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978-0-521-77014-9 - Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949

Yung-Chen Chiang

Excerpt

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## 1

*Introduction*

When it comes to learning, sociology is the foundation. Only when sociology is understood will the cause of peace or disorder, prosperity or decline, be known, and will objectives from self-cultivation, ordering one's family, pacifying a nation, to bringing peace to the world be achieved. Truly this is a great learning!

Yan Fu (1896)<sup>1</sup>

Social science research in China during the 1930s constituted part of a larger phenomenon that occurred simultaneously in the United States and Western Europe. It was a movement toward an empirical study of society in order to control the social, political, and economic forces at work. The origins of this social science movement are diverse due to the differences in the academic and cultural traditions of these countries.<sup>2</sup> However, when the movement came to represent a new approach in the early twentieth century, it exhibited not only a strikingly uniform tendency toward empirical research, but a belief in the technocratic potentials of the social sciences.<sup>3</sup>

1. Yan Fu, "Yuan qiang" (On Strength), *Yan Fu sixiang zhitan* (Themes of Yan Fu's Thought) (Hong Kong, 1980), p. 16.
2. For a bird's-eye view of this phenomenon, especially in connection with sociology, see Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, eds., *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880–1940* (Cambridge, 1991) and Edward Shils, *The Calling of Sociology and Other Essays on the Pursuit of Learning* (Chicago, 1980), especially "The Confluence of Sociological Traditions," pp. 134–64 and "Tradition, Ecology, and Institution," pp. 165–256.
3. For studies of the technocratic claims and American social sciences, see William E. Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900–1941* (Berkeley, 1977); John McClymer, *War and Welfare: Social Engineering in America, 1890–1925* (Westport, CT, 1980); and Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Capitalism, Social Science, and the State in the 1920s* (Princeton, 1985).

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One major factor that contributed to the rise of this empirical approach was the patronage of social science research by philanthropic foundations, particularly the Rockefeller Foundation. The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial appropriated about \$21 million for the social sciences from 1923 to 1928 when it was reorganized into the Division of the Social Sciences of the Rockefeller Foundation. Besides exerting a powerful influence on the development of the social sciences in the United States, the Memorial set the prototype for patronage of social science research on a large scale. Through concentrated funding to selected institutions, the Memorial contributed to the ascendance of several social science centers in the United States, such as Chicago, the Brookings Institution, Columbia, Harvard, Minnesota, Yale, Berkeley, Stanford, Cornell, Pennsylvania, and the National Bureau of Economic Research.<sup>4</sup>

This strategic targeting for support of premier social science centers was an attempt to address the lack of scientific rigor of the social sciences, which the Memorial attributed to the old scholastic traditions that were “largely deductive and speculative, on the basis of secondhand observations, documentary evidence and anecdotal material.”<sup>5</sup> According to a report commissioned by the Memorial in 1923, almost all the Ph.D. dissertations in the social sciences written in the United States from 1919 to 1922 belonged to library research – 86 percent at Chicago and 95 percent at Columbia, for example.<sup>6</sup> In order to foster empirical approaches, the Memorial deployed its resources for a two-pronged attack on economics, sociology, political science, psychology, anthropology, and history: provisions of institutional grants for research and a fellowship program to train a new generation of elite social scientists.<sup>7</sup>

That the Memorial could not have fostered something that had not already emerged within the social science disciplines is obvious. It is, however, beyond dispute that money from the Memorial contributed to

4. Martin and Joan Bulmer, “Philanthropy and Social Science in the 1920s: Beardsley Ruml and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1922–29,” *Minerva*, XIX.3 (autumn 1981), pp. 347–407; Martin Bulmer, “Support for Sociology in the 1920s: The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and the Beginnings of Modern, Large-Scale, Sociological Research in the University,” *The American Sociologist*, 17 (November 1982), pp. 185–92.

5. Ramond Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. 194.

6. Martin and Joan Bulmer, “Philanthropy and Social Science in the 1920s: Beardsley Ruml and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1922–29,” p. 373.

7. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation*, p. 195.

