility rates did not appear until the twentieth century, and much or most of the measurable life-qual-
ity gains occurred after 1950. Although less dramatic, the same types of life-quality improvements have occurred throughout India (and in most all human populations) in the twentieth century. Life quality improvements which occurred throughout India in the twentieth century are usually credited to efficiencies of large-scale resource rationalization, to public education, to western medicine, and to green-revolution technologies. Returning to the special case of Kerala within India, there appears to have been a synergism between the Kerala appreciation of female skills and twentieth-century technologies. The application of female skills to twentieth-century technologies has accentuated life-quality effects in Kerala leading fertility declines below replacement levels.

Summary

I do not deny the perils of development in Kerala. I point to a demonstrated prospect for human survival through the twenty-first century without Earth-consuming economic development. 1. Extreme son preference has been caused in India by the intense focus of families on upward mobility in the very stable culture of India—a religiously sanctioned caste system emulated by non-Hindu communities. Over time, extreme son preference in a non-rich culture has caused fatal daughter disfavor explaining the abnormally low female-survival rates displayed in the declining ratio of females to males in the Indian population. In the non-rich culture of Kerala, the matrilineal and matrilocal family structures do not manifest extreme son preference. 2. Fatal daughter disfavor (evident in the low female to male survival ratios) has limited and depressed the opportunities for female education and literacy. Daughters valued are educated. 3. Females less educated are less able to create the life quality necessary to encourage rapid fertility declines. The education of females is one of the significant measures of the life-quality characteristics that encourage declines in fertility. Other well-defined life-quality measures are low infant mortality and long life.

4. Quality of life and consequent fertility declines below replacement levels are possible at very low incomes and near-zero economic growth rates. All factors commonly called economic may be balanced out in an analysis of the slow fertility decline of India. That is, higher incomes and/or higher economic growth rates in India have not caused the greater fertility declines. And conversely, the greater declines in fertility have not caused higher incomes and/or higher economic growth. A resource economist may see India as a huge laboratory in which the per capita ecosystem services available are held constant—resource utilization improvements just equal to population growth.

Ecologists will ask whether the human behavior displayed in India and Kerala occurs only within the realm of low consumption (compelled by the low availability of ecosystem services), or whether such behavior may be observed at higher consumption levels. Anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists will find an urgent need for the research that may confirm or deny the connection implied between female skills (skills more particularly applied and/or more ably utilized by females than by males) and the higher measures of life quality necessary to encourage fertility declines.

Within all this, economists will be occupied with much necessary economic analysis, writ small, as in production of goods and services for family use, in the distribution of these goods and services, and in home economics. As in Kerala, there will be emphasis on activities that are both necessary for human survival and light on the use of ecosystem services, for example, health care and education. Economics as if humans mattered.

References


### Comparative quality of life and related measures in three Indian states, India, and three of India’s neighbors

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kerala</th>
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<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
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<td>Female Literacy Rate</td>
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<td>39%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male Literacy Rate</td>
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<td>56%</td>
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<td>3.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
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<td>139</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>114</td>
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**Source:** All data selected from the statistical appendix in Jean Dre'ze and Amartya Sen, *India: Economic Development and Social Change* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996)
I am happy that my paper on the Kerala model of development (Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars 30:1, January-March 1998) has evoked such thoughtful responses from so many (ten in all) well-known scholars. I believe it is symptomatic of the discourse on Kerala that these responses are mostly from the political left although this left does not by any means speak with one voice. I think it is important to mention this as it may explain why it is so difficult to be politically correct in writing about this subject and why some critics seem to be too willing to create straw men, to label them, and then to shoot at them. Therefore, it seems appropriate to begin with a few disclaimers.

**Disclaimers and Labels**

First of all, I do not say that social spending is the cause of economic stagnation or suggest that it should be cut. And I do not assume, as suggested by Heller, that there has been a zero-sum trade off between social welfare and accumulation. On the contrary, the problem is that without a productive base this spending is not sustainable, especially within the current regime of economic liberalization. The fact is that the share of social spending has been declining and this decline has been driven by fiscal constraints without the benefit of a rational ordering of priorities. I want social spending to continue, and even to increase.

Nor do I hold that stagnation is caused by redistribution. Stagnation is caused simply by low investment and low productivity, themselves caused by a number of factors, which I attempt to identify.

And no, I do not say that low productivity is caused by lazy workers, as Parayil charges (3:30*); I do talk about a weak work ethic, a cultural phenomenon probably more prevalent among the middle classes such as university teachers than among blue collar workers.

I am not an admirer of the Punjab model, and it is completely irrelevant to try to prove, as Franke and Chasin do, that Punjab is socially backward. The point I make is simply that even a state that has given low priority to social development is now overtaking Kerala in investing in education because of its very favorable economic performance. Furthermore, Kerala is falling behind at a time when it is crucial to invest more just to maintain its achievements, leave alone the further need to catch up in several areas of higher education.

I am not an admirer of East Asian fascism either (Parayil: Parameswaran). Once again I am only making a point that has been repeatedly stressed by Amartya Sen: although human development has its intrinsic value, it is also instrumental in spurring economic development, particularly development that takes advantage of world market opportunities. In this respect Kerala presents a sharp contrast to East Asian countries.1

I am not against trade unions, being an active unionist myself (having recently served two terms as president and two terms as chief grievance officer of my faculty union in Canada). But I do suggest that unions in Kerala have been over-politicized and fragmented, and as a result they act in a self-defeating manner and have had a negative impact on Kerala’s economic development.

Similarly, I am not opposed to state intervention per se, but I raise questions about undue state interference in the economy and other institutions such as education.

Before leaving the topic of disclaimers and labels, I wish to refer to a particular critic, Patrick Heller, who gets carried away with the labeling process and plays the trick of dismissing my arguments by labeling them: they are neo-classical, functionalist, Olsonian, Durkheimian, reified, based on “modernization theory,” and so on. Presumably these are all bad, although he does not say so (except in the case of functionalism, which he says has long been recognized as inadequate [3:33]). This is very interesting because he then goes on to develop one of his substantive arguments about the politics of accommodation within a model of integration and even equilibrium that is quite clearly functionalist.

**Thesis and Argument**

Kerala is exceptional in two paradoxical ways. On the one hand, it has achieved exceptional social development despite low economic growth (though this social development has not been accompanied by commensurate economic development necessary to make this social development sustainable). On the other hand, in contrast to the East Asian experience, social development has not become an instrument in triggering economic development, especially in this era of liberalization and market-based economic reforms. Human development has produced an
indirect economic benefit in the form of skilled migrant workers who are able to generate an investable surplus. But even this "benefit" has produced only distortion in the economy since much of the investment has been channeled into the service sector. Agriculture and industry have continued to stagnate (especially industry) leaving a productive and revenue base that is too weak to sustain the gains already made, not to speak of making new strides and tackling second-generation problems such as providing services to the increasing numbers of the elderly. I ask why. I suggest that this dilemma is inherent in the very pattern of Kerala's social, political, and cultural development. I see Kerala's economic stagnation as systemic—inherent in the very structure of its society, politics, and the state, as well as in its cultural patterns.

Several of the respondents, especially K. K. George, Gail Omvedt, and Anthony Parel, supported and supplemented my analysis. My severest critics, however, Franke and Chasin, consider that my analysis is invalid because they think it is not backed by sufficient evidence. I regard this criticism as unfair, to say the least, and I think it may be useful to make two remarks by way of a response. First, the main objective of my paper was to provide a holistic conceptual framework that would enable us to explain well-established facts (e.g., continued economic stagnation) in terms of internal structural and cultural factors. The arguments I advanced were more in the nature of hypotheses than "proofs." It is perhaps not possible to decisively "prove" my thesis in its entirety. Second, I have conducted research in Kerala since 1974, including many years of extensive fieldwork on agricultural laborers and their unions, on caste, matriliney, and on broader issues of Kerala's development. This is apart from the fact that I have had continuous contact with the Kerala village in which I grew up in the late 1940s and 1950s. I base my discussions of topics such as trade unions and state enterprises on my field notes and my personal experience, along with secondary data—not as overtly and extensively as I could have done in a larger and more comprehensive work (such as the one in which I am currently engaged). If my paper appears rather schematic, it is because it is mainly conceptual and analytical in nature.

I shall now turn to a brief discussion of some selected substantive issues integrating and/or critiquing the views of the critics where appropriate.

The Economy

There is little disagreement about the economic crisis facing Kerala, about the state's deep-rooted fiscal problems and high levels of unemployment, or even about the root cause of these, namely, stagnation in its productive sectors. As George points out in his response (4:35), Kerala's economic failures have occurred not only in spite of social developments in education and health, but also despite other favorable conditions such as radical land reforms, relatively good infrastructure, loanable and investable capital, and long-standing international linkages. It is therefore necessary to examine Kerala's economic failure from a holistic perspective—in its political, institutional, and cultural contexts.

Politics and the State

Several commentators expressed agreement with my analysis of Kerala as an over-politicized and over-extended state that has bitten off more than it can chew, as George aptly stated. Under constant pressure from mobilized groups, unions, and parties, which increasingly act as pressure groups advancing particular vested interests, Kerala has become a "soft" state unable to define, formulate, and implement sustainable policies in the long-term interests of its people. "Because of such a situation," says Kannan, the state is seen, more often than not, as a reactive institution [rather] than a proactive one."

In supporting my argument that Kerala developed into a no-growth and even an anti-growth state after independence, George states (4:37):

The Peter Evans study quoted by Tharamangalam talks about the embedded autonomy of the redistributive state of Kerala with the "mobilised groups" resulting in a welfare state. But this is a more recent phenomenon. In the earlier stage of Kerala's development dating back to the pre-independence period, the embedded autonomy of the state was not only in relation to the mobilized groups but also in relation to capital—agricultural, mercantile, and industrial. The state in Kerala then was as much developmental as redistributive. And this was the period of economic expansion that permitted later social development. The adversary relationship between capital and state, backed by mobilized groups, will be seen later, developed mostly after independence. This resulted in the state extending its dominance and controls over private capital not only in economic sectors, but also in social sectors. The state also tried to assume a direct entrepreneurial role in a number of fields. Excessive state controls led to the drying up of initiatives and killed the spirit of innovation, as Tharamangalam suggests, and to the diversion of investments to low priority but less regulated fields.

Kannan adds that "(C)apital as a class has been a much less powerful institution compared to the country as a whole. Since the formation of the state of Kerala, the influence of capital over the government has been a marginal one at best."

The real debate should be about how Kerala can and must constructively and creatively deal with liberalization and globalization in order to make the best use of its assets and strengths and to minimize its risks.

It is in the context of this specific relationship between state and capital—characterized as adversarial by George and marginal by Kannan—that I examined public sector enterprises in order to illustrate the way in which the state has been managing or mismanaging perennially loss-making enterprises with scant regard for the norms of efficiency and economic rationality. Franke and Chasin consider my argument invalid since I do not present data showing that Kerala's public enterprises are significantly more mismanaged than are those in other parts of India. They think "such data are essential in linking the Kerala model to Kerala's problems" (3.25). I am afraid they are simply missing the point. First of all, the predominance of public enterprises in Kerala's industrial sector has been well established as is shown in my paper (1.29). Second, this predominance is not accidental, but constitutive of Kerala's political economy (of the Kerala model) both in terms of the adversarial relationship between state and capital and in terms of the ideological and cultural devaluation of entrepreneurship and private enterprise (this latter point made by Parsyil also [3:29 and footnote 4]). Third, given the weak presence of private enterprises, which too are inefficient in Kerala, Kerala is in a far weaker position to absorb the loss-mak-
ing public enterprises than other economically more dynamic states (e.g., Maharashtra, Gujarat or Tamil Nadu) where the relationship between capital and the state is far more friendly.

I examined the higher education system as another instance of a crucial institution distorted and stultified by undue political and state/bureaucratic interference. I am grateful to Omvedt for stating the case so precisely: “The lack of ‘productivity’ in education is symptomatic of that in the entire bureaucratized public sector” (3.32), and to George for drawing attention to the widely prevalent practice of appointing vice-chancellors, syndicate members, and other senior university functionaries on the basis of party and religious/caste affiliation. Once again the effects of these may be more devastating in Kerala, which historically has had neither high quality central institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (as also pointed out by Parel) nor an elite sector catering to a privileged clientele—institutionsthat enjoy relative autonomy from local political interference. There is no wonder that the state is finding the growing demand for private education difficult to resist at a time when enrollments in its own institutions may be falling as a result of the demographic changes. George talks about an emerging two-tier system in health care. The number of beds in the state sector increased from 36,000 to 38,000 between 1986 and 1996, while the aggregated bed strength in the private hospitals jumped from 49,000 to 675,000. At the same time the private sector also outpaced the state sector in the acquisition of medical technologies (4.37). It appears that education too may be heading in that direction.

**Fragmentation and Deterioration**

Two critics take issue with my argument that over-politicization has led to the fragmentation and deterioration of politics, distorting the functioning of institutions and making it difficult for the state to pursue long-term policy-making in the interest of the people—an effort that often requires policy-makers to rise above the short-term demands of interest groups. The critics contend that accommodative politics has triumphed in Kerala (Heller, 3.35) and that the communitarian spirit is alive and well (Parayil, 3.30).

Heller is right in arguing that in the 1970s and 1980s the politics of class struggle ultimately resulted in the expansion of the welfare state and redistributive reforms (3.35). It is also true that unrestrained labor militancy declined as this militancy became counterproductive. These are processes I myself documented in earlier works. But he is only partially right in arguing that the 1980s witnessed a shift from the politics of class struggle to the politics of class compromise, a case that I advanced in the 1980s. What really happened was less class accommodation than opportunistic class, caste, and communal collaboration, which has only accelerated fragmentation.

A few examples should suffice to illustrate this point. The first is the fragmentation of the Kerala Congress, a party that came into existence in the mid 1960s espousing an ideology of Kerala nationalism in the wake of widespread disaffection with the National Congress Party as well as with what was perceived to be Kerala’s failure to receive its due from the federal system. But the party soon fragmented and now has four factions led by four different leaders (with no agenda for voicing Kerala’s grievances in the federal system). None of these factions has any semblance of an ideology or program (let alone a coherent one) or even shows any pretense of hiding its sheer opportunism in collaborating with any party that can give it a berth in the government. True, the militant unions gave up some of their disruptive tactics, but they continued to employ others. Omvedt (3.32) has referred to the agricultural labor union’s tactic of leveling of fields where cash crops were planted by farmers who found paddy cultivation unviable, a tactic they continued to employ well into the 1990s. A similar tactic that I discussed (George mentioned it as well) is that of organizing state-wide bundhas that bring to a standstill all transportation, educational institutions, and other economic and social activities. The advantage of this strong-arm tactic was that it could flout all democratic norms and the will and rights of the majority since a well-organized small group was effective in achieving its ends. This practice continued until 1997 when the Kerala High Court banned it on the ground that it violated the fundamental rights of citizens.

My last example involves an event that happened in Payyavur Panchayat (Village Council) in Kannur district during my most recent visit to Kerala in October 1998. My description of the event is based on newspaper reports and on discussions I had with colleagues at the Centre for Development Studies in Thiruvananthapuram. It is important to note that this event took place in the context of the recently introduced decentralized planning program (of which more below) that puts substantial funds in the hands of the panchayats. The panchayat in Payyavur was controlled by a coalition led by the CPM. Two Congress Party members who were partners in the governing coalition hatched a plan to withdraw support from the CPM and to take control of the panchayat with the support of other members and/or parties in a manner that is now common in coalition politics in India. It is further alleged that the Congress strategy of passing a no-confidence motion was aborted by the CPM, which forcibly prevented the Congress members from attending the panchayat meeting. The CPM action reportedly had the cooperation of the local police who detained the Congress members in the police station under some pretext—despite a court order ensuring that these members would be allowed to exercise their democratic rights. As a result, contempt of court charges have been laid against senior police officers and the chief secretary of the state. The case is still in the courts awaiting resolution. This was said to be by no means an isolated incident; people are expecting more of the same as struggles over the spoils of decentralized planning become more acute.

I have maintained that the over-extended state and the over-politicized society have undermined the autonomy of civil society in many spheres including education and industry. My critics say that civil society is very vigorous in Kerala. Olle Törnquist (4.43) thinks that decentralized planning has the potential of revitalizing Kerala’s civil society. It then appears to depend on what is meant by civil society. If the so-called new democratic movements—such as those for decentralized planning—are seen as exemplifying a vigorous civil society, these critics may be right. But insofar as these are now highly politicized and basically engineered and controlled by the government and by certain political parties, I think it is erroneous to characterize these as emanating from an autonomous civil society.

**Unions**

Organized under the auspices of contentious parties, Kerala’s fragmented unions often work at cross purposes even within the same enterprise. Unions and the union culture are generalized in society, encompassing a variety of unskilled, skilled, clerical
profits. Under optimum conditions this would also lead to the efficient and competitive. Technological change, however, re­
Kannan that became available to me after the publication of my better working conditions gained by the unionized workers meant results in high levels of unemployment. The union strategy, there­
cash crop cultivation in agriculture and of low-technology manu­
preventing modernization and technological innovation, particu­
towards rethinking was forced upon the leaders of the CPM, the major union militancy could not be sustained, and a certain degree of
The cooperatives have been no radical paradigm shift: unions continued to organize the sponsor of the militant unions. However, there appears to have been no radical paradigm shift: unions continued to organize the
strong evidence to suggest that the state’s industrialization and economic development have been hampered by restrictive labor practices, disruptive politics of competing unions, and efforts by some unions to prevent modernization and technological innovation, particularly in the coir and cashew industries.” I would like to expand this analysis a little more, drawing also on a recent work by Kannan that became available to me after the publication of my paper. Both agriculture and industry were characterized by a relatively high share of wage labor due to the predominance of cash crop cultivation in agriculture and of low-technology manu­
sponsoring “socialist” enterprises, not able to function competitively in the market and to compete with the private sector. Have the trade unions in Kerala learned their lessons? And reexamined their strategies? Not sufficiently, in my view. To be sure, in the face of the failures and the increasing job losses, union militancy could not be sustained, and a certain degree of rethinking was forced upon the leaders of the CPM, the major sponsor of the militant unions. However, there appears to have been no radical paradigm shift: unions continued to organize the notorious state-wide bundhs until stopped recently by the courts; they are still politicized, fragmented, and able to disrupt and distort the rational functioning of institutions of civil society such as universities, as I argued in my paper.

