

## FEI XIAOTONG

Wujiang County of Jiangsu Province, where Fei Xiaotong was born on 2 November 1910 and spent his first ten years, lies south of the fabled Changjiang (Yangtze River) city of Suzhou (Soochow) and only fifty miles or so from the treaty-port metropolis of Shanghai. He was born into a time of turmoil, less than a year before the national revolution that toppled the Qing, China's final imperial dynasty—a revolution in which his father, Fei Pu'an, played an active local role. Indeed, Fei Pu'an was a man very much abreast of the times. A man of the gentry, although apparently not wealthy, he had been educated in the Chinese classics and earned a shengyuan civil service degree. He was also among the thousands of young Chinese students of his day who flocked to Japan to study Western learning in schools that catered to Chinese students. Not knowing Japanese, Fei's father made his way in Japan “with a pen,” that is, by communicating through the classical Chinese characters that educated Chinese and Japanese people knew in common. Back home in Wujiang, Fei Pu'an founded a school based on modern Japanese models, the first of its kind in the province. Fei's mother, Yang Renlan, a highly educated woman for her time, followed her husband's lead and established a pioneering nursery school in Wujiang, which the young Fei himself attended.

The family lived well and occupied a large house with servants and gardens within the walled county seat of Wujiang. As an inspector of schools with the provincial bureau of education, Fei Pu'an was a man of status and of sufficient means to educate all five of his children at a time when such education was still a privilege of the few. Xiaotong was the youngest child in the family and, in a sense, an urban child. Even so, the countryside nestled close to Wujiang and he remembers open fields even within the city walls.

Fei began primary school in Wujiang but in 1920, when he was ten, his father moved the family to Suzhou. Here Fei finished primary school at Zhenhao Girls' School, which was run by friends of his mother and, despite its name, also accepted a handful of boys. Then, he shifted to a middle school affiliated with Suzhou University. The university had been founded in the late nineteenth century by American missionaries. Although Chinese language was emphasized in the middle school, instruction in English was also

rigorous and, overall, Western subjects prevailed. Indeed, the middle school was run more or less as an American high school even though the teachers were Chinese. The studious type, Fei excelled in his classes.

Life at home was happy. Fei's parents were self-consciously modern and eschewed the harsh discipline typical of many gentry families, although they were strict about school work. There was a pedal organ in the household that Fei's mother could play and he remembers gathering round with the family to sing. In other ways, the family tone was set by the elder Fei's ebullient personality, a trait that rubbed off on his famously optimistic and genial son. Not even the political turbulence of the warlord years seems to have marred Fei's charmed childhood. When warlords did attack the town, the family simply retreated to a safe spot in the lake district nearby and later returned home. "As a child," Fei says, "I enjoyed this vacation."

Under the influence of a sister, Fei's mother became a Christian. But his father did not, and embodied instead the gentry values of a public-spirited Confucian. Fei grew up without strong religious attachments, despite the important impact on his life of Christian institutions. Nor was Fei's immediate family particularly political. Fei's father was a devotee of the reformer Liang Qichao. "We had all of his books," Fei remembers. After the revolution, Fei Pu'an devoted himself to local reforms. When Fei's mother died (Fei was only sixteen), his father remarried. Fei's stepmother, along with Fei's sister and brother-in-law, dedicated herself to reforming the local silk industry, another cause in which the elder Fei also joined.

Other relatives took a more active interest in politics, however. Fei's older brothers were engaged actively in left-wing revolutionary politics during Fei's student days. One of them, Fei Zhendong, fled China for the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) in 1927, evidently under threat from the Guomindang (Nationalist Party).

After high school, Fei enrolled directly in Suzhou University. He became an honor student and adapted to the Western style then in vogue, appearing in the university yearbook wearing a coat and tie and Anglicizing his name as S. T. Vee ("presumably reflecting his native Wu dialect," writes Fei's biographer, R. David Arkush). Already imbued with a sense of service, Fei decided that "the best way to do something good for the people is to become a doctor." For two years, he followed a premedical course focused on chemistry, biology, and physics—"very heavy work," as he recalled years later. During his second year in college, however, Fei was drawn into a student tempest. Suzhou University was a "foreign" school. Students spoke English in class and used American textbooks. Some faculty members were also American, although most were "returned students," or Chinese who had studied abroad. Patriotic feelings were aroused when an American doctor at Suzhou University's affiliated hospital mistreated one of the students.

Fei joined in leading a protest: “We all came out...and stomped to the school,” he says. Evidently marked as a troublemaker, he was warned by his friends: “You had better leave Suzhou University.” Fei admits he was happy to do so, all the more so because he was now offered admission to Yanjing (Yenching) University, one of China’s best and, moreover, located in the former imperial capital of Beijing. Fei had never been there.

Yanjing University, located on a leafy suburban campus outside the city, was also a Protestant missionary school of recent vintage. During Fei’s years there, it was led by John Leighton Stuart, an American Presbyterian minister and educator. Instruction was in English. Fei remained at Yanjing for five years and there he established the intellectual direction and momentum that would shape the rest of his life. Among the notable scholars at Yanjing was Wu Wenzao, a pioneering Chinese sociologist who had studied at Dartmouth College and received a doctorate from Columbia University, both in the United States. Under Wu’s influence and the inspiring impact of visiting professor Robert Ezra Park of the University of Chicago, Fei concluded that his original choice of medicine was too narrow. “China’s problem was not sickness, not a medical problem,” he decided. “It was a social problem and a political problem. So I went to the social sciences.”