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the ascendance of the institutions that responded to the Memorial's new initiatives in the social sciences. This is certainly the case with research institutes, such as the Brookings Institution and the National Bureau of Economic Research, that depended for their endowments, administrative expenditures, and project funds on the Memorial and, later, the Rockefeller Foundation, in addition to the Carnegie Corporation.<sup>8</sup> More subtle but no less definitive is the connection between foundation support and the university social science programs that achieved national prominence. The University of Chicago, which received close to three and a half million dollars from the Memorial, is perhaps the most illustrious example of this linkage. In essence, what the Memorial pursued was a policy of building on strength, or as Wickliffe Rose, president of the Rockefeller International Education Board and General Education Board, put it, of "making the peaks higher." It is noteworthy that more than half of the \$21 million that the Memorial appropriated for the social sciences went to five major centers – Chicago, Columbia, the Brookings Institution, the London School of Economics, and Harvard.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the four universities that the Memorial supported – Columbia, Chicago, Harvard, and Pennsylvania – produced, together with Wisconsin, more than 80 percent of the Ph.D.'s in the social sciences in the United States from 1919 to 1922.<sup>10</sup>

Direct funding to universities, however, did not fully illustrate the Memorial's policy of "making the peaks higher." For in addition to institutional grants, the Memorial also funded research through the Social Science Research Council. Created in 1923, the Social Science Research Council was an operating arm for the Memorial and, later, the Rockefeller Foundation, which contributed more than 92 percent of the Council's \$6.25 million budget from 1924 to 1940.<sup>11</sup> Like the National

8. Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 400–4; and Ellen Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), pp. 57–70.

9. Martin and Joan Bulmer, "Philanthropy and Social Science in the 1920s: Beardsley Ruml and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1922–29," p. 386.

10. Lawrence Frank, "The Status of Social Science in the United States," p. 5, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Archives deposited at the Rockefeller Archives Center (hereafter cited as RAC LSRM) III 63.679. Note that Martin Bulmer has mistakenly reported that these five institutions produced three-quarters of the Ph.D.'s in the social sciences. See his "Support for Sociology in the 1920s: The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and the Beginnings of Modern, Large-Scale, Sociological Research in the University," p. 187.

11. The discussion in the following two paragraphs, unless indicated otherwise, is based on Donald Fisher, *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences: Rockefeller Philan-*

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Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences,<sup>12</sup> the Social Science Research Council promoted and coordinated interdisciplinary empirical social science research through committees, conferences, fellowships, and grants-in-aid. One cannot overemphasize the impact the Social Science Research Council's programs had on the social sciences in the United States. Consider, for example, the Council's fellowship program, which consumed 26.3 percent of its budget from 1924 to 1940. Of the 519 fellowships the Social Science Research Council awarded between 1923 and 1940, 240 were postdoctoral. As of 1951, 75 percent of these postdoctoral fellows whose employment status was known worked in academia, spreading across North America in fifty-six universities. Some of them became the most famous social scientists in the United States: Herbert Blumer, Crane Brinton, John Kenneth Galbraith, Simon Kuznets, Harold Lasswell, Charles Loomis, Margaret Mead, Robert Redfield, and Louis Wirth.

The national scope and posture of the Social Science Research Council, however, belied the fact that the Council's programs, like the Memorial's, disproportionately benefited elite institutions. Take, for example, the Council's postdoctoral fellowship program. While a total of thirty-two universities were represented, more than 70 percent of the fellows during the interwar years came from eleven universities. To be more precise, 49 percent were graduates of Chicago, Harvard, Columbia, Stanford, Yale, and Berkeley, and another 22.5 percent were from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Cornell. These institutions, furthermore, benefited from the infusion of these fellows to their faculty. While most universities had one ex-fellow, Chicago, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Berkeley, Stanford, Yale, Michigan, Illinois, and Cornell each had six or more ex-fellows on their faculty.

The Memorial's policy of "making the peaks higher" was not limited to the United States, but was global in its intent. In the words of the Memorial's director, Beardsley Ruml, "the development of social science requires that there should be in the world a dozen, fifteen, twenty, well-rounded and effective research institutions."<sup>13</sup> In practice, however, the

*thropy and the United States Social Science Research Council* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 199–211.

12. For an analysis of the National Research Council, see Robert Kohler, "Science, Foundations, and American Universities in the 1920s," *OSIRIS*, 2nd series, 1987, 3:135–64.
13. Quoted in Donald Fisher, "The Role of Philanthropic Foundations in the Reproduction and Production of Hegemony: Rockefeller Foundation and the Social Sciences," *Sociology*, 17.2 (May 1983), p. 212.