Decentralized Planning

Decentralized planning is the newest experiment currently being tried out in Kerala, and it seems to evoke fervent enthusi­
asm, on the one hand, and cynical disinterest, on the other. It is still too early to determine the program’s success or failure, but I think we will be better able to assess its significance if we situate it in its proper context. We have seen that Kerala’s traditional entrepreneurs were destroyed or driven out after facing relentless hostility as “exploiters of people.” Thereafter, the cooperatives
too failed to deliver the goods, belying the expressed expectations of the unions and their sponsors. As the economy continued to stagnate and even to decelerate, the people of Kerala, in general, and the left, in particular, desperately needed fresh ideas and initiatives. Meanwhile, the entire world was witnessing a significant movement away from state-controlled and bureaucratized command economies and the launch of an era of economic liberalization that swept through even old socialist countries like Russia and China. In India, too, liberalization became a fact of life, and different states and regions competed with one another to attract new investments. And what of Kerala? For better or for worse, with or without the support of its trade unions or of its sponsors, Kerala also moved into an environment of a more open and competitive market economy in which Kerala’s enterprises would all have to function and survive whether they were state enterprises, private businesses, or cooperatives.

Given the above context, it was widely expected that a new strategy would be formulated to mollify the old entrepreneurs and to attract new ones, to change the hostile climate and create one that is welcoming to entrepreneurs, and to make a serious effort to attract investments. Such a strategy need not have meant a mindless acceptance of globalization, but rather a judicious and selective policy of accepting liberalization and its benefits, as has been done by even socialist countries such as China. At this juncture the CPM-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) was elected to power after a gap of several years. Having neither the experience nor the mindset to deal with markets or with the new liberalization regime, the LDF drew on its recent successes (e.g., in resource mapping and total literacy campaigns) and on its ideological repertoire and discovered decentralized planning. Though originally prescribed by the central government, this was a strategy that would enable the LDF to treat the familiar path of campaigns and mobilization, while at the same time adhering to the old ideologically correct position of more planning and less market, instead of the new strategy of less planning and more reliance on the market. This was old wine in new bottles, a prescription that I characterized in my paper as amounting to “more of the same.” This characterization may have been rather negative and uncharitable, but correct, nevertheless; it was not a result of “an incredible ignorance of what is occurring in Kerala today,” as pronounced by Franke and Chasin (3:27).

No human endeavor or idea must be judged by its provenance; neither should the campaign for decentralized planning. I have no intention whatsoever of belittling the significance of this major initiative or in denying that it may have considerable potential in addressing some very important developmental issues. In particular, this may very well be the answer to the vexing problem of maintaining and strengthening community infrastructure and welfare services in the context of the declining ability of the state bureaucracy to deliver the goods. Decentralized planning also envisages several initiatives with potential for some limited economic growth in such areas as agriculture, fisheries, and small scale industry. There is no doubt that these too have considerable potential for addressing some of the issues of economic growth faced by Kerala.

The basic problem with decentralized planning is not that it is useless, or even that it may fail, but that it sidesteps the macro-economic issues in Kerala—in particular, its abortive industrialization. It is true that only 35 to 40 percent of the plan allocation is set aside for decentralized planning and that the other 60 percent (as well as non-plan funds) are available for tackling the bigger issue. But in the absence of any new ideas or initiative as regards the central issue and the total absorption of the main ruling party and the mobilized groups on decentralized planning, it appears to be business as usual on this front. In fact it may be worse since attention has now been diverted away from the big issue and a false hope offered that once again keeps the people from the major effort that is now needed to address this issue. It is already clear that foreign investments and technology brought by liberalization have practically bypassed Kerala (with only Bihar falling behind Kerala in this respect). And in the excitement about decentralized planning people have hardly noticed! This certainly does not augur well for Kerala at a time when the rest of the country, including Kerala’s neighboring states, is seizing the opportunities brought by liberalization.

### Kerala in the Indian and Global Context

I state in my paper, “perhaps the most important [point] in understanding the Kerala model is that the Kerala economy exists and functions as an integral part of the Indian economy and polity and of the underdeveloped periphery of a world economic system that at this stage needs the cheap unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled labor of Malayalees. A failure to understand this explains the naiveté of those romantic scholars who project the Kerala model as the ideal for the twenty-first century” (1:29; see also footnote 14, p. 34). It continues to be my view that there is a basic flaw in the arguments of Alexander, Franke, Chasin, and Parameswaran in that they give insufficient consideration to the many linkages that encapsulate Kerala within a larger regional, Indian, and world system. These linkages are not accidental, but are constitutive of Kerala’s political economy and of the Kerala model itself.

In her response, Omvedt makes the important observation that with paddy cultivation made unviable in Kerala, Kerala’s people now feed on cheap rice produced by poorly paid farmers and agricultural workers of Tamil Nadu and Andhra where wages are much lower (3:32). This means that the “Kerala model” of agriculture is sustained by its links with “another model” in the neighboring state, in a manner not unlike the way high consumption in the United States is sustained by low wages and low consumption in the third world. But this is not all; there is yet another dimension to this phenomenon. Just as coir, cashew, and hand-loom weaving were driven into the neighboring states by the Kerala model, so too have many types of agriculture. And it is not just rice, but a large variety of vegetables and fruits, including the Malayalees’ favorite Malabar banana, now a Pandy (Tamil Nadu) product consumed in great quantities, with some occasional grumbling about its inferior quality in comparison to the “original” Kerala variety. These Tamil Nadu products now also include tapioca, once the poor person’s staple (especially during the depression of the 1930s) but now a nostalgic delicacy.

In addition, a variety of marginal jobs in construction and domestic labor can now be performed only by migrant laborers from the neighboring states. At the same time the Kerala model also presupposes the availability of jobs in the rest of India, in the Gulf, and in other parts of the world. And the same can be said about the consumer goods that Malayalees are now addicted to. These too are products of another model, another industrial culture, another way of organizing the economy, politics, and the state. The fact is that Kerala’s present socio-economic and political system (the Kerala model) is crucially dependent on a wider economic (and increasingly cultural) world for rice, jobs,
their own coolie work, for quality higher and technical education, for markets for their cash crops, for consumer products, and for a variety of other material and non-material goods. This wider world—in which Kerala is embedded—is governed by rules, especially rules of the marketplace, from which Malayalees cannot be insulated. The real debate should be about how Kerala can and must constructively and creatively deal with liberalization and globalization in order to make the best use of its assets and strengths and to minimize its risks. In this Kerala must try to be proactive rather than reactive as it has often done in the past. However, at the moment, there does not seem to be any coherent policy. Politicians from the ruling coalition make pronouncements about the importance of attracting investments and ministers travel to foreign lands with the message, but little has been done to formulate or implement any well thought out policy on this front. Meanwhile, decentralized planning offers a politically correct and politically easier path to take. The danger is that Kerala will repeat the mistakes of the 1970s and 1980s, suffering the loss of yet another generation while the rest of India moves ahead.

Conclusion
In this reply, I have dealt with only a few selected issues germane to the development crisis faced by Kerala. Space constraints do not allow me to address many of the issues raised by the ten respondents, especially such important issues as caste, gender, and communalism, raised by Omvedt and George. Surely, it is nobody’s case that the choices available to the people of Kerala are easy or that they are without risks and dangers. It is my view that a fundamentalist rejection of liberalization and the global market system will perpetually condemn Malayalees to third class citizenship in the backwaters of the world capitalist system. In the last analysis, of course, Alexander and Parameswaran are right that the wasteful industrial civilization is not sustainable indefinitely. Certainly Kerala’s people should address these issues together with the rest of the world community. But they have a right to aspire to a status that is better than that of third class citizens in a rapidly shrinking world.

Notes
1. “The role of widespread basic education has been quite crucial in countries that have successfully grown fast making excellent use of world markets: for example, the so-called four ‘tigers’ in East Asia (namely South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan), and more importantly, China and also Thailand. The modern industries in which these countries have particularly excelled demand many basic skills for which elementary education is essential and secondary education most helpful. While some studies have emphasized the productive contribution of learning-by-doing and on-the-job training, rather than the direct impact of formal education, the ability to achieve such training and learning is certainly helped greatly by basic education in schools prior to taking up jobs.” Jean Dreze and Amartya K. Sen, eds., Selected Regional Perspectives (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 20.


5. Ibid.

6. Tharmanadaram, Agrarian Class Conflict, and especially “From Class Struggle to the Politics of Accommodation.”

7. Tharmanadaram, “From Class Struggle.”

8. The latest report I saw was “Payyavur Case: Chief Secretary Denies Admitting Guilt,” The Hindu (Delhi), 19 November 1998.


11. Ibid., p. 5.


18. For a debate on decentralized planning, see N. P. Chekkutty, ed., The People’s Plan (Kozhikode: Calicut Press Club, 1997). This collection includes a critique of the plan by M. G. S. Narayanan who expresses his misgivings about a plan that he sees as politicized and engineered by the CPM with a tradition of “democratic centralization,” and a response by T. M. Thomas Isaac, an important CPM leader and architect of the plan. See also, T. T. Srikrishnan, “Asoottu Thiruvendoo Karanathile Prathishtandi” (Malayalam), Janavartha, 1998. Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin provide an enthusiastic early appraisal in “Power to the Malayalee People,” Economic and Political Weekly 32, no. 48 (1997): 3061-68. As an objective appraisal of the program, however, this is of doubtful quality since it is based on a study of a CPM-dominated village, basically seen through the eyes of admirers of the program.

19. See Government of Kerala, “Kerala Panchayat Act, Kerala Municipality Act Ennayiavu Vavakshakal Prakaram Sarkarinte Chunathama­ kalam Stapanangalam Padhatikalum Thadhesahbaram Stapanangalam Kaimatam Chaitukondulla Uttaravu” (Thiruvananthapuram: Government Press, 1965). (In Malayalam). This government ordinance lists the duties of Block Panchayats (13), and other duties in seven areas such as agriculture, small scale industry, and fisheries (pp. 2-10). Similarly, it also lists the duties of District Panchayats (13), and Municipalities.
Review Essay

The Shape of the World: Asian Continents and the Scraggy Isthmus of Europe

by Peter C. Perdue


Sihai zhi nei, fie xiongdì ye (Within the four seas, all humans are kin) —Confucius, Analects

How then do we see this early modern history? We see it as needlepoint. The horizontal continuities (the weft of the web) run from left to right. From top to bottom run the various vertical continuities of successive societies (the warp). The subtle translucent hues of the warp and the dazzling colors and patterns of the needlepoint yarn almost totally conceal the horizontal continuities of the weft. But without the weft we have no needlepoint at all. Only a bag of threads. —Joseph K. Fletcher

The East has risen again. As anyone can tell from the newspapers, Asian economies influence the globe daily. Over the past twenty years, rhetoric about Asia, especially East Asia, has changed dramatically, but the centrality of Asia has grown. Americans used to think that a prosperous, technologically advanced East Asia which did not play by our rules would threaten U.S. global hegemony. Now, in the time of the Asian financial crisis, some complacently proclaim the end of the Asian century. But the prominence of the first global economic crisis to originate in Asia only confirms Asia's dominant economic role.

The late twentieth century has returned to the normal global experience, when the centers of economic, cultural, and social dynamism were nearly always located in the broad belt extending from the "Nile to the Oxus," as Marshall Hodgson described Middle Eastern civilization, plus the valleys of the Indus, Yangzi, and Yellow Rivers. All three authors here agree that until 1800, Asia was at least equal, and probably superior, to Europe in most measurable characteristics of economic performance. Beginning in the eighteenth century, blinkered ideologies that grossly exaggerated the significance of the Western "scraggy isthmus" of the Afro-Eurasian Oekumene came to dominate Westerners' thinking about the East. Nineteenth-century imperialism combined with the Industrial and French revolutions to reinforce this ideology. But now that, after a short lag, Asia is catching up, Eurocentric parochialism is beginning to fade.

Basic paradigms of history, geography, and other social sciences, however, change slowly. Notions of the "free" West and the "despotic, stagnant" East were systematically implanted into Western social theory by Montesquieu and others, and they form a deeply rooted pillar of Western liberalism. Critics of this vision have proliferated recently and scholars have accumulated abundant evidence about Asia's socio-economic development. We have begun to reach a new stage in which solidly grounded empirical research on non-Western societies can be joined to comprehensive critiques. These three books in three genres—history, geography, and sociology—are outstanding examples of this research.

Asianists may well feel that these battles have long been won. Who seriously believes in the unquestioned superiority of Western civilization these days, and who seriously endorses the long discredited thesis of Oriental Despotism espoused by the ex-Communist Sinologist Karl August Wittfogel? They need not look far. The news of the decline of Europe has not yet reached certain intellectual backwaters. Some Princeton scholars still assert "modernization theory," assuming that all countries will eventually follow the Western route. A recent publication of the Center for Study of Freedom at Washington University trots out once again the arguments for the superiority of Western freedom. Deliberately neglecting social and economic freedoms (despite FDR), it downplays Greco-Roman slavery and describes the Orient as the land of despotism. In this volume, Douglass North, winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, uses Wittfogel's thesis to confirm his belief that the secret of Western economic success lies in its purportedly unique security of individual property rights. One of the best recent world history textbooks still
devotes nearly two-thirds of its chapters to Europe alone, including two separate chapters for the early and late Roman empires, relegating 1200 years of India and China to a mere thirty pages. David Landes recent work, The Wealth and Poverty of Nations, a mere compilation of the tired shibboleths of a 200-year-old tradition, has won undeserved praise from economic historians, even though for the most part it only rehashes the prejudices of Montesquieu about the East, completely ignoring a generation of scholarship on the economic history of Asia. The only explanation for its popularity is that its unabashed triumphalism is congenial to Western readers. It is just too convenient to believe that all economic and political virtue is found in our own society. Eurocentric blinders are comforting. They relieve us of the effort of learning foreign languages, seriously studying other cultures, or questioning the bases of our own beliefs. We Asianists have no cause for complacency. There is still plenty of work to be done.

Asianists must, however, share much of the blame. We are all too aware of the diversity of Asia, and we rightly reject simplistic generalizations about "Asian values." The turn toward local social and economic history in Chinese studies broke up misleading assumptions of a uniform Confucian civilization by revealing widespread social conflict. In the turn to the local, however, global preconceptions were left untouched. Metageographical presuppositions still determine how we categorize the lands of the globe. Within the Chinese empire, G. William Skinner's influential models undermined the congruence of economic and bureaucratic organization of space by showing that marketing systems cut across administrative boundaries. But on the larger scale, "China" was implicitly defined as the maximal boundaries of the Qing empire, and not called into question.

Modern anthropologists have had to recognize the intertwined boundaries of the local and the global, ever since they realized that the isolated, homogeneous village of their field work was only a construct. But historians have remained much more solidly wedded to nation-states or empires. These large institutions define the language and the character of our sources; they control the publications and the archives; they usually set the agenda of historical questions, and each nation's historians have their own particular concerns. Only a few bold historians have deliberately set out to cross the boundaries. The great pioneers of world historical analysis, like Fernand Braudel, Joseph Fletcher, Marshall Hodgson, and William McNeill, broke away from endemic limitations of single-nation history, but also avoided the ethnocentric traps of Toynbee, who isolated civilizations from each other. They all stressed interactions between cultural units as the central forces driving long-term global change. The Myth of Continents carries on this world-historical and geographical tradition.

**Continental Myths**

The authors attack vigorously the irrationality of our implicit division of the world into "continents." This "metageography," or "set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world" (p. ix) seems on the map or the globe to be based on conspicuous distinct divisions of the earth. But even slight considerations of logic and evidence dissolve this scheme. Our definition of "Europe" is especially absurd: it is called a continent, even though it is much smaller than the "subcontinent" of India. The boundaries of Europe have no consistent definition: the maximal definition of European civilization cuts through the middle of Russia, but the low Urals, defined as the conventional boundary between European and Asian Russia in the eighteenth century, form no significant cultural or economic barrier at all. Narrower definitions confine Europe to the Latinate countries, sharing the heritage of the Roman empire, or at least some of them: primarily England, France, Italy, Spain, but inconsistently including or excluding Germany, Poland, Hungary, or Austria. Linguistic criteria (the Indo-European language family) would include India and Persia, excluding Hungary and Finland; religious criteria (Christianity) would include Siberia and exclude pagan Lithuania in the early modern period and Muslim Spain. The wide fluctuations in the definition of "Europe" over time indicate that it has no essential, fixed, coherent, distinctive geographical features.

Likewise, North Africa shares much more with the lands to the north of the Mediterranean than it does with sub-Saharan Africa. Russia's position in Eurasia is particularly problematic: the vast taiga and steppe zones stretch horizontally across thousands of miles with no division. On the other end, the boundaries of China are no less ambiguous, since China's Inner Asian frontiers fluctuated constantly over the centuries, and most of China's imperial history did not include modern day Mongolia, Xinjiang, or Tibet.

The central purpose of Lewis and Wigen is to undermine the notion that "continents" are fixed, timeless entities. Instead, through careful geographic and historical analysis, they demonstrate convincingly that all of our implicit ways of dividing up the world are created by particular geopolitical situations. Late nineteenth-century European imperialism was only firmly embedded in the minds of colonial powers the sharp division between the rational, democratic, technological West and the stagnant, mystical, despotic East.

The seven-continent scheme taught in every schoolbook is only a product of the post-World War II era. It strongly reflects the binary divisions characteristic of the cold war era, which are in turn successors to the age-old division of Occident and Orient. Excluding Antarctica and Australia, the globe was divided into binary hierarchies of New World/Old World; North/South America; Eurasia/Africa; and Europe/Asia. With the end of the cold war and the rise of East Asia, no one can avoid becoming skeptical about the validity of these divisions, but they remain embedded in the scholarly and popular minds.

