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A College Student's Rural Journey: Early Sociology and Anthropology in China Seen through Fieldwork on Sichuan's Secret Society

Abstract This paper focuses on the investigators of rural society in the Republican period, specifically research made through fieldwork on the Gowned Brothers (or, Paoge) in 1940s Sichuan. It takes up one such investigator, Shen Baoyuan—a student at Yenching University; her youthful work never became published or recognized. The present study reveals how the pioneers of Chinese sociology and anthropology, who called themselves “rural activists,” tried to understand rural China. It argues that the developments in those fields in China of the 1920s and 1940s made it possible for us today to have a better understanding of the contemporary rural problems. The investigators played an important role in the Rural Construction and Rural Education Movements in Republican China. They show us how Western sociology and anthropology were localized in order to answer “Chinese questions” and to solve “Chinese problems.” As source material, these investigations have given us rich records, which in turn have become precious sources and historical memories of rural China's past.

Keywords rural activists, sociology, Yenching University, Sichuan, 1920s–1940s, secret society

In 1939, residents of Hope Township (Wangzhen), a rural village close to Chengdu, watched Lei Mingyuan, a leader of the local chapter of the Paoge (Gowned Brothers) secret society, execute his own teenage daughter only because of a rumor that she and a young tailor who worked for his family were having an illicit affair. Despite the brutal and brazen nature of his crime, however, Lei did not face any charges. Six years later, in the summer of 1945, Shen Baoyuan, a female college student in the Department of Sociology at Yenching University, arrived in Hope Township to conduct fieldwork and research on the social organization of rural secret societies; she did this as part of a larger set of educational experiments and summertime activism programs that her professors had established, as discussed later in this paper.

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Shen spent more than a month getting to know Lei and his family and recorded previously unknown facts about the murder, the Lei family, and the secret society to which he belonged. In April of the following year, she completed her report “A Family of the Rural Organization” as her bachelor degree thesis.¹ From the title page of the thesis, we know that her thesis adviser was Xu Yongshun, and that the two reviewers were Lin Yaohua, chair of the Department of Sociology, and Zheng Linzhuang, the dean of the School of Law.² In addition, in the preface, Shen offered a special appreciation to Liao Taichu (Liao T’ai-ch’u) for providing her with his English-language paper on secret societies in Sichuan.³ The professors who supervised Shen’s thesis were clearly well-known and respected pioneers in the fields of sociology and anthropology.⁴

My paper focuses on the means, methods, and persons involved with academic investigations of rural society in the Republican period, but the focus uses the lens of Shen’s fieldwork and her written report. The aim is not so much to summarize her work and writing, but to talk about Shen’s intellectual upbringing among the pioneers of Chinese sociology and anthropology. They called themselves “rural activists” (*nongcun gongzuo zhe*). They tried to understand rural China’s reactions to the wave of Westernization and modernization, and they hoped to change that society as guided by their own notions of modernity. The developments in

¹ Shen Baoyuan, “Yige nongcun shetuan jiating,” BA thesis, Department of Sociology, Yenching University, 1946: 46 pages, plus a 2-page abstract. The thesis is written on the special stationary printed for Yenching University with 576 Chinese characters on each page. Each page is folded on the center line where it reads “Yanjing daxue biye lunwen” (Graduation thesis of Yenching University), something like A and B pages of traditional woodblock printed books. The thesis has 43 pages with a total of 24,000 Chinese characters. The last three pages are an appendix, approximately 1,000 characters, including six items: (1) origins of the Paoge and Haidi; (2) definition of Paoge and other names; (3) examples of Paoge secret codes; (4) Paoge internal regulations; (5) examples of Paoge argot; (6) examples of Paoge canons. Haidi was the canon of Paoge.

² The Department of Sociology was under the School of Law of Yenching University.

³ It is Liao T’ai-ch’u, “The Ko Lao Hui in Szechuan,” 161–73. Although Shen Baoyuan did not mention the title, Liao published only one article on the Paoge. Shen completed her thesis in 1946 but Liao’s article was published in 1947. Apparently, what Shen read was the draft manuscript of the article before its publication.

⁴ It should be noted that at that time, there was not a clear distinction between sociology and anthropology. Today, when we review the works done by the Department of Sociology at Yenching University, we will find that in fact their methodologies and research objects hardly can be distinguished from those of anthropology. This tradition has even carried on until today. Currently, Anthropology in many Chinese universities is part of the Department of Sociology (including Peking University). Therefore, the professors of sociology of Yenching University mentioned in this article, in fact, were also anthropologists.

Chinese sociology and anthropology from the 1920s into the 1940s have made it possible for us to have some kind of a picture of rural problems in those years. The investigations by academics, and their attention to the indicators of China's modernization, fed into the Rural Construction and Rural Education Movement. It was these academics who entered the countryside and the lives of peasants and left rich accounts and data, which have in turn become sources for today's research, as well as for actual memories of rural China's past. Their accounts display how the development of the two disciplines in China in fact also reflected the way that modern intellectual values entered into academic research, and how Western sociology and anthropology became localized in order to answer "China questions" and to solve a "Chinese problem."

The Paoge and the Lei Family

"Paoge" was another name for the "Sworn Brotherhood Society" (Gelaohui) in Sichuan, the most influential secret organization in that province, and one that had arisen as early as the Qing dynasty and continued into the Republic.⁵ Although early on there were different opinions on the percentage of its members in the male population, almost all believed it was very high. An article in 1946 said, "The

⁵ Important works of Chinese secret societies include Cai Shaoqing, *Zhongguo jindai huidang shi yanjiu*; Cai Shaoqing, *Zhongguo mimi shehui*; Dai Xuanzhi, *Zhongguo mimi zongjiao yu mimi huishu*; Zhou Yumin and Shao Yong, *Zhongguo banghui shi*; Yu Songqing, *Minjian mimi zongjiao jinguan yanjiu*; Li Fuhua and Feng Zuozhe, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi*; Zhuang Jifa, *Qingdai mimi huitang shi yanjiu*; Wang Jianchuan and Jiang Zhushan, eds., *Ming Qing yilai minjian zongjiao de tansuo: Jinian Dai Xuanzhi jiaoshou lunwenji*; Jean Chesneau, *Secret Societies in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*; Jean Chesneau, ed, *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China 1840–1950*; Fei-Ling Davis, *Primitive Revolutionaries of China: A Study of Secret Societies in the Late Nineteenth Century*; David Ownby and Mary Somers Heidhues, eds., *"Secret Societies" Reconsidered: Perspectives on the Social History of Early Modern South China and Southeast Asia*; David Owenby, *Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in Early and Mid-Qing China: The Formation of a Tradition*; Barend J. Ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity*; Martin Booth, *The Dragon Syndicates: The Global Phenomenon of the Triads*. Studies of Paoge in China mainly present general history and information, although there have been a few articles published in English. However, there is no thorough monograph. Regarding studies of the Paoge, see Hu Hansheng, *Sichuan jindai shishi sankao*; Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*; Qin Heping, *Ersanshi niandai yapian yu Sichuan chengzhen shuijuan guanxi zhi renshi*, 76–96. Kristin Stapleton, "Urban Politics in an Age of 'Secret Societies': The Cases of Shanghai and Chengdu," 23–64; Lee McIsaac, "'Righteous Fraternities' and Honorable Men: Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing," 1641–55; Wang Di, "Chi jiangcha: Chengdu chaguan, Paoge yu difang zhengzhi kongjian," 105–14.

