

The Small Peasant Economy in North China: Development or Underdevelopment?*

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Two characteristics of the small peasant economy—development and underdevelopment — have been under debated among scholars. The theory of underdevelopment offered by Philip Huang argues that the development of the small peasant economy of the North China plain was a process of “involution and semi-proletarianization” due to population pressure, commercialization, and the integration of China’s economy into the world economic system. On the other hand, the “development” school of thought indicates that the small peasant has potential to generate growth in the agricultural sector, and this growth will further benefit the modern sector.

This study attempts to use the village survey done by the Japanese investigator in the late 1930s and 1940s to examine the reasons for development or underdevelopment of the North China small peasant economies. By comparing and contrasting eco-systems, crop patterns, degrees of commercialization, and owner-tenant relations of four villages, this study finds the keys for development are: 1. access to water for irrigation; 2. technological innovations, such as adopting new crops and applying fertilizer; 3. eliminating exploitative owner-tenant relations.

Access to irrigation may have been the most crucial factor for development among the three key elements. Hsiao-t’ien-chia-chuang was the only village that achieved a degree of growth, which was the result of this village’s access to water. Irrigation allowed the peasants in Hsiao-t’ien-chia-chuang to grow tobacco, which provided a higher return per unit of input than growing food grain did. The labor intensive characteristic of tobacco production increased the opportunity for peasant households to utilize the marginal

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民國以來華北小農經濟變遷的形態： 成長或低度開發？

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摘要

近年來，學者對於近代小農經濟的變遷模式，提出許多不同的理論。「成長派」的理論認為：小農經濟並非落後的生產方式。他們認為小農生產的方式其實具有相當大的成長潛力。一家一戶的小農是具有企業精神的經營者。只要外在的條件如：技術，資本能夠配合，小農經濟的前景是十分樂觀的。主張小農經濟導致「低度開發」的理論認為：受制於人口壓力，世界經濟市場體系等因素。小農經濟的前景是悲觀的。這種經濟的發展終會陷入邊際效率遞減的陷阱之中，形成貧困與低度開發的結果。

本文的宗旨係企圖透過華北的四個農村在民國二三十年的發展為例在檢討小農經濟的發展形態。在本文所採的四個樣本村莊為河北省沙井村，寺北柴村，山東省杜家莊，小田家莊。經過對比研究這四個村莊的生態環境，農作物形態，農產品商品化程度，以及土地關係之後，我們發現灌溉技術，技術革新，及土地所有形態（地租關係）是影響小農經濟成長與否的關鍵所在。在三者之中尤以灌溉為要。

本文中的四個農村僅有小田家莊因具備灌溉條件。在推廣，商品化作物（煙草）之後，農民充分運用其農家勞動力獲取較高的收益，逐漸擺脫地主的控制，成為自耕農。其他的三個農村或因灌溉不足（如沙井，杜家莊），或因租佃制度不合理（如寺北柴），農民始終無法擺脫貧困的陰影。最近的資料顯示，在沙井村中因灌溉條件的改善，農民已能有效地提高生產效率。