Book Reviews

A Chinese Village in Early Communist Transition. C. K. Yang. Technology Press (distributed by Harvard University Press), Cambridge, Mass., 1959. xii + 284 pp. $6.50.

The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution. C. K. Yang. Technology Press (distributed by Harvard University Press), Cambridge, Mass., 1959. xii + 246 pp. $6.

The study of contemporary sociocultural developments in China presents social science with some of its most momentous problems. Perhaps a quarter of the world's population is immediately involved in these events, but all of us will be affected by their outcome. Indeed, the gigantic sociocultural experiment presently being carried out on the Chinese mainland dwarfs all other similar experiments in scope and even, perhaps, in intensity. Yet, it is a source of enormous chagrin to American students of these problems that they are forced to consider the problems from the outside, studying them through an intermediary screen which filters out much of the best data and, unquestionably, distorts a great portion of the data that come through. Under the circumstances, we are particularly grateful to have the present volumes, one describing the events and processes involved in the transition of an agricultural village near Canton from Nationalist to Communist control, the other giving a more generalized analysis of the great currents of change which are sweeping through the familial institutions of the Chinese.

C. K. Yang, professor of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh, was chairman of the department of sociology at Lingnan University (Canton) in 1948, when he decided to take his students to Nanching, only 5 miles from Canton, where they could learn field techniques while contributing to the knowledge of Chinese culture and society. After this project had been in operation about a year, the Communists took control of the village. Yang was in an almost unique position: continuing to collect data, he was one of the very few social scientists to have the opportunity to make a continuing study of a rural village under the impact of great change. Yang remained in China until 1951, though his work was often impeded. As a matter of fact, he was deprived of his notes when he left China, but managed to put down the essence of his field observations during a period of residence at Harvard University that followed his arrival in the United States.

Though the volume on Nanching would have been better if all the original statistics had been available, it is still an excellent and highly useful work, distinguished by a high degree of objectivity and by Yang's ability to discuss economic, political, and other social-structural changes without the intense personal involvement so frequently found in similar works by Chinese writers. This is particularly notable in Yang's treatment of many changes as parts of processes which were already substantially under way before the Communists achieved power.

A particular and important example is Yang's treatment of changes in Chinese family structure. Beginning with a high degree of sophistication, manifest in his careful distinction between the large family found in the economically secure sectors of the traditional society and the much smaller family groupings common to the less fortunate but numerically more preponderant sectors, Yang seeks to demonstrate that the prevailing tendency for the last several decades has been a reduction of corporate, unilineal descent groups as an important structural feature, with concomitant enhancement of the significance of nuclear family organization. This central tendency has wide ramifications throughout the rest of the social fabric. It correlates with a reduction in the power of the older adults and consequent improvement in the status of youth. It relates to the freeing of marriage from parental supervision and the equalizing of male and female status. It has important links to the revolution in property ownership, which divests lineage heads and older people in general of vested property. The manipulation of such property has traditionally been translated into political power.

The transition from private to collective ownership of land in Nanching was not completed during the period of his observation, but Yang did see the initial stages of land redistribution. Despite the precarious economic status of about 75 percent of Nanching's approximately 230 households, there was little violence during the redivision. This was in keeping with the village's tradition of conflict on the lineage and individual levels but not on the class level. At any rate, Yang combines observation and subsequent documentary research to reach the conclusion that the land reform failed to result in any significant rise in the standard of living. This failure, Yang believes, has yet to be overcome, but he also believes that it must be overcome if the new system is to succeed. Even should the present regime collapse, however, Yang makes it clear that the way to the past is barred and many, if not most, of the recent changes will remain in one form or another.

Yang has attempted to extend his materials well beyond the temporal point at which his firsthand observations ceased, by incorporating the results of research in Mainland newspapers and other perodicals. This method is, of course, simply an expedient and needs no apology. Yet it is peculiarly unsuited for getting at the heart of the great alterations being experienced in China. Certainly the greatest and most jolting changes are those which accompanied the replacement of the cooperative and collective program by the system of communes initiated in April 1958. Yang dwells only briefly, in a postscript, on the significance of this move which is so novel that it precludes prognosis. He believes, however, that the commune will not destroy the nuclear family, though he recognizes that certain features, such as barrack dwellings, if pushed by the Communists, may lead to precisely such a result.

Yang's books could have been improved by more extensive and judicious comparison with available sociological

and anthropological books and papers in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages. Under present circumstances, however, this is rather like looking a gift horse in the mouth. If and when a means is established whereby our own scholars can pursue research in China, we will begin to develop real knowledge and insight into this great, if alarming, experiment. Even then we will continue to be indebted to Yang for this thoughtful and provoking set of studies.

