Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949

China’s introduction to and development of Western social sciences in the late 1920s and 1930s grew from a larger intellectual movement in Europe and the United States emphasizing the empirical study of society. The idea of applying scientific methods to better understand and control social, political, and economic forces was timely for a country still emerging from its long imperial past and struggling to modernize. The empirical approach offered the hope of engineering Chinese society to eradicate such problems as poverty, illiteracy, and corruption and to promote education and industrial development.

In this book, Yung-chen Chiang tells the story of the origins, hopes and visions, and achievements of the social science movement in China during the first half of the twentieth century. Chiang focuses in particular on the efforts of social scientists at three institutions – Yanjing Sociology Department, Nankai Institute of Economics, and Chen Hansheng’s Marxist agrarian research enterprise – to relate their disciplines to the needs of Chinese society. Because all three groups received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, their stories constitute a unique window onto Sino-American interactions, revealing how the social sciences became a lingua franca of the cultural frontier as patron and clients negotiated through the medium of social science agendas and methodologies.

Drawing on an impressive variety of archival materials used here for the first time, this study corrects and enriches current scholarship, offering simultaneously a more detailed account and a panoramic view. Chiang does more than relate an extraordinary phase in the history of the social sciences in modern China; by focusing on the three most dynamic social science enterprises, he engages the complex issues of the transfer, indigenization, and international patronage of social science disciplines. Chiang’s study of China’s experience with Western social science, driven in large part by Sino-American intellectual and cultural exchanges, offers important lessons for contemporary social science development and education in China.

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YUNG-CHEN CHIANG

DePauw University
For Li-feng and Carolyn

Jishi shi “bizhou zizhen,” haishi

yao xiexie nimen dui wo de xinxin
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Note on Names and Romanization

This study adopts the pinyin romanization system, with two exceptions. First, out of respect for their own choice and to facilitate corroboration and future research using multilingual sources, those who adopted English names and used them consistently and those who completed their careers in the United States are identified accordingly. Thus, it is H. D. Fong rather than Fang Xianting; Franklin Ho instead of He Lian; Leonard Hsu and not Xu Shilian; and James Yen in place of Yan Yangchu. Second, it retains personal names and place names that are long familiar in the West. Thus, it is Sun Yat-sen rather than Sun Zhong-shan; Chiang Kai-shek instead of Jiang Jieshi; Peking rather than Beijing; and Canton rather than Guangzhou.