From Wu and Park and others on the Yanjing faculty, Fei learned the fundamentals of sociology, especially as they had been developed in American universities and applied to American subjects. “We learned about American sociology,” Fei remembers. “We knew more about Chicago than Beijing.” This was understandable given the literature at the time and the youth of the discipline. But Wu Wenzao believed that sociology in China should, ultimately, focus on China itself, a conclusion in which Professor Park heartily agreed. “You must study China,” Park exhorted his students. Fei was only too eager to comply. Yet Park’s influence went deeper. Founder of the so-called Chicago school of sociology, Park pioneered in applying anthropological methods to the study of broad themes and problems in human society, thus combining the disciplines as Fei himself would subsequently do.

At age twenty-four, Fei completed his baccalaureate degree and shifted to nearby Qinghua (Tsing Hua) University to begin graduate studies in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Here the dominating figure was S. M. Shirokogoroff, a Russian anthropologist of the European school, who had conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Siberia and subsequently fled to Beijing to escape the Soviets. A polymath and rigorously scientific in his scholarship, Shirokogoroff deeply impressed the young Fei. “At the time,” Fei says, “I thought he knew everything.” (This did not include Chinese, however. Teacher and student communicated in English.) Shirokogoroff spe-

cialized in physical anthropology and, particularly, anthropometry—the science of human measurement. Using calipers and “a whole set” of other devices, he took precise measurements of human faces, bodies, and bones with the goal of identifying scientific distinctions among the world’s ethnic groups, or “races.”

Fei became Shirokogoroff’s avid disciple and spent two years working daily in his skeleton-filled laboratory, keeping meticulous notes and records that Shirokogoroff routinely checked and corrected. For his thesis, Fei made an analysis of Korean physio-types (based on measurements made by a Japanese anthropologist) in light of his mentor’s theories. Although anthropometry has long since been discredited (and Fei himself soon abandoned it), Fei still believes that Shirokogoroff’s empirical approach, his focus upon “physical things...real materials, data, and measurements” was fundamentally valid and valuable. His admiration remains undiminished.

Shirokogoroff’s relations with the university authorities were troubled and in 1935, as he prepared to take his leave, he told Fei to go directly to Europe and study cultural anthropology. The opportunity to study abroad was a privilege Qinghua University offered its advanced graduate students. On his mentor’s advice, Fei chose the London School of Economics, where Bronislaw Malinowski was the leading figure. Malinowski was a social anthropologist. A line in his 1926 book, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, had greatly excited Fei: “I shall invite my readers,” wrote Malinowski, “to step outside the closed study of the theorists into the open air of the anthropological field.”

Fei was advised not to go to London empty-handed but, instead, to conduct fieldwork in China beforehand. That way he would have a body of data as a basis for his eventual dissertation. Fei now planned his first major research trip together with Wang Tongwei, his girlfriend and anthropology soul mate from Yanjing University. “We liked to work together,” he said. “And we had the same ambition.” This was to study the Yao minorities of remote Guangxi Province. To do so together, as an unmarried man and woman, would raise all kinds of questions and impediments. In “the very interior of China,” Fei says, “you cannot say ‘she is my secretary’ or ‘he is my coworker.’ But if you are a couple, everybody will accept you.” Fei and Wang, therefore, married and in October 1935 set off for “the open air of the anthropological field.” Shirokogoroff, who had been to Guangxi, sent them off with heavy leather boots.

The terrain was extremely harsh. The small groups of Yao people that Fei and Wang sought out lived far apart and were separated by narrow mountain paths that, to uninitiated travelers, were difficult to discern from the natural rock ways and washes that occurred randomly throughout the hills. This forbidding wilderness took the two young tenderfoots by surprise, as Fei later admitted, but they struggled not to fail—and Fei did manage to collect a substantial body of data under the circumstances. One day, however, Fei set off a

tiger trap that crushed him with falling stone. Setting out alone to find help, Wang lost her way and drowned in a mountain stream. Searchers found her body days later. Fei says he survived until a rescue party found him only because of Shirokogoroff's boots, which prevented the bones in his feet from breaking to pieces. He was badly hurt nevertheless. A stone had struck his spine, resulting in the temporary paralysis of half his body. Much more, he had lost his young wife and companion. Later he would write, romantically, that "she died for Anthropology."

Fei recovered slowly. After some months of treatment in Guangzhou (Canton), he went to recuperate with his sister in Wujiang, his home district. Serendipitously, this led to the work that would establish his name.

The rural village of Kaixian'gong lines the southern bank of Lake Tai in fortunate proximity to the fabled lower Changjiang (Yangtze River) cities of Hangzhou and Suzhou. Here Fei's only sister, Fei Dasheng, was introducing scientific silk culture and silk-spinning technology, applying the knowledge she had acquired in Tokyo at the Women's Sericulture School. With her collaborator and future husband, Zheng Bijiang, she had set up a cooperative silk factory in Kaixian'gong run by the farmers themselves. The good company of his sister and the village folk, the familiar sights and sounds of home, and the inspiration of Dasheng's progressive work served as a balm to Fei's troubled spirit. As he strengthened during the months of July and August 1936, he threw himself into a study of Kaixian'gong's rural life and enterprises, collecting masses of social and economic data on the village people. "I wanted to know something about how they lived," he says. Armed with his data about the mountain folk of Guangxi and his notes from Kaixian'gong, he was now ready for London. "So I went to Malinowski!"