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Dosimetrie und Strahlenschutz. Physikalische und technische daten. R. G. Jaeger. Georg Thieme, Stuttgart, Germany, 1959 (order from Intercontinental Medical Book Corp., New York). xii + 282 pp. Illus. $11.80.

This collection of basic data, formulas, tables, and diagrams fills an urgent need for material on radiation dosimetry and radiation protection. Selection and arrangement of the material reflect the great experience of the author, an expert in the field for many years. There is no doubt that this monograph will become a standard work in every radiation laboratory.

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Levels of Knowing and Existence. Studies in general semantics. Harry L. Weinberg. Harper, New York, 1959. xiv + 274 pp. $4.50.

General semantics emphasizes the symbolic transformations which all of our experiences must undergo in the process of being evaluated. The most crucial of these transformations is the passage from the nonverbal (sensory) to the verbal (categorized) level of cognition. Essentially, then, the latter is a "map" of the former and, by extension, a map of the "real" (objective) world. Since verbal knowledge is cast in language, and since language has its own structure (syntax, analogies, conventions, and so forth), it follows that the verbal levels of cognition can and do bring serious distortions into our picture of the world.

This outlook has obvious relations both to the philosophy of language and to the philosophy of science; indeed, the intimate relation between language and cognition has been pointed out in other schools of thought (for example, in logical positivism). However, Alfred Korzybski, who gave the name "general semantics" to this outlook, has put special emphasis on its psychiatric implications. He believed he had outlined a general theory of sanity, applicable not only to individuals but to cultures and to the whole human race.

Perhaps because of this emphasis, general semantics has attracted relatively wide attention in the United States, where a public concerned with problems of self-help and mental health is always potentially present. Some of this interest has been siphoned off into cultist activity, but there have also been salubrious and constructive results. A number of gifted and devoted teachers have used general semantics as the central idea in a philosophy of communication with excellent pedagogic results. Accordingly, several popularizations of general semantics have appeared, each using the "system" as leverage for expounding ideas in the study of language, psychology, human relations, the arts, and even medicine and law.

The present volume follows the pattern of the previous popularizations and is, perhaps, closer to Korzybski's formulation than any of the others. In a way, this faithful account is one of the book's merits, for it allows the reader to follow Korzybski's ideas as originally stated without wading through the atrocious verbiage of *Science and Sanity* (the principal source book) in constant danger of mistaking obscurity for profoundness. But in this close adherence to the teachings of the Master lies also the book's shortcoming. Together with Korzybski's challenging insights and tantalizing conjectures, Weinberg carries along the shaky generalizations and, most unfortunately, the scientism—that is, the appearance of scientific rigor assumed by reference to technical investigations—which bear, at best, an analogical relation to the matter at hand.

Happily, Korzybski's treatment of neurological and "colloidal" aspects of behavior is omitted. A factual account of current methods of "semantitherapy" is informative and welcome, and so is the chapter on religion, particularly the reference to Zen Buddhism (a statement on existentialism might also have been included to advantage). Here Weinberg comes closest to stating convincingly the principal theme of his book and the ethical meaning of general semantics: Both direct experience and rational cognition are attributes of human condition; both must be open to man. In order that the one should not exclude the other, we should become aware of their distinct modalities and of their relation to each other and to the external world. This awareness is the content of sanity.

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Readings in Linear Programming. S. Vajda. Wiley, New York, 1958. vii + 99 pp. $3.

This little book is something of an expository tour de force. In less than 100 pages, its 24 chapters give a representative collection of worked out examples of problems in which linear programming can be used. The references (approximately 100) will enable the interested reader to go more deeply into the literature of the subject.

Linear programming deals with maximizing or minimizing an "objective function," which is a linear function of a set of variables subjected to linear equations or inequalities (referred to as constraints). Nontrivial cases arise when there are more variables than equations. It is remarkable what a large variety of practical problems can be treated by this technique. Personnel allocation, smooth patterns of production, blending of aviation gasolines, product selection, ship scheduling, airlift, warehouse, and transportation problems, maximal flow through a network, and trim loss reduction are a representative rather than an exhaustive list of applications. Even zero-sum, two-person games can be solved (in the sense of von Neumann's theory) by methods of linear programming.

A feature of the book is the use of elementary mathematics throughout; the examples are generally worked out almost entirely by simple arithmetic. The exposition is generally clear, although its conciseness may cause difficulty to readers with limited mathematical background. The worker in the field of operations research will find the book a simple, readable introduction to the varied problems and literature of the subject. Managerial personnel may find it useful in developing a feeling concerning justifiable uses of oper-