power of the Paoge in Sichuan is really huge. It is said that in Chongqing alone at least more than half of the people have joined the organization, including people in various trades, especially among business and the military.”⁶ An article in 1947 claimed that in Sichuan, nearly two-thirds of the population were members.⁷ An observation made in 1948 said, “Almost all people who participate in social activities are members of the Paoge, no exceptions.”⁸ Fan Shaozeng, a former master (or leader, strongman) of the Paoge in Chongqing, estimated that the members accounted for about 90% of male adults in Sichuan.⁹ The previously mentioned sources relied generally on reporters’ estimates, but the sociologist Liao Taichu (Liao T’ai-ch’u)—Shen Baoyuan’s teacher—estimated in his 1947 research article that more than 70% of male adults in Sichuan were Paoge members.¹⁰ It is easy to understand how someone could point out that the Paoge during that time “were the most powerful people in the local society. As long as the secret society is put to a good use, it would not be like other gangs, but might become a favorable mass organization.”¹¹

Shen Baoyuan noticed the Paoge’s ability to exert control in local communities and was surprised to see “how powerful and strong its social control was.” She found that “in Hope Township, the association is the center of the community,” and it “takes responsibility for social sanctions, even the legal, political, religious, and ethical aspects of social sanctions.”¹² Shen’s expression gives us important hints. In her report, when it came to the Paoge she always used the term “association,” even for the title of her thesis. This term probably reflects serious consideration on her part. The name “Paoge” itself was a sort of Sichuan-area nickname for Gelaohui, which was what the members of the secret society and local people most frequently used. In fact, in official documents, they were more often called “Gelaohui” or “Rebel Bandit Clique” (*huidang*). After all, these organizations were social associations, so when Shen Baoyuan attempted to study it from an academic point of view, without prejudice, she used “association” (or social organization) as something she thought to be a neutral descriptor.¹³

⁶ Shi De, “Paoge zai Chongqing,” 10–11.

⁷ Li Mufeng, “Lüetan Sichuan de Paoge,” 81–84.

⁸ Guan Qun, “Chengdu de Paoge,” 14.

⁹ Fan Shaozeng, “Huiyi wo zai Sichuan Paoge zhong de zuzhi shenghuo.”

¹⁰ Liao, “The Ko Lao Hui in Szechuan,” 162.

¹¹ Zhang San, “Chongqing de canyiyuan,” 1946.

¹² Shen Baoyuan, “Yige nongcun shetuan jiating,” 7.

¹³ In this paper, I use “Paoge” often as a plural term because they had many branches but not under a unified headquarters. Paoge could mean both the organizations and their members. For the latter, sometimes I use the term “Paoge members” or “Paoge brothers.”

Lei Mingyuan was in fact a local Paoge head in Hope Township. In 1937, the year when the defensive war against Japan broke out, middle-aged Lei was energetic. In his mind, he always wanted to be “heroic”; he was surrounded by a group of loyal, powerful sworn brothers. His economic situation was good, so that a batch of young brothers lived in his house and enjoyed his benefits. One day, when he was alone in a teahouse, nearly 20 armed rival gangsters approached and shot at him. His Paoge brothers rushed to the site and then a bloody battle took place during which Lei and his followers killed several opponents. That battle strengthened his position in the Paoge.¹⁴

Shen Baoyuan's thesis lodged criticisms against the Paoge in Hope Township and found that its members often associated with secret agents (implying links with the GMD's police forces); further, they “violated the people's interests and opposed democracy” by using bureaucratic structures, meaning that Paoge masters controlled almost all positions in the administrative offices of the township. As such, they implemented high-pressure policies and imposed unreasonable taxes, trafficking in opium, prohibiting people's thought, speech, association, and even freedom to read newspapers. Such control benefited from the Paoge's dual identities—local administrators and leaders of a secret organization.¹⁵ Moreover, Shen's leftist ideology must be taken into account in order to understand her criticisms of the Paoge. This sort of connection will be explained below.

Some other accounts have pointed out that Paoge members acted in favor of the poor. An investigation into the factors of the Paoge's radical growth found that “Paoge possess a strong solidarity that has held for hundreds of years without a break, especially in terms of their righteousness.” The most important credo for them was the prohibition against rape and adultery. Any such accused “would be executed.” In addition, the Paoge could help members to lead a better life by “sharing happiness and overcoming troubles together.” But one writer pointed out that the above points were not the fundamental reason for growth. “The basic reason for the Paoge's expansion was due to years of civil war in Sichuan, and because powerful men there were suppressing the lowly and poor, whose livelihoods were seriously affected. Such victims hardly could survive if they did not have a strong organization to protect them.” If a person who was bullied wanted to go to the court, he knew nothing about the law and also could not afford the time and money for a lawsuit. Therefore, they often invited a Paoge “big brother” as mediator to settle the case. “The big brother” had authority, and people always obeyed his judgment.”¹⁶ Therefore, we can see a certain complexity in the Paoge: they could be a local protector or a local bully, depending on circumstance.

¹⁴ Shen Baoyuan, “Yige nongcun shetuan jiating,” 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶ Li Mufeng, “Lüetan Sichuan de Paoge,” 81–84.

“Rural Activists”

As a student in the Department of Sociology of Yenching University, Shen Baoyuan’s choice to investigate the Paoge was not accidental but a part of the Rural Education Movement and a result of the recent emphasis on fieldwork among early Chinese sociologists and anthropologists. In 1926, the Association to Promote Chinese Common Education (Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui), led by Y. C. James Yen, conducted experiments in rural education in Ding county, Hebei province. In the early 1930s, by using funds raised in the United States, Yen moved the headquarters from Beijing to the city of Dingzhou and recruited college students to participate in the experiment.¹⁷

In 1929, Liang Shuming founded the Institution for Village Governance (Cunzhi yanjiu yuan) in Hui county, north Henan province, for the purpose of “rural reconstruction.” In 1931, he established the Rural Research Reconstruction Institution in Zouping county, Shandong province and published the journal *Village Governance* (Cunzhi) in Beijing. He wrote several books to express his ideas on rural reconstruction.¹⁸ Entrepreneurs also took part in this movement, people like Lu Zuofu, who launched an experiment in Beipei, a part of today’s Chongqing, and emphasized that education was the highest priority for rural areas. In 1934, he laid out the blueprint for rural reconstruction in his article, “The Rural Reconstruction Movement in Jialing and the Three Georges Areas” (Sichuan

¹⁷ Regarding the Movement of Rural Construction, see Zheng Dahua, *Minguo xiangcun jianshe yundong*; Li Weizhong, “Zhishi fenzi ‘xiaxiang’ yu jindai Zhongguo xiangcun biange de kunjing: Dui 1930 niandai xianzheng jianshe shiyan de jixi,” 115–25; Liu Chonglai, “Minguo shiqi xiangcun jianshe yundong shulie,” 74–85; Lu Zhenxiang, “Sanshi niandai xiangcun jianshe yundong de chubu kaocha,” 37–44; Zhao Xudong, “Xiangcun chengwei wenti yu chengwei wenti de Zhongguo xiangcun yanjiu: Weirao ‘Yan Yangchu moshi’ de zhishi shehui xue fansi”; He Jianhua, “Yan Yangchu de pingjiao yundong jiqi xianzheng gaige shiyan,” 61–68; Charles Wishart Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China*; Martha McKee Keehn, ed., *Y. C. James Yen’s Thought on Mass Education and Rural Reconstruction: China and beyond: Selected Papers from an International Conference Held in Shijiazhuang, China, May 27–June 1, 1990*.