Not only does the unthinking division of the world into continents rest on no solid geographical bases, it relies on invalid theses of geographic determinism, contradictory criteria of classification, and most important, powerful biases that raise the prominence of Western Europe to undeserved heights. Time and again, noted social theorists claim to discover cultural "essences" in world civilizations that derive ultimately from climatic and geographic roots. The supposed "torpor" of the tropics, contrasted with the "dynamism" of the temperate zones, is the most conspicuous example. From Montesquieu to Wittfogel to David Landes, including Marxists and post-colonial theorists, these antiquated dichotomies continue to pervert our perceptions of the globe. Worse yet, a host of analysts have found philosophical and sociological "rationality" only in the West. The authors concisely demonstrate the bankruptcy of such claims. First, organizational (bureaucratic) and epistemological rationality do not necessarily go together (contra Weber), and however rationality is defined, it is found in all cultures, and may be at best a threatened, minority view in all of them.
The authors, however, do not go so far as to claim that all global demarcations are equally arbitrary. Unlike so many of today’s cultural critics, they offer an alternative, based on an argument for a modified area studies approach. Area studies has been under attack recently from two extreme ends of the social science spectrum whose global spatial conceptions, oddly enough, converge. Social scientists suffering from “physics envy” (neoclassical economists and rational choice theorists) espouse the “view from nowhere” that reduces human behavior to universal impulses of gain and loss, greed and fear. Extreme postmodernists likewise eliminate spatial and cultural dimensions of human behavior by dissolving all institutions, cultures, and material limitations in a sea of discourse. Lewis and Wigen assert that there are significant cultural wholes with diffuse but real boundaries, which are useful for organizing our classification of the globe. They end up, for the most part, confirming the standard units established by regional studies programs after the end of World War II: North America, Latin America (divided into “Ibero America” and “African America”), Western-Central Europe, Russia-Southeastern Europe-Caucasus, Middle East (renamed “Southwest Asia and North Africa”), sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, East Asia (maps on pp. 168, 187). They add on Australia-New Zealand, Melanesia, and Micronesia-Polynesia, for a total of fourteen world regions. Their division of the world is far more accurate, balanced, and nuanced than previous divisions. They succeed, at least partially, in cutting across nation-state and specious geographic boundaries: Hawaii is not put in North America; Africa is cut in half across the Sahara; China’s inner Asian zones are separated from the Han core. Europe is divided from Russia, and the Urals disappear as a dividing line. Cold war dividing lines are also cut: NATO members Greece and Turkey end up each in a separate zone, outside of Europe.

We could always quibble with particular decisions, but more important than the map itself is their careful discussion of the uncertainties of these global divisions. None of these world regions have unambiguous boundaries. Particularly problematic is Southeast Asia, a “residual, artificial” category, which “lack(s) unifying features” (pp. 175-76). They discuss insightfully other spatial formations rivaling the neatly bounded atoms of nation-states and continents: (1) “Middle grounds,” a term derived from Richard White’s discussion of the Great Lakes region of North America in the eighteenth century, are areas where no one culture dominates, but two or more formations accommodate each other to produce a mixed frontier zone. Such intermediate creations are common at all borderlands. (2) “Diasporas” are widely dispersed commercial, ethnic, or religious communities maintaining networks of communication. They have always existed as quintessential border crossers, transgressing and resisting efforts of states, empires, and nations to make them stay put. Their prominence has risen in today’s world of Internet and jet travel. (3) “Archipelagoes” of small minorities tenaciously maintaining distinctiveness within a surrounding dominant culture again undermine homogenizing pressures of states and nations. (4) A multi-dimensional “cultural matrix” leads to concepts of identity in multiple scales, crisscrossing religious, ethnic, linguistic, and economic characteristics: it allows for Bulgarian Muslims, Turkish-speaking Christians, Chinese Muslims, and other dual or multiply defined identities.

All these arguments greatly advance our understanding of how properly to conceive the globe. Yet the cartographic creativity of this volume does not match its textual originality, even though one of the authors’ ten principles of critical metageography is “creative cartographic vision” (p. 200). The maps still use only dark lines; they could at least have used shadings at the edges to indicate the blurred boundaries. Perhaps all of Southeast and Central Asia should be shadings, not a bounded region. They could have put more stress on the significance of frontiers and borderlands as key foci of cultural concern. And they could indicate core-periphery structures within regions graphically.

These questions highlight the cartographer’s dilemma, well expressed by Edward Gouver in 1854: “The Historian may express that which is doubtful by a few strokes of his pen; but the Geographer, who has to describe a fact by a line or a single word, is in a different position.” It is an irresistible temptation of all map makers to draw sharp boundary lines, when in fact cultural borders and economic zones are inevitably blurred. Wherever we look—the Southwestern United States, Hawaii, China’s Northwest, Eastern Europe, France—hybrid peoples and fluctuating intersections defeat our best efforts to put them in clear boxes. Replacing dark lines with blurred shaded areas would help us to rethink graphically, as well as textually, the illogically rigid divisions we draw between regions.

Geographers’ static classifications conflict with dynamic change portrayed in historical narrative. Systematic descriptions of the world must go beyond static maps; they must depict change over time. Andre Gunder Frank’s ReORIENT is a heroic effort to reconstruct our conceptions of the world economy in the early modern age, from ca. 1500 to 1800 A.D.

ReORIENTing the Early Modern World

Guo yu bu ji (Excess is the same as insufficiency)
—Chinese proverb.

Frank’s basic argument can be stated simply. There was a single global system, dating from at least the year 1500, not a unique European formation which diffused to the rest of the world. Within this system, no one region held dominance, although Asian economies, especially China, Japan, and India, generally exceeded the rest in productivity, technology, population, commercialization and per capita income. Global commodity flows linked the entire system, forming integrated regional and global market systems. Silver extracted from the New World was the crucial lubricant (or blood) of the circulatory system, passing across the Atlantic through Spain to Amsterdam and England, whence it made its way East as a necessary element to cover deficits in trade with Asia. Nearly all of the world’s silver ended up in China, where it was hoarded, but circulated broadly in a highly monetized, commercialized fiscal and agrarian system. Two chapters demonstrate in detail the essential role of silver in world commodity flows.

Monetary forces also drove crises and cycles in the system. Frank denies that there was a long-term seventeenth-century global crisis, but he argues for a short-term crisis in the 1640s caused by silver shortages. He endorses the late Joseph Fletcher’s call for “horizontally integrative macrohistory” that ties together parallel events across the globe. Thus events as distant as the Manchu conquest of China, the revolt of the Catalans and Portuguese against Spain, and the English Revolution are connected by silver shortages in the 1640s. Frank concludes with a sweeping challenge to all social theorists and comparative historians.
to abandon unfounded assumptions of European superiority and devise new, truly global models.

Frank’s single-minded, relentless, and I must say exceedingly repetitious, insistence on the primacy of a global world system has much to offer. He challenges Europeanists to recognize the superiority of Asian economies in the early modern age, and he provokes Asianists to look beyond regional studies. No other major social theorist has paid such serious attention to the new work on Asian economies. He has not only read the latest research, but he has earned the respect of many Asian scholars whom he has consulted. Since the 1980s, quite a few researchers have focused on the dynamic changes of late imperial China, the Ottoman and Mughal empires. Frank’s contribution is to draw together this new research, most of which consists of regional socio-economic analyses, into a brilliant, holistic, globally embracing systemic analysis. If most historians are foxes who love the details, Frank is a hedgehog, or rather bulldog, of the first order. 15

The sociologist Jack Goldstone has dubbed this new approach to China the “California school,” since a number of its proponents now teach on the West coast, but I cannot resist noting that a large number of us on the East coast would also endorse it. 16 I say this not merely out of Eastern chauvinism, but to demonstrate that the recognition of the vitality of high Qing China represents the well-founded consensus of an entire generation. Broadly speaking, we agree that China monetized and commercialized its economy beginning at least in 1500, if not earlier, and that imperial institutions responded to and often promoted commercial growth with concrete policies such as the monetization of the tax system in the Single Whip Reform, or the promotion of cash cropping and regulation of markets. Unlike Adam Smith, who recognized China’s wealth but thought that China had merely been in stable equilibrium since the days of Marco Polo, modern scholars note substantial transformations in state and social structures over many centuries, culminating in the mid to late eighteenth century “Flourishing age” (shengshi) of the high Qing.

Nineteenth-century British traders themselves knew well the robustly competitive character of China’s rural economy. The very perceptive report of W. H. Mitchell in 1859 on the reasons for England’s failure to increase its home exports to China noted that the British “were about to start in competition with the greatest manufacturing people in the world, with a people who manufactured cloth for themselves when the nations of the West wore sheepskins, and that any development of our manufactures in this country must necessarily be very slow” because the “beautiful and simple economy” of peasant household production “renders the system literally impregnable against all the assaults of foreign competition.” 17 (pp. 314-15). Even by the 1850s, British textile manufacturing had no cost advantages for mass markets in China; only opium and the “country trade,” both from their Indian colony, gave them profitable access to China. It was not cultural obstruction, or fiscal exactions, but sheer competitive power, that walled off China from foreign goods for so long.

China used to be viewed as the most isolated of the major world civilizations, but even difficult geophysical barriers did not prevent extensive trading and raiding contacts on all of her frontiers. Imperial China linked herself with neighboring regions, overland not only via the famous Silk Route, but via Tibet to India, and by sea to Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan. The Japanese scholar Hamashita Takeshi views East Asia as a coherent region, a tribute and trading zone centered on China; Frank adds that East Asia itself was linked to the other major world regions. 18 We know much about the impact of trade on the South and Southeast coasts, but we need a systematic analysis of how regions transmitted stimuli from beyond the East Asian ecumene.

One respects a brilliant theory best not by bowing down to it, but by critically examining it. I agree with Frank that globalization did not begin in the twentieth century, and that Asian societies at least equaled or even excelled Europe by many technological and economic measures until 1800. Widespread recognition of these basic points alone would sharply undermine Eurocentric interpretations.

The most common critique leveled at the world-system perspective relies on the fact that international trade comprised at most two percent of gross domestic product in the early modern world. 19 Therefore, it is argued that internal factors must far outweigh the impact of the global market. On this point I would support Frank. No quantitative measure by itself can demonstrate the insignificance of trade. 20 We must always ask, How big is big? or How small is small? Economists recognize that changes at the margin generate conspicuous effects, and linkages amplify small impulses; chemists know the value of catalysts, and a small amount of leavening radically changes the nature of bread. Was the two-percent solution of trade important enough to transform vast agrarian economies? Frank argues that silver was a vital lubricant, but his focus on trade alone fails to include agrarian economies, so he cannot show conclusively how far global silver’s impact spread. Although we still know too little about the interior, studies of coastal China confirm the vital role of silver and of exports, and studies of market integration indicate that price impulses were transmitted long distances into the interior. 21

Let me single out two more problematic areas: global-regional-local relationships, and economic determinism and institutional change.

Frank’s single-mindedness makes for clarity, but it has its costs. He brushes off criticism that his model is reductive and determinist. The global market economy dominates all other institutions, and causal arrows run only one way: the global determines its parts and not vice versa. Frank’s language on the causal force of the system is slippery: it may merely “at least condition” (p. 352) individual actors, but institutions are “derivative and dependent” (p. 325) on the system. He is always tempted to beef up the contribution of the systemic forces, but only specific empirical studies can confirm in each case how important they were. Frank does at one point refer to a “three-legged stool” of economic/ecological, political, and social bases (p. 340); but in this book he focuses exclusively on economic links; it is really a “silver unicycle” we see here.

The global system is in effect placed beyond historical change, unaffected by its component regions, institutions, nations, or individual actors. 22 True, structural analysis requires looking beyond the flotsam and jetsam of individual events, or even whole nations; Frank shares with Fernand Braudel the structuralist’s bias toward the large scale, the anonymous, the long term. But Braudel himself violated his precepts in practice, mixing delightful anecdotes of quirky individual behavior into his conjunctural analysis, as well as devoting one-third of *The Mediterranean* to “events,” even if with reservations. Frank’s approach is excellent for focusing on the constraints and oppor-
opportunities created by global silver flows and for highlighting parallel crises across the globe. His linkages are plausible, but effects on localities must be mediated by local institutions and actors. Silver shortage alone produces no definitive result.

Global interactions go well beyond commodity exchange. Frank mentions some of the merchant diasporas: the Chinese in Southeast Asia, Gujarati Indians, who spread from Malaysia to Astrakhan and Narva in Russia, Tibetans who crossed from India to Xinjiang to Northwest China, alongside the well-known Jews, Armenians, East Indian and Dutch trading companies. All these groups knitted together communities and networks between port cities. The Jesuit order, one of the first truly global corporations, spread weaponry, scriptures, and new technology and science wherever they went. Swedes captured by Russia at Poltava ended up casting cannon for the Mongolian Khan, and refugee Mongols ended up on the lower Volga serving the Russian Tsar. All these crisscrossing travelers tied the continents together with human as well as material bonds. Like silver, they were a small percentage of the total population, but they contributed vital circulatory functions.

All the social sciences, history included, perennially dispute the relationship between the global and local, or micro and macro. Economists solve it by splitting their discipline in two: microeconomics derives the logic of firm behavior from primitive psychological postulates; macroeconomics analyzes the behavior of national economies abstracted from individual firms. Anthropologists debate whether field sites have their own integrity or are inextricably imbedded in a wider political economy. Historians commonly avoid stating whether the global determines the local or the local constructs the global: variations of time and place can produce multiple results. But, historians too often take for granted nation-state and administrative boundaries.

Frank strangely ignores G. William Skinner’s model of regional systems in imperial China, the most influential social science paradigm now applied to China. Skinner insisted that nearly all social and economic change in China must be explained by quasi-autonomous macregions, each with its own cycle of growth and decline; there was no single “imperial” cycle. But often regional cycles moved synchronously, as in much of the eighteenth century, indicating that there was an empire-wide trend. Regions may move together because of a central coordinating force like the imperial state, or because of common interacting processes (demographic or commercial) across regions. Can we really distinguish between the local or the local constructs the global: variations of time and place can produce multiple results. But, historians too often take for granted nation-state and administrative boundaries.

At the same time, the Ottomans called off the siege of Vienna in 1683, stabilized borders with the Safavid empire, and held off Peter the Great’s attacks; their military institutions declined thereafter. China’s great military mobilizations turned to the Northwest against the Zunghar Mongols after negotiating the Treaty of Nerchinsk with Russia in 1689, and continued until the final extermination of the Zunghars in the mid-eighteenth century. After this time, China saw no need to promote aggressive expeditions, and military progress lapsed. Thus a large part of the rise of European powers and the decline of Asian powers after 1800 can be traced to continued military aggressiveness fueled by the European state system, compared with relative international peace in Asia after negotiation of major boundary settlements. Even Frank cannot avoid mentioning the powerful impact of Peter the Great of Russia, one of the few named personalities in the book. Peter aimed to extract profit from the Baltic trade by building St. Petersburg and by developing the fur trade with China. Both yielded important cash revenue for the treasury, but it was the needs of war that drove the demand for profit.

If institutions were only passive respondents to the encompassing system, they would always adapt smoothly and never block change. States would not engage in rent seeking, or exact passing system, they would always adapt smoothly and never block change. States would not engage in rent seeking, or exact passing system, they would always adapt smoothly and never block change. Fiscal policy would follow the Goldilocks principle: not too much, not too little; just right. But we know of many institutions that respond slowly, and reluctantly, to changes in the wider environment. (For proof, just consider the modern university!)
Frank is rightly suspicious of claims that Asian states suppressed exchange, because such claims usually support the myth of Asiatic despotism. But even those of us who believe in the positive impact of Asian states on the economy would not claim that rulers always acted in the best interests of merchants. They closed down mines when large crowds of miners threatened social conflict, confiscated property, and supported monopolies of salt, tea, cloth, etc. We do not have to endorse the myth of despotism, as long as we point out that European states did much the same thing. Adam Smith was well aware of the obstacles to free markets created by the mercantilist states of his time. He would not have written The Wealth of Nations if he did not think that substantial institutional change was necessary, and that it would not happen by itself. If ideas do not matter, there would have been no need for the book to have been written (nor for Frank’s).

James Scott demonstrates that states can wreak havoc when armed with ideologies and technologies that claim to produce a rationalized organization of society. Modern states of course have caused the greatest catastrophes—in China, Cambodia, Tanzania, Stalinist Russia, etc. But Scott’s analysis begins in the eighteenth century. Early modern states had fewer ways to mobilize resources so they could inflict less harm, but their incessant warfare, persecutions, confiscations, and restrictions on trade put many obstacles in the way of commercial development. As long as we recognize that both Western and non-Western institutions could promote or block development and that there was no inherent superiority of the West over Asia, we can introduce institutional factors without bringing along Eurocentric prejudice.

On the question of the autonomy of institutions, China scholars will recognize resistances to the competing paradigms of China’s peasant economy presented by Philip Huang and Ramon Myers, among others. Clearly, Frank would side with Myers and the neoclassical economists, who view China’s peasant economy as broadly competitive, integrated, monetized, and marked by substantial division of labor and high productivity from at least the eighteenth century. This provides him with some strange political bedfellows. Huang’s basic argument was that premodern Chinese institutions obstructed radical economy reform so much that a mass revolution was necessary. Myers, by contrast, finds imperial structures closely attuned to market interests with factors of production freely and efficiently allocated across the entire economy. In effect, he implies, Adam Smith should have been born in China: there he would have found his laissez-faire ideal.

Other historians are uncomfortable with both extremes. Pomeranz and Mazumdar find substantial political obstruction or monopsonistic control of credit markets, disinvestment in waterworks, and sharp dichotomies between core and periphery, or wealthy and poor lineages, in nineteenth and twentieth century Shandong and Guangdong. Perhaps these dichotomies were less pronounced in the high Qing, but they did not vanish. The positive effects of world trade on China still passed through regional structures. Disparities within the empire sharply constrained the abilities of the imperial state to respond to new challenges in the nineteenth century.

