

Chen Hansheng and the Rural Social Survey of the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica

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Abstract

In the 1920s and 1930s, China set off an upsurge of rural social investigation. The rural social investigation in Wuxi and other places led by Chen Hansheng, a Marxist scholar, not only provided a theoretical basis for the debate on the nature of Chinese society and the rural land revolution of the Communist Party of China at that time, but also provided a useful reference for the construction of socialist countryside with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

Keywords

Academia Sinica; Chen Hansheng; Rural Social Survey.

1. Introduction

Chen Hansheng (1897-2004), formerly known as Chen shu, was born in Wuxi, Jiangsu province. In 1915, Chen Hansheng went to the United States to study. He received his master's degree in history from the university of Chicago in 1921 and his doctor's degree from the university of Berlin in 1924. At the invitation of Cai Yuanpei, President of Peking University, he returned to China and became a professor of history at Peking University. In 1927, Chen Hansheng went to Moscow to work at the third international peasant institute. While in Moscow, Chen Hansheng and Magyar, a Hungarian who heads the eastern department of the international institute of peasant movements, argued about the nature of China's rural society. Magyar believed that the Chinese rural society at that time was already capitalist in nature. Although Chen Hansheng disagreed with Magyar's point of view, he could not provide sufficient evidence to refute it, so he came up with the idea of in-depth investigation of rural China. In 1928, Chen Hansheng returned to China. In the spring of 1929, at the invitation of Cai Yuanpei, President of the Academia Sinica, he became a researcher of the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica, his desire to carry out a rural social survey was put into practice.

Under the trust and support of the President, Cai Yuanpei and Director-General, Yang Quan, Chen Hansheng presides over the Institute of Social Sciences. Before carrying out the large-scale rural survey, Chen Hansheng led the social studies group of the Institute of Social Sciences to investigate the living conditions of the workers of the Japanese-owned textile factory in Shanghai and the internal exiled refugees of the Northeast Yingkou, Dalian, Changchun and Qiqihar who rushed to Northeast. These field survey activities have accumulated experience for the subsequent rural survey.[1]

In consideration of China's vast territory and its varied rural conditions, Chen Hansheng decided to focus on Wuxi in the Yangtze river basin, Guangdong in the pearl river basin and Baoding in the north. Chen Hansheng chose these places to conduct rural surveys because he believes that "Jiangnan, Hebei and Lingnan are the places where China's industry and commerce are relatively developed and the rural economy is changing the fastest. If we can

thoroughly understand how the relations of production in these three different economic regions have evolved there, and understand the nature of their social structures, it is not difficult to get a general idea of the process of national socio-economic development; In order to save rural economy, it is a concise way to start with these three places.”[2]

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Rural Survey in Wuxi

From July to September 1929, under the leadership of Chen Hansheng, the Institute of Social Sciences of academia sinica set up a 45-member investigation team in rural Wuxi, Jiangsu province. The investigation team was divided into four groups, led by Zhang Jiafu, Qian Junrui, Qin Liufang and Liu Duansheng. Within three months, 22 villages were investigated door-to-door. In addition, the general situation of 55 villages, the industry and Commerce of 8 towns and the economic life of 1204 households were investigated. In order to ensure the smooth progress of the investigation, Chen Hansheng made detailed arrangements for the training of investigators, the organizational structure of the investigation team and the selection of representative villages before the investigation. In addition, the members of the investigation team discussed in detail the investigation items, methods and obstacles faced by local forces in rural areas and formulated corresponding countermeasures. [3]The survey found that there was a problem of uneven land distribution in Wuxi. Landlords, who account for less than 6 percent of rural households, own 47 percent of the farmland, while the remaining 69 percent are poor farmers and farm labourers, who own only 14.2 percent of the land. High rent, heavy taxes, usury oppression and commercial unrest are also some of the major problems affecting Wuxi's rural economy. [4]

2.2. Rural Survey in Baoding

After the rural investigation in Wuxi, from May to August 1930, Chen Hansheng organized an investigation team composed of Wang Yinsheng, Qian Junrui and 68 others to Baoding Qingyuan county for investigation. According to the different topography and water conservancy, the investigation team divided Qingyuan county into four districts. In each district, the most common village was selected as a sub-village economy, town separation rural household economy and household sampling. These four surveys focus on distribution, production, exchange and consumption respectively. The survey is improved on the basis of Wuxi's investigation experience. The contents of the survey form are more detailed and the division of labor is more clear.[5]The results show that the land is still concentrated in the hands of landlords and rich peasants, but the concentration is slightly lower than that in Wuxi. Employment exploitation and usury exploitation are also common in Baoding area. In addition, the commercial exploitation of farmers is becoming more and more serious.