¹⁸ Liang Shuming (1893–1988) taught in Peking University during 1917 and 1924. Regarding studies of Liang and rural construction, see Lu Xinyu, “Rural Reconstruction, the Nation–state and China’s Modernity Problem: Reflections on Liang Shuming’s Rural Reconstruction Theory and Its Practice,” 235–56; Stig Thøgersen, “Revisiting a Dramatic Triangle: The State, Villagers, and Social Activists in Chinese Rural Reconstruction Projects,” 9–33; Shugang Wu and Binchang Tong, “Liang Shuming’s Rural Reconstruction Experiment and Its Relevance for Building the New Socialist Countryside,” 39–51.

Jialingjiang Sanxia de xiangcun jianshe yundong.¹⁹

After the start of the War of Resistance against the Japanese (1937–45), the Great Rear Area (Dahoufang, i.e., southwest and northwest China under the Nationalist government during the war) became an important basis of the Rural Reconstruction Movement. James Yen's Association to Promote Chinese Common Education, for example, shifted its focus to rural education in Sichuan. In the spring of 1936, the Association worked with the Sichuan provincial government to establish a committee devoted to this goal. In April of 1937, the provincial government set up Xindu as an experimental county that it governed directly. In September 1939, the Nationalist government announced the "Outline of County Organization at All Levels" (Xian geji zuzhi gangyao), which adopted the experiences of Yen's work in Ding county and Xindu. Given the special circumstances and the important position of Sichuan in the war, the Nationalist government decided, on March 1, 1940, that with the assistance of the Association, Sichuan would be the first province to implement the new outline.²⁰

During the 1920s and 1930s, there were over 600 organizations and institutions nationwide that engaged in activities that were associated with the Rural Reconstruction Movement, with over a thousand locations and a variety of experiments, such as Ding county (Hebei) by James Yen, Zouping county (Shandong) by Liang Shuming, and Qinghe (Beijing) by Yenching University, mostly dealing with education.²¹ In addition to rural education, the experiments involved rural self-government, agricultural reforms, seed-stock improvement, pest control, and other activities. Furthermore, they tried to solve the problem of farmers' loans by establishing cooperatives and credit unions, rural hospitals, and rural public health care systems. They also educated rural people to reform "evil" social customs, such as foot-binding, drug abuse, gambling, child marriage, mercenary marriage, infanticide, and other "bad habits." In this sense, it was important for Shen Baoyuan that when she was in Hope Township during the summer of 1945, Yenching University had opened a summer school there. Through her work at the latter, Shen sought every opportunity to connect with and to understand Lei Mingyuan and his family.

In addition, to a large extent, Shen Baoyuan's investigation was inseparable from

¹⁹ Lu Zuofu (1893–1952), an entrepreneur, educator, and social activist and founder of the Minsheng Shipping Company. Regarding studies of Lu's ideas of rural construction, see Liu Chonglai, "Minguo shiqi xiangcun jianshe yundong shulüe."

²⁰ Li Zaiquan, "Guonan zhong de xiangcun shiye: Kangzhan shiqi Sichuan de xiangcun jianshe yundong-yi Pingjiao hui wei zhongxin de kaocha," 132–36.

²¹ Liu Chonglai, "Minguo shiqi xiangcun jianshe yundong shulüe"; Cheng Bicheng, "Minguo xiangcun jiaoyu yundong jiqi dui nongcun jiaoyu gaige de qishi."

the effects of the national military crisis. After war broke out, many colleges and universities closed down, and the Nationalist government began to relocate them to the interior. In these early years of the war, almost all universities along the southeast coast, except certain missionary institutions such as Yenching and Fu Jen Catholic, moved to southwest and northwest China. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education of the Nationalist government, 77 colleges and universities moved to these rear areas and resumed classes, but 17 were closed. After the World War broke out across the Pacific in December 1941, Yenching University moved from Beijing to Chengdu and resumed classes there in 1942 under the English name “Yen Ching University in Chen Tu.”²²

Li Anzhai and Lin Yaohua served as chairs of the Department of Sociology successively, and they both emphasized social service.²³ Based on the wartime situation, the department encouraged and organized students to participate in social surveys and services. It can hardly be a surprise that Shen Baoyuan chose the topic that she did, namely that of a family of Paoge. Students in Yenching University during that time were deeply influenced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was expanding among their ranks. On October 15, 1944, “the progressive students” (*jinbu xuesheng*, i.e., leftists) from various universities, including Yenching students, established the “Association for Democratic Youth in Chengdu” (Chengdu minzhu qingnian xiehui). As we know, the Chinese Communist revolution was based in the countryside, and the CCP encouraged young people to go to rural areas in order to understand the peasants. Therefore, the Yenching students who went out were not only influenced by their professors,

²² Zhou Yong, ed., *Xinan kangzhan shi*, Yanjing daxue Chengdu xiaoyou hui, “Kangzhan shiqi qian Rong de Yanjing daxue,” 339–56; Zhang Huiying, Wang Baiqiang, et al. eds., *Yanjing daxue shigao*.

²³ Li Anzhai (1900–85), a scholar of ethnology and sociology. During 1934 and 1936, he studied anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley and Yale University, later he returned to China (1936) and taught at Yenching University. His major works include: *Meixue*, *Yili yu lijì zhī shehuixue de yanjiu*, *Yiyixue*. Lin Yaohua (1910–2000), one of pioneers of Chinese anthropology, whose major works were on clans and families including: “Zongfa yu jiazū,” 237–44; “Meiyue hunyin zaji”; “Yixu zongzu de yanjiu”; *The Golden Wing: A Sociological Study of Chinese Familism*, *Minzuxue yanjiu*, *Jinyi: Zhongguo jiazū zhīdù de shehuixue yanjiu*, trans. Zhuang Kongzhao and Lin Zongcheng; *Minzuxue tonglun*; “Baizu,” 302–24; *Shehui renleixue jiangyi*; “New China’s Ethnology: Research and Prospects,” 141–61; “A Tentative Discussion of the Survival of the Concept of Rank in Contemporary Liangshan Yi Areas,” 46–62. For studies of Lin Yaohua, see Zhang Haiyang, “Lin Yaohua jiaoshou yu Zhongguo de shaoshu minzu he minzu yanjiu,” 28–31.

but also were responding to the CCP's call. In the spring of 1945, the association organized this shift during the summer break, and thus members of "rural work teams" (*nongcun gongzuo dui*), for example, provided medical service and medicines, organized evening classes, gathered people to support the war, and looked into landlord-tenant relations.²⁴ Although I did not find direct information to determine whether Shen Baoyuan's investigation was organized by the CCP, a connection is not implausible; in particular, her leftist ideology would have made common ground with that of the Party.