Fall of the East, Rise of the West

Why then, did the West rise, and the East fall, in the nineteenth century? Never one to shy away from big questions, Frank espouses long-term waves in the world economy. Asia entered a “B” phase, or downturn, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, just as Europe began to ride an “A” phase upward, continuing its recovery from the seventeenth-century crisis. Europeans took advantage of Asia’s temporary decline, and their new prosperity and power, to initiate the great crossover of global power, lasting until the mid-twentieth century. Frank’s other explanation is more conventional, relying on relative factor prices: China’s dense population provided its manufacturers with little incentive to substitute machines for labor. Both explanations are problematic, but there is no space to go into detail here. Suffice it to say that the beginning and ending points of global cycles are only vaguely defined, and historians of technology deny that there is a simple relationship between the relative price of labor and major technological breakthroughs. Frank, despite his distaste for economics in his Chicago days, returns to his neo-classical roots with a vengeance in tracing all techno-industrial change to shifts in relative factor prices. Historians of technology, by contrast, focus on how microfactors such as labor relations, industrial structure, personalities, and capital affect invention. Once again, for Frank, macrolevel forces make smaller scale analysis irrelevant.

Frank’s choice of 1750 as the Asian turning point is, however, intriguing, even though it seems to fit better with the experience of the Ottoman and Mughal empires than with China. Historians of China do not generally see major signs of decline until nearly the beginning of the nineteenth century. But there were early warning signs. The Qianlong emperor thought that he had successfully established Pax Sinica by exterminating the Zunghar “nomadic alternative” from 1750-60. Much of the dynamism of state and social structures slackened thereafter. Vain-glorious Qianlong boasted of his frontier victories but reduced military capabilities and ran into disasters in the later Gurkha and Jinchuan campaigns.

Internal strains within the major empires became apparent during the eighteenth century. Even though Ottomans now tend to resist the terminology of “decline,” regional powers replaced the center in both Ottoman and Mughal realms. China, too, paradoxically combined central rationalization and regional autonomy. Even as it built the world’s largest system of grain storage, price reporting, and relief distribution, it began losing control of grain and fiscal resources to provincial and local officials. The Qianlong emperor could mount huge expeditions across the Northwestern deserts, but he could not stop corrupt diversion of tax revenues and grain supplies, nor could he prevent massive internal migration. If Europe’s rise now seems late and sudden, Asia’s decline seems less fortuitous.

One phrase from the Book of Changes sums up Frank’s conclusion: “When the sun reaches its zenith, it begins to set” (ri zhong ze ze). Asia was a victim of its own success. Explanations for China’s decline include ecological constraints, commercial structure (Elvin’s “high-equilibrium trap”), social disintegration, and population pressure. Prosperity led to a massive population during the eighteenth century. Even though Ottomans now fall to resist the terminology of “decline,” regional powers replaced the center in both Ottoman and Mughal realms. China, too, paradoxically combined central rationalization and regional autonomy. Even as it built the world’s largest system of grain storage, price reporting, and relief distribution, it began losing control of grain and fiscal resources to provincial and local officials. The Qianlong emperor could mount huge expeditions across the Northwestern deserts, but he could not stop corrupt diversion of tax revenues and grain supplies, nor could he prevent massive internal migration. If Europe’s rise now seems late and sudden, Asia’s decline seems less fortuitous.

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probably had an even poorer peasant population and an extremely unequal income distribution, but most of its peasants were tied down by serfdom: the major rebellions took place only in the Ukrainian steppe-Cossack region. China’s rebellions broke out all over its frontiers: in Taiwan, upper Han River and Yangzi, Guangxi (Taiping), Northern Anhui, Gansu, and Xinjiang.

Frank makes a plausible case that Asian systems began their decline well before major European impact, but without specific social and institutional analysis, he cannot say much more. He challenges us to link regional systemic changes to global trading connections. I would insist on adding global geopolitical relations: it was the apparent lack of major military challenges once the Russian border had been negotiated and the Mongols suppressed, combined with the insignificance of the European presence on the South coast, that led the Qing rulers to reject drastic institutional reforms.

Frank is certainly right that the origins of the Industrial Revolution must be sought globally, not locally. Competition with Indian textiles drove English manufacturers to raise the productivity of cloth production at home; frustration with their inability to sell these cloths on the China market drove them to construct the opium profitable intra-Asian country trades. Exactly how and why Europeans took advantage of Asian decline, however, remains unclear. Frank admits that only Europeans collectively were involved in every stage of the silver flow from the Americas to Asia. Only European trading mechanisms had a truly global reach. Each of the Asian communities might dominate regionally and establish links with its neighbors, but Europeans could forge the chain that circled the globe. Was it this global reach that ultimately enabled Europeans to draw on the advanced technology of the rest of the world to pull their backward region ahead?

Organic metaphors have an irresistible attraction for structuralists. Frank and Braudel echo, of all people, Talcott Parsons, when they compare silver to the blood that circulates in the body. His compelling organic model achieves coherence at the cost of oversimplification, determinism and implicit teleology. For an alternative perspective—a fractal, and fractured view of social organization—turn to R. Bin Wong’s China Transformed.

Europe Limited, China Transformed

Comparative institutional analysis is where Wong’s book excels. For him, unlike Frank, “institutions matter” (p. 51). Wong moves back and forth from China to Europe, examining comparable economic institutions and political events, including grain markets, grain riots, tax resistance, and revolutions.

Wong, like Frank, aims to undermine classic social theory’s assumption that Europe is the normative case, by asserting the separate and equal claims of Chinese economic development, but he is more circumspect, and better grounded empirically. He argues only for basic economic similarities, not relative superiority. He relies on a large literature of secondary research by Chinese, Japanese, and Western scholars, including his own work on grain riots and granaries. Curiously, Wong, the historian describes fewer specific events and actions than Frank the sociologist. More examples would be helpful.

Wong’s binary comparisons between China and Europe risk reverting only to well-trodden paths, but he avoids most of these dangers with nuanced analyses that focus on specific institutional practices, not the normative prescriptions of religions, ideologies, or political cultures. Here he, too, vastly improves on Landes’s cranky, unsupported opinions and crude dichotomies. His primary tactic is to insist on “symmetric perspectives”: if we must use simplified accounts of European history to look at China, we should equally employ simplified narratives of China to look at Europe. This technique, often recommended but seldom pursued, leads to profoundly original insights.

Combining the message of these three books, the complete Asianist must rethink her spatial conceptions of the globe, always keep in mind the world systemic impacts on her region, and practice close-textured comparative institutional analysis. Daunting challenges, to be sure, but in the Confucian spirit of “Zhi buke er wéil” (Do the impossible), essential ones for Asian scholars to meet.

Wong recognizes the Industrial Revolution as the fundamental breaking point in global economic history, but he finds most explanations either too specific or too essentialist. Either they provide an extensive list of factors that assisted the growth of industry in one region, usually England, failing to single out the necessary causes, or they focus on a single feature, be it property rights, class relations, commercial capital, “rationalism,” or “entrepreneurial culture,” etc. The assumption is that only the West had this crucial element, and the rest of the world lacked it. But the search for secret elixirs of industrial growth, present in England and absent elsewhere, has proven inconclusive. Every “definitive” factor is amply present elsewhere. There is no Holy Grail. Protoindustrialization, a fashionable focus of research in the 1970s and 1980s, found rural industry to be an important stage linking agrarian economies to industrialization through demographic and commercial effects. But nearly all the features distinctive of rural industrialization in Europe are also found in China, and even in Europe, many areas with rural industry did not industrialize. Protoindustrialization is found broadly across the globe. Early modern Asia bears out Adam Smith’s principle that the division of labor grows with the extent of the market, but this fact alone did not produce an industrial revolution.

The European demographic structure, characterized by late marriage, relatively low percentage married, and low fertility within marriage, has been held responsible for the European miracle because it kept aggregate growth rates down, allowing for accumulation of an agrarian surplus. In Asia, early and universal family formation plus unregulated fertility is supposed to have eaten up the productive surplus with population growth. But Malthusian myths have yielded to realities. Chinese families, despite early marriages, used extensive infanticide and birth spacing to keep family sizes in balance with economic resources. Thus Malthusian pressures were broadly similar in both Europe and China.

His second original approach is to use a common model (“4 Cs”) to examine both European and Chinese states. They both face Challenges, they have limited Capacities to respond to them, people make Claims on them, and they make Commitments. Unlike so many theorists, Wong does not divide empires from states. China’s empires and Europe’s states began with similar constraints and opportunities. The resultant differences are not a
product of cultural foundations, but of the interactions of states with each other in the early modern age. Put most simply, early modern European states’ primary challenges arose from nearly continuous military and economic competition, while Chinese empires’ main task was to hold together a single agrarian society. China’s resource base was much larger than that of Europe: it had more productive agriculture and an established bureaucratic regime that could support itself with relatively light taxation on an agrarian base. Europe’s state-builders scratched up their taxes wherever they could find them, against tenacious resistance from local elites, autonomous communes and towns, and sporadic peasant revolts. Claims by non-state actors on imperial China were more subdued than those of Europeans, but China was no despotism: subjects had serious expectations of reasonable tax payments, standards of equity, and a modicum of social order, and they could resist, or turn to alternatives, if the officials did not provide what they needed. Europe’s state building era looks much more turbulent, because of the proliferation of state rivalry, but many common features emerged, especially in conflicts over distribution of grain and taxes. Chapters 9 and 10, the best parts of the book, use careful, concrete analyses of grain seizures and tax resistance movements to demonstrate the value of controlled comparative analysis. Here, an often excessively abstract theoretical discussion is brought down to earth. In the end, the apparent similarities hide underlying structural differences, because the states’ commitments were quite different: European rulers aimed to maximize power and wealth first and foremost, in the interest of survival; Chinese rulers had stronger welfare goals, driven by a serious commitment to maintaining the prosperity of the independent peasant cultivator.

Distinctions natural to Europeans become much more ambiguous when applied to China. The sharp line between the state and civil society is not mirrored well in China, where social groups did not usually establish totally autonomous realms independent of the state. Likewise, in foreign affairs, the wall between “domestic” and “international” defined by linear boundaries turns into a graded hierarchy of concentric circles extending from internal administration, to frontier zones, to tributary states, to trading relationships. In responding to grain seizures, too, European governments ultimately chose the second of two exclusive policies: protection of local subsistence rights or suppression of community actions in favor of national markets. China’s emperors and her twentieth-century governments, with mixed success, repeatedly tried to balance local and national claims. We are tempted to see the European categories as “natural” and the Chinese ones as somehow problematic, but why not turn the comparison around? Chinese literati who moved flexibly in and out of public service would
find European rigid separation of public and private spheres too Procrustean; they would see the European state system as much too crude a method of handling external relations, and they could not conceive of rulers surviving without paying serious attention to the welfare of their agrarian subjects. In these senses, imperial China was more "modern." It anticipated developments that only came to Europe after the devastation of two world wars discredited the nation-state model permanently. Europeans developed welfare states, at last; they created "quasi-non-governmental organizations" (QUANGOS) merging public and private, and they began to compromise exclusive state sovereignty in the European Union. Oriental wisdom had finally triumphed.37

Finally, Wong contributes powerfully to a growing "anti-necessitarian" trend in social theory.38 Economic and political developments are contingent. Nothing is guaranteed. Economic growth, technological change, and political freedom do not always hang together.39 Tax resistance movements do not necessarily prefigure class-based revolutionary outbreaks. Economic specialization does not automatically lead to industrial revolutions. Western triumphalists assume that because all of these events happened in Europe at some time, they must be related to each other in a deep sense. Landes even traces the wealth of the West back to Judaeo-Christian religious beliefs!40 These assumptions clearly leave the rest of the world with no choice but to adopt the entire Western package wholesale. By unbundling the package, Wong leaves the future open to surprises and multiple paths. In this perspective he differs radically from world-system theorists, whose holistic determinism derives all paths from imperatives of a system that transcends individual states or persons, even if it is not a Eurocentric one. China serves for Wong not as the radical Other whose strangeness confirms our own superiority, but as the challenging rival whose different, but equally valid, course of development undermines our complacency. Where Landes sees only "a weird pattern of isolated initiatives... almost as though the society were held down by a silk ceiling," Wong finds China's development to be normal, understandable, and often admirable.41

Wong, on the other hand, goes too far in denying the relevance of military demands to Chinese state formation. Major fiscal reform in China was almost always driven by military pressure.42 Neglect of the military leads him to describe Chinese political economy as "Confucian," ignoring the contrast to a Confucian "mask" and an underlying "cultural reality." Imperial statecraft. These are equally applicable to domestic issues, especially on the frontiers. Still, imperial China was not plagued by the incessant cycle of interstate warfare so typical of European state formation from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, which in turn drove tax increases, bureaucratization, and mercantilist political economy. Rather than radically contrasting the two, it is better to say that a major theme in Europe becomes a minor, or rather subdominant, theme in China: always present, but only sometimes becoming the leading motivation.

Anti-Eurocentrists: Ships in the Night?

All three authors, like the societies they study, follow multiple paths toward common goals. Unfortunately, their perspectives do not intersect very much. Lewis and Wigen give respectful attention to the social power of spatial and linguistic imaginaries, an approach that smells suspiciously "post-modern" to Wong and Frank, who focus almost exclusively on instrumental rationality. Wong finds world system perspectives irrelevant or at best incomplete, and explicitly denies the impact of foreign trade on domestic economies in China.44 Frank nearly eliminates the autonomy of institutions and ignores the cultural and political structure treated in loving detail by the other two. Is a synthesis possible that transcends flabby eclecticism?

Combining the message of these three books, the compleat Asianist must rethink her spatial conceptions of the globe, always keep in mind the world systemic impacts on her region, and practice close-textured comparative institutional analysis. Daunting challenges, to be sure, but in the Confucian spirit of Zhi buke er wei (Do the impossible), essential ones for Asian scholars to meet.

Notes

10. Pat Giersch has used the same concept to discuss Qing China's Southwest frontier. C. Patterson Giersch, "Qing China's reluctant sub-


14. A second major flow went West across the Pacific to Manila, and thence to China, and major amounts of silver also moved from Japan to China.


16. For California, in addition to Wong and Pomeranz (University of California, Irvine), there are James Z. Lee (California Institute of Technology) and Robert Marks (Whittier College). On the east coast, among others: Timothy Brook (Toronto), Lillian M. Li (Swarthmore), Sucheta Mazumdar (Duke), Susan Naquin (Princeton), Evelyn Rawski (Pittsburgh), William T. Rowe (Johns Hopkins), and Madeleine Zelin (Columbia). Except for a passing reference to Rowe, Landes cites none of this work.


22. Comment of Huri Islamoglu at a panel on ReORIENT at the International Convention of Asia Scholars (Noordwijkhout, Netherlands, June 1998).

23. Marcus and Fischer, Anthropology as Cultural Critique.


33. Frank, p. 252, citing Braudel.


35. James Lee and Cameron Campbell, Fate and Fortune in Rural China: Social Organization and Population Behavior in Liaoning, 1774-1873 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): “In contrast with the European demographic system where there was only one form of voluntary control over population growth—marriage—the imperial Chinese demographic system was characterized by multiple forms of control... (it) exhibits a form of rationality that was in many ways proto modern” (p. 56). See Landes, Wealth and Poverty of Nations: “Early, universal marriage and lots of children. That takes food, and food in turn takes people. Treadmill” (p. 23). In fact, total marital fertility in China was 6.3, in Europe 8.5 (Lee and Campbell, Fate and Fortune, p. 90).


37. Town and village enterprises (TVEs), the most dynamic sectors of the rural economy of China today, also fall to fit simple public/private categorizations.


41. Ibid., p. 57.

42. The Han dynasty, after a famous court discussion known as the Salt and Iron debates, established monopolies of these two essential products in order to finance northwestern military defenses. Wang Anshi’s fiscal reforms of the eleventh century were designed to meet military threats from the North. Late Ming surtaxes, which ultimately brought down the dynasty, were an effort to bolster defenses against Mongol raids. The Grand Council and palace memorial communication system, China’s equivalent of C^3 (command, control, communication, and information) responded to eighteenth-century imperial needs for rapid response to frontier military exigencies. The one major exception is the sixteenth century Single Whip Reforms, a consequence of commercialization and monetization.


44. Wong, China Transformed, p. 207.
Review Essay

Trotskyism in China: Struggling towards the Road of Light

by Harry Williams


In the lightless years of the Mao dictatorship, the darkest spot behind the blackout on the history of the Chinese Revolution in the deepest circle in the Maoist’s political hell was reserved for Trotskyism (Benton, *China's Urban Revolutionaries*, p. 1).

Communism’s collapse in Eastern Europe, and the abandonment by China’s Party/state of any radical impulse, has reinforced the long-term crisis of Marxist theory and practice. These trends have at least partially vindicated dissident Marxists like Trotsky, but vindication has not prevented the continuing marginalization of Marxist theory and social practice in China. Given this crisis and marginalization, it may seem like an inauspicious time for Gregor Benton to bring out three works on Trotskyism in China, but we are fortunate he did. Historians of Republican China and the People’s Republic will appreciate these works, which recover (and translate into English) the words and deeds of important communist actors in the 1920s and 1930s.

More importantly, as Benton recovers the words of China’s Trotskyists, he also brings back their critique of the Chinese Communist Party and of Stalinist practice in general. In this double recovery, Benton stakes out a claim that Trotskyists can be seen as democratic revolutionaries, opposed to oppression in its Colonialist, Stalinist, Nationalist, Maoist, or Dengist guises. This double impulse—at once democratic and radical, nationalist and iconoclastic—might then offer a small ray of hope to those who seek to resist the dichotomy the Chinese Communist Party has erected between democracy and socialism.