But Malinowski was not at the London School; he was temporarily at Harvard University in the United States where, coincidentally, Fei's mentor Wu Wenzao was also visiting (and where Wu promoted Fei enthusiastically to Malinowski). Meanwhile, in London, Fei enrolled for his doctoral studies under Raymond Firth. Fei showed Firth his Yao mountain data: "To me, the real anthropological work," says Fei, and his extensive notes from Kaixian'gong, "my side product." It was Firth who first discerned the potential of Fei's research in Kaixian'gong. "Yes, yes," he told Fei, "This is the work. You go on with it." Fei then began shaping his notes on Kaixian'gong into a doctoral thesis, a project he continued and completed under the venerable Malinowski when he returned to London from Harvard.

The result was "K'ai-hsien-kung: Economic Life in a Chinese Village" (using the then-standard Wade-Giles spelling for Kaixian'gong). Published as *Peasant Life in China* in 1938, Fei's study was a panoramic view of Kaixian'gong that covered everything from kinship to religion to marriage customs, but that focused on mat-

ters of economic production, consumption, distribution, and exchange. A signal insight of Fei's study was that China's farmers were far from being farmers only. Most of them relied upon local crafts and industries to supplement their agricultural earnings. "Industry" was therefore an essential element of China's rural economy. In Kaixian'gong, for example, growing silk worms was a lucrative family sideline. This historic complementarity was now at risk, however.

In Kaixian'gong, Fei noted in *Peasant Life in China*, the local silk industry was in decline. Finer silk products produced in modern factories were driving the price of Kaixian'gong's traditional products down. The consequences were dire: farmers who depended upon silk earnings to complement agricultural earnings (and there were a great many in the area) were being forced to sell land to meet crises and obligations, leading to widespread tenancy. As silk prices fell on international markets in the 1930s, things got worse. "The income of the villagers," he wrote in his conclusion, "has been reduced to such an extent that it is not sufficient even to meet the expenditure in securing the minimum requirements of livelihood. It is the hunger of the people that is the real issue in China."

Malinowski praised Fei's study as a breakthrough, for focusing on a community within a major civilization rather than on an obscure ethnic group and also for addressing the variable of profound social change. Fei himself was more interested in the usefulness of his work. In the introduction to his book, he wrote, "A current understanding of the existing situation based on empirical facts will assist in directing change toward a desired end. Herein lies the function of social science." This hope and belief would guide the rest of his career.

Degree in hand, Fei Xiaotong made his way home. It was 1938 and Japanese invaders had already engulfed Kaixian'gong and much of eastern China. By this time, many of China's leading scholars, including Wu Wenzao, had fled their Beijing campuses and reconvened in Kunming, Yunnan. Here, under austere and sometimes dangerous circumstances, they endeavored to sustain a life of learning and teaching. Fei determined to join them. Boarding a train in Hanoi, in French Indochina, he made his way across the mountains of southern China to the makeshift university enclave deep in Yunnan. There Fei was reunited with his brother, Fei Zhendong, who had been expelled from the Dutch East Indies for his political activities among the overseas Chinese community in the colony. Through Zhendong, Fei met Meng Yin, a school teacher who had also been expelled from the Indies. Fei and Meng were married in July 1939. Their daughter and only child, Fei Zonghui, was born the following year.

In Kunming, Fei became a professor of social anthropology at National Yunnan University and also served as field director of the

Yanjing-Yunnan Station for Sociological Research. By 1940, however, the war had arrived in Kunming. In Japanese bombing raids that October, Fei's house was destroyed, along with those of many of his colleagues and many university buildings as well. (Fei remembers witnessing the counterattacks by American Flying Tigers.) Fei and Meng fled to a village fifteen miles out of town. He and his students and colleagues now regrouped in a temple called Kuige. Here Fei taught, executed new research, conducted seminars, and guided the work of younger colleagues—as Wu Wenzao later recalled, accompanying them in the field “until the object of the inquiry and the methods to be followed...[were] clear and definite.” Despite hardship, the work was deeply satisfying. Fei later wrote, “Inspiration came from various sources; from the statue of the monkey-like god; from the purified light through the paper windows, giving the feeling of a reflection from the snow; from the roar of the wind in the pine trees....”

Fei's previous work now provided him with a meaningful focus: the problems of land use, land ownership, agricultural income, village industry, and the impact on village welfare of Western economic penetration of the countryside. He designed a project to test his earlier theories from Kaixian'gong about rural industry and tenancy. Three villages—one in which most of the landowners were occupants of their farms, another in which several large landowners possessed land in other villages, and a third in which there were many tenants and the big landowners lived in town—became the objects of intensive field investigations by a Fei-led team.

The results of Fei's Kuige studies, published as *Earthbound China* in 1945, confirmed his hypothesis. He concluded that the “same process which has made petty owners into tenants elsewhere is now active in the interior of China, especially in the vicinity of the commercially developing towns.”

Fei's new fieldwork impressed upon him anew the small and tenuous economic base of peasant life, where forces such as marriages, funerals, and opium smoking could “easily...affect the entire fortune of a villager.” It also illuminated the class structure of rural China and the vast gulf that separated landowners from landless peasants. In the Yunnan villages, this gulf was calibrated not in material goods and luxuries, but in pure leisure. A man who owned one-half acre of land in rural Yunnan, Fei learned, might be wealthy enough on that basis alone never to have to work. Moreover, he found that those who could afford to live without being engaged in hard work were willing to do so even at the expense of their standard of living. He wondered why and concluded that, “the indulgence in physical comfort in the form of avoiding any sort of labour, which finds its highest expression in opium smoking, is a reaction of the peasantry against hardship.”

