COMMUNICATIONS

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies:*

Professor Skinner's three articles on "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China" break new ground and should stimulate interest in an important subject. General agreement may be accorded to his statement that the difficulties of 1960–61 gave the Communists "new respect for the enduring significance of natural social systems" and made them seek ways "to use traditional solidarities for their own organisational ends." (*Journal of Asian Studies,* Article III, May 1965 p. 396). However some conclusions he draws or implies in support of these statements may be controverted.

Professor Skinner suggests (pp. 386–387) a correspondence between the commune of 1959 and the intermediate marketing system of his Model B. type, based primarily on the fact that the total number of communes in "agricultural China" in 1959 was approximately 21,600, almost exactly a third of his estimated 65,200 "cumulative total of the number of rural and suburban traditional markets in agricultural China." (p. 386). Professor Skinner reasonably assumes that the leaders in the commune movement, based on the big cities of North China and South Manchuria, would have had the Model B. type of society in mind, but he later (p. 394) adds the qualification that in parts of China—e.g. in Szechuan and Kweichow—the 1958–59 communes were not formed on the ideal pattern probably propounded by these leaders but corresponded to the standard marketing areas rather than to the intermediate marketing areas (pp. 388–389). Therefore while the hypothesis of the correspondence of commune and intermediate marketing areas may have held good for certain areas in 1959, it did not do so for others. Therefore the similarity in numbers between totals of the two units must be merely co-incidental.

Similar considerations apply to the reference to "the subdivision of communes into units approximating standard marketing systems (or in modernised areas, intermediate trading systems)" (p. 397), resulting in the 74,000 communes of 1963, a number considered significantly close to the 80,000 total of *hsiang* and also to the total of "natural marketing systems" of agricultural China. However, in 1964 instances of communes with over 50,000 inhabitants (i.e. larger even than intermediate trading systems) were reported in Kwangtung.[1] Also, if Szechuan's communes had corresponded to standard marketing areas in 1959, this could not still have been the case in 1963 when they had increased in number by around 60%–70%, from a total of 4,800 to "more than 7,000."[2]

A study of the numbers and functions of present day communes induces considerable cynicism concerning the reliance to be put on the figure of 74,000 communes in 1963. The size and activities of communes vary so much from place to place that it is difficult to define the unit at all. The clerk, perhaps at *hsien* level, sending in a report on the number of local communes, may often be uncertain of the correct answer (if one could be said to exist) and either put in a deliberately vague estimate or some figure he considers acceptable to the next higher authority; similarly at the level of the province. Thus we hear of "nearly 10,000 communes" in Kwangsi in 1964: 10,000 often being used in Chinese to mean just a large number.[3]

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[1] *Far Eastern Economic Review,* Vol. XLVI, No. 12, 17 Dec. 1964, p. 564. Derek Davies: "A Kwangtung Commune" and Anna Louise Strong: *The Rise of the Chinese People's Communes—and Six Years After,* p. 193. It must however be noted that on p. 163 this author described Kwangtung's 1,500 communes as equivalent to *hsiang.*

[2] *Statistical Work* (*Tongji Gongzuo*) No. 20, 29 Oct. 1958, p. 23 and NCNA Chengtu, 2 Oct. 1963.

[3] Exemplified in a local "three year socialist construction plan" calling for the setting up of farms for 10,000 pigs, 10,000 chickens, 10,000 head of cattle, the planting of 10,000 *mow* of orchards, building

The same difficulties of definition and enumeration apply with even greater force in the case of production brigades and teams. Production brigades often now have a very shadowy existence. As far as production teams are concerned, job groups (some seasonal and others permanent) have been widely set up beneath them with responsibilities which appear to have increased in many cases until they must be indistinguishable from economic accounting units, i.e., production teams. At any point of time it must be very difficult to know how many job groups have reached this stage. Thus the figures of over 700,000 production brigades and more than 5 million production teams (pp. 398 footnote 277 and p. 399 footnote 279) must be regarded with great scepticism.

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(Editor's note: Miss Donnithorne will discuss further the nature and functions of communes and their constituent units in her forthcoming book, *China's Economic System,* to be published by Allen and Unwin.)