In her investigative report, Shen enthusiastically welcomed the notion that students needed to link their learning to practice in the field, and to mingle with ordinary people. She said that since her childhood she had yearned for the rural life and liked the environment there: she had little interest in the hustle of urban life. She felt that rural people were honest and she did not trust "crafty city residents." In fact, she admitted that her participation in the investigation was "for a selfish reason": she could derive no peace in the city, and she longed for "the quietude of the village life." She sympathized with lower-class people and felt guilty for her privileged life when she saw their hardship. She had "compassion and love" for peasants and a desire to "live, play, and work with them." Obviously, Shen was an idealist and felt uncomfortable with her own background. Shen herself wrote that fieldwork was a response to the slogan that touted "intellectuals going to the countryside" and she tried to "take advantage of this relaxing summer break to sow seeds of rural work, to express my respect to farmers, and to learn from them beyond knowledge from books."²⁵ Actually, her professors at Yenching had become her direct examples. Professor Liao Taichu in the Department of Education established a rural service station in Hope Township. During four years at the Chengdu campus, Lin Yaohua, chair of the Department of Sociology, spent his three summer breaks in the minority areas of Liangshan and Xikang.²⁶ Therefore, Shen's investigation followed the typical practices undertaken by her

²⁴ Wang Xiaoting and Huang Wenyi, ed., *Zhandou de licheng, 1925-1949, Yanjing daxue dixiadang gaikuang*, 100-101. Regarding Yenching University, see Stuart, J. Leighton, *Fifty Years in China*; Dwight W. Edwards, *Yenching University*; Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations, 1916-1952*. Regarding its student movement, see Elizabeth J. Perry, "Managing Student Protest in Republican China: Yenching and St. John's Compared," 3-31.

²⁵ Shen Baoyuan, "Yige nongcun shetuan jiating," 1.

²⁶ Zhang Huiying and Wang Baiqiang, *Yanjing daxue shigao*, 1320; Lin Yaohua, *A Tentative Discussion of the Survival of the Concept of Rank in Contemporary Liangshan Yi Areas*, 457-60.

teachers and shared class-oriented values that were regularly preached in Communist ideology.

Shen Baoyuan and Leftists

Shen Baoyuan attended Yenching University probably based on family connections. Her father, Shen Zurong (Samuel T.Y. Seng, 1883–1977), was the founder of library science in China.²⁷ Shen's family provided the best education and gave her a foundation to become an open-minded and new-style young woman. Yet, in contrast to her famous father, she is basically unknown. I discovered that she is still alive and managed to reach her by phone. She has lost most of her memory due to Alzheimer's disease. However, I was able to learn from her daughter that she was born in 1924. When Shen went to Hope Township for her sociological investigation in the summer of 1945, she was 21 years old and a junior in the Department of Sociology, Yenching University.

²⁷ Born poor, Shen Zurong's grandfather was a tracker on the Yangtze River; his father opened a small restaurant on the waterfront, where he worked for many years. At 15 years, Shen Zurong worked for the Protestant Episcopal Church in Yichang and then studied at Boone University, a missionary school. After his graduation, he was employed by the Boone Library (Wenhua gongshulin) founded by Mary Elizabeth Wood, an American library expert. In 1914, he went to the US to study library science funded by Wood and earned his bachelor's degree from Columbia University in 1916, thus becoming the first person from China awarded a degree in library science from there. After returning to China, he continued to work for the Boone Library. In 1920, Wood collaborated with Boone University to build a library major, where both Shen and Wood taught courses. In the 1920s, Shen initiated the Chinese Library Association and as the sole representative of China, he participated in the first general assembly of the International Federation of Library Associations. Later he served as president of the Boone Library School. During the 1930s and 1940s, he trained many library professionals. In 1952, his position was incorporated into Wuhan University with the Boone Library School. He died in 1977. In 2005, Shen Baoyuan and her relatives set up the "Shen Zurong and Shen Baohuan Memorial Scholarship" at Sun Yat-sen University. Shen Baohuan was Shen Zurong's eldest son, who went to the US in 1946 and because of the Communist revolution was thereafter separated from his father. Without further news about his son, Shen Zurong did not know that he moved from the United States to Taiwan and continued his father's mission of library development. Shen Baohuan died in 2004 in the United States. See Cheng Huanwen, "Shen Zurong guju xunli," 104–7; Chen Weizun, "Wujinde aisi shenshende huainian: Huiyi waizufu Shen Zurong xiansheng." <http://zwf251.blog.sohu.com/>. Post date: September 12, 2010; access date: July 2, 2014.

Shen Baoyuan's academic work was not completely separated from politics and ideologies. At the time, Yenching students were greatly influenced not only by the professors of sociology and anthropology (who will be discussed next) but also by the CCP. As just mentioned, late in 1944 left-wing student activists set up the "Association for Democratic Youth in Chengdu," and it included Yenching University communists. In the spring of 1945, when the association was organizing college students in the countryside in order to further their understanding of peasants and rural issues, a participant claimed, "The rural experience for a month decided my life for the future. The rural reality made me join the revolution."²⁸

Although lacking direct evidence of a connection with the CCP, one can see clearly that at Yenching Shen was a left-wing student, specifically an active member of the Sea Swallows Troupe (Haiyan jutuan) of the university, founded in the fall of 1942 and named after the famous poem "Sea Swallows" by Maxim Gorky—the Russian writer who was famously devoted to the communist revolution. In the Chinese New Year period of 1943, the troupe performed its first drama, *Wind and Clouds beyond the Great Wall* (Saishang fengyun), by Yang Hansheng, a story about the Han people and Mongols uniting to fight the Japanese. Later, the troupe performed *Fragrant Grass at the Edges of the Sky* (Fangcao tianya) by Xia Yan, a drama of modern intellectuals' lives and loves.²⁹ Furthermore, Shen's name appeared on a statement titled "An Appeal from Chengdu's Cultural Circle about the Current Political Situation" signed by 248 people on September 29, 1945, including many celebrities in Chinese literature and the arts. They demanded that the GMD government "immediately end the one-party dictatorship," and "unconditionally protect basic human rights, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and religions."³⁰ When the appeal was made, Mao Zedong had arrived in Chongqing for negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek concerning the ongoing civil war. The "Appeal" presumably was aimed to work with the propaganda of the CCP on the Chongqing Negotiation (Aug. 29–Oct. 10, 1945). Later, Shen went to Hong Kong and became a secretary in the Office of Women Workers of the YWCA. In early 1950, five evening schools for women were closed down, affecting more than a thousand women workers; Shen and 33 teachers and staff issued "A Letter of Public Appeal," calling for "Christians,

²⁸ Wang Xiaoting and Huang Wenyi, *Zhandou de licheng, 1925–1949, Yanjing daxue dixiadang gaikuang*, 100–101.

²⁹ Zhang Huiying and Wang Baiqiang, *Yanjing daxue shigao*, 558.

³⁰ *Xinhua ribao*, September 29, 1945.

co-workers, and all people who enthusiastically support the YMCA” to work together “to save the schools.”³¹ After that, Shen’s name disappeared from media. Apparently, she did not continue in academia. My chief point here is that despite her seemingly slight career (but excellent family and university influences) the investigation she conducted 72 years ago is valuable to our current understanding of secret societies. Without her report, we would not be able to examine a family associated with the Paoge in such depth.