Although it would be surprising indeed if a Trotskyist alternative appeared on the Chinese scene, that doesn’t preclude our learning something valuable from the efforts of China’s most urban and cosmopolitan revolutionaries. Indeed, the Trotskyist experience anticipated some of the triumphs and failures of the post-Mao democracy movements. Long before the student movement in 1989, Trotskyists showed that support for democracy required a connection with, and respect for, workers and other non-elites. The factionalism displayed by the democracy movement in exile is also anticipated in the factionalism of the Trotskyist movement. Intellectual activists separated from popular movements tend to split organizational and theoretical hairs, quickly losing sight of larger goals and playing for the very small stakes of leading tiny, marginalized groups of like-minded thinkers. A final lesson that China’s Trotskyists can teach today’s activists, and one that is especially relevant to the works examined here, is that the rebel’s path is extremely difficult. Both Chen Duxiu and Zheng Chaolin suffered years of imprisonment and isolation for their actions and beliefs, which conformed to neither Nationalist nor Communist orthodoxy.

The Question of Chen Duxiu

If we can associate Trotskyism in China with democracy it is largely because we associate Chen Duxiu with Trotskyism. This connection is not always accepted. In the PRC, official and semi-official opinion of Chen has varied over the years, but Party historians seem certain of one thing: Chen’s flirtation with Trotskyism never became a stable relationship. PRC historian Tang Bolin, who has written extensively on Chen and Chinese Trotskyism, claims that Chen came to view his acceptance of Trotskyism as a false step and quit the movement. In reply, Zheng Chaolin, Chen’s comrade in the Trotskyist movement, argues that Chen remained committed to Trotskyism up to his death, albeit in a diffuse way (CUR: 197-202). While it is difficult to pin any position on the mercurial Chen, it does appear that he remained broadly committed to a Marxist analysis of the world, and that his Marxism was strongly influenced by his understanding of Trotskyism. The publication of *Chen Duxiu’s Last Articles and Letters* represents an opportunity to shed some light on the question of Chen’s commitment to Trotskyism and democracy.

Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) was a leader of three crucial movements in the Chinese revolution: the May Fourth Movement, the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s, and Chinese
The Trotskyists, China's urban revolutionaries, were also China's most internationalist and perhaps most democratic revolutionaries. But they were undermined by brutal repression from both the CCP and the GMD, as well as by their own inability to unite around a common program. Their legacy is ambiguous.

The extent to which Chen can be legitimately considered a democratic alternative to Maoist Communism should start, as we will see, with a consideration of life inside Chen's CCP. In the last decade, several important works on the Party's founding and first decade have been published. Although they differ in many ways, these works view the "Bolshevization" of Chinese Communism—that is, the emergence of a Party able to discipline (control) cadres according to organizational and ideological imperatives—as the chief goal and accomplishment of the early Communist movement. Chen was an angry man after the failure of the May Fourth Movement and his subsequent arrest, and very much in the mood for action. Chen converted first to Communist organization, and only later, and partially, did he develop skills as a Marxist theorist. Democracy was a goal, and internal debate and diversity was a feature of the CCP under Chen. But it was not until he became a Trotskyist that democracy became both the means and the end of revolutionary action.

Chen Duxiu Becomes a Trotskyist

Following the disastrous rout of Communist forces in the Northern Expedition, Chen was removed as head of the Party. He remained aloof from politics between August 1927, when he lost his leadership of the CCP, and 1929, when he began to read Trotskyist literature and became an Oppositionist in the Trotskyist tradition. His conversion to Trotskyism was slow and probably incomplete. The agents of his conversion were people such as Yin Kuan and Peng Shuzhi, veteran communist revolutionaries who remained loyal to Chen after he lost his Party posts. They would visit Chen and present him with Trotskyist arguments and literature, but Chen remained skeptical. Even as he converted to Trotskyism, his pride and independence were evident. According to Zhang Chaolin,

After reading each of Trotsky's documents, Chen would raise a disagreement, and then they [Peng Shuzhi, Yin Kuan, and Wang Zekai] would argue with him; but by the next time he came he would have abandoned his previous disagreement and would raise a new one on the shoulders of the old argument. In the course of his gradual conversion to their point of view, he had never once yielded to them in their presence, but next time he came face to face with them he would raise new differences on the basis of what they had previously told him. And so it went on (CUR: 146).

Chen's adoption of Trotskyism occurred in 1929, the same year he was formally expelled from the official party.

Chen's final move toward Trotskyism was precipitated by Trotsky's advocacy of democratic slogans for China after 1927, and especially by Trotsky's article "The Chinese Question after the Sixth Congress." It was not that Trotsky's works converted Chen to a new way of thinking; instead, Chen found in Trotsky an intellectual and political ally who appeared to be following the same paths in thinking about the Chinese revolution. Ironically, one important idea Trotsky and Chen shared, the call for a National Assembly, eventually caused a split between Chen and most of China's other Trotskyists. Chen strongly advocated for the formation of a National Assembly and, after 1931, Trotskyist cooperation in the war against Japan. As we will see, these positions were anathema to more theoretically concerned Trotskyist comrades.

 Factionalism, based on personal as well as doctrinal differences, kept China's Trotskyists from effectively propagating their alternative to official Marxism. There were at least four Trotskyist organizations in China, and their unification required the prestige of Trotsky himself (who intervened by letter) and Chen Duxiu. Although opposition to the official party's Central Committee had been common after 1927, it was not until 1929 that an Opposition, organized and committed to Trotskyism, emerged in China. It was even later, in 1931, that the four Trotskyist organizations were united briefly.

One group was made up of communists who had departed from the USSR in 1928. This group of "Moscow Trotskyists" had been exposed to the factionalism of the Soviet Party and had learned firsthand the political and ideological methods of the
Soviet struggle. As a result, the Moscow Trotskyists were “tight
and highly ideological” (CUR: 29). They considered Chen an
opportunist for following the Third International’s directions in
the 1925-1927 Revolution. Ironically, then, this group agreed
with Stalin and not Trotsky on the question of Chen Duxiu; like
Stalin, they saw Chen as an opportunist. Trotsky, on the other
hand, thought of Chen as a valuable asset to the revolutionary
movement, whatever mistakes he may have made in the past.

The second group can be called the “Chen group,” although
Chen was not active in organizing it. These veterans generally
came to Trotskyism because it gave theoretical expression to
their opinions of the Central Committee and Comintern. The
Chen group reciprocated the hostility of the Moscow Trotskyists,
who they saw as inexperienced (CUR: 30). There was also
another group of CCP activists who had come out openly as
Trotskyists but, like the Chen group, viewed the Moscow return­
ees as immature. Among the members of this group was Liu
Renjing. Liu had met Trotsky in Turkey and, because of this
connection, he believed he should be the arbiter of Trotskyist
doctrine. Finally, a fourth group emerged under the name Mili­
tant (Zhandou) (CUR: 33).

According to Benton, “Though there were minor political
differences between the four Trotskyist organizations, what re­
mainly kept them apart was personal ambition and factional preju­
dice” (CUR: 33). For example, Zhao Ji, a leader of the Militant
group, later admitted that the group was formed to help its members
get better positions in a future united Trotskyist organization.

The combined interventions of Chen and Trotsky moved
the groups to compromise, and a unification congress was held
in 1931.11 The combined membership of the four groups was only
483 (CUR: 35). Even this small group was soon diminished
greatly when nearly the entire Central Committee was arrested
by the Nationalist police three weeks after the congress. Most of
the remaining leaders, including Chen Duxiu, were arrested in 1932.

Even without the arrests, it would have been difficult for
the Trotskyists to grow. Most Trotskyists opposed Chen’s call to
cooperate with the CCP and GMD in the war against Japan
(CUR: 46). It was difficult to organize in the major cities, as labor
was controlled by anti-communist triads linked to the GMD,
while the countryside was increasingly dominated by the CCP.

Given their weakness, Chen Duxiu believed that a call for
a popular front, to be rallied around the idea of convoking a
National Assembly, was the only real alternative for the Trotsky­
ists. A call for popular democracy would allow the Trotskyists
to gain prestige among liberal intellectuals and organize without
fear of repression. As a small actor, the Trotskyists had the most
to gain from a turn away from military conflict toward demo­
cratic politics, even if this meant working with the CCP and
GMD. Most Trotskyist activists, however, could not overcome
the memory of the recent, bitter split with the CCP, and they
would not agree to cooperate with the bourgeois GMD. During
Chen’s years in prison, the Trotskyist parties hardened in their
opposition to Chen’s positions, although Chen’s split with or­
organized Trotskyism because of this issue was probably a foregone
conclusion even before his arrest.

The Prophet Outcast: Chen Duxiu 1932-1942

In Chen’s third incarnation as Chinese revolutionary, he
was a dissident revolutionary opposed to both the official Com­
munist and Nationalist alternatives. As such, he has served as a
precursor of the politically committed but organizationally dis­
enfranchised Chinese dissident of the latter twentieth century.

Arrested in 1932, Chen spent the next five years in prison.
After his release, he was forced to live in an isolated town in
Sichuan province, until his death in 1942. Chen wrote the pieces
included in Chen Duxiu’s Last Letters and Articles after his
release from this second prison term. The book is mostly com­
prised of Chen’s letters and replies to Wang Fanxi and other
Trotskyists on the question of democracy.

Chen was a revolutionary practitioner and not a theorist.
His friend Hu Shi once labeled Chen an “oppositionist for life,”
meaning that he would never uncritically accept authority. In
Chen’s own words:

I understand nothing about theory, and I have not the slightest
compunction about inclining to the left or to the right. I shall always
strive to be extreme, I view with contempt the doctrine of the golden
mean, I absolutely detest parrotry, I refuse to utter commonplace
that neither hurt nor itch, I want to be absolutely right and absolutely
wrong in all my utterances; the last thing I want is never to say
anything wrong and at the same time never to say anything right.
(CL: 40)

Although he was not a theorist, these last writings are
important for the light they shed on the difficult problem of
combining iconoclastic impulses with nationalism, and radical­
ism with democracy.

One of the most essential questions facing radical activists
after 1917 was the nature of the Soviet Union. Chen lost faith in
the socialist nature of Stalin’s USSR. At least as early as 1934
Chen stopped equating Russia and socialism. In that year Chen
argued that “We must replace the slogan ‘Defend the USSR’ with
the slogan ‘Recreate the Soviet Union of October!’” (CLL: 15).
Unlike Trotsky, who continued to believe that the USSR was a
“degenerate worker’s state,” Chen believed that the USSR had
simply degenerated into barbarism (CLL: 19).

In his last letters and articles, Chen tried to eliminate the
tension between radicalism and democracy by claiming—in a
movement that echoed Thomas Paine and anticipated post-Marx­
ism—that democracy itself was the highest form of radical
politics. Chen’s commitment to democracy led Liu Renjing to
brand him a Menshevik. This commitment to democracy, how­
ever, sounded more like Lenin in The State and Revolution than
Second International gradualism; it was certainly very different
from Stalinist “democracy.”12 Chen stated that “The only differ­
ence between ‘proletarian democracy’ and bourgeois democracy
is in the extent of its realization; it is not that proletarian demo­
cracy has a different content” (CLL: 62). Democracy was an
inalienable part of progressive civilization. In 1939, echoing his
statements from the May Fourth period, he wrote that “Science,
modern democracy, and socialism are the three main inventions,
precious beyond measure, of the genius of modern humankind.”
(CL: 73).

Chen was suspicious of Trotsky’s commitment to democ­
acy. “Leon Trotsky only discovered after personally experienc­
ing the dictator’s knife that the party, the trade unions, and the
soviet at all levels need democracy and free elections, but by
then it was too late!” (CLL: 73-74).13 This characterization was
not quite fair to Trotsky. Like Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky had
opposed Lenin’s conception of a centralized party until 1917.
After the February 1917 Revolution, however, Trotsky came to
believe that a vanguard party was necessary to turn spontaneous
protest into a genuine movement against the bourgeois state. Once he had accepted Lenin's conception of the Party, he became an "ultra-Leninist," leading the call to outlaw organized factions, such as the Worker's Opposition, within the Russian party.

More than the dictator's knife led Trotsky to reemphasize democracy; the Chinese Revolution also played a crucial role in this process. A major theme of the Left Opposition's critique of Stalin and Bukharin was the manner in which socialism in one country led to the subordination of the Comintern to the interests of Russian foreign policy, and therefore to the squandering of major revolutionary opportunities—for example, in China in 1925-27 and in Britain during the General Strike of 1926. The Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 also led Trotsky to generalize his theory of Russia's revolution into a universal theory of revolution in backward states known as the theory of permanent revolution. Trotsky's inability to air his views on revolution abroad brought home the importance of democracy, although it was too late to save Trotsky from Stalin's growing power.

Was Chen Duxiu a Trotskyist?

There is considerable evidence that Chen was and remained a Trotskyist after 1929. Yet Chen was too independent to completely trust Trotsky or subscribe to his doctrines—especially after Chen was burned by the Comintern for following its flawed policies. It is also hard to specify a content for "Trotskyism." Trotsky was a Menshevik, later a Bolshevik, and finally a democratic revolutionary, a path similar to the one taken by Chen Duxiu. Yet, as Chen himself said, it is easier to call for increased democracy once one has lost power. The CCP under Chen was more open than it was in later years, but just as Trotsky must bear some responsibility for Stalin, so Chen, following orders from Moscow, must bear some responsibility for the CCP's degeneration into despotism.

Clearly Chen's Trotskyism was a question of affinity and influence rather than a closely held ideological line. According to Wang Fanxi, "...in the final years of his life [Chen] was already far from [Wang's own version of] Trotskyism," (CLL: 18) but both he and Zheng Chaolin believe that Chen would certainly have returned to the Trotskyist fold. This, of course, is speculation, and it is at least partially motivated by the desire to keep Chen's name associated with the Trotskyist movement. Certainly other Trotskyist leaders abandoned, rather than returned to, revolutionary politics. For instance, another Trotskyist leader of the 1930s, Max Shachtman, turned the Socialist Workers Party in the United States into anti-Communist crusaders as part of the right turn of U.S. labor after World War Two. Just as Stalin had used patriotism as a force to subvert socialism and strengthen the state in the USSR, Shachtman used patriotism to re integrate a radical section of the U.S. working class into the U.S. neo-imperial state following World War II.

Given Chen's independence, even capriciousness, as well as his lack of theoretical sophistication, there was certainly no guarantee that Chen would have returned to the organized Trotskyist camp, even if a Shachtman-like rightward turn was unlikely. Still, maintaining a position as both a patriot and a radical was difficult. Chen broke with organized Trotskyism when he left prison in 1937, in large part because of the Trotskyists' attitude towards the Japanese invasion. Those Trotskyists still active in Shanghai were not involved in the fight against Japan. Under the influence of Liu Renjing, they refused to support the bourgeois GMD in the war against Japan. The group around Peng Shuzhi would support the GMD, but only as long as Western troops did not join Chinese troops. As Zheng Chaolin saw it, "there was no future for a revolution that concentrated only on imperialism," (OL: 182) and the Trotskyists feared they would strengthen the bourgeoisie by cooperating with the GMD.

Chen, on the other hand, believed that it was crucial to organize a united front of all democratic parties outside the GMD and CCP. As he wrote to Trotsky, "Only a small group that, organizationally, has won the support of large numbers of workers and, politically, has gone all out to engage in the democratic and national struggle, is qualified to be the central force that recreates a proletarian party" (CLL: 49). Chen saw that internationalism had to be combined with the patriotic impulses of the masses to become part of an effective political program.

Like the veteran revolutionaries around Chen, the students who led China's democracy protests in 1989 did not have the theoretical flexibility or experience to engage the masses in revolutionary politics. When the students kept the workers at arm's length they were isolating themselves as well as the worker activists. As a result of this split, the workers' forces took an even harder hit from the government than the students. In any event, as Chen Duxiu saw from his remote outpost in Sichuan, democracy is best crafted by the people themselves, rather than doled out to them in small portions as a gift—a lesson Chinese activists from Mao to Wu'er Kaixi have been slow to embrace.

The Politics of Memory: Zheng Chaolin

Like many other veteran revolutionaries who followed Chen on his path to Trotskyism, Zheng Chaolin eventually split with Chen over the call for a National Assembly and cooperation with other parties in the resistance against Japan. But true to his nature, in his memoirs Zheng writes of Chen with the utmost respect, describing Chen as a great revolutionary. Although Zheng wrote his memoir in 1944-45, it was not published until 1986. Even then, it was published in a classified, Party-only edition, and the interesting chapter on "Love and Politics" was not included. Benton's translation thus represents the fullest published version of the book. The memoirs are fascinating for the light they shine on the personal side of Communist politics in the 1920s and 1930s. They are memoirs of rare honesty, devoid of self-promotion. As Benton puts it, the memoir shows Zheng "to be modest, frank, Argus-eyed, compassionate, broad-minded, humorous, playful, stubborn, inquisitive, inventive, creative, loyal, free from all vanity and pretensions, and with the memory of an elephant" (OL: x).

Zheng was a political prisoner for thirty-four years of his life: seven under the GMD (1931-1937) and 27 under the CCP (1932-1979). His early life did not portend the life of a Communist politician. He received a very traditional education in Fujian, and was more interested in classical romances than politics. Zheng graduated from middle school in 1919. At the time, he did not read newspapers, and he knew of the May Fourth Movement only as an anti-Japanese boycott. Even this did not arouse much enthusiasm from Zheng, who was focused instead on finding a way to continue his studies. His family had no money to pay for further schooling, so Zheng, like many Chinese, enrolled in a work-study program in France, where Chinese labor was needed to reconstruct the war-ravaged economy. Many young people joined these programs because they represented the anarchist ideal of combining labor and education, but Zheng's goal was to study, not to transform himself or make revolution.
He, therefore, joined a program being promoted and partially financed by Chen Jiongming, commander of the GMD, forces which controlled part of Fujian.

On the steamer to France, however, Zheng experienced his "personal May Fourth Movement." His fellow students quickly converted him to radical politics, and once he was initiated into this new world, Zheng embraced the most radical ideas:

Is a long period of capitalist democracy necessary to get from Chinese society with its "feudal remnants," to socialism? This is still a controversial question. As for me personally, I got from feudal ideology to socialist ideology without a "long and stable" intervening stage of bourgeois ideology. The same is true of the collective awakening of the Chinese consciousness—at least of its main current—in the May Fourth era. Like me, it skipped the long and stable period of bourgeois democratic ideology.19

In France, he met many later leaders of the CCP, such as Li Lisan and Zhou Enlai. When his scholarship money ran out, he went to work in a rubber factory, where activists invited him to join the Party. He did so in 1922 (OL: 26).