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Memorial's power was much more circumscribed globally than domestically. Instead of cooperating with the existing peaks within the national systems, the Memorial often found itself having to foster fledgling new centers. In Great Britain, for example, due to the lukewarm response by Cambridge University to the Memorial's overtures, it was the London School of Economics, an empirically oriented institution founded in 1895 by Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw, that became the major beneficiary of the Memorial. As the fifth largest grant recipient of the Memorial, the London School of Economics was transformed from a small institution, providing mainly part-time courses, to become the principal social science center in Great Britain.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere in Europe, the concern about the "speculative inertia" and strife among professors kept the Memorial from committing itself in France, Austria, and Germany, even though the social sciences were relatively advanced there. Instead, the Memorial concentrated on three major centers where interdisciplinary work in economics flourished: the Institute of International Studies in Geneva, the Institute of Social Science at the University of Stockholm, and the Institute of Economics and History at the University of Copenhagen.<sup>15</sup> Given its brief history, the Memorial could not extend much beyond the United States and Europe and only made a scant beginning in Asia in 1928, when it made a seven-year grant totaling \$140,000 to Yanjing (Yenching) University in China. Nevertheless, in China too it was not the established premier universities but rather the keen and resourceful private institutions analyzed in this book that rose to become prominent social science centers by responding to the Rockefeller patronage.

This first Rockefeller grant to Yanjing was significant in that not only did it link Chinese social sciences to the empirical social science movement in the United States and Western Europe, but it incorporated China into the patronage network of American philanthropies. From this modest beginning, the Rockefeller support of the social sciences in China would by the early 1930s evolve into an ambitious program mobilizing Chinese social scientists for a concerted attack on China's rural poverty. That modern Chinese social sciences constituted part of a Western social science movement with technocratic aspirations raises an intriguing issue

14. Martin and Joan Bulmer, "Philanthropy and Social Science in the 1920s: Beardsley Ruml and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, 1922–29," p. 396.

15. Earlene Craver, "Patronage and the Directions of Research in Economics: the Rockefeller Foundation in Europe, 1924–1938," *Minerva*, XXIV.2–3 (1986), pp. 208–9.

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concerning a possible convergence of traditions, particularly in view of the fact that there had existed in China the Confucian ideal of using knowledge to govern society and the examination system that recruited men of letters into the governing process. Might this perennial Chinese ideal of governing society through knowledge have rendered a certain kind of Western social science knowledge particularly congenial to the Chinese? And to what extent was the development of the social sciences in modern China shaped by the convergence of this Chinese ideal and the modern Western notion of social engineering?

Equally intriguing is the issue concerning the incorporation of Chinese social scientists into the patronage network of American philanthropies. The Rockefeller support of social science research in China followed the patterns it had developed in the United States and Western Europe. Whether it was through funding directly from the Foundation itself or through its subsidiary funding agencies, it was a practice of “making the peaks higher.” Here the issue transcends the field of Chinese studies and joins that of the study of philanthropy, on which a vast literature exists, though China is underrepresented in it.<sup>16</sup> A detailed study of the interactions between Chinese social scientists and American philanthropies would provide some documented data in a cross-cultural context to enrich the discussion of some of the highly contested issues in this literature: namely, the role of philanthropy in perpetuating a conservative ideology as well as in determining the research agenda and methodology.

Taking the involvement of American philanthropies in empirical social science research in China as the focal point, this study argues that the development of the social sciences in modern China was shaped by the convergence of ideas and aspirations at two different levels: first, the convergence of the traditional Chinese ideal of governing society through knowledge and the modern Western notion of social engineering, a convergence that led Chinese social scientists to see their work as a means to steer China’s modernization; and second, the convergence of Chinese

16. This literature is too vast to cite here. For a convenient compendium from a critical perspective, see Robert Arno, ed., *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Boston, 1980). For more recent discussions and debates, see the following articles: Donald Fisher, “The Role of Philanthropic Foundations in the Reproduction and Production of Hegemony: Rockefeller Foundation and the Social Sciences,” *Sociology*, 17.2 (May 1983), pp. 206–33; Martin Bulmer and Donald Fisher, “Debate,” *Sociology*, 18.4 (November 1984), pp. 572–87; and Barry Karl and Stanley Katz, “Foundations and Ruling Class Elites,” *Daedalus* (winter 1987), pp. 1–40.