The Academic Background of Shen’s Investigation

An understanding of Shen Baoyuan’s academic environment helps us understand her rural sojourn of fieldwork and activism. Her subsequent written investigation may be regarded as a product of early Chinese sociology and anthropology and a result of pioneering efforts since the 1920s and 1930s. China’s social research work started in the early 20th century and was conducted by several foreign professors, especially at missionary universities. In 1917, C.G. Dittmer, an American professor at Tsing-hua College, guided student research into the living costs of 195 households in the western suburbs of Beijing. In 1918 and 1919, the missionary Sidney D. Gamble and Professor John Stewart Burgess of Yenching University launched a survey of the social conditions of Beijing and published *Peking, a Social Survey* in 1921. In the same year, Professor Daniel H. Kulp of the University of Shanghai took students in the Department of Sociology to Phoenix village, in Chaozhou, Guangdong province, where they investigated 650 households and published their report *Country Life in South China* in 1925.³² In 1922, the Federation of International Famine Relief Commission invited C.B. Malone and J.B. Tagler to lead 61 students from nine universities in an investigation of 240 villages in Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and other provinces and published *The Study of Chinese Rural Economy* in 1924.³³ During 1921 and 1925, Professor John Lossing Buck at the University of Nanking organized students to survey 2,866 farms in 17 counties of seven provinces and published *Chinese Farm*

³¹ *Xingdao ribao*, January 30, 1950.

³² C.G. Dittmer, “An Estimate of the Standard of Living in China,” 107–28; Sidney D. Gamble and John Stewart Burgess, *Peking, a Social Survey*; Han Mingmo, “Zhongguo shehuixue diaocha fangfa he fangfalun fazhan de sange lichengbei.”

³³ Malone, C.B. and J. B. Tagler, *The Study of Chinese Rural Economy*.

Economy in 1930. Later, Buck organized an even larger investigation of 16,700 farms in 22 provinces and published *Land Utilization in China* in 1937.³⁴

During the same period, Chinese sociologists conducted other social surveys. In the 1920s, the board of the Chinese Educational and Cultural Foundation (Zhonghua jiaoyu wenhua jijin dongshihui) established the Office of Social Surveys, which was renamed Institute of Social Surveys in Peking (Beiping shehui diaochasuo) in 1929. Since 1926, with funding from the United States, it conducted many social studies led by Tao Menghe and Li Jinghan and it published over two dozen books. During 1929 and 1930, the Institute of Social Sciences (Shehui kexue yanjiu suo) of Academia Sinica, headed by Chen Hansheng, investigated the rural areas of Wuxi, Jiangsu province, and Baoding, Hebei province.³⁵ Meanwhile, James Yen set up an experimental area in Ding county, Hebei; Li Jinghan took it over in 1928 and later edited *Investigation of the Social Conditions in Ding County* (Dingxian shehui gaikuang diaocha), which became one of the earliest large-scale county-level surveys.³⁶

Developments in the fields of sociology and anthropology in China were inseparable from studies being conducted directly in the countryside. The Yenching sociology pioneers, academics such as Yang Kaidao, Li Jinghan, Wu Wenzao, and Fei Xiaotong (Wu's student) emphasized rural fieldwork.³⁷ They

³⁴ John Lossing Buck, *Chinese Farm Economy*. The Chinese translation by Zhang Lülun, *Zhongguo nongjia jingji*; John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China*.

³⁵ Chen Hancheng (1897–2004), also known as Chen Han-seng and Geoffrey Chen, who was educated in the US and Europe and considered a pioneer of modern Chinese social science.

³⁶ *Dingxian shehui gaikuang* (An investigation of the general social situation of Dingxian) has 17 chapters, including geography, history, county government and other local organizations, population, education, health, hygiene, living expenses, rural entertainment, customs and habits, beliefs, finance and taxation, county finance, agriculture, industry and commerce, rural loans, natural disasters and famine, and disasters of war, and so forth. Li Jinghan, ed., *Dingxian shehui gaikuang*. Also see Han Mingmo, “Zhongguo shehuixue diaocha fangfa he fangfalun fazhan de sange lichengbei.”

³⁷ Yang Kaidao (1899–1981) studied at the University of Iowa and University of Michigan and earned a doctoral degree in sociology. After his return to China, he taught rural sociology in Shanghai and Fudan Universities. In 1928, he began a teaching career in the Department of Sociology of Yenching University and was in charge of the experimental district in Qinghe township in the suburb of Beijing to investigate history, environment, economy, population, families, hygiene, education, customs, folk rituals, village organizations, and so on. The investigation resulted in Yen-ching ta hsüeh and Shê hui hsüeh hsi, *Ching Ho: A Sociological*

also published a number of textbooks on rural sociology, such as Yang Kaidao's *Rural Sociology* (Nongcun shehuixue).³⁸ These works studied the realities of rural China's society, population, land, economy, finance, education, organizations, self-government, and other issues.

The Department of Sociology at Yenching University was founded in 1922 by John Stewart Burgess and D.W. Edwards, whose purpose was to train experts to engage in social welfare and social services.³⁹ After earning his doctoral degree from Columbia University, Wu Wenzao took a position at Yenching in early 1929 and began to devise a methodology of training students working on China. In 1933 professor Robert Ezra Park from the University of Chicago was invited by Yenching to teach methodologies of community surveys. Aiming to bring together the best practitioners to form the department, Park suggested that Wu Wenzao invite Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown—the founder of the theory of Structural Functionalism—to give talks at Yenching for three months.⁴⁰

Analysis: The Report of a Preliminary Survey of the Town of Ching Ho, Hopei, North China 1930. Li Jinghan (1895–1986) studied in the United States in his early years and then taught in the Department of Sociology of Yenching University. In the mid-1920s, he guided students conducting surveys of population, families, family income, and family lives in four villages in the Beijing suburbs. He later published *An Survey of Rural Families in the Suburb of Beijing* (Beiping jiaowai zhi xiangcun jiating diaocha). During 1924 and 1931, he was in charge of the famous survey of Dingxian, Hebei and wrote *An Investigation of Social General Situation of Dingxian* (Dingxian shehui gaikuang). Wu Wenzao (1901–85) earned his doctoral degree from Columbia University in 1929 and then returned to China and became a professor at Yenching University. By applying methodologies of community studies and field investigation that were employed in British functionalism of cultural anthropology, he promoted studies of rural community. See Wu Wenzao, “Xiandai shequ shidi yanjiu de yiyi he gongyong”; Wu Wenzao, “Zhongguo shequ yanjiu de xiyang yingxiang yu guonei jinkuang”; Wu Wenzao, “Gongneng pai shehui renleixue de youlai yu xianzhuang.”

³⁸ Similar works include Gu Fu, *Nongcun shehuixue*; Yang Kaidao, *Nongcun shehuixue*; Feng Hefa, *Nongcun shehuixue dagang*; Yan Xinzhe, *Nongcun shehuixue gailun*.

³⁹ Lei Jieqiong and Shui Shizheng, “Yanjing daxue shehui fuwu gongzuo sanshi nian,” 49–58.