2.3. Rural Survey in Guangdong

From November 1933 to May 1934, the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica, in cooperation with the Zhongshan culture and education hall and Lingnan university, conducted surveys in rural Guangdong. The investigation was presided over by Chen Hansheng, attended by Wang Yinsheng, Xue Muqiao, Sun Yefang, etc., and supported by Song Qingling. The investigation went smoothly. The results show that the contradiction between production relations and productivity is sharp in Guangdong rural areas, land is still concentrated in the hands of landlords and rich peasants, and peasants are still exploited by usury and commercial capital.

3. Significance

3.1. It Provides A Basis for the Identification of the Nature of Semi Colonial and Semi Feudal Society in China

In 1928, at the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, modern Chinese society was characterized as semi-colonial and semi-feudal. Based on Marxism, historical facts and concrete data, the rural investigation in Wuxi and Baoding of the Central Research Institute confirmed that the poor peasants in China's rural areas were exploited by land rent, hired labor, tax and business. It made the Chinese Communist Party believe that the social nature of China was semi colonial and semi feudal society, and thus provides theory basis for rural land revolution.

3.2. It Promots the Development of Marxist Sociology in China

Chen Hansheng used Marxist theory and method to lead the the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica to carry out social investigation. He proposed: "the sum of all production relations creates the basic structure of society, which is the starting point of real sociological research. In China, most production relations belong to the countryside. Therefore, the sociological group of the Institute of Social Sciences of the central research institute takes China's rural research as its first step. "[6] In the process of rural social investigation, Chen Hansheng gave full play to the spirit of demonstration and combined the theory of Marxist sociology with the reality of China's rural areas. In addition, Chen Hansheng has always used the method of Marxist class analysis to divide farmers into landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and farm labourers according to class relations and status, instead of the sociological classification of non Marxist scholars. He intends to analyze the role of classes with different economic status in rural social economy and find out the symptoms of rural problems in China. he rural investigation led by Chen Hansheng has clear theoretical guidance, detailed planning and scientific methods. It was carried out in accordance with strict academic norms and became a model of social investigation at that time, which played a positive role in promoting the development of Marxist sociology in China.

3.3. It Has Trained A Group of Marxist Economists

During his tenure in the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica, Chen Hansheng presided over the work of the social group, and successively hired a group of young people such as Wang Yinsheng, Qian Junrui, Xue Muqiao, Zhang Xichang, Zhang Jiafu, Sun Yefang and Jiang Junchen to form a rural investigation team to carry out rural investigation under the guidance of Marxist theory. Through the investigation, some of them have accumulated experience and gained exercise. They have initially mastered the relevant theories and scientific investigation methods of Marxism, and have gradually grown into Marxist economists. Xue Muqiao mentioned in his memoir that "our leader, Comrade Chen Hansheng, is the pioneer of Marxist rural economics in China", "Qian Junrui, Sun Yefang, Zhang Xichang, Jiang Junchen, Qin Liufang, Chen Hongjin and I started to study rural economy and other economic issues under his cultivation." [7]

3.4. Reference to Rural Construction in the New Era

The problems of agriculture, countryside and peasants are always the fundamental problems in the process of revolution, construction and reform. Since the founding of the people's Republic of China, especially since the reform and opening up, China's farmers' income has steadily increased and living conditions have significantly improved. However, due to various historical and practical reasons, the "three rural" problems still exist in China at this stage.

The rural survey led by Chen Hansheng of the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica not only provides real and objective survey data, but also provides new ideas for solving rural

problems. The first way to solve the rural problems is to adhere to Marxism, adhere to the scientific world outlook and methodology to judge and analyze various phenomena, and build research on scientific investigation. The results of the rural social survey conducted by the Central Research Institute show that the land problem is the fundamental problem in rural areas. The land distribution is very different, and the land is mostly concentrated in the hands of landlords, while the farmers have less arable land, which is the root cause of China's rural economic depression and sharp class contradictions at that time.

To protect the land rights and interests of farmers and reduce the burden of farmers are the core measures to solve the "three rural" problem. Today, in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, great achievements have been made in the construction of new countryside. However, to solve the problem of "agriculture, rural areas and farmers", we still need to pay attention to the rational allocation of land resources, safeguard the land rights and interests of farmers, and adhere to the protection and improvement of people's livelihood, so that the majority of farmers have more sense of access. Therefore, general secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that in deepening the rural reform under the new situation, the main line is still to deal with the relationship between farmers and land. No matter how it is changed, the collective ownership of rural land can not be broken down, the farmland can not be changed, and the capacity of grain production can not be weakened, so that the interests of farmers can not be harmed.

4. Conclusion

In the 1920s and 1930s, the rural social survey of the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica led by Chen Hansheng, guided by Marxist theory, was a large-scale rural social survey in the modern history of China. It not only had an important significance and influence at that time, but also had a positive reference significance for the "three rural" issues in the new era even today.

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