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social scientists' aspiration in social engineering and the Rockefeller Foundation's ambition to guide China's modernization.

Three cases illustrate the central theme of this study. The first two were social science enterprises in the academic setting: the sociology department at Yanjing University in Peking and the Institute of Economics at Nankai University in Tianjin – the most prominent social science centers in modern China in their respective fields. The third case study involves a competing social science enterprise, led by the Marxist agrarian economist Chen Hansheng, which, significantly, also received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation through its subsidiary funding agency, the Institute of Pacific Relations. While Yanjing and Nankai represented the Anglo-American oriented social science establishment, Chen Hansheng's enterprise was rooted in the intellectual and ideological universe that stretched from Moscow in the west to Tokyo in the east.

Evolved from the YMCA movement in Peking sponsored by Princeton University graduates in 1906, the Yanjing Sociology Department, the subject of Chapters 2 and 3, metamorphosed from a vehicle for social betterment into a premier sociological center in China by the late 1920s. The trajectory of its history followed some of the broader trends in early twentieth-century American sociology. The legacy of the department in social service reflected the influence of the American social survey movement, particularly the Pittsburgh Survey of 1906–9. When a competing paradigm emerged within the department in the early 1930s, it mirrored what had happened a few years earlier with the social survey movement in the United States. Of the factors that contributed to the decline of the American social survey movement,<sup>17</sup> two are pertinent to the development of the Yanjing Sociology Department: the rise of empirical sociology, particularly the Chicago school of sociology; and the entry of the Rockefeller Foundation in the patronage of social science research.

This paradigm shift at Yanjing reflected an accurate, though slightly belated, reading of a realignment of power within American sociology. A crude and yet unmistakable indicator of Chinese cognizance of the American academic scene is their changing perceptions of the premier graduate program in sociology in the United States. Columbia University was the mecca for Chinese students in sociology until the late 1920s, when it had long been outshone by the University of Chicago. A major

17. Bulmer, Bales, and Sklar, eds., *The Social Survey in Historical Perspective, 1880–1940*, pp. 299–311.

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shift toward Chicago did not occur until the early 1930s,<sup>18</sup> when Chicago had in turn passed its prime.<sup>19</sup> Not only did Chicago remain the most preferred institution well into the 1940s, but the Chicago methodology helped provoke a paradigm crisis at Yanjing.<sup>20</sup>

A new funding policy of the Rockefeller Foundation, altogether unrelated to the debate at Yanjing, delayed the resolution of this crisis, however. Instead of contributing to the ascendance of the new rising paradigm, as it had with Chicago sociology, the Rockefeller Foundation helped neutralize its impact at Yanjing. After having supported the department's social service mainstream since 1928, the Foundation bolstered its power again by incorporating its advocates into an ambitious rural reconstruction scheme in north China in 1935. Two years later, the war with Japan broke out. The resultant retreat of the Rockefeller Foundation wreaked havoc at Yanjing. The rebels from the prewar era thrived. Working in a war-torn economy in China's southwest and fusing the insights and approaches from sociology and social anthropology, they set up field stations, tested Western theories against the field, and strove to relate their disciplines to the nation's needs. In its reenactment of paradigm shifts within American sociology, Yanjing typified, albeit in a dramatic way, the powerful influence the United States had on knowledge transfer in modern China. Where Yanjing was unique was in its efforts and success in obtaining external funding.

The Nankai Institute of Economics – the jewel of Nankai University, the only private institution to have achieved national prominence in modern China – was the only other institution that, in addition to responding to the new empirical social science movement from abroad, thrived on funding from the United States. As analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5, the Nankai Institute of Economics embodied twenty years of brilliant collaborative work in academic entrepreneurship between two economists who received their training at Yale University: Franklin Ho (He Lian) and H. D. Fong (Fang Xianting). This premier center of

18. Robert MacIver, who joined the sociology department at Columbia in 1927, reminisced that at first nearly one-third of his graduate students were Asians, most of them Chinese. He was a little mystified why “[i]n later years these Chinese students vanished.” See his *As a Tale That Is Told* (Chicago 1968), p. 98.

19. The decline of Chicago sociology began with the departure of Robert Park, who was on leave traveling around the world for much of 1931 and 1932, and eventually retired in 1934. See Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research* (Chicago, 1984), pp. 122–3, 205–7.