In early 1923 Zheng and twelve other Chinese students in Western Europe went to Moscow to study at the Communist University for the Toilers of the East, known by its Russian acronym KUTV. They joined about thirty other Chinese students who had come directly from China. Showing how rapidly revolutionary theory was advancing in China, Zheng found that the Chinese students who came directly from China were better versed in socialism than even the French-based students who had been exposed to French socialist and communist literature (OL: 46).

Factionalism, ever-present among Chinese radicals, divided the Chinese at KUTV. Before Zheng arrived, an anarchist-Communist row had caused about half the Chinese students (the anarchists) to leave. Zheng describes the split between the anarchists and communists in chilling terms. The young Chinese communists, more advanced in theory than practice, quickly lost their political innocence and learned the organizational tactics they would use for the next seven decades. The anarchists were "sensitive, lively, intelligent, many-sided, and lofty-minded" and they "loved freedom and opposed authority," while the communists were "stubborn, self-assured, and courageous but at the same time dull, narrow-minded, [and] superficially informed," "worshiped authority" and "easily buckled under it." The communists won the battles, and "from chaos was born order; from equality were born stability; [were] excessively flexible and given to empty talk." The communists used "individual criticism" to hurl back against their critics. The result was that most of the time was given over to abstract psychological attitudes: You're too individualistic, you're too arrogant, you're too petit bourgeois, you have anarchist tendencies, etc. The ones who were criticized would think of similar criticisms to hurl back against their critics. The result was that everyone ended up blushing, and seeds of hatred were sown in people's hearts (OL: 54).

As one might expect from an oppositionist for life, Zheng was "criticized more than anyone else at these cell meetings" (OL: 55). This criticism did not hurt his immediate prospects in the Party; however. On his return to China in 1924, Zheng began work on the Party's official journal, Guide Weekly, under the editorship of Cai Hesen. He also did some translations, including Bukharin's The ABC of Communism.

Despite the opposition of Chen and many other Party leaders to the United Front policy, they all obeyed Party discipline and therefore did not make public their opposition to the policy. At the Fourth Party Congress in January 1925, "None of the members of the Central Committee expressed views that differed from [Comintern] instructions, nor did any of the delegates. The congress ran so smoothly it was more like a ceremonial assembly than a political discussion...." (OL: 78). Democratic centralism served to silence criticism of the policies that were to undermine the 1925-27 revolution. The "dull, narrow-minded" victors from Moscow and KUTV were teaching the Party the ways and means of Stalinist organization.

Although an excellent writer and translator, and an honest and loyal comrade, Zheng maintained himself near the top of the CCP hierarchy largely by not making enemies. Other cadres did not perceive him as a threat because he seemed to have so little ambition. Even after the coup in August 1927 deposed his close comrade Chen Duxiu from the Party leadership, Zheng was kept on by the new Central Committee. After the conference, as the United Front disintegrated, Zheng's focus was typically personal. He wandered around Hankou and Shanghai, feeling that his "only problem was that [he] had too little money to spend on pursuing pleasure" (OL: 117).

From 1927, however, Zheng became more dissatisfied with the CCP and moved closer to the opposition forming around Chen. Zheng was strongly opposed to Mao's Red Army, believing that it would cause the Party to abandon real revolution and become a purely military organization. Following Mao's path, the Party would "abandon the proletariat and start representing the peasants or even bandits (OL: 238)." Indeed, revolution in China should be essentially the same as revolution in other countries: there was no room in Zheng's Trotskyism for "special national characteristics" that exempted China from parts of Marxist theory (OL: 239).

While the main part of Zheng's book was written in the 1940s, a new section written in 1990 explains some of what happened to him after 1945. After World War II, Zheng remained an active Trotskyist, and despite overtures from friends within the official Party, he refused to either recant his views or, as many Trotskyists did, leave China. In a nationwide sweep in December 1952, Chen and perhaps a thousand other Trotskyists, including his wife, were arrested. Liu Jingzhen, Zheng's wife, was released in 1957, but Zheng was not released until 1979. During these twenty-seven years, Zheng was never charged with a crime nor criticized, but most of this work was lost during the Cultural Revolution. In his new freedom he served on the Shanghai People's Political Consultative Conference but held fast to his Trotskyist views. Just a few months after his release in 1979, Liu Jingzhen, the wife "who for twenty-seven years had done everything possible from the other side of prison walls to alleviate his suffering," died.

**Love and Politics—and Gender**

Liu Jingzhen and Zheng Chaolin began living together in 1927. In his memoirs, Zheng notes that this relationship "did not harm politics," and thus the two activists had the blessing of the
Party for their union. Many relationships between Party members did hurt politics, however, and Zheng, in the chapter “Love and Politics” (left out of the Chinese versions of Zheng’s memoirs), discusses the origins and fallout from these relationships. The stormy intra-party relationships Chen examines illuminate the relationship between gender and Communism in the early days of the CCP.

Christina Gilmartin has argued recently that the cause of women was set back by “the incorporation of traditional hierarchical gender patterns in the Chinese Communist polity.” Zheng’s work allows us another window on this process. The lack of feminist practice among Communist comrades wasn’t mere ideological laziness or cultural hypocrisy, it also sprang from personal politics. Relationships had important consequences in CCP politics: “Cai Hesen against Peng Shuzhi, Li Lisan against Cai Hesen, He Chang against Luo Yinong, Luo Yinong against Peng Shuzhi!” —all coming about as a result of disputes over lovers (OL: 149). This internal chaos and factionalism, spurred by relationship rivalries, may help explain why CCP leaders fell back on traditional relationship patterns: they simply needed to preserve order within the Party.

While some cadres became conservative on gender matters as a result of politicized love affairs, not all young Communists were as revolutionary regarding relationships as the vanguard of communists, such as Chen Duxiu, who talked about free choice marriages and other feminist issues. Many comrades looked down on May Fourth views of relationships as overly romantic; others, it seems, never really grappled with the issue. Speaking of his class at KUTV, Zheng reports that “Unlike young people in the early period of the May Fourth Movement, most of us who had been in Russia were not against arranged marriages” (OL: 139). Relationship rivalries among CCP leaders, combined with more traditional attitudes among younger activists, thus played a crucial role in pushing radical changes in gender relations to the side of the Communist political agenda.

The Trotskyists, China’s urban revolutionaries, were also China’s most internationalist and perhaps most democratic revolutionaries. But they were undermined by brutal repression from both the CCP and the GMD, as well as by their own inability to unite around a common program. Their legacy is ambiguous. They were too weak to be a serious political alternative, and this weakness dampens their appeal to those in China today who might be searching for a socialist path outside the CCP. They were too radical to enjoy the respectability afforded bourgeois democratic activists outside the major parties. Their critiques of the CCP’s lack of democracy, and their insistence that patriotism need not rule out internationalism, have kept them largely outside the bounds of acceptable public discourse in the PRC. But for Chen Duxiu, they might have fallen out of historical memory almost completely.

Fortunately, the works under review keep the Chinese Trotskyists, and their flawed but real commitment to joining socialism and democracy, alive for our reflection.

Notes
7. In an open letter, written after his expulsion from the party in 1929, Chen took his share of responsibility for the United Front policy, but also blamed the opportunism of the Third International: “The only hope of avoiding a very grave error was correct guidance by the proletarian policy of the International. But under the guidance of such a consistently opportunist policy how could the Chinese proletariat and the Communist Party clearly see their own future?” Chen Duxiu, “Appeal to All the Comrades of the CCP,” in Leon Trotsky, Leon Trotsky on China, (New York: Monad Press, 1976), p. 605.
8. Nick Knight offers an interesting story about Chen, the United Front, and intra-party democracy. According to Knight, Chen’s nasty disposition led Marxist theorist Li Da to leave the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1923 after a row with Chen over the United Front policy: “Chen stormed and railed at Li Da, banging the table and smashing a teacup, and threatening him with expulsion from the Party.” All this despite Chen’s own opposition to the United Front. Nick Knight, Li Da and Marxist Philosophy in China (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), p. 11.
10. CUR: 11, 32. Trotsky’s essay can be found in Trotsky, Leon Trotsky on China, pp. 345-97. According to Benton, Trotsky’s article “even caused a violent wavering among many of the older generation of CCP leaders who did not go over to the Opposition” (CUR: 32).
13. Perhaps it was Chen’s similar mistakes and fate which made him cast so critical an eye on Trotsky’s commitment to democracy. 14. Alex Callimicos, Trotskyism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 13.
16. Wang was a Trotskyist activist who worked with Chen Duxiu in 1930-1931. He left China in 1949 (CUR: 223).
18. Chen’s writings on World War II stand up well after more than five decades. For instance, his belief that “In the absence of revolutionary unity, even counterrevolutionary unity has a progressive significance, whether on a world scale or within a single country” (CALL: 102), definitely rings true after the horrors perpetrated by the Axis powers. It may also be relevant to activists seeking to find a radical alternative to the World Trade Organization/World Bank/regional free trade pacts that reign today. The radical implications of such unity for cross-national organizing of labor may do more to stem the tide against workers than protectionist nationalism.
19. OL: 16. This raises an interesting question: Did Zheng’s ability—and that of other activists as well—to “skip” the bourgeois stage
in thought cause him/them to underestimate the difficulty of China as a whole passing quickly through this stage?


21. The CCP engaged in revolutionary activity in the cities, but its purpose was to support the war against the Guomingdang in the countryside. See Joseph K. S. Yick, Making Urban Revolution in China (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1995).

Books Received—1998

The following books were received for review by BCAS in 1998.

Readers who wish to review any of these titles should contact book review editor Peter Zarrow (<p.zarrow@unsw.edu.au>) or Bulletin editor Tom Fenton (<tfenton@igc.org>).

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Research Report

Rural Situation in Post-Mao China and the Conditions of Migrant Workers: The Case of Gao Village

by Mobo Gao

The economic reforms instituted in China in the late 1970s have transformed Chinese society and it is clear that the material well-being of many Chinese has improved greatly since that time. Numerous studies confirm this general picture and it would be pedantic to cite references to document the obvious benefits of these reforms. This report intends to draw the attention of readers to the other side of China’s economic policies and practices. Focusing on the case of one rural village in Jiangxi province, this paper analyzes the reasons for material improvements in village life in China today and then highlights some of the detrimental aspects of post-Mao economic reforms. Finally, the paper discusses the conditions of villagers who have left their homes to become migrant workers.

The village examined here is Gao Village, where I was born and lived until 1973. I still have family connections in the village and have visited there many times in the 1990s. I made my first field research visit to the village in 1992, beginning the studies that would eventually result in a book entitled Gao Village: Rural Life since the Revolution (Hurst, 1998). I was visibly shocked by the changes that had taken place since my previous visit to Gao Village five years earlier. There was electricity in the village and most households now cooked with coal rather than firewood. Villagers wore leather shoes and sneakers; young people dressed in Western style suits, some with ties and even sunglasses! The material improvements were obvious. When I started talking to villagers, however, I found that they did not seem happier or more content. Instead, they complained a lot, mostly about corruption by local officials, the lack of security, a sense of disorientation, and the absence of any sense of law and order. Looking around at the physical appearance of the village, I sensed a lack of community spirit: there was no space for any public life, and the former village playground had been stripped of anything that could be removed. There was not even a proper path as there used to be in the village. Piles of pig and cow dung were everywhere. I also observed that villagers were now less willing to help each other for nothing.

During follow-up research visits I made in 1994, 1997, and 1998, I interviewed villagers young and old, as well as local officials and former cadres of the commune system. I requested and was given access to official records on various subjects, and I also visited several work sites in Xiamen and Guangdong where most of the migrant workers from Gao village worked and lived. In between visits I sent many information requests about the village to my brother, who either answered them himself or asked others for answers. This report is based on the information I gathered in these various ways.

Material Improvements

Gao village now has a registered population of 310 inhabitants. The village is not located in a remote or mountainous area, but along the edge of Poyang Lake, where there is fertile land for rice growing. Until the late 1970s the village had been almost completely self-sufficient. Villagers produced enough food and they wove their own clothes. The village was relatively isolated; it was only in 1973 that villagers began to hear any national or international news, when a loudspeaker was installed at the Production Team headquarters and news of the outside world was broadcast through official wires. Before 1988 villagers arranged their work and daily lives according to natural daylight since there was no electricity in the village. Up until the late 1970s only one villager—the “barefoot doctor”—had a watch and no villager except the doctor could afford a bicycle or a radio. Growing up in Gao Village I had always wanted three things: a knife that could be folded, a torchlight (flashlight), and a pair of rubber boots. It was not until I left the village that I acquired these items.

In 1978, in all of the 593 households in the Qinglin Production Brigade, to which Gao Village belonged, there were only 36 watches, 12 bicycles, 25 sewing machines, and 30 radios. Nowadays, small consumer products such as gloves and socks, torchlights, and hats and scarves, are no longer considered to be major items in the family budget. There were only two bicycles in Gao Village in the early 1980s; now there are forty-two. The village today has more than twenty television sets (most black-and-white). Householders no longer fluff cotton or spin yarn, that craft has died out. You are laughed at if you wear a pair of rice-straw shoes or home-made clothing, as villagers used to do. Villagers today wear woolen sweaters, windcheaters, raincoats, overcoats, and other clothes made of synthetic fibers.

One dramatic change in post-Mao rural China has been the dismantling of the commune system. In 1981 land in Gao Village was distributed to households equally on a per capita basis under...
what was called the Production Responsibility System. The claim is often made that the dismantling of the commune system, beginning in the late 1970s, resulted in the liberation of the villagers from the shackles of the commune, with production output increasing dramatically as a result. McMillan, Whalley, and Zhu, for example, attribute 78 percent of the growth in output per unit of agricultural inputs to the adoption of the Production Responsibility System; Lin puts the figure at 86.5 percent.

The Production Responsibility System gave villagers the right to grow crops for their own use; with this came a new sense of ownership. It is not surprising, then, that villagers would work harder than they did in the commune system. Yet it is wrong to assume that villagers had no sense of ownership in the commune system. Under the leadership of a production team leader, and within a production unit of ten to fifteen households, villagers had a very keen sense of ownership and self-management. Moreover, the elaborate evaluation and monitoring systems of work points and team work in the commune system were sufficient for coordination and supervision.

The lack of motivation, if such there was, might be due in part to the lack of a system of immediate rewards, since debts and credits were often not settled in a timely manner. Those who had credits could not be paid by the production team because those in debt were not able to pay up. There was simply no cash around. This was the case largely because the government controlled prices and had a monopoly over the procurement of agricultural produce. Therefore, one crucial factor in the material improvements in Gao Village in the post-Mao era was the change in the price and procurement systems.

Before 1979 the government had monopoly control of the grain market and any surplus grain produced in the village had to be sold to the state at state-designated prices. More than 180 items of agricultural produce were included in this "monopoly procurement" system. In 1979, the number of items was reduced to sixty-two. Two years later, the amount of grain sold to the state under the terms of the monopoly procurement system had dropped to only 64 percent of what it was in 1978. Not only was monopoly procurement reduced, allowing villagers to sell their produce in the market, but prices for the various items still included in the monopoly procurement system rose from 25 percent to 40 percent in 1979. This post-Mao reform policy led to an increase in income in rural areas because higher prices were paid for agricultural produce, while at the same time villagers were required to sell less of their grain to the state. The policy not only raised unit values, it also gave villagers an incentive to produce more. Income in Gao Village as a whole rose during the early 1980s as a result of these price increases and new-found market freedom. This leads to the conclusion that it was not the dismantling of the commune system per se that resulted in the rise in villagers' income in the early 1980s but rather the price and procurement reform policies put in place by the post-Mao Chinese government. Note that if the government had altered pricing and purchasing policies in a similar manner during the commune period the effect on the villagers' income would have been the same.

**Deterioration since the Mid-1980s**

The prices paid for agricultural produce, which rose so dramatically after the reforms started in 1979, began to fall by the mid-1980s. By the 1990s price increases were nominal. For instance, 100 jin (half a kilogram) of un-husked rice sold for 60 yuan in the mid 1990s, more than five times the 1972 price. However, if input costs and other payments are taken into consideration, this price increase for agricultural produce did mean an increase in income.

Take the family of Gao Changxian for example. In 1997, Gao Changxian had four mu of paddy fields and two mu of dry land on which he grew cotton and rape seed. Four mu of rice yielded 2,000 kilograms, which gave him 1200 yuan; two mu of dry land yielded 50 kilograms of ginned cotton, which gave him an income of 720 yuan; and 300 kilograms of rape seed gave him 500 yuan. Total income for the year, then was 2420 yuan. Production costs were 100 yuan for seeds and 1000 yuan for various agricultural chemicals. Taxes and levies in 1997 amounted to 240 yuan per person, which for the Gao family (two adults and three children) came to 1200 yuan. The family’s net income for 1997 was 100 yuan. Gao Changxian and his wife each spent about 90 days in the field, which means that they each earned 0.66 yuan a day, which is less than 8 cents a day at the present rate of exchange with the U.S. dollar. This was less than the average amount at face value that the best village laborer earned 0.66 yuan a day, which is less than 8 cents a day at the present rate of exchange with the U.S. dollar.
could earn back in 1972—in spite of an aggregate inflation rate of 500 percent since 1972!

Given this reality, how can we explain the obvious improvements in material conditions in Gao Village in recent years? The key lies not in income from the sale of agricultural produce, but in income from thousands of kilometers away, namely, the earnings of young villagers who have become migrant workers. By the mid 1990s, around 30 percent of the people had left the Gao Village area to become migrant workers. If each migrant worker sends an average of one hundred yuan a month back to Gao Village, which they in fact do, the cash income from 98 Gao Village migrant workers would amount to 117,600 yuan annually. This is a huge amount of money for the village, on top of which the absence of these workers substantially reduces the burden on the village’s resources.