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies:*

I welcome Miss Donnithorne's comments not alone on their merit, for they provide me an opportunity to clarify a number of points which, to judge from her reading, must have been anything but lucid in my original article.

Miss Donnithorne's second paragraph suggests that she misunderstood not only the hypothesis in question but also the outcome of its test. It is, to be sure, not unreasonable to suppose that the communes formed in 1958–59 had been aligned with intermediate marketing systems, but the hypothesis which I put forth was rather more complex, namely 1) that the commune prototype was evolved in areas where the demise of standard markets through agrarian modernization had left in its wake modern intermediate trading systems of the Model-B type, each equivalent to three standard marketing systems; 2) that when this prototype was held up as a model for the nation, it was interpreted by local cadremen in terms of superficial characteristics (area and population) rather than of the model's centrality and essential systematic character; and 3) that in consequence communes were generally formed to accord with the model in terms of size but not of system. This hypothesis, unlike Miss Donnithorne's simplified version, would account not only for the average size of the 1958–59 communes but also for the obvious artificiality characteristic of so many of them.

As it happens, however, the data *in toto* support neither my hypothesis nor the simplex thesis which Miss Donnithorne took me to be positing. I showed *inter alia* 1) that at least half of the model communes were larger than Model-B intermediate trading systems (hereafter ITS, meaning modernized), 2) that the average size of all communes in eight provinces and two provincial-level municipalities was larger than the average size of intermediate marketing systems (hereafter IMS, meaning traditional) or ITSs of either Model, 3) that the average size of communes in Kweichow and parts of Szechwan was very nearly as small as the average size of standard marketing systems (hereafter SMS), and 4) that the average size of communes in the rest of China appeared to be larger than the average for SMSs but smaller than the average for IMSs. I concluded, therefore that, with the possible exception of Kweichow and Szechwan, the communes of 1958–59 were typically not aligned with natural commercial systems at any level and that no significance could be read into the intriguing fact that averages for agricultural China as a whole

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new residential quarters for 10,000 persons, and establishing 10,000 *mow* of fishponds and 10,000 beehives. *Economic Research (Jingji Yanjiu)* August 1958, p. 38.

showed three SMSs per commune. The coincidence in ratios was just that: a mere coincidence.

My finding, then, was that *nowhere* in China were communes generally formed to correspond to IMSs, whereas Miss Donnithorne writes as though I had reported just the reverse: that the correspondence held *everywhere* in agricultural China. She then insists that I am wrong because the correspondence holds in "certain areas" only.

When an intelligent reader completely misses the point of an argument, it suggests that the fault lies with the writer, and for my sins in this regard I beg the pardon not only of Miss Donnithorne but of others whom I have inadvertently misled. There is an additional factor, however, which may have contributed to the misunderstanding, namely, the infrequency with which negative findings are reported outside certain scientific journals. Despite the urgings of methodologists, researchers tend to leave unmentioned the hypotheses which do not pan out, while readers, as a result of their conditioning, may not recognize an honest test of an hypothesis when they see one: To read a proposition is to assume that the author thinks he has been able to validate it. I must confess that I was moved to report this particular hypothesis in part out of covert pride in what I considered a rather ingenious formulation, and in part out of a desire to introduce into an all-too-dry account something of the zest of the research process. My only valid reason for detailing this particular abortive proposition, however, is that its pursuit turned up the clues to a different hypothesis (pp. 391–92) which appears to fit the available data and to account for certain of their peculiar patterns.

When we turn to the communes of 1963–64, it is encouraging to note that Miss Donnithorne has correctly understood what I was attempting to demonstrate. My argument holds that, unlike the communes of 1958–59 (which were for the most part formed to envelop rather than to coincide with basic-level commercial systems), those of 1963–64 had in most instances been brought into fairly close alignment with SMSs or, in modernized areas, ITSs. Two systematic exceptions are noted at p. 398 (Part III), one being that in certain areas "where population is dense and agrarian modernization advanced" communes are viable even when their size exceeds that of the typical ITS. The rationale of this exception becomes apparent when it is remembered that most of these areas are, for the reasons set out on pp. 203–04 (Part II), situated in the immediate vicinity of large cities. Where modern transport is highly developed, as it is today in the inner trading systems of Canton, Shanghai, Peking and other modernized metropolises, even many former intermediate market towns have lost their function as economic central places. In such areas, then, the premodern distribution of rural markets has been rendered irrelevant, and any discussion of alignment with either SMSs or ITSs becomes meaningless. With regard to Miss Donnithorne's strictures, it is important to realize that the great majority of foreign observers who are privileged to visit communes are taken by their hosts to the suburban areas of China's most modernized cities; their observations, therefore, are usually relevant only to one of the systematic exceptions to my alignment thesis.