⁴⁰ Robert Ezra Park (1864–1944) was an American urban sociologist considered one of the most influential figures in early U.S. sociology. He taught at the University of Chicago from 1914 to 1933, where he played a leading role in the development of the Chicago School of sociology. His works include: *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (with Ernest Burgess); *The City: Suggestions for the Study of Human Nature in the Urban Environment* (with R. D. McKenzie & Ernest Burgess). Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), English social anthropologist,

Subsequently, Wu arranged for Li Anzhai to study anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, and then Li transferred to Yale. Wu also sent Lin Yaohua to Harvard for doctoral studies in anthropology and Fei Xiaotong to the London School of Economics to study under Bronisław Malinowski. After they completed their degrees and came back to Yenching, all became influential.⁴¹

Under Wu Wenzao's leadership, faculty members and students in sociology, guided by the theories and methodologies of community studies and social anthropology, traveled to a wide range of rural areas for their surveys. In 1936, Fei Xiaotong studied Kaixuangong village and completed *Peasant Life in China*.⁴² Shen Baoyuan's adviser Xu Yongshun published an article titled "Migrants and Crime in Northeast China" (Dongsansheng zhi yimin yu fazui).⁴³ In addition, the researches of department chair Lin Yaohua, the dean of the Law College Zheng Linzhuang, and professor of education Liao Tai-chu focused on the countryside. It is safe to surmise that their work influenced Shen's investigative methods and techniques. Thus prepared, Shen Baoyuan came to Hope Township. Her Yenching training and the political and ideological trends there had had some sort of real impact on her work.

Methodologies of Shen's Investigation

As soon as Shen Baoyuan and her classmates arrived in Hope Township, they sought to establish a good foundation based on "friendly exchanges" with villagers.

one of founders of "Structural Functionalism." His works include *The Andaman Islanders: A Study in Social Anthropology* and *Social Organization of Australian Tribes*.

⁴¹ Fei Xiaotong (1910–2005) earned his doctoral degree from University of London in 1938. His works include *Hualanyao shehui zuzhi*, *Yunnan sancun*, and "Fifty Years Investigation in the Yao Mountains." There are many studies of Fei Xiaotong's scholarship, such as Zhao Xudong, "Fei Xiaotong duiyu Zhongguo nongmin shenghuo de renshi yu wenhua zijue," 54–60; Wang Jianmin, "Tianye minzuzhi yu Zhongguo renleixue de fazhan: Jinian Fei Xiaotong, Lin Yaohua xiansheng 100 zhounian danchen," 6–11; R. David Arkush, *Fei Xiaotong and Sociology in Revolutionary China*; Fong Shiaw-Chian, "Fei Xiaotong's Theory of Rural Development and Its Application: A Critical Appraisal," 20–43; Naigu Pan, "Vitality of Community Study in China: Professor Fei Xiaotong and Community Study," 33–43.

⁴² It was written in English (Fei Hsiao-tung, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangzi Valley*). Also see Han Mingmo, "Zhongguo shehuixue diaocha fangfa he fangfalun fazhan de sange lichengbei."

⁴³ Xu Yongshun, "Dongsansheng zhi yimin yu fazui," 147–65.

Shen tried to understand “the conditions of rural life, the situation of farm families, and structure of local forces.” She knew that to really understand “local forces” in the area she would have to start from the top, and from there open channels of access to “local relationships.” As suggested by villagers, she first visited the head of the township (*xiangzhang*), the security chief (*baoran duizhang*), and heads of the *baojia* (a traditional system of local order), who “mostly were members of the society.”⁴⁴ Here, “the society” means the secret society—Paoge. Her thesis, including the title, often used the two terms “social organization” (*shetuan*) and “society” (*shehui*). The latter has two meanings in Shen’s report. One is the most common, with a meaning close to “community”; the other has actually the same meaning as the “Paoge” or its members.

Shen Baoyuan subsequently discovered that it was difficult to collect information about the Paoge because their members were “very cautious about leaking secrets of the organization.” Therefore, after she became familiar with Lei Mingyuan and his wife, Woman Lei, she “was still afraid to tell them what she was doing, to avoid their suspicion.” With their relationship getting closer, she started to ask more questions, but she was dissatisfied with the progress because she “often could not get the needed answers.” Sometimes, she had to “circle around,” but “failed to gain the slightest material”; or “tried very hard just to get a little sporadic information.”⁴⁵ No doubt it was difficult to enter the world of this kind of family.

Shen got to know Lei Mingyuan mostly through his wife. Lei’s youngest daughter and son enrolled in the summer school, and through this teacher-student relationship, she had more opportunities to become close to the family. She began to treat them “as the beginning of a study of Paoge society.” At that time, although peasants’ children had opportunities to go to a rural school, they also carried a heavy work burden, usually helping in the fields after school; they did not have tutoring after school, and many had difficulties learning. When the Yenching college students provided the summer school, it was a boon for peasant families. Lei and his wife enthusiastically supported the school, and helped set up equipment. They also became “voluntary propagandists for the school.” Also, when the school needed it, the Lei couple helped keep students in order. Shen felt that their methods were “not very appropriate,” but that they certainly provided much needed support.⁴⁶ An illiterate man, Lei Mingyuan “respected” educated people and showed “extreme friendliness” to Shen and her classmates. He liked to talk to

⁴⁴ Shen Baoyuan, “Yige nongcun shetuan jiating,” 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

these young people about guns and military knowledge. He often carried and displayed a Browning pistol, carefully wiping it daily with a piece of cloth. He possessed excellent marksmanship skill and taught shooting to whichever students wanted to learn. He had owned this pistol for nearly 20 years and claimed that he had used it to “kill countless lives.”⁴⁷

The Lei couple played a “decisive role” in Shen’s investigation. Every afternoon she would investigate and visit all kinds of people, and in the evening she wrote in her working diary. She gradually discovered that the scope of the investigation should be limited to the Lei family, which thus would help to understand the Paoge. Therefore, she began to collect and sort her materials in this manner.⁴⁸

In the beginning, Shen experienced difficulties because of the secret aspect of the Paoge. Her inquiries faced “either support or obstruction by local forces,” and she thus made an effort to gather all kinds of information through daily chats, “intentionally or unintentionally asking questions” and to try to gain “totally honest answers” in a spontaneous way.⁴⁹ For example, she sometimes deliberately asked Woman Lei about traditional medicines or recipes, while in the kitchen; these were opportunities to know about the family’s life and “the inside stories of Paoge society.”⁵⁰ She did not explain that she was collecting information for her thesis, only that she acted from “curiosity.”⁵¹ Shen often visited their house, and stated, “In many a long evening, when the sunshine made the rice fields a golden color, I sat in their living room as a guest.” When the Lei daughter Shuying asked Shen to be her English tutor, Shen deepened the relationship and “established a friendship.”⁵²

Shen stayed in Hope Township for only a month and five days, unlike anthropologists who often lived in a village for a long period. However, since it was not a long distance between Hope Township and Chengdu, she kept in close touch after the end of her fieldwork; some of the stories in her report actually happened after she left Hope. Shen went back several times in August and September of 1945, and in January 1946. In the fall and winter, Woman Lei and Shuying visited the Chengdu campus of Yenching several times, and Shuying even once watched the student performance of *Fragrant Grass in Skyline* and stayed

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3–4.