20. The other major source of inspiration, as is discussed in Chapter 3, was Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalism in social anthropology.

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economic research in modern China began with a simple adaptation in the Chinese context of a Western economic research tool: the compilation of index numbers. Emulating the work of Irving Fisher, his mentor and teacher at Yale, Franklin Ho set out in 1926 to compile index numbers on wholesale prices and money markets in Tianjin, where Nankai was located. The first breakthrough occurred in 1929, when Nankai received a grant from the Institute of Pacific Relations to study industrialization in Tianjin, which helped transform Ho's hitherto one-man enterprise into the Nankai Institute of Economics, with a grandiose scheme to measure the extent and effect of industrialization in China as a whole.

No sooner had this research program crystallized, however, than Nankai was under pressure to reinvent itself. As the Rockefeller Foundation's funding policy in China underwent a major shift toward rural reconstruction in the early 1930s, Nankai moved swiftly to position itself for inclusion into the patronage network of the Rockefeller Foundation. In addition to discarding its earlier macroeconomic concern about China as a whole in favor of a microeconomic focus on north China, it made a dramatic shift from urban to rural by proposing to study county government and rural industries in Hebei. In 1935, like Yanjing, Nankai was incorporated into the Rockefeller scheme for social engineering in north China.

Unlike Yanjing, however, Nankai did not suffer a near collapse following the outbreak of the war with Japan. Although it had to weather, as did Yanjing, the near withdrawal of Rockefeller support and the departure of key personnel, Nankai carried on its work in China's southwest by seeking funding from the business community. Along with the retreat of the Rockefeller Foundation, however, came an attenuation of its influence, which manifested itself in the reversion at Nankai to a research focus on macroeconomics. Whatever field work there remained, it was once again connected with index numbers. Nankai thus returned to where it had started two decades before. Nevertheless, whether it was macroeconomics or microeconomics, whether it was urban or rural, Nankai remained remarkably consistent in its endeavor to relate economics to the needs of the nation.

As unique and distinct as Yanjing and Nankai each was, both operated in academia and within the Anglo-American social science tradition. Whether it was through social service or social engineering, both envisioned social and economic change in terms of management and control. It came perhaps as no surprise that in China during the 1920s, when

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the fledgling Chinese Communist movement was spreading its wings, Marxism should have inspired a contending social science that envisioned nothing short of a revolution.

Like mainstream social sciences at Yanjing and Nankai, Marxist social sciences in China developed in stages and along different paths. Chapter 6 analyzes two such early endeavors. The first concerns Shanghai University, a radical institution founded in 1922 with a mission to train its students in Marxist social sciences for making revolution. At the core of this experiment was its sociology department, which, in sharp contrast to its counterparts in mainstream academic institutions, propounded Marxist and Soviet sociology as it existed at the time. This radical endeavor did not last long, however. Having being swept into the vortex of revolutionary politics of the early 1920s and situated at the eye of its storm, Shanghai University became a casualty in the coup against the Communists in 1927. Given its history and the way it ended, student activism and revolutionary politics understandably became the much celebrated legacies of Shanghai University. What has hitherto been overlooked, however, was one characteristic that the experiment at Shanghai University epitomized about the early Chinese Communist movement: a preoccupation with the universal truth of Marxism while ignoring the need to study the situation in China.

The other early endeavor in the Marxist social sciences involved a solitary effort in agrarian surveys by Mao Zedong. Beginning from his celebrated report on the peasant movement in Hunan in 1927, Mao sprang into a brief spurt of survey activities during a most trying period of his revolutionary career, between his retreat to the Jinggang mountains in late 1927 and his further retreat to southern Jiangxi in 1930. He was a tenacious worker, braving adverse conditions, as in one case, when the survey had to be hastily concluded because the pursuing enemy troops had caught up with him. Although most of his surveys were small in scale and his method crude, relying primarily on informants whom he cross-examined in group sessions, he was versatile in his experimentation with a variety of approaches. He was unique in that he alone among the early Chinese Communist leaders perceived the need to gain a thorough understanding of the field in order to make revolution. Most important perhaps was the powerful legacy his surveys bequeathed. His vision and approach would dictate the way social investigations were to be conducted in the People's Republic.

Political circumstances explain much but not all of the limitations of these two early endeavors in the Marxist social sciences. Neither