In Part III I noted specifically that in Kwangtung the communes of 1958–59 had by 1963 been merely halved on the average, which is to say that the number of communes was doubled in Kwangtung rather than tripled as in the whole of agricultural China; and I accounted for this fact in terms of the high level of agrarian modernization achieved in Kwangtung by 1963. To be more specific, in Kwangtung both urbanization and transport modernization are far more advanced than in China as a whole, and in addition the province supports one of China's few extensive areas of exceedingly dense agrarian population. It follows that surburban areas which are both highly modernized and densely populated (i.e., areas for which the hypothesis of alignment is essentially irrelevant and in which one would expect outsized communes to be viable) should be exceptionally widespread. Therefore, the case of an outsized commune less than 30 miles from Canton can hardly be said to bear upon my central thesis.

The other systematic exception to alignment which I noted in Part III is that "in sparsely settled, inaccessible and relatively unmodernized areas," more than one commune may have been formed in a single standard marketing area. The reason for this departure from the general policy of alignment would appear to be that in the mountainous areas where population density is exceedingly low and transport undeveloped, standard marketing areas are too large (150 sq. kilometers and up: see Table 1, Part I, p. 34)to serve as efficient units of administration. Moreover, the special developmental goals which the Communists have set, in the post-Leap era, for remote areas where agriculture is marginal underlines the functional utility of bringing basic-level administrative units in these areas down to manageable size.

It should be unncessary to add that in non-agricultural China—the vast territories where natural resources and traditional technology did not allow the Han Chinese to pursue sedentary agriculture—the hypothesis of alignment is simply irrelevant, for SMSs were not and are not found. (Fns. 68 and 69, pp. 32–33, Part I.) The fact needs to be emphasized here, however, for Miss Donnithorne writes as though nationwide figures for communes and townships referred to the same restricted area as do my estimates for marketing systems. In fact, the total area of China (exclusive of Taiwan, Tibet and Chamdo) is very nearly twice that of agricultural China, as defined in my article.

Without further ado, let me present a set of estimates summarizing a degree of alignment between communes and natural commercial systems which seems probable at the present time. As noted on p. 379 (Part III), my model predicts that as of 1964 the countryside of agricultural China supports 42–45,000 traditional market towns (i.e., towns in which traditional periodic markets persist) alongside of 6500–7300 modern towns (i.e., economic central places other than cities in which periodic marketing has been superseded. If we take 43,000 and 7,000 as working figures, that is, if we assume that agricultural China supports approximately 50,000 basic-level commercial systems of which 43,000 are SMSs and 7,000 modern trading systems, then a probable level of alignment may be represented as follows:

Basic-level Commercial Systems		Relationship to communes	People's Communes	
Number	Type		Number	Composition
37,000	SMS	Aligned	37,000	One SMS
6,000	SMS	Subdivided	15,000	Half or third SMS
5,000	ITS	Aligned	5,000	One ITS
2,000	ITS and still larger modernized systems	Consolidated or unaligned	1,000	Two or more ITSs or entirely artificial
50,000	Est. no. in agricultural China:		58,000	
	Est. no. in non-agric. China:		16,000	
	No. cited, all China, 1963–64:		74,000	

With regard to the figure which this model tabulation shows for the number of communes outside agricultural China, it should be noted that communes now very nearly exhaust the landscape of China, with the obvious exceptions of Taiwan and Tibet/Chamdo. An estimate of 16,000 as the number of communes in non-agricultural China is, if anything, small rather than large, for it implies a minimal average area of 250 sq. km., a unit size which may well be inefficiently large in most of the less well-developed pastoral areas.

