

ELISABETH CROLL, *From Heaven to Earth. Images and Experiences of Development in China*. London/New York: Routledge, 1994. XVIII and 317 pp, £ 13.99 Pb / £ 40.00 Hb. ISBN 0-415-10187-5 / 0-415-09746-0

In ten chapters Croll deals with the problems of changes in China's farming sector and in population policies, as perceived by the peasants themselves, describing how they adapt to them both in farming and in the family. From the start the author refutes the simplistic approach that the reforms after 1978/80 – the dissolution of the people's communes and their aftermath – mark a return to capitalism. The new strategy is a "search for appropriate institutions conducive to maximal rural development with equity" (p. X). It is in the interest of the state, of economic development and of the peasant household to find a new balance between the single rural household and the collective village institutions. The first step in 1978 was naturally to reduce the overwhelming weight of the collective and the village, a return from "heaven", promised by Mao, to "earth", the return to "seeking the truth in facts".

Chapter 1 deals with the promised heaven, where harmony, equality and unity should rule on earth after hasty full-scale collectivisation. In practice this thorough reshaping of the village implied present renunciation for the sake of a much better, but very distant future. Early peasant enthusiasm faded away in spite of repeated mobilisation campaigns. From 1978 onwards the reform was a full-scale turn, the dialectical negation of collectivisation, but no return to pre-revolutionary conditions. New inputs were offered to the peasants together with new responsibility and a different type of control plus incentives for the ultimate producing (and reproducing) unit, the farm household.

In chapter 2, the author stresses again that the redistribution of responsibility and the split of political and economic power in the village was a socialist contract, promoting development and equality (p. 18). By the reform the peasant again won "de facto long-term control over the land" (p. 22). Diversified production, commodity production, specialisation, and the breaking-up of the closed circuit created the need for capital goods and external inputs, thus promoting market exchange between village and town and industrial development.

Loosening collective responsibility for disabled, elderly people, widows, and orphans, implied social differentiation. Thus, in 1984 a first-ever official survey of these groups was undertaken to establish who was still eligible for the "five guarantees" (food, clothing, medical care, housing, burial). For the non-eligible, a new marriage law in 1980 and a new constitution in 1982 confirmed the younger generation's duty to support their

parents. The government envisaged the establishment of new, voluntary forms of cooperation which would, in the long run, finally dominate. In the village, part-time local leaders were to direct affairs and control development of the local economy, but not interfere in the activities of economic organisations.

In chapters 3-9 the author describes the findings of her nine case studies in diverse regions in the late eighties. Both the positive and negative results of reform are analysed: increased production, higher income, construction of new houses, labour shortage in the highly developed regions on the one hand and children dropping out from school quite early, social differentiation and unemployment in backward regions on the other hand. Regional differentiation was aggravated. The chapters give a vivid picture of development and its many variations. In some remote provinces progress was quite slow and villagers looked forward to the "poverty alleviation programmes, recently introduced by central government" (p. 93).

Chapter 4 describes the partial "swing back" to a redistribution of functions, in which some tasks were again vested in off-farm institutions, now, however, in a more smooth, voluntary process, together with new inputs and services, beyond the financial capacity of dwarf-holdings. Development did not grind to a standstill with the 1978 reform. Land redistribution is a continuous process; equal distribution after decollectivisation was "naturally" eroded (p. 99). Various forms of joint or village land cultivation are described, whereby the profit is divided: 20 percent to the individual, 40 for investment and development and the remainder to the village for its services (p. 100). The author reports discontent among the poorest villagers with the new situation and sometimes the desire to return to collective farming. There are "unstable and most openly rebellious villages", studied by Croll, "an underlying and seething resentment focused on these exactions" of levies (p. 107).

Chapter 5 deals with the changed information network. A village survey is quoted in which peasants stress their freedom: "We now dare to speak our minds and air our grievances. There was no such freedom in that era of the big collective" (p. 117). Such facts and views are now published in research publications. Croll says: "One of the most significant repercussions of the decade or so of reforms has been the emergence of the peasant household from its encapsulation within the village and of the village within collective structures" (p. 118). In 1989 rural sociologists demanded: "The farmers should be permitted to have more decision-making power, to acquire the means to protect their interests and aspirations,



and channels should be established for farmers to voice their complaints to the authorities" (p. 130).

Chapter 6 describes a "dramatic increase in cash incomes and standards of living of peasant households" (p. 135) for the early years of reform. Much of it is now derived from off-farm sources. Inflation, however, has taken part of the increased income, and the income differentials have grown. The issue of social polarisation is discussed by economists, and the central government has drawn its conclusions with its poverty alleviation program. While becoming rich was applauded earlier, now there is "increasing official and popular concern" (p. 143), open debate and reports in central newspapers and the media. In 1984, active measures were taken by the central government: formation of voluntary "help the poor"-committees and new income sources from the Poverty Alleviation Office. The village poor may be estimated at 80 millions, largely in the marginal regions and provinces. Croll also reports the difficulties and failures of these programs: the help sometimes flows to higher income households (p. 155). The "floating poor" from the villages leave their families behind and remit a large part of their earnings to their relatives.