Fei experienced a good deal of hardship himself in those years. According to R. David Arkush, Fei learned to his dismay in 1942 that

male field hands at harvest time earned more than he did. He and the family were forced to share a house with a peasant and to borrow money to meet his daughter's medical expenses.

A welcome and surprising respite from these wartime stresses offered itself in 1943, when Fei was selected to represent Yunnan University in a yearlong trip to the United States. The trip was sponsored by the U.S. State Department and included a generous stipend. From June 1943 to July 1944, shifting between the Institute of Pacific Relations in New York (based at Columbia University), the University of Chicago's sociology department, and the Harvard Business School, Fei zealously prepared English-language translations of his wartime studies and those of his Kuige students, which the University of Chicago Press subsequently published in 1945 as *Earth-bound China*. He also completed other translations and visited widely at major American universities—Cornell and the Universities of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, among others—and made dozens of new contacts among his fellow social scientists, prevailing on them to accept his students for graduate study and to enter into cooperative research projects and exchanges. Indefatigable, he also raised money for the Research Station and succeeded in arranging for Chicago's Robert Redfield to visit China in 1944 under Rockefeller Foundation sponsorship to survey the possibilities for U.S. assistance for social science research there. (This plan was aborted at the last minute because of a medical emergency.) He also made friends and enjoyed the support and assistance of two American women. Wilma Fairbank, working for the U.S. State Department's Division of Cultural Relations, had "spotted" Fei in Yunnan and facilitated his year abroad. And Margaret Redfield, wife of Robert and, remarkably, the daughter of Fei's first American teacher Robert Ezra Park, helped him invaluablely in rendering his work into English. (Fei was fluent but not always grammatical.)

In the midst of all this, Fei wrote a series of articles about the United States for a Kunming magazine and other Chinese publications. In these, especially at the beginning of his stay, he expressed admiration for many aspects of American life, including the culture of hard work, industry, and enterprise; the country's youthful future-directed outlook; and its respect for women. He contrasted the shared sacrifice and national will of Americans in wartime to the passive and opportunistic behavior of his own compatriots. He was amazed by the size of American farms and the standard of living of even humble workers. Yet, after a longer stay in the United States,



Fei became more critical, noticing how little respect Americans accorded the elderly and how they seemed to live with no strong sense of tradition and history. For all its flaws, he concluded, “Chinese culture at its base is beautiful...”

Fei’s journalistic musings on the United States were followed eagerly in China and he returned home in 1944 to find himself considered something of an expert. He published two books on the subject, published in China by the U.S. Office of War Information and based partially on his earlier articles, and subsequently wrote often about the United States and its relationship with China—a subject he was to grow increasingly bitter about in the years to follow.

Back in Kunming, Fei devoted himself to teaching and, more and more, to writing. He became a prodigious contributor to magazines, newspapers, and journals on a wide range of urgent topics. It was about this time that he accepted a position at Qinghua University, with which he would be affiliated for the next several years. [In wartime Kunming, Qinghua University was temporarily amalgamated with Beijing (Peking) University and Nankai University to form the Southwestern Associated University.] At the same time, Fei continued simultaneously to teach at Yunnan University and to guide its anthropology department for another year. Meanwhile, he became deeply embroiled in China’s unfolding political crisis.

Never a political activist, Fei was nevertheless preoccupied with the fate of his country. His fervent dream was to contribute to China’s modern transformation as a scholar and, more particularly, as a social scientist. But as Japan’s occupation came to an end and China braced itself for civil war, Fei felt compelled to join the urgent political arguments of the day. He was not a communist. But like many Chinese intellectuals of his time, he opposed the Guomindang regime of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and, moreover, did so vocally in many of his writings at the time. R. David Arkush writes that, by 1944, “Fei’s disgust with the Nationalists’ corruption and demoralization was explicit and bitter.” Despite harsh censorship by the Guomindang, such opposition was possible in Kunming because the area was actually under the control of a warlord, Long Yun, until the end of the war and Long gave the Kunming-based intellectuals more or less free rein. Nevertheless, the city was full of Guomindang spies and Fei says, “I was on the blacklist.” In October 1945, Jiang Jieshi seized Kunming directly and tension between the city’s liberals and the regime immediately worsened.

The Democratic League was one of several Chinese political groups seeking a democratic alternative to both the corrupt and discredited Nationalists and the rising Communists and, more immediately, to forestall the looming civil war between them. Fei had joined

the League in 1944 upon his return from the United States and became increasingly active in 1945. In November of that year, he defied a Guomindang order and joined a large outdoor rally protesting the civil war. Rising to speak, he harshly criticized U.S. military support for the Guomindang's anticommunist campaign. As he did so, Nationalist soldiers surrounded the crowd and fired machine guns and mortars into the air. Six days later, soldiers and goons attacked and looted Kunming's university campuses and killed three students and a teacher. Fei was now completely inflamed. He condemned the outrage in print and lent his name to several petitions and open letters calling for, among other things, an end to secret-police harassment and other Nationalist outrages and pleading for a cease-fire, a coalition government, and, more sweepingly, democracy and peace. This action was dangerous, as became apparent in July 1946 when two Democratic League leaders in Kunming were brazenly assassinated within four days of each other. Fei feared for his life. "They wanted to kill me, that's very clear," he says. With several other Democratic League leaders, he took refuge in the U.S. consulate in Kunming. Afterwards, with Meng Yin and their daughter, Fei left Kunming under local government protection and went into hiding with his sister in Suzhou. Three months later, in November 1946, he left China once again for England and there spent three busy, recuperative months as a guest of the British Council.