**Corruption among Local Authorities**

One of the elements in the post-Mao reform policies was the loosening of state control, as evidenced in the disbanding of the commune system and the government’s financial contract system. But this change has given rise to abuses of power and corruption by local officials. The function and role of grassroots authorities such as the Village Committee and the xiang government are little more than that of extracting taxes and levies from villagers who become victims of the arbitrary rule of corrupt local officials.

Here we have only enough space to present some examples. In 1989, villagers in the area were ordered to pay five yuan per person for building pavilions in the middle of paddy fields so that when villagers worked during the summer they would have a place to rest. This was an excellent idea, supported by everyone. The money, a total amount of forty thousand yuan, was duly collected. However, up till now, not a single pavilion has been built. No one in the Village Committee bothered to give an account of where the money had gone. In 1990, the villagers were told that the former Production Brigade owed the government about twenty thousand yuan. In order to pay the debt, every villager was ordered to pay eighteen yuan. By the late 1980s, pressure and hardship had been mounting from all directions on Gao villagers. Because of the population increases, which by the late 1980s had lasted for four decades, ecological pressures had reached a crisis point. Villagers worked overtime to produce more grain for the government. As a consequence of the increasing application of chemical fertilizers and insecticides to produce more grain for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tax and Levies Paid by Gao Village, 1991 (all in yuan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National government:</strong> 5,198.4 yuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agriculture taxes = 4,463.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>special agriculture tax = 357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slaughter tax = 168.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education tax = 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>County:</strong> 2,909.43 yuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education levy = 1,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women and child health insurance levies = 67.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family planning levy = 369.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>broadcast communication levy = 75.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corvée levy (“voluntary labor”) = 683.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Xiang government:</strong> 5,647.42 yuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education levy = 1,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corvée levy = 421.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Guarantee Household levy = 112.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistance for households who have members serving in the army = 182.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construction labor levy = 140.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insurance for households without male labor = 606.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>domestic animal immunization levy = 150.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government bonds and militia training levy = 140.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fine for failure to fulfill the 1990 cotton production quota = 2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangxi Province newspaper levy = 28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>another newspaper levy = 140.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stamp duty = 8.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Village Committee:</strong> 2,718.5 yuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conference fee levy = 140.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levy for the village school = 838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salaries for Village Committee members = 1,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>village committee management levy = 281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 (above) illustrates, the villagers are taxed four times over, by the state, the County, the xiang, and the Village Committee. They are taxed for education, but they end up paying again, in cash, if their children go to school. They have to pay for newspapers they do not read; they have to pay for family planning, which they hate, and they have to contribute “voluntary” labor (corvée)—something they are under orders to do. Another levy, the so-called woman and child health insurance levy, is actually for covering the costs of forced abortions. During the 1990s, villagers even had to pay for government bonds that they could not afford to buy. By the late 1980s, pressure and hardships had been mounting from all directions on Gao villagers. Because of the population increases, which by the late 1980s had lasted for four decades, ecological pressures had reached a potentially disastrous level. The forest and bushes around the village had been destroyed as a result of the increasing demand for firewood. As a consequence of the increasing application of chemical fertilizers and insecticides to produce more grain for
the rapidly increasing population, aquatic life, which in the past had been an important source of nutritious food, has been wiped out.

The post-Mao reform of the pricing system did give Gao villagers some breathing space for several years in the early 1980s. But by the late 1980s, a large amount of surplus labor had accumulated in the village as a result of the increase in population. Yet there was no local industry able to absorb this surplus labor and no other source of revenue for the local authorities.11

Most serious of all, the abandonment of state responsibility for revenue and expenditure caused the local authorities to resort to measures that squeezed as much as possible out of the already poverty-stricken villagers. It was under these circumstances that industrial development in places far away from Gao Village became a way for families to cope with the deteriorating situation in the village.

Migrant Workers and Remittances

Since the late 1980s, a large number of rural residents have left their homes to work in the fast developing areas of coastal south China. By the mid 1990s, it was estimated that at any given time one million people, mostly rural, were on the move or working away from their homes.12 Thirty percent of Gao villagers have become part of what the Chinese press calls mangliu, “the blind floating population.” According to the head of the xiang government, 20 percent of the population in Yinbohu xiang has become migrant workers by 1997.

The 85 young men and 13 young women from Gao Village who had become migrant workers were all aged between fourteen and twenty-five.13 Nine of them had been apprenticed as carpenters, painters, and bamboo craftspeople before they left the village. Most were able to transfer their skills, but for the majority of migrant workers the work they found usually demanded very little skill; jobs available to migrant workers are typically repetitive and monotonous, demanding physical attention rather than mental agility. The enterprises in which most migrant workers labor are low-tech, e.g., the manufacturing of shoes, garments, toys, kitchenware, and simple tools.

By the mid 1990s, 34 Gao villagers had gone to the city of Shantou in Guangdong Province, 18 to Hainan, 14 to the city of Xiamen in Fujian Province, 7 to Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province, 4 to Jiujiang, 4 to Jingdezhen, 3 to Nanjing, 1 to Wuhan, and 2 to Lanzhou. The rest have no fixed place of work; they roam around looking for temporary jobs. Those who migrated to the three places nearest to Gao Village (Nanchang, Jiujiang and Jingdezhen) are working mostly as nannies, if they are female, and carpenters and painters, if they are male.

The way these Gao villagers came to work in these places is typical of rural migration in China today. First of all, they went where they had relatives and friends. Those who went to Nanchang, Jingdezhen, and Jiujiang all had some relationship with former Gao villagers who lived in these places. Five Gao villagers had been able to move to Jingdezhen and Jiujiang in the 1950s and two went to Nanchang during the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, these people themselves, or their connections in these cities, were able to find work for Gao villagers who were related to them in some way.

Second, enterprises in coastal south China do not usually need to advertise to fill job openings. When these enterprises want to recruit more workers, they tend to ask their employees to nominate their fellow villagers. By doing so, the employers avoid not only advertising costs, but also any government scru-

tiny of their working conditions and tax arrangements. (Avoiding official advertising channels means the employers can get away with not having to sign contracts with migrant workers.) Furthermore, the existing employees are required to act as guarantors for their fellow villagers. The guarantees required cover labor discipline, workshop theft, level of education, and conformity with child labor regulations. If anything goes wrong, not only the new employee but also his or her guarantor is punished. As a result of this system, groups of migrant workers tend to work in the same workshop as others from their village. For instance, the eight migrant workers from Gao Village in Xiamen all work in one kitchenware factory; they were all nominated by Gao Changwen.

Conditions of Gao Village Migrant Workers14

During the 1990s, Gao Village migrant workers earned between 300 and 400 yuan a month, or eight to ten yuan a day. Earnings were a little higher than 400 if the workers did piece work. However, the rate of piece work is always set so that to earn more than 600 yuan a month is rare, even if workers push themselves to their physical limits. The best accommodations for migrant workers are factory dormitories. A standard dormitory is a room of ten to sixteen square meters shared by ten to sixteen people of the same sex. The rooms usually contain bunk beds and little else besides a bare bulb hanging in the middle of the ceiling. The workers have to bring their own bedding and all their belongings are either placed on or under their beds. Everyone has a mosquito net to ensure some privacy.

Workers pay between 30 to 50 yuan a month for their lodging. Some enterprises do not provide lodging at all, in which case the workers have to live in shelters they build themselves out of cardboard, bamboo poles, and whatever else can be picked up from the rubbish dump. The workers use plastic buckets to fetch water from a nearby tap or well to drink and to wash. Migrant workers all eat in factory canteens that provide basic food, which is identical from day to day: porridge and pickled vegetables for breakfast, some steamed rice with whatever seasonal vegetables are available mixed with a few pieces of meat, mostly pork fat, for lunch and supper. Most migrant workers have to buy food from a street corner shop to supplement their diet.

Migrant workers, such as those from Gao Village, have to work at least six days a week and some seven days a week. A typical working day is ten to fourteen hours and some work as long as twenty hours. For most workers, any time that can be spared is spent sleeping. Occasionally they play poker or mah-jong. A local resident may set up a couple of snooker tables near the factory for the workers to use. One in Xiamen charged each player half a yuan a go and another in Shenzhen charged one yuan for a game. Some young workers get so bored that they spend all their savings on gambling. One young Gao villager in Xiamen has been doing just that for many years; he has never been able to send even a cent home. The most popular leisure activity is visiting with fellow workers from the same place of origin. Occasionally, workers may catch a television program in a corner shop. In some factories, a television set is provided in the canteen for workers to watch.

Migrant workers are unable to calculate their hourly rate of pay because there is no such thing as an eight-hour working day. Workers are never told about their hours of work when they are hired, whether they sign a contract or not. Only a monthly wage is determined in advance. Therefore, the most common way for private enterprises to extract as much as possible from migrant
workers is to make them work as many hours as possible. A worker who refuses to work overtime can either be dismissed straight-away or be punished with reduced wages. In the case of piece work, the situation is no less exploitative. The usual practice is that a piece rate is not stipulated and migrant workers are only told that if they produce so many pieces they will get so much.

The kitchenware factory in Xiamen where eight Gao villagers are working had a profit of more than twenty million yuan in 1993. On paper, the basic wage of an average worker in this factory that year was 250 yuan a month. An additional 100 yuan for overtime work brought the monthly total to 350 yuan. However, the number of hours of overtime work was not specified either orally or on paper. The average overtime was four hours a day and thirty hours a week. Sometimes when told by the boss that there was an increase in customer orders, overtime could be as long as eight hours a day. If a worker refused to work overtime, a penalty in the form of a five-to-ten yuan-a-day deduction from the so-called basic wage was imposed. Refusal to work overtime several times would result in dismissal. Workers must work overtime for thirty-odd hours a week for an extra of 100 yuan a month.

Working conditions in these private factories are primitive and in some places very dangerous. Workshops are crowded, polluted, and extremely hot in summer. In some workshops I visited in 1994, the noise level was unbearable. There are often reports about the poor standards of worker safety and about the mistreatment of migrant workers. The most frequently reported accidents involve injuries such as losing fingers or arms. In a hardware factory in Shenzhen, five accidents in the space of a single week resulted in workers having their fingers cut off. The boss refused to take any measures to prevent further accidents.

There are no national statistics available on injuries and deaths caused by such workplace accidents. Figures from one specific area, however, may indicate the seriousness of the situation nationwide. By 1994, six out of the 4,000 villagers who had left Yinbaohu xiang (where Gao Village is located) as migrant workers, had died as a result of work-related accidents.

Settlement for such accidents varies from place to place. Judging from the payments made in the case of the six villagers from Yinbaohu xiang, the average death compensation in the 1990s was 10,000 yuan (according to the current exchange rate of one U.S. dollar equaling a bit more than eight yuan). One boy from Jingo Village was crippled by an industrial accident in 1990. He can no longer move and has to lie in bed all day long. This boy was given a one-time compensation payment of 5,000 yuan. Another migrant worker, Gao Yuangui, broke his left foot while working in Shantou in 1991. The boss paid only 80 percent of his hospital costs and subsequently fired him. In some places, the injured worker is hospitalized at the employer's expense until the worker is again well enough to work. If the worker is not able to resume work, he or she will be dismissed, some with some compensation, and others with nothing. In the Xiamen kitchenware factory where Gao villagers work, a worker once lost all the fingers off one hand. The employer paid the hospital costs and gave the worker six months' basic wage, that is, 250 yuan multiplied by six.

In another case in the same factory, the skin of a worker's whole arm was accidentally peeled off by a machine lathe. The factory owner paid the worker 20,000 yuan for hospital costs—no more. For the factory owner the cost was more than two death compensation payments. Migrant workers from Gao Village informed me that the boss in their factory would rather see a worker killed in an accident rather than survive with a serious injury because survivors cost more. Once when a forest area was being cleared for the expansion of a factory site, a migrant worker was struck by a falling tree. The boss laughed when he saw that the worker was dead. He was pleased because the death compensation was less than the hospital costs he would have had to pay had the worker survived. The boss, a man from Hong Kong, commented that the worker's red blood prophesied a lucky beginning for the new factory site.

Migrant workers are victims of other forms of mistreatment and exploitation. One common practice is that of "dodging payment." A factory owner may make the workers work for unreasonably long hours, to the extent that they can no longer cope physically. As a result the workers' so-called normal wages...
Looking around at the physical appearance of the village, I sensed a lack of community spirit: there was no space for any public life, and the former village playground had been stripped of anything that could be removed. There was not even a proper path as there used to be in the village. (Photo: Gao Village, 1998)

are docked as punishment. Some employers even find excuses not to pay the workers at all. Another method is to delay payments or break the promise of a pay increase. In the kitchenware factory in Xiamen, for instance, whenever customers' orders come in and the boss wants the workers to work hard, he will promise a pay increase to everyone. For two consecutive years, however, this has never happened.

In many cases, factory rules and discipline are arbitrary, and there is no external accountability. Most factories use fines as a major method of management. Workers may be fined for going to the toilet, for being sick, or for taking a leave of absence.

Other measures employed by factory owners to intimidate migrant workers and make them submit to the boss's orders include various kinds of deposits. Upon employment migrant workers are required to pay, or have deducted from their first wage payments, a security deposit, a contract deposit if there is a contract, a tool deposit, a temporary residence nomination deposit, and a resignation deposit. These deposits can total between 400 and 1,000 yuan. Some migrant workers are stuck with their employers because of these outrageous deposits.

Cash payments, however low and exploitative by Western standards, are very attractive to rural residents in China. Migrant workers had most likely never seen so much cash in their lives. Out of their earnings of from 300 to 400 yuan per month, most workers can save at least one hundred and some even two hundred a month. An annual remittance of between 1,200 and 2,400 yuan is of great value to the villagers back home. To the migrant workers the conditions in these private enterprises do not seem harsher than those in the paddy fields. At least they are away from the sun in summer and cold and wet in winter. In any case these rural youngsters are not aware of the health hazards caused by unhealthy working conditions—partly because of their ignorance and partly because it may take a number of years before symptoms appear. As for accidents, these youngsters, like drivers, tend to think that they are lucky, and that accidents will not happen to them. On top of the incentive of cash earnings, rural youth are excited about the prospect of travelling to the big city to work.

Whatever migrant workers may think and feel about their work and living conditions, their situation is the picture of the laissez-faire style of capitalism witnessed in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. However, there are "Chinese characteristics" that alleviate the pain and hardship of migrant workers. One of these is the sense of obligation towards one's fellow villagers. Because of the recruitment process, workers tend to form groups whose members are from the same place of origin. If someone is sick, the others can be relied on to stand in. They lend money to one other in cases of emergency. They fight to defend one another from outside bullying, and they even band together against the boss. With no trade union to back them up, the workers use this group identity to offset the power of the boss, who may find it more difficult to deal with a group of discontented young workers than with an individual.

The case of Gao Changwen is an example. Because Gao Changwen was the first to leave Gao village as a migrant worker, and because he is the most educated of the Gao Village migrant workers, almost every other day there is somebody coming to him for help. They come to him looking for a job, or to borrow money, or when they need a place to sleep. During the five years that he worked as an assistant manager—earning for a salary of more than 800 yuan a month—he loaned a couple of thousand yuan to workers who asked for his help. He does not expect that he will ever be repaid. Sometimes, a Gao villager, or a villager from Qinglin may just arrive at his doorstep unannounced and expect Gao Changwen to fix everything. In such cases, Gao Changwen has either to find a job for the villager or buy a train ticket to send the villager back home. If he ever failed to help, Gao Changwen would not have "the face" to return to Gao Village.

Impact on Village Life

The "push and pull" factors are such that it is now considered that a young Gao villager is an odd person out if he or she stays in the village. In fact, virtually all the young people in Gao village have gone. Almost every household has at least one youngster who has left; in some households as many as three in
the family have left. The rest of the villagers are middle aged or elderly men and women who work on the land to pay agriculture taxes. They use the money sent home by the migrant workers to build houses, to send little sisters and brothers to school, and to pay the local levies.

The fact that so many people have left Gao Village and that their earnings add an unprecedented amount of cash income to the village has brought about a number of changes in Gao Village, some immediate, others slower in coming and possibly more far reaching. The most immediate effect is that life is possible in Gao Village in spite of the harsh local levies. Villagers are able to afford to send children to school at least from grade one to grade three. By 1994, all school-aged children were enrolled in grades one through three.

Materially the villagers are better off; but the village is lifeless and listless. With no young males in the village—except during the annual Spring Festival—Gao Village is quieter. But this surface peacefulness also gives a sense of the village being abandoned. The center of activities is no longer located in the village and the aspirations and expectations of the whole village lie thousands of miles away. For the first time in Gao Village's history, the villagers have realized that they do not have to rely on the local land and water for a living. Ecological and resource pressures have been reduced dramatically. Thirty percent of Gao villagers no longer depend on the land for a livelihood. Gao villagers have more grain per capita, and they can afford to be less exploitative of local land and water. Juvenile crime, which had increased sharply during the late 1980s, declined dramatically in the early 1990s for the simple fact that young people are not around.

Some of the less-obvious consequences of migrant labor are more far reaching. The young migrant workers have begun to let their hair grow long and they wear dark sunglasses. They have begun to assert their own identity by not wanting to marry local girls any more. Four Gao villagers have already married co-workers from other parts of China—without consulting their parents. Gao Changwen, a migrant worker, has married an educated woman from Boyang County Town, who also went to Xiamen as a migrant worker. Many of the migrant workers have boy or girl friends, without necessarily intending to get married. A young woman from Gao Village had worked as a nanny in Jingdezhen for a number of years, said to me during an interview in 1992 that she did not want to get married because she wanted to be free. In 1992 during the Spring Festival, Gao Chaolin brought a wife home unannounced, to the great surprise and consternation of his parents. The fact that so many people have left Gao Village and that their earnings add an unprecedented amount of cash income to the village has brought about a number of changes in Gao Village, some immediate, others slower in coming and possibly more far reaching. The most immediate effect is that life is possible in Gao Village in spite of the harsh local levies. Villagers are able to afford to send children to school at least from grade one to grade three. By 1994, all school-aged children were enrolled in grades one through three.