Chapter 7 starts to analyse the changes in the household. One of the awkward effects of decollectivisation is the increase of child labour, of new illiteracy among children who are kept away from school by their parents. The drop-out rate is higher among girls. Part of the rural workforce has become superfluous. Since the men look for alternative jobs, peasant households turn into "half-side families" with a heavy workload for the women.

In this and the last three chapters Croll discusses extensively the effects of the reform on the peasant family. She gives evidence that the ideas, targets and methods of government policies are far removed from village reality: early marriage, several children etc. But official family planning is soft and quite flexible; directives are adapted to regional conditions and the needs of ethnic minorities. Family planning with the unpopular target of the one-child family is scrutinised. Surveys lead to early and frequent changes of directives. The government probably understands that in this field coercion and sanctions are neither useful nor feasible, but counterproductive. Sanctions can hardly be applied due to peasant resistance and the fact that cadres, too, do not toe the line in their families. The only practical way to induce and enable families to stop reproduction after the first child is a nation-wide old-age insurance system, still out of reach both for government and for the agricultural population. There has been a slow decline in household size; the number of multi-generational households is decreasing. On the other hand, new economic challenges compel families

to aggregate their means and efforts, which leads to a new type: the "aggregate family".

Croll recounts the different periods of demographic policies: coercion 1983-84, moderation 1985-86. "There was general recognition that there was *de facto* a two-child policy in operation in the countryside, an acknowledgment, which placed the government in a new position of checkmate after 1987." (p. 193) This policy is "masked by unreliable data even in the highest-performing counties" (p. 196).

Chapter 9 analyses the difficult position of women. The revolutionary efforts to liberate half of heaven were not entirely in vain, but did not lead to full success either. In view of parents' preference for boys, family planning policy contributed to female infanticide, a "custom" quite common from old days in several rural cultures. The dimension of the problem has led to open discussion and government measures.

The last chapter sees the important features distinguishing reform from revolution in the interest in present reality, in incentives, enrichment and consumption – from long-term to short-term objectives (from heaven to earth) (p. 215). Improved living standards may also have smoothed resistance to unpopular family planning. Reform offered new venues for income generation, but at the same time did away with collective security and equality on the low level of primary accumulation. The next step then is to limit social differentiation by introduction of taxation.

Croll stresses that the new problems connected with reform, *inter alia* "inflation, unfair income distribution and a drop in social morals" are openly discussed; research is encouraged and published. Several surveys of peasant opinion have been undertaken and their findings published in full in a national newspaper – another sign of a more open atmosphere. Marxist social science is no longer used to legitimise political errors by pointing to a future heaven. Continuous reappraisal also leads to new thinking about socialism, the goal, objectives, phases and pace of development and social change in a society of 1.2 billion human beings. Croll expresses the opinion that economic uncertainty and hopes for a better life here and now make Chinese peasants take a distant view of such "outbursts" as in spring of 1989, a view "dominated by the fear of disorder, a fear, which is reinforced by past events of the Cultural Revolution and current events in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe" (p. 224).

Croll's anthropological approach sheds new light on a long period of reform that has deeply changed the farming sector and the attitudes of the Chinese peasantry. Though the book is impressive by the wealth of data and facts and by its balanced approach, its account of success as well as



failure and its analysis of the new problems, a few critical remarks may be permitted:

1. The villages in the village survey (chapters 3-6) illustrate the dwarf-size of peasant holdings and the level of cash-income and at the same time the paramount task of integrating these peasant masses into a commodity economy and a paying social security system, financed by the producers and beneficiaries themselves. But it seems delusive and it offers a false resemblance of precision, if the data are calculated with two digits behind the comma.
2. In several instances, low crop yields and low incomes are explained by "physical and mental incapacity" (p. 38 and 87). Is that the real cause?
3. Chicken producing "approximately 550 eggs in one year" (p. 62) were probably reared and kept in China's Potemkin village.
4. Peasants losing fertile land – that happens frequently. But will the land really be used for a railway-line to Japan (p. 101)?
5. "The highest village per capita income was thirty times that of the poorest." (p. 139). Is that realistic?

In spite of these few critical remarks the book is very valuable reading for rural and development sociologists and for sinologists. It includes 90 tables, an index and a report about the methods of field research in China.

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ALBRECHT ROTHACHER, *The Japanese Power Elite*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1993. 336 pages, £ 40.00. ISBN 0-333-58463-5.

*The Japanese Power Elite* reveals a great deal about Japan's governmental and business leadership in a very un-Japanese way. That is to say, Rothacher is refreshingly candid, forceful and blunt in his critical examination of Japan's movers and shakers. This book, the author's fourth dealing with Japan, is the welcome product of Rothacher's considerable academic talent, as well as his practical experiences as a first secretary to the then European Community delegation in Tokyo from 1987 to 1991.

To Rothacher, there is little inscrutability in understanding Japan's small core of true power holders and little so-called "emptiness" at its center. He argues that "Japan's power structure is not substantially different from other western capitalist democracies." Rich with statistical analyses skillfully blended with historical examples and personal anecdotes,