In the midst of this turmoil and danger, Fei somehow persevered in his intellectual work. He hoped to apply the accumulated findings of his own research and that of his colleagues to achieve a wider synthesis applicable to China's situation writ large. Like so many other things for Fei, this, too, was urgent if the social sciences were to play a part in his country's revival.

By 1946 he had worked out the main elements of this synthesis. The peasantry and the gentry, he wrote in a seminal article that year, formed distinctively separate classes in Chinese society. Peasants worked the gentry's land so that the gentry could live in conspicuous leisure. Members of the gentry reinforced their parasitic position through highly structured kinship ties, strongly controlled extended families, and strictly observed inheritance patterns. And they justified their social position by citing their role in civil administration—providing order and organization at the local level and serving as a buffer between the people and the state bureaucracy. Although everyone, including peasants, hoped to educate a son into officialdom, Fei argued that peasant-to-gentry mobility was rare. The pressures of dearth, calamity, and population growth almost always mitigated against it. Indeed, only rural industries—and this was Fei's key point in a complex argument—kept the peasant population afloat at all, by providing peasants with sufficient additional income to compensate for the high rents they paid to the gentry. The collapse of these industries under pressure from machine-made goods brought

disaster to the countryside and made the parasitic position of the gentry untenable, all the more so because it failed to provide innovative alternatives. The country's true economic innovators, the comprador class of the treaty ports, was unscrupulous and predatory. When the Western-educated professionals (second-generation gentry such as Fei himself) failed to develop a spirit of political responsibility, these treaty-port opportunists and warlords usurped power. This led to China's present calamity.

Fei concluded that reviving the economic viability of rural life was the key to reviving China itself. His research led him to believe that this could be accomplished—indeed, it could only be accomplished—by restoring and developing rural industry. He did not mean reviving China's old handicrafts, truly hand crafts. Instead, he said, the modern tools of electricity and machines could be exploited by small- to medium-sized rural industries to produce any number of necessities, from sugar, paper, and alcohol to varnish, soap, and leather goods. Village cooperatives, he said, should replace petty capitalist landlords as the owners of such enterprises, hearkening as he often did to his sister's innovations in Kaixian'gong. Fortifying villages with industry had another important benefit, Fei argued. The community life of rural folk, such a valuable component of the civilization itself, would not be harmed but would be strengthened.

By February 1947, Fei was back in China and, moreover, back in Beijing where his country's great political drama was rapidly reaching its climax. During this uncertain period, Fei remained passionately engaged as a public intellectual. R. David Arkush has estimated that during this period Fei wrote from five to eight articles a month. (Fei admits, "I had to write. We couldn't live on my salary.") His writing appeared in several magazines and newspapers, including the *Dagongbao*, China's leading independent daily, and the journal *Guanche* ("perhaps the most widely regarded journal in China," according to Arkush), in which Fei was the most frequently published author. Dozens of Fei's articles also circulated in book form. Fei had long ago mastered a clear and interesting style of writing and he now applied it to a wide range of concerns. Aside from matters of Chinese society and politics, he also wrote prodigiously on foreign affairs, informing his readers about several European countries and attacking the United States for fomenting the Cold War and supporting the Guomindang in China. Fei says today that even five decades later he still meets people who "remember constantly reading my articles."

In his writing, Fei had often expressed admiration for the constitutional system of government practiced in Britain and the United States. He admired the way that democratic freedoms, combined with a system of popular representation, served to mitigate political disagreements and to promote compromise, if not consensus. By sub-

jecting rulers to laws, such a system imposed restrictions upon those who governed and prevented the abuse of power. At one point he wrote hopefully, "What we must do is take the Anglo-Saxon spirit of constitutional government and transplant it to China." By the late 1940s, nothing of the sort was in the offing. Instead, the revolutionary movement led by Mao Zedong and China's Communist Party was rapidly closing in on territories still controlled by Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and the Guomindang. Fei was not a Marxist and, in fact, he knew relatively little about Chinese Communism. Through the Democratic League, however, he says, he had many friends who were communists. He agreed that China needed radical reforms. He personally advocated a comprehensive land-to-the-tiller program in which landlords would be compensated for their land and encouraged to invest in rural industries, for he ardently hoped that reform could be peaceful. But Fei also admired the Communists for mobilizing peasants themselves to solve a great peasant problem and, in the end, as a communist victory became inevitable, he made his peace with history.

It was at just this moment that Robert Redfield and his wife Margaret at last visited China. During their stay in November 1948, Fei dictated to Margaret the material that she would subsequently publish in the United States as *China's Gentry*. During their private discussions, Fei spoke of the uncertainties to come under China's new government and told them he hoped to become part of a "loyal opposition." So on 16 December 1948, when the Communists entered the Qinghua campus to claim the university for the revolution, Fei Xiaotong was there. Sociology had a role to play in rebuilding the countryside of China, he said.