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

⁵² Ibid., 4.

overnight at the school, returning home the next day.⁵³ After Shuying started her middle school, located on the same street as Yenching, the two young women could meet each other almost every day.⁵⁴ This ongoing friendship helped Shen complete her materials.

Although Shen did not disclose the name of Shuying's middle school, it would have been Huamei Girls' Middle School, a missionary school on Shaanxi Street. In 1939, because of air raids the school and a primary school next door were closed and evacuated to the countryside. The Chengdu campus of Yenching University subsequently took over the space of these two sites.⁵⁵ Despite there being no indication of the place Huamei evacuated to, based on other accounts it probably was Hope Township, and thus Shuying's having attended Huamei seems quite logical.⁵⁶ After the war, the middle school moved back to Chengdu, so Shen and Shuying lived almost in the same place.

I have discussed how Shen did her fieldwork and collected materials, but what methodology did she use in writing? In her thesis, Shen briefly mentioned that Lin Yaohua taught her the "viewpoint of Structural Functionalism," which regarded society as a complex structure in which all parts work together to function integrally and stably. One may surmise that, to a certain extent, Lin's study of families influenced Shen's choice of topic. The theory of Structural Functionalism had become popular in 1930s–1940s China, and went on to dominate Western academic sociology, as seen in the work by Harvard University's Talcott Parsons of the 1930s–1960s and beyond (through his students). When the University of Chicago's Robert Ezra Park visited Yenching, he taught field investigation and community studies, inspiring Wu Wenzao, Lin Yaohua, and Fei Xiaotong to combine the methodologies of sociology and anthropology. During his visit to China, Radcliffe–Brown was the adviser for Lin Yaohua's master thesis, and under

⁵³ Ibid., 4. The modern drama *Fragrant Grass in the End of the World* was written by Xia Yan. The story is about a group of intellectuals' experiences during the war, their love life, their struggle for survival, and their participation in the Resistance of War (Xia Yan, *Tianya fangcao*).

⁵⁴ Shen Baoyuan, "Yige nongcun shetuan jiating," 5.

⁵⁵ On August 15, 1945, the Japanese surrendered and the war in China ended. The Chengdu campus of Yenching University returned to Beiping in the summer of 1946 (Yanjing daxue Chengdu xiaoyouhui, "Kangzhan shiqi qian Rong de Yanjing daxue," 339–56).

⁵⁶ According to an entry of his diary on November 18, 1940, Ye Shengtao (1894–1988, a famous educator) travelled with Gu Jiegang (1893–1980, a famous historian) to Chongyiqiao (i.e., Hope Township) to visit Huamei Middle School and was treated to a meal by its president (Ye Shengtao, *Ye Shengtao ji*, vol. 19, 311). Under the jurisdiction of Hope Township, there were 13 villages, one of which was called "Huamei," likely getting the name from the time when Huamei Female Middle School relocated there (Chengdu shi difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed, *Chengdu shizhi, zongzhi*, 425).

Radcliffe-Brown's influence, Lin advocated the new sociological and anthropological methods of structural functionalist research for the study of families, and this advocacy turned immediately to village families in the west, due mostly to the fact that the war had pushed everything away from the northern and eastern areas of China.⁵⁷

The training Shen Baoyuan received determined the purpose and techniques of her investigation. In the preface to her thesis, she thanked her adviser Lin Yaohua for teaching her the "Operational Method (*jisuan fangfa*) and Functionalism." She said that she used the "Operational Method" to "measure interactions among people." She also explained that the Operational Method was a new approach, coming after Critical Theory and Functionalism in American social anthropology; it resulted from synthesizing both those approaches. The new method could be applied using mathematical methods, such as statistics, for studying human phenomena and could "predict the occurrence of future events." She tried to use her thesis to make an "experiment" in this new research method. She believed that the "narrative of relations" (*guanxi xushu*) was important, being "an essential element in the Operational Method."⁵⁸ In her view, the two approaches were mutually complementary since people's relations involved requests, rituals, actions, and contexts, all of which could become data.

However, in reading her thesis, I did not find any actual application of the new methods. The Operational Method is generally a macro perspective, using statistical theories and mathematical methods in order to calculate formulas related to quantifiable conditions that are changing; thus it determines increase and decrease in the conditions, which give shape to, or even eliminate, the situation.⁵⁹ Shen might have planned to use this approach for the next step, but once she

⁵⁷ During the Chengdu period (1942–45) of Yenching University, he visited the Yi people's area in Liangshan for three times. See Lin Yaohua, *Shehui renleixue jiangyi*, 456–60.

⁵⁸ In his late years, Lin Yaohua wrote *Teaching Notes for Social Anthropology* in which he reviewed both schools of Critical Theory and Functionalism. Lin Yaohua, *Shehui renleixue jiangyi*, 22–24. Regarding studies of these two schools of anthropology in China, see Qiao Jian, "Meiguo lishi xuepai," 137–56. Regarding Franz Boas' specific school, see Franz Boas and George W. Stocking Jr., *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883–1911*; Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life*. Regarding major works of Functionalism, see A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*; Adam Kuper, ed., *The Social Anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown*; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*; Raymond Firth, ed., *Man and Culture: An Evaluation of the Work of Bronislaw Malinowski*.

⁵⁹ Cai Jiaqi, "Shilun minzuxue tianye diaocha de lilun yu fangfa," 25–52.

completed her thesis, she did not have a chance to go back to the project. For us, today, I believe that it is not important to pursue Shen's methods and theories; thus I pay more attention to the stories of Lei and his family that Shen recorded. Although she often made comments that reflected her Westernized, educated elite's point of view, she was still trying to understand the Leis' lives and their inner world, and to make objective observations. In my opinion, she actually combined microscopic methods, individual visits, and observations, all of which were then being used in field investigations generally.

As stated, Shen Baoyuan said in her thesis that Professor Lin Yaohua taught her mathematical methods, but about this Lin himself did not say much in his book *Teaching Notes on Social Anthropology*, a comprehensive summary of his own lifetime's teaching and research. When he commented on the Critical Theory adherents (*piping pai*) in anthropology, he said, "As for methodologies of studies, applying statistics to analyze culture is not beneficial; using it to recover ethnic cultural history is too mechanical."⁶⁰ It seems Lin did not give much credit to this methodology. However, the theses written by Lin Yaohua's students repeatedly referred to the use of the theory under Professor Lin's supervision. For instance, in his thesis "A Rural Handicraft Family: A Report on the Du Family in Shiyangchang" (*Yige nongcun shougongye de jiating: Shiyangchang dujia shidi yanjiu baogao*), Yang Shuyin said that in the class on "Social Systems" during 1942 and 1943, Lin Yaohua "introduced this perspective to students," stressing use of the comparative mathematical method to "examine the interaction between people using standardized units and predicting the future."⁶¹ Although to understand to what extent Lin Yaohua influenced his students methodologically requires more study, it is clear that Lin set up student sojourns in rural areas so that they would better understand peasant lives. Shen was one of them, and she left valuable records from her field investigation.

Conclusion

This paper uses Shen Baoyuan's rural investigations of 1945 as a starting point to examine how the academic and ideological trends at Yenching University

⁶⁰ Lin, *Shehui renleixue jiangyi*, 25.