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The demographic changes are sweeping but unsettling for Gao Village. If the present process continues, more and more young people will leave Gao Village. Where are these people eventually going to settle down? The current assumption by both the government and Gao villagers is that these young people will eventually get married and come back home. It used to be the case that the villagers would get married young and have children when young. Since the 1990s, however, they tend to marry late and have children even later largely because they are too busy "making money."

It is still too early to predict what will happen, because the process has been going on for less than a decade. Some migrant workers have no intention of returning to Gao Village. Gao Changwen, for instance, has already bought a flat in Boyang County Town and he intends to set up his own business if and when he and his wife quit migrant work. Others who married women from other parts of China are not likely to return to the village. If the present process continues, given that China remains stable and its economy maintains its present rate of growth, Gao Village as an entity will eventually disappear from the earth.

In March 1998, when I visited the village again, I detected an alarming change. The number of village migrant workers had not increased, but had decreased for the first time in years. Two young villagers returned home after failing to find any work. Another two came back because their employers reduced their earnings to the extent that it was not worthwhile working any more, even for them. I have not been able to determine whether these new developments are related in any way to the Asian currency crisis.

**Concluding Remarks**

It is clear that the obvious improvements in the standard of living in Gao Village are due in large part to the blood and sweat of migrant workers. Though the life and working conditions of the migrant workers are horrendous by "Western" standards it is unlikely that the workers would want to return to Gao Village if given the choice. This is the case for many good reasons. First, the earnings from migrant labor are necessary for survival. The economic "pull" and "push" factors are such that the cash income from migrant labor is very attractive. Second, it is considered "prestigious" to travel and to work in urban areas. The young people feel proud that they are the main providers of their family income. Third, the young workers themselves do not find factory work necessarily harsher than laboring in the fields. As for health hazards and poor working conditions, they are not immediately obvious to young people from rural areas like Gao Village. They choose to ignore them, therefore. Finally, there is the excitement of seeing a different world and of being able to afford otherwise unattainable materials things such as fashionable clothing. The phenomenon of workers migrating to the cities from rural China on such a scale has developed only in recent years. Thus, these migrant workers are still young. What will they do when they get married? Where will they settle down? In urban areas or back in their villages? Government policies are crucial in determining the final outcome, but there are no clear signs yet of what government policies are in this regard.

**Notes**

1. I say "registered" because many villagers have left the village as migrant workers but are still officially registered as belonging to Gao Village.

2. These figures are from the official Production Brigade Record, which was classified as *jimi* ("secret") by the county authorities.


6. That pricing and procurement policies were a crucial factor can be seen from what happened after 1985. Between 1979 and 1985, after fulfilling the quotas, villagers could sell their produce to the state at the above-quota bonus price (for grain and oil seeds these prices were 50 percent higher than the quota price; for cotton it was 30 percent higher). The villagers also had the option to sell their produce at the negotiated prices which were slightly lower than the market price. Furthermore, sale at negotiated prices was not compulsory, and the villagers had the option to sell their produce in the market. Grain procured at the above-quota and negotiated prices was sold at considerably lower prices to urban residents, causing substantial financial losses for the government. Assuming that the Chinese peasantry benefited too much from price increases in agricultural produce, and seeing that subsidies for urban residents were stretching the government's budget, the government responded in 1985 by lowering monopoly purchase prices for agricultural produce and raising the prices of industrial goods. In 1985, the state monopoly purchase price of grain was 28 percent lower than that in 1984. At the same time, prices for chemical fertilizers were 43 percent higher than in 1983, and prices for insecticides were 82.8 percent higher than in 1983. (An Xi-yi, "Development and Improvement of Agricultural Marketing") Monopoly procurement was re-imposed and grain trade on the free market was prohibited unless quotas had been met. As a result, agricultural production output at national level dropped in 1985, in spite of the government's assurance in 1984 that the Production Responsibility System would remain unchanged for at least fifteen years. For instance, national per capita output of grain dropped from 392.84 kilograms in 1984 to 360.70 kilograms in 1985 (China Statistical Yearbook 1995 [Beijing: Zhongguo Tongji Chubanshe, 1995], p. 31, Table 2-9).

7. Yuan is a Chinese currency unit. Currently, about 8.50 yuan equals US$1.00.

8. Mu is a Chinese surface size unit. One mu equals 0.0667 hectares.

9. Xiang can be loosely translated as township. However, in the Gao Village area there are no towns but only villages of various size though the lowest local authority is called the xiang government.

10. These figures were obtained during my research trip in 1992 when I was shown the original document by the village head.

11. In other areas such as Guangdong and Fujian where there has been rapid industrialization and commercialization (either as a result of foreign investment and/or as a result of expansion of township enterprises) the situation is more positive. Industrialization in these areas has turned a large number of villages into towns, and towns into cities. As urbanization takes place the economy of self-sufficiency breaks down, and with it disappears the cellular nature of the village structure. Commercialization has also flourished in these areas. In the most commercially developed provinces, on average one in every seven rural households has been involved in non-agricultural businesses. One likely consequence of such industrial development and commercialization is that with income from industrial production, local authorities can raise sufficient revenue without having to plunder the villagers for financial income. For a discussion of how the fiscal reform has positively affected the development of rural industry see Jean C. Oi, "The Role of the Local State in China's Transitional Economy," China Quarterly, no. 144 (December 1995): 1132-1149.


13. The only old villager was Gao Renfeng who was forty-eight. Gao Renfeng was able to find work as a migrant worker at this age because he had acquired some skills as a mechanic during the commune period. At that time he was assigned to look after an engine and water pump for paddyrigation for Gao Village. Because of his skills he was able to work as a mechanic in a workshop in Guangzhou.


16. A leather factory in Shenzhen only gave 100 yuan a month to its workers as a living allowance for the whole of 1993. The reason given to the workers was that the boss was not around (Shenzhen Shangbao [Shenzhen Commercial Daily], 14 January 1994, p. 1). The boss in a Huatai electronics factory was reported to have deducted half a month's wages from his workers because they went home for their traditional Spring Festival in February. Workers in a garment factory in Fuyong-zen went on strike many times because their wages were always in arrears. Their wages for August 1993 were not paid until the end of October and their wages for November and December had not been paid when the workers were preparing to go home for the Spring Festival in February (Shenzhen Shangbao, 1 February 1994, p.11).

17. One Taiwan-funded factory in Fuzhou stipulates that sick leave of one hour incurs a fine of two yuan, and any sick leave longer than one hour is taken to be an absence of a whole day, the penalty for which is to deduct three days' wage. In a factory in Baao in Guangdong, one of the thirteen factory rules is that anyone who violates a factory rule will be caned like a dog (Yangcheng Wambao [Yangcheng Evening News], 29 March 1994, p.8).

Book Review


Reviewed by Olle Törnquist

Order reigned in Indonesia, for decades. Individual protests, strikes, and East Timorese resistance did not disturb the stability—a stability as remarkable as the oppression was potent and the growth rate high. Now the picture is a different one. The economy is in crisis and political change is inescapable; the risk is that the situation will continue to be violent.

Indonesia has had just two democratic elections—one at the national level in 1955 and the other at the local level in 1957. In the local election, reformist communists were on their way to producing instead; election campaigns thereafter have been tightly controlled affairs. In the face of the parliamentary election in 1997, however, as well as the indirect presidential election in March 1998, the regime has been forced to crack down on opposition leaders such as Megawati and on the democracy movement. Hundreds lost their lives during the election campaign in 1998; riots were reported every week—several were directed as Chinese residents. On top of the political turmoil, millions of Indonesians have also been struck by an economic crisis, including harvest failures.

What does all of this mean? And above all: how can we explain the political violence? Today’s protests and riots have an ethnic and religious character and many claim that this confirms the conclusions from studies done of Java at the end of the 1950s.
by Clifford Geertz, the world-famous anthropologist. According to Geertz, Indonesian politics was stamped by four socio-cultural streams (alirans): two groups of “devoted” Muslims (santri)—“traditionalists” and “modernists”; the Javanese common people (abangan); and their lords (prjaji). Minorities like the Chinese were in addition to these groups. Politics and conflict rested on so-called primordial ethnic and religious bases, according to Geertz, (e.g., the communists of the time were tied to the abangan) and violence and conflict could be avoided only when the state checked and integrated these alirans. Sukarno failed in this effort, but Suharto succeeded. Now this argument has returned. Political violence and threats to stability, it is argued, reflect the fact that conflicts rooted in ethnicity and religion have come to the surface again. Everyone from post-modern anthropologists to paternal gentlemen now contends that these identities may assume even greater importance than they did under Sukarno (when, after all, a series of groups did unite in the struggle for national independence, freedom, and modernization). Renewed and vigorous efforts are therefore needed to handle the “multicultural” problem and to prevent the masses from running amok.

There is special cause [now] to study Robinson’s historical examples and explanations—and to adopt a critical attitude not only towards the powerful survivors from the Suharto era but also towards their foreign patrons.

Explanations of this sort have long been tossed back and forth in the absence of good alternative analyses of the fundamental political dynamic behind the elite game in Jakarta. Now, however, an unusually sharp, exciting and well-written study is available, a study that is not only of general interest but one that should also be mandatory reading for every enlightened traveler to Bali: Geoffrey Robinson’s The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali.

Bali is usually depicted as a harmonious anomaly in Indonesia. The local culture is said to be different, and Geertz’s socio-cultural streams are absent. Thus, the commonly accepted bases for explosive political conflict simply do not exist in Bali. Yet the mass murder of leftists in 1965-66 was the worst right here in the middle of paradise—beneath the palms on the beach; among the rice terraces, temples, and studios in the mountains. How could this be?

Robinson goes far back in time, searching the archives, examining research reports, interviewing those who were there. He draws on these materials to make the story come alive for readers today. The result is amazingly effective and clear. Cultural traits are shown not to matter very much in themselves. Both harmony and political violence in Bali vary sooner with the exercise of authority by external and central-state actors—as well as with how such intervention relates to the island’s own social and economic conditions. Strong external and central-state dominance—whether by the Dutch, the Japanese or Suharto—coincides with periods of relative harmony (notwithstanding the various methods used to divide and rule), while a weaker and more divided central power—as during periods of resistance and under Sukarno—an open up greater space for the organization and manipulation of latent conflicts over land and other vital resources.

We may therefore conclude, together with John Sidel (see the journal Indonesia, no. 63), that Robinson’s results both refute Geertz’ cultural explanation and undermine the argument that continued control over ethnic and religious groups is necessary. Dominating such groups may suppress the surface manifestations, but it does not solve the real social and economic conflicts that Indonesia has identified. Against Geertz’ established perspective, then, stands an historical interpretation, one that stresses the importance of socio-economic conflict in combination with political repression.

How then can one use Robinson’s approach to explain the rising levels of violence in Indonesia today, and at the same time predict what will happen tomorrow? The most important thing, as far as I understand it, is that the working and middle classes have grown, while at the same time large youth groups have become politically more mobile and general discontent with the despotic political system and with the unjust distribution of incomes and wealth has increased. During the first half of the nineties these changes led, in combination with conflicts within the elite, to certain limited opportunities for political association and expression. The regime, however, could not handle the clearer conflicts that emerged. In the summer of 1996, the repressive lid was jammed on again. There was not, consequently, even a weakly organized democracy movement capable of channeling frustrations. Protests tended therefore to take violent and primordial expressions. For one thing, although ethnic and religious loyalties and some organizations were permitted, class loyalties and class-based organizations were not. For another, the regime itself stimulated and even paid many instigators—both to escape an open display of state violence against dissidents and to justify a policy of national harmony enforced by autocratic means. The most recent example was in early May 1998 when prices increased dramatically and hired goons and sections of the armed forces instigated everything from looting to the widespread rape of Chinese women. Hence, what we can learn from this example (as from so many others) is that while it is true that riots need fertile and well-prepared soil, this is never enough. Riots do not start spontaneously or accidentally. (Indonesians might benefit from reading Paul R. Brass’s recent anthology on India, Riots and Pogroms [Macmillan]. )

Among the old followers of Suharto who are trying to survive, similar provocations may well continue. And the tense situation is accentuated by both the drought and the economic crisis. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and most foreign governments aim to ensure stability by means of austerity measures, emergency relief, and with greater freedom for foreign capital. The effect is that, among other things, millions of workers and white-collar employees have been laid off and interest rates and prices continue to rise. There is competition over the distribution of relief to various constituents. Many try to protest, but the opposition (aside from some religious movements) still lacks powerful organizations of its own—and the regime still lacks representative opposition parties with whom to negotiate solutions. The old and sick president was able to hold on until his aides left to save their own skins. Suharto has stepped down, but no one knows how the successor regime will fare. At any rate, the effectiveness of central government control is certain to diminish.

The risk is great, then, that we are headed for a period of widespread (if not always large-scale) political violence. There is special cause, therefore, to study Robinson’s historical exam-
ple and explanations—and to adopt a critical attitude not only towards the powerful survivors from the Suharto era but also towards their foreign patrons.

BOOKS RECEIVED continued from page 69


East Asia


Northeast Asia


For a complete list of books received for review, visit the BCAS Web site: <http://csf.colorado.edu/bcas/>


Dee Mack Williams: "Alcohol Indulgence in a Mongolian Community of China"

Joseph Tharamangalam: "The Ferils of Social Development without Economic Growth: The Development Debacle of Kerala, India"

J. David Seldon: "HIV-AIDS in Nepal: The Coming Crisis"

Perspectives

Vera Schwarzw: "A Brimming Darkness: The Voice of Memory/The Silence of Pain in China after the Cultural Revolution"

Review Essays


Short Reviews

Kenneth Pomeranz: China's Motor: One Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism, by Hill Gates

Lane Fenrich: An Exhibit Denied: Lobbying the History of the Enola Gay, by Martin Harwit

Leela Fernande: Dry Wells and Deserted: Women: Gender, Ecology and Agency in Rural India, by Brinda Rao

Photo Essay

Lou Dematteis and Dana Sachs: "A Portrait of Viet Nam"

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Textbook Nationalism, Citizenship, and War: Comparative Perspectives

Introduction

Laura Hein and Mark Selden, guest editors: "Learning Citizenship from the Past: Textbook Nationalism, Global Context, and Social Change"

Four Dimensions of the Current Debate over Textbooks in Japan

Gavan McCormack: "The Japanese Movement to 'Correct' History"

Nakamura Masanori: "The History Textbook Controversy and Nationalism"

Aaron Gerow: "Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: The New Neotonal Revisionism in Japan"

Inokuchi Hiromitsu and Nozaki Yoshiko: "Japanese Education, Nationalism, and Ienaga Saburo's Court Challenges"

Problems of Strategy

Kimijima Kazuhiro: "The Japan-South Korea Joint Study Group on History Textbooks and the Continuing Legacy of Japanese Colonialism"

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International Contexts

Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal: "Identity and Transnationalization in German School Textbooks"

Stevan Harrell and Bamo Ai: "Combining Ethnic Heritage and National Unity: A Paradigm of Nuosu (Yi) Language Textbooks in China"

David Hunt: "War Crimes and the Vietnamese People: American Representations and Silences"

Review Essay


Short Review

Sonia Ryang: The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity, by Susan J. Napier

Vol. 30, No. 3 / July-September 1998

Jensine Larsen: "Crude Investment: The Case of the Yadana Pipeline in Burma"

David Roberts: "Meddling while Phnom Penh Burned: The U.S. Role in the Cambodian Scession, June 1993"


Photo Exhibit: "Sha Fu of Calcutta"

Review Essays


Book Reviews

Andre Gunner Frank: Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teaching, ed. Ainslie T. Embree and Carol Gluck

Nick Thomas: The Hongkong-Guangdong Link: Partnership in Flux, ed. Reginald Yin-Wang Kwok and Alvin Y. So

An Exchange: Hill Gates and Kenneth Pomeranz

Commentary

Olle Törnqvist: "The Indonesian Lesson"

Vol. 30, No. 4 / October-December 1998

Sonia Ryang: "Inscribed (Men's) Bodies, Scented (Women's) Words: Rethinking Colonial Displacement of Koreans in Japan"

Andrew K. J. Wyatt: "Dalit Christians and Identity Politics in India"

Philip Hooken Park: "The Cause of the Acute Food Crisis in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea"


Joseph Tharamangalam: "A Rejoinder"

Review Essays


Research Report

Mobo Gao: "Rural Situation in Post-Mao China and the Conditions of Migrant Workers: The Case of Gao Village"

Book Review

Because all that was yours was desolated
the Gods of the Godhouse
who engraved fate on your forehead
were flung in the gutter....
Why did the 33 crores of Gods
dancing arrogantly in the alley
come to life again?
In broad daylight lighting the torch,
brandishing weapons in eight hands,
panting with bloody tongue,
they showed the transvestite which is traditional culture.
You say you want to leave
this haunted town forever!
Oh yes, how can you run so far.
You may go anywhere, but even there
you will bump up against the ochre-colored gods.

by Daya Pawar, translated by Rekha Damle and Eleanor Zelliot
from Kondwada (Pune: Margowa, 1964)

Nowadays the same tea shop owner
calls again and again
"Come on in, sir, come in...."
So, my friends! I agree
my hometown folks are changing
but
I also know that even if the rope is burned
the twist is still there
because
like a fly snared in snot
when the time comes to marry daughters
he is stuck in horoscope, caste, family line, kin.
He never can get free.

by Pralhad Chendvankar, translated by Jayant Karve, Veena Deo,
Eleanor Zelliot from Asmitadarsinh (Diwali issue, 1988).

If you were to live the life we live (then out of you
would poems arise).
We: kicked and spat at for our piece of bread
You: fetch fulfillment and name of the Lord.
We: down-gutter degraders of our heritage
You: its sole repository and descendants of the sage.
We: never have a paisa to scratch our arse
You: the golden cup of offerings in your bank.
Your bodies flame in sandalwood
Ours you shovel under half-turned sand.
Would the world change, and fast,
if you were forced to live at last
this life that’s all we’ve ever had?

by Arun Kamble, translated by Gauri Deshpande,
published in the Times Weekly Supplement (25 November 1973)

These Dalit poems are translated from the Marathi. The Dalit literary movement arose in Maharashtra
and has been an active force for the past thirty years in literary and social matters. —Eleanor Zelliot