The next long phase of Fei's life occurred within a national realm that was utterly changed. "We were emancipated," Fei says, "independent for the first time in two hundred years. It was a new China." As Fei would learn, however, the concept of a "loyal opposition" was not one that China's new masters accepted readily. Intellectuals such as Fei were problematic in the new order, despite their expressed loyalty and hopefulness. The Chinese Communist Party subjected them to "thought reform"; Fei himself was severely criticized as a "bourgeois thinker" for his past advocacy of Western liberal ideas. Fei's links to the outside world were now completely cut off. And when Robert Redfield wrote his introduction to Fei's *China's Gentry* in 1952, he revealed he had had no word from him since Liberation.

In fact, Fei was busy at work. The new government had quickly identified an arena where Fei's academic expertise was needed. This was a massive research project to study China's many ethnic groups. As part of a fieldwork group organized by the national government in 1950, he spent the next several years visiting and interviewing minority groups in Guizhou and Guangxi Provinces. "It goes without

saying that we studied the social history of these minority peoples with a view to promoting their progress,” he wrote. “Doing work like this...made me feel genuinely happy.” In 1952, he left Qinghua University to become professor at the Central College of Ethnic Minorities. Fei’s hopes to harness the social sciences for China’s progress suffered a blow in mid-1952, however, when the government banished the study of sociology from all Chinese universities and colleges, an extraordinary step that Fei attributes to the domineering influence in China at the time of the Soviet Union (which did not acknowledge sociology). This decision by the Party is indicative of the ideology-driven climate to which Fei and other intellectuals now had to adjust. Fei did his best. But the rules were not obvious, as he was to learn.

In 1956, Mao Zedong invited China’s intellectuals to speak their minds freely, saying in his famous epigram, “Let a hundred flowers bloom.” Fei took Chairman Mao at his word and urged other intellectuals to do the same. He spoke up for the rehabilitation of sociology. And, in the spirit of a “loyal opposition,” he offered criticisms of the Party’s approach to rural development. These indiscretions cost him dearly.

At the center of the storm was Kaixian’gong. In May 1957, Fei returned to the village after an absence of twenty-one years. With him was his sister, now a people’s representative for Jiangsu Province. Fei Dasheng had been an important figure in the village and the people greeted her joyfully. Many remembered Fei warmly, too, saying (he admitted ruefully), “We couldn’t recognize you, you’ve grown so fat.” Kaixian’gong had suffered badly during the Japanese War and the civil war that followed. But since then, much had changed, as Fei wrote in an article immediately following his visit: “Rural peasants rose, the land was divided, the irrigation canals were repaired, collectivization came, and crops were better and better each year.” Moreover, he wrote, “a society based on exploitation of man by man has changed into one in which there is no exploitation.” During his twenty-day visit, however, Fei concluded that whereas, overall, life was much improved in Kaixian’gong as a consequence of the revolution, some aspects of the village’s current development deserved some critical attention, especially rural industries. “I have gathered courage,” he wrote, “to bring these things up again, in the sincere hope that the leadership will pay attention to these problems.”

Fei had long ago discerned that many Chinese peasants relied upon sideline occupations and rural industries to make ends meet. In Kaixian’gong, the primary product of this kind was silk, which in 1936 had been rendered from mulberry tree, to silkworm cocoon, to thread, and, finally, to cloth—all in the village. Now, he said, only the initial stages of the process occurred there; in China’s new

planned economy, weaving silk was a job for the country's industrial cities. Kaixian'gong's old silk factory, the one his sister had helped to organize as a cooperative, had been destroyed in the war years and never restored. This was a pity because, Fei continued to believe, rural industry (and not agriculture alone) was essential for rural prosperity. Fei also noted the absence of Kaixian'gong's lively river-borne commerce of yesteryear and other supplementary occupations that once enhanced peasant incomes in the village. As a result, he observed, peasants now had enough food but they did not have any money.

Fei offered these critical observations respectfully, saying, "In our China the problem is no longer which road to choose, but how best to advance along the road which has already been chosen."

Unfortunately for Fei, the Hundred Flowers Movement generated more open criticism than the Party could tolerate. Fei was among thousands caught in the backlash, known as the Anti-Rightists Movement. His article on Kaixian'gong was viciously attacked by his own research assistants in the very journal that had published it (and which soon hastened to apologize for publishing such a "poisonous weed"). The critics lambasted Fei for not emphasizing more enthusiastically the gains of the revolution and for concentrating instead on certain "crises." Moreover, they said, Fei's advocacy for reviving the silk factory and riverine trade simply revealed his pro-landlord, pro-capitalist biases. He is advancing "reactionary theories," they said. In addition, Fei's recommendations are designed to incite peasant discontent with the Party. And so on. Other articles followed in which Fei's scholarship was stigmatized as Comprador Sociology, designed to further the cause of capitalism and "bourgeois democracy" and to "turning the wheel of history back to the era of semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism." (Little wonder, in this atmosphere, that the discipline of sociology remained in a state of official scorn for another twenty years.) Some of the articles were personal and even hysterical, such as one titled "The Sinister and Detestable Fei Hsiao-tung," by Lin Yuehua (Lin Yueh-hua), a former friend and fellow student of Yanjing days in the 1930s. Fei's ongoing ties to the Democratic League and certain of its leaders were also invoked against him.

Among Fei's official positions at the time was as representative to the National People's Congress. In a speech before the Congress on 13 July 1957, Fei conceded defeat.

"I am confessing to the people," he told the delegates, "in order to...expose my own criminal behavior...." Yes, he said, I have "expressed some absurd anti-Party arguments." Yes, he said, I have "repeatedly opposed the abolition of bourgeois social science and asked instead for its restoration." Yes, he said, my report on Kaixian'gong lacked "a class analysis" and stressed "shortcomings in order to divert attention from the achievements of the Party in its rural work."