⁶¹ Yang Shuyin, "Yige nongcun shougongye de jiating: Shiyangchang dujia shidi yanjiu baogao," Thesis, Department of Sociology, Yenching University, 1944. Other theses written by Lin Yaohua's students who used this method include "A Study of Factory Workers: A Printing Factory in Chengdu" and "The Lama Temple in Zagunao," and so on (Zhao Li and Zhu Hu, "Yanda shehui diaocha yu Zhongguo zaoqi shehuixue bentuhua shijian," 95–96.

influenced her work. It also provides a window into early Chinese sociologists and anthropologists in their approach to rural communities, how intellectuals in the Republican era tried to solve rural problems, and how the introduction of Western sociology and anthropology influenced them as well. We are given access to an individual (Lei) and his family in a rural community that had little impact on the nation's struggles, but it connects them with prominent scholars who did have an intellectual impact on China. A place as small as Hope Township was linked to the larger Chinese society and to intellectual trends that also linked up internationally.

The development of Chinese sociology and anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s made a workable picture of the world of Paoge possible. The rural investigations of the time became an important part of the Rural Reconstruction and Rural Education Movements. Shen Baoyuan, part of this larger academic work, made it clear that her motive was "to study a secret society and the family profile of one of its leaders," and that she wished it to be a "purely academic exploration of personal interest."⁶² The topic Shen chose was quite challenging. From the subjects of sociological and anthropological investigations during the time, this topic seems to be relatively quite difficult. Most fieldwork like this at the time concerned industry, economy, life, customs, etc., in which the subjects were not sensitive to a certain social group or organization, much less concerns of any secret to be revealed. But, as she saw more clearly the role of the Paoge, things fundamentally changed in her project. Although the secret society was semi-public, after all, it was still explicitly banned. Furthermore, it maintained stringent rules to protect secrets and to punish violators. Shen's study involved problems and dangers.

Of course, Shen doing this survey had an advantage: the site was close to Chengdu—unlike her adviser Lin Yaohua, who took three trips to Xiaoliangshan and Xikang during 1943 and 1945, experiencing long journeys, hardships, and even threats to his life.⁶³ It is a well-known tragic story that when Fei Xiaotong and his newly married bride Wang Tonghui together went to Yao Mountain (Dayaoshan), Guangxi province, for their fieldwork in 1935, Wang disappeared forever.⁶⁴ Because of the short distance between Chengdu and Hope Township, Shen could keep up frequent contact with the Lei family even after the summer fieldwork. Without such continuing exchanges, Shen's investigation would have lacked breadth, especially since the events in the Lei family after the summer of

⁶² Shen Baoyuan, "Yige nongcun shetuan jiating," 6.

⁶³ Lin, *Shehui renleixue jiangyi*, 457–60.

⁶⁴ Fei got caught in a tiger trap and Wang presumably died while traveling to get help for him. Fei Xiaotong, *Liushang Yaoshan*, 268–71; Arkush, *Fei Xiaotong and Sociology in Revolutionary China*, 66–67.

1945 would have been missing.

Shen acknowledged that she did not have a clear idea what she would study, before she arrived in Hope Township. Subsequently, however, she recognized the Paoge everywhere and found that they occupied the center of local forces. This phenomenon caused her to gain an “interest in the study of such an organization and her willingness to take this opportunity to gather information about them,” which would only eventually become the “real motivation for this thesis.”⁶⁵ Apparently, to understand the rural society of the western Sichuan plain in the 1940s one simply had to examine the Paoge. Lei Mingyuan and Shen Baoyuan lived in the two different worlds, but they did interact in the summer of 1945. The former was investigated and described, and the latter was the investigator and narrator of the former’s story. Shen recorded the Lei family’s stories as well. Ultimately, we view the Paoge and one of their families through the eyes of a Western-trained student in sociology who exhibited youthful thinking, youthful influences, and a bit of naivete.

Indeed Shen’s thesis is superficial; it lacks real in-depth analysis and extensive discussion. After all, it was done by an undergraduate student, whose theories and methods were still relatively immature. However, its merits are the data. To some extent, my aim is to continue her task. Although it has been many years since her work, I am surprised to find that today our understanding of the Paoge still is slight. Although historical accounts provide a great deal of information about Paoge activity and presence, no other source brings us so close to them and their organization.⁶⁶ Her thesis perhaps was not solid, like a mature academic research would be, but this was due to her lack of ability to process the information more slowly and with deliberation about the best methods. Larger events unfolded around Shen, making all that impossible. In the end, she seems because of this more trustworthy: we are not reading dressed-up or doubtful data.

Character List

Baoan duizhang 保安隊長

Beipei 北碚

Beiping shehui diaochasuo 北平社會調查所

Chen Hansheng 陳翰笙

Chengdu minzhu qingnian xiehui 成都民主青年協會

⁶⁵ Shen Baoyuan, “Yige nongcun shetuan jiating,” 2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

- Chongqing 重慶
Cunzhi yanjiu yuan 村治研究院
Cunzhi 村制
Dahoufang 大後方
Dayaoshan 大瑤山
Dingxian shehui gaikuang diaocha 定縣社會概況調查
Dingzhou 定州
Dongsansheng zhi yimin yu fazui 東三省之移民與犯罪
Fan Shaozeng 範紹增
Fangcao tianya 芳草天涯
Fei Xiaotong 費孝通
Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛
Guanxi xushu 關係敘述
Haiyan jutuan 海燕劇團
Hui county 輝縣
Huidang 會黨
Jinbu xuesheng 進步學生
Jisuan fangfa 計算方法
Kaixiangong cun 開弦弓村
Li Anzhai 李安宅
Li Jinghan 李景漢
Liang Shuming 梁漱溟
Liangshan 涼山
Liao Taichu 廖泰初
Lin Yaohua 林耀華
Lu Zuofu 盧作孚
Nongcun gongzuo dui 農村工作隊
Nongcun gongzuo zhe 農村工作者
Nongcun shehui xue 農村社會學
Paoge 袍哥
Piping pai 批評派
Qinghe town 清河鎮
Saishang fengyun 塞上風雲
Shehui kexue yanjiu suo 社會科學研究所
Shehui 社會
Shen Baoyuan 沈寶媛
Shen Zurong 沈祖榮
Shetuan 社團
Sichuan Jialingjiang Sanxia de xiangcun jianshe yundong 四川嘉陵江三峽的鄉村建設運動
Tao Menghe 陶孟和

- Wang Tonghui 王同惠
 Wangzhen 望鎮
 Wenhua gongshulin 文華公書林
 Wu Wenzao 吳文藻
 Xia Yan 夏衍
 Xian geji zuzhi gangyao 縣各級組織綱要
 Xiangzhang 鄉長
 Xiaoliangshan 小涼山
 Xikang 西康
 Xindu 新都
 Xu Yongshun 徐壅舜
 Yang Hansheng 陽翰笙
 Yang Kaidao 楊開道
 Yang Shuyin 楊樹因
 Yanjing daxue biye lunwen 燕京大學畢業論文
 Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶
 Yichang 宜昌
 Yige nongcun shetuan jiating 一個農村社團家庭
 Yige nongcun shougongye de jiating: Shiyangchang dujia shidi yanjiu baogao
 一個農村手工業的家庭——石羊場杜家實地研究報告
 Zheng Linzhuang 鄭林莊
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