In setting out the circumstances in which various relationships are held generally to

obtain, I must disavow any attempt to have my cake and eat it too. Rather, I follow the standard scientific practice of *specifying* an hypothesis. At two extremes—one of high population density and maximal development, the other of low population density and minimal development—the hypothesis that rural people's communes had by 1963–64 been brought into general alignment with basic-level commercial systems (SMSs or ITSs, whichever is present) is controverted by available evidence. For each of these two 'deviations' I have specified its nature and the conditions under which it occurs, together with a rationale for the posited relationship which is consistent with known facts as well as with the central hypothesis. The great majority of China's rural communes are situated in those parts of agricultural China where population densities are neither marginally low nor atypically high, and where agrarian modernization is neither highly advanced nor virtually nil. In these circumstances, my specified hypothesis holds that alignment with basic-level commercial systems should be general. It will be noted that the above estimates show over 70 per cent of communes in agricultural China to be aligned with basic-level commercial systems and no less than 84 per cent of basic-level commercial systems to be aligned with communes.

Let me now turn to the special and crucial case of Szechwan. Miss Donnithorne suggests that a total of at least 7,000 communes for the province as a whole in 1963 controverts my alignment hypothesis. There is a sense in which she has me over a barrel, for available data do not allow one to argue for *close* alignment in both 1958 *and* 1963. But the logic of her assertion and the assumptions on which it is based are, I believe, fundamentally wrong. It will facilitate this part of my argument to reiterate the *two* hypotheses which are relevant here. The one holds that in the Szechwan Basin, where market towns are peculiarly prominent on the landscape, the degree of alignment between communes and marketing systems would at all times be higher than elsewhere in China. The other holds that in 1958–59 communes were formed if not deliberately to crosscut or envelop SMSs then without specific intention to achieve alignment, whereas the reformation of communes after 1961 was specifically and deliberately designed to maximize the fit between commune and basic-level commercial system. *Both* hypotheses would be supported if available evidence indicated 1) that in 1958–59 as well as in 1963–64 the proportion of communes which were aligned with basic-level commercial systems was significantly higher in the Szechwan Basin than elsewhere in agricultural China, and 2) that the extent of alignment in Szechwan was significantly greater in 1963–64 than in 1958–59.

So far as I can determine, the facts support both of these conclusions. Miss Donnithorne is able to attempt an oblique denial only because she has overlooked two crucial factors. In the first place, as I argued at length in Part II, the number of basic-level commercial systems does not remain constant over time. On the one hand, increases in rural population density and in commercialization lead directly to a rise in the number of SMSs as new standard markets are established. On the other hand, when modern transport reaches a certain level of development in an already commercialized area, standard markets begin to die and the number of basic-level commercial systems declines as three or four SMSs are replaced by one modernized ITS.

The rapid development of Szechwan during the past fifteen years, especially in the realm of transport (see p. 378, Part III), coupled with inexorable population growth, has almost certainly led to a not inconsiderable increment of standard market towns on the landscape. A model based on three assumptions—1) that the number of SMSs in 1948 approximated the number of townships in that part of the province lying in agricultural China (see pp. 222–23, Part II), 2) that in agricultural Szechwan outside the Central Riverine Zone of the Szechwan Basin commercialization occurred at a rate which by 1963 brought it up to the level which the Central Riverine Zone had attained as of 1948, and 3) that commercialization in that part of the province lying in the Central Riverine Zone proceeded during 1948–63 at a somewhat lower rate and was accompanied in limited areas

around the river ports by true agrarian modernization—indicates that the number of basic-level commercial systems approximated 4500 in 1948, 5300 in 1958 and 5800 in 1963:

Szechwan within Agric. China only	Total area Sq. km.	1948 No.	1948 Ave. area	1958 No.	1958 Ave. area	1963 No.	1963 Ave. area
Riverine Zone	98,000	2162	45	2660	37	2720	36
Other Szechwan Basin	139,000	2077	67	2350	59	2770	50
Other *hsien*	45,000	263	171	290	155	310	145
	282,000	4502	63	5300	53	5800	49

Clearly, the number of communes would need to be increased between 1959 and 1963 if even the degree of alignment obtaining in 1959 were to be maintained.