And yes, he said, “I have not yet criticized and reformed my heavily bourgeois thoughts, especially with respect to the problems of bourgeois ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’....” Fei’s capitulation was complete. “I have resolved to accept the Party’s education, and I will follow the road of socialism under the Party’s leadership.” As Fei was to write many years later, with remarkable understatement, “My duties came to an end in the autumn of 1957.”

Fei Xiaotong lived the next many years in obscurity. He was stripped of his authoritative posts, reduced to a professor of the lowest rank, and forbidden to teach, although he was permitted to remain in his residence at the National Minorities Institute. In this, he fared better than many “rightists.” Thousands, tens of thousands, were jailed. But as a “rightist,” Fei says, he became “an untouchable” and was ostracized by former friends and colleagues. This was a bitter experience. Still, he used his time productively. He read extensively and, with other ostracized “rightists” such as Wu Wenzao (and his wife Bin Xin), made translations of English-language books such as H. G. Wells’s *An Outline of History*. But Fei did not write. “No journal would accept my articles,” he says.

Fei’s life as a nonperson continued through the early 1960s and lightened from time to time. One or two of his honorific positions were restored. Then came the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In this tumultuous upheaval, beginning in 1966, millions of enraged Chinese youths, empowered by radical Party leaders as Red Guards, mounted savage attacks on China’s “four olds,” or reactionary elements. These reactionary elements included teachers and professors and other authority figures as well as “feudal” and “bourgeois” intellectuals and, indeed, virtually anyone with a Western education or other ties to the West. The Party itself was not spared and even senior Party members and leaders were attacked and purged. Victims of the Cultural Revolution were humiliated and tortured and subjected (as Jonathan Spence has written) “to countless acts of calculated sadism.” Many thousands were beaten to death or driven to suicide. Thousands more were imprisoned. And millions were driven to the countryside to be reeducated by working with peasants.

Fei did not escape. Red Guards looted his house and “took everything away,” including precious manuscripts of work in progress. They forced him to stand in public to be criticized and ridiculed and to confess himself. For a time, after Fei sent his wife to the safety of his father’s household in Suzhou, Fei was transferred to a dormitory-like room that he shared with other men and where he was obliged to perform menial work. For about a year, his job was cleaning the campus toilets. “So, I knew every toilet,” he says. Then, “they moved us to the countryside; the whole college moved to the countryside.” In Fuha in the Hankou area, Fei now learned to build a

house and to grow cotton. For a time he lived with peasants—for the first time, he says, “not as a professor” but as a fellow farmer. The experience left him fitter than he had been in years.

Fei’s two-and-a-half-year rural sojourn included reeducation at a May Seventh Cadre School, which, in Spence’s words, “combined hard agricultural labor with constant self-evaluation and study of Mao’s works, allegedly to instill in ‘students’ a deeper understanding of the socialist revolution.” Fei took the lessons to heart. Sometime in early 1972, Fei returned to Beijing and the National Minorities Institute. Some foreign students from the Chinese University of Hong Kong who met him there in July (along with Wu Wenzao and Bin Xin) said that Fei repudiated his earlier studies and explained that “Chairman Mao deserves our respect, just as the books I wrote were in error, and so do not deserve any respect.”

Fei continued to remain circumspect as the final bitter winds of the Cultural Revolution spent themselves. Mao’s death in 1976 set in train the power struggle that would ultimately topple the radicals, including the infamous Gang of Four. “Then,” as Fei wrote in 1980, “another tremendous change occurred and order appeared out of chaos.”

And so, at the age of sixty-eight, Fei Xiaotong reemerged. In 1979 he began writing again, with two articles in the English-language *China Reconstructs*. He was soon traveling widely in China and abroad. In 1980, he traveled to the United States to receive a prestigious anthropology award named after his mentor Malinowski. That same year, the government lifted the opprobrium of “rightist” from his name and he served as a judge in the trial of the Gang of Four, the leading instigators of the Cultural Revolution including Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing. But for Fei, the signal event of these unanticipated years of openness was the rehabilitation of sociology. “After the calamitous decade,” he wrote, “I was assigned in 1978 to re-establish sociological studies in the Academy of Social Sciences.” At first reluctant, Fei soon threw himself into the task. In 1979, he became first president of the Chinese Society for Sociology and, during the following several years, he mobilized his old colleagues and many contacts abroad to rebuild the discipline in China, organizing introductory courses, training lecturers, compiling a new textbook, and, gradually, establishing and staffing new departments in several Chinese universities. All the while, Fei emphasized the importance of sociology for China. “We must carry on with the original idea,” he told his neophytes. “Study Chinese society!”

In the midst of this, Fei embarked on research of his own by making a five-day follow-up visit to Kaixian’gong. Fei Dasheng, his “still healthy and lively seventy-eight-year-old sister,” accompanied him. It was now forty-five years since Fei’s first fieldwork in Kaixian’gong. He presented his findings in the Huxley Memorial



Lecture of 1981, hosted in London by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. In doing so, he placed many of the sweeping events affecting rural China of the past half century in perspective.

Liberation, he told his listeners, had ended a long era of exploitation and rendered Chinese peasants owners of their own land. Moreover, collectivization and other communist reforms had increased peasant incomes. Kaixian'gong itself is relatively prosperous these days, as a consequence of beneficial government initiatives and policies. But, Fei said, the government's stewardship of the village had not been consistently wise. Communes and other "ultra-leftist ventures" introduced in 1958 and after had failed. And during the Cultural Revolution, village economies everywhere had stagnated under the authority of ignorant cadres and "the leftist emphasis on a doctrine of absolute egalitarianism." Fortunately, corrections were implemented in 1978 and, since then, "economic production in rural areas like Kaixian'gong has entered a new and promising phase of development." In this new phase, government policy has shifted away from a single-minded concentration on food crops. Now, as Fei observed, "Kaixian'gong's villages used surplus grain to raise pigs and chickens and considerable land to grow mulberry trees for raising silkworms." This pluralistic approach emphasizing sideline cocoon cultivation (part of the village's collective economy), the introduction of collectively owned industries ("two soybean mills, a silk-reeling filature, and a silk-weaving workshop"), as well as individual household enterprises explained Kaixian'gong's rising prosperity. In 1980, about half of the village's per capita income came from such sideline occupations. This came as no surprise to Fei, of course, since he had reported the significance of such supplementary ventures in 1936—and had complained of government's failure to support and encourage them in 1957.

Although Fei was encouraged by these trends, he warned that China must not be complacent. The country's population was growing at an alarming rate and "the limits of agricultural growth are about to be reached." Village sidelines based on agriculture, such as livestock and silkworm growing, could not be expanded indefinitely. China must face these "cruel and inescapable facts." The solution lay in more rural industry, he concluded, especially "scattering industry and technology to the countryside." In villages close to larger cities, for example, factories had "contracted with commune or brigade-organized workshops to manufacture parts for bicycles, sewing machines, radio sets, and the like. This...seems to have a bright future." To Fei, the promotion of sideline enterprises and rural industry had yet another benefit. It mitigated against "the excessive concentration of population in urban centers and...the potentially widening gap between workers and peasants." China's farmers, Fei concluded, should therefore "leave the land but not the village."

Fei was once again a person of influence in China. He had many public duties and again represented the Democratic League in the National People's Congress. This stature gave him access to high officials in the Party, with whom he now held "completely free and open discussions." "I carried the message to Beijing," he says. At a lengthy meeting with China's top leaders in 1982, Fei made the case for rural industries. He encouraged the leaders to observe the phenomenon for themselves and says, "even those who were opposed...admitted that this is the way we can enrich the peasants and maintain the economy of China." In the general climate of market-oriented reforms of the post-Mao leadership of Deng Xiaoping, Fei's ideas were welcome. In 1984, an edict issued by China's central government, known as Document Number Four, called for the nationwide development of rural industries. What Fei said of Kaixian'gong in 1981 could now be said of all China: "My dream of many years is now emerging a reality in China."

Witnessing this remarkable development unfold during the past several years, a Filipino urban planner with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities in China, Aprodicio Laquian, said, "Rarely has a scholar been able to influence a major national policy the way Fei did."

Fei has always maintained that "agro-industrial complementarity" of rural China emerged from the genius of China's peasants themselves. He had only observed it and analyzed it. This was the role of the social scientist. As new rural-based industries mushroomed throughout China in the 1980s and early 1990s, Fei remained active despite his advancing years. It was imperative for a social scientist "to participate in social development," he said, "making practical contributions to social development as an observer, analyst, and consultant." Once again he traveled the length and breadth of China and wrote prolifically for a public audience, describing the transformation of China's countryside: the proliferation of new industries in villages and small towns; the growth of local market centers, which also doubled as centers for services and education; the emergence of regional "key cities" and distinct economic zones; and the beginnings of what Fei calls "a new multi-layer structure of a village-town-city metropolis." Fei asserts that rural sideline enterprises and industries are the key to the health of the entire system. For one thing, he says, by the early 1990s, "the output value created by township- and village-owned enterprises was about 1,000 billion [Rmb] yuan, making up one-third of the national GNP." One hundred million peasants were in the process of becoming modern workers. At the same time, most of these new workers were still entrenched within the family and community life of the countryside. They had left the land but not the village. This was helping China mitigate against "city disease": the unrestrained flow of poor villagers into already glutted cities (a difficult problem, nevertheless). And it

was bringing new skills and literacy and awareness to rural people. "Peasants now think differently," he says. As their aspirations rise and their view of the world widens, and as they participate more actively in a market economy, says Fei, "People will start to demand rights. Then the word will just come out: democracy." The democracy movement of the Tian'anmen demonstrations of 1989, he says, was "not the real thing. It had no social roots." Real democracy in China will emerge organically and from within a process of social change unleashed by its own characteristically Chinese path to industrial modernity.

Today, despite the extraordinary vicissitudes of his life, Fei remains an optimist. Perhaps this accounts for his resilience, his success in rebounding from the humiliations and hardships meted out to him in the process of his country's tumultuous ideological power struggles to emerge as a participant in its recovery. Although his wife, Meng Yin, survived the Cultural Revolution, she did not rebound. Her descent into depression and mental illness has been a sadness in his life. This happened in many families, he says. But Fei is not a naïve optimist. Revolution is complex and the forces now at work in China sometimes seem overwhelming. "We do not understand markets very well," he says. And there is no stopping the flood of poor Chinese peasants into the country's mushrooming coastal cities—even with vibrant rural industries. Still, facing the world's complexity, Fei takes solace in his vocation. Neither sociology nor anthropology has all the answers, to be sure. But there will always be value, he says, paraphrasing Deng Xiaoping, in "seeking truth from facts."

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