The second factor overlooked by Miss Donnithorne is that the statistic for the number of communes in Szechwan as of 30 September 1958 was incomplete: The figure of 4827 communes was accompanied by an indication that approximately 125,000 rural households had not yet been organized into communes. We can be almost certain that these households consisted largely of Tibetans, Lolos and the other non-Han peoples who inhabit that sparsely-settled part of Szechwan which lies in non-agricultural China. (It must be kept in mind that Szechwan province as constituted under the Nationalists was vastly enlarged by the Communists through the addition of that part of Sikang province lying to the east of the Chin-sha River.) While it is true that the non-Han areas of non-agricultural Szechwan were almost completely formed into communes by 1963, as of September 1959 most of this territory had not yet been communized. And it is precisely in these parts of the province that communes small enough in area to be viable had necessarily to include a very small number of households. Therefore, the difference between 4827 (1958) and 7000+ (1963) must be accounted for in part by the fact that the former refers to only a part of the province while the latter refers to the whole.

In short, *all* things considered, it is not only quite possible but highly probable that the great majority of Szechwan's SMSs (and modernized ITSs) each constituted a single commune in 1958 as well as 1963. According to my calculations at least 80 per cent must have been aligned in 1958 and perhaps 95 per cent in 1963. (If the non-agricultural parts of Szechwan had by 1963 been formed into communes averaging 250 sq. km., then they would account for 1070 communes out of the 7000+ total. That would leave 5930+ communes to be formed out of 5800 basic-level commercial systems.) These tentative conclusions accord with my general alignment hypothesis for agricultural China as a whole as well as with the expectations concerning the Szechwan Basin in particular.

Finally, a word about the quality of Communist statistics. They are doubtless of questionable validity, especially those pertaining to the 1958–61 period, and no one could fail to join with Miss Donnithorne in urging that available statistics be regarded with skepticism. But in this connection I should like to make two points. The first is that from my failure to sound the customary caveats it does not follow that I am accustomed to lapping up every figure supplied without reservation. Take the case of Kwangsi's communes. One source (Dick Wilson, "China's Farming Prospects," *Far Eastern Economic Review,* vol. 45, 6 August 1964, p. 235) asserts that the number of communes in the province "shot up from 1,000 to 20,000." Anna Louise Strong's version is that the 1,000 communes of 1958 were subdivided until "there are now [1964] nearly 10,000." Clearly the original informants of both writers, in using *i-wan* or *liang-wan* (one or two 'ten-thousands'), had merely been conveying the information that communes in Kwangsi were exceptionally small and

numerous. And it should be equally clear that I accepted neither figure at its face value: Mr. Wilson's I did not bother to report, and Miss Strong's was used in a footnote (no. 274, p. 358) to support the statement that in "sparsely settled, inaccessible, and relatively unmodernized areas" such as Kwangsi, communes had been formed to be smaller than SMSs. (My opinion of Miss Strong's reliability in matters of detail is made clear in Footnotes 276 and 277 on the page in question.)

Official figures for the number of communes in other provinces, as reported in the Chinese press, are quite another matter, and this brings me to my second point: Skepticism should properly lead not to the blanket dismissal of all statistics on Communist China but rather to discrimination among them on the basis of careful evaluation. A number of criteria can be helpful in this regard. Do we have reason to believe that the Communist authorities themselves use the figures? Were they transmitted by a meticulous and reliable person? Are the trends shown by figures for the same area at different points in time corroborated by evidence from case studies? Are those trends consistent with known policy changes? Are the differences between contemporaneous figures for two different areas consistent with what is known about ecological and demographic differences between the areas? By these various criteria, increases between 1959 and 1963 in the national totals of communes from approximately 24,000 to 74,000, of production brigades from approximately 500,000 to 700,000, and of production teams from approximately 3.5 to 5 million "make sense" as orders of magnitude.

In bringing this reply to a close, I must take exception to Miss Donnithorne's assertion that production brigades "often now have a very shadowy existence." So far as I can determine, brigades are more often than not aligned with nucleated villages and are almost universally the unit within which basic-level Party branches have been formed. There is nothing shadowy about a nucleated village on the rural landscape, and few organizations can be more real in rural China today than the basic-level Party branch. But these are matters of substance which, being peripheral to the main thrust of Miss Donnithorne's remarks, need not be argued here.

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