

## Cotton Textile Production and Rural Social Transformation in Early Modern China

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The competition between rural handicraft industry and modern industrial production, and its effects on the peasant household have long been subjects of interest and controversy among scholars of China. Textile handicrafts, historically the single most important sideline production of rural households in China, is frequently used as a case study in examining domestic-foreign competition, rural-urban influx and conflict between pre-modern and modern economy. In his study of one Yangtze village, for example, Fei Hsiao-t'ung argues fervently that in the mid-1930s the economic depression in the village was primarily due to the decline of the rural silk industry, which came about as a result of the increasing foreign produce and more competitive world market.<sup>1</sup> The social and economic impacts of the textile industry on the rural scene, which will be explored in this paper, were significant even in the absence of foreign or modern elements.

Cotton and silk were the two major textiles in early modern China (here defined as from the 14th to the 18th century), whereas ramie production, though significant earlier, gradually faded out. Cotton, introduced to China in the Sung-Yüan period, had become widely produced by the late Ming, and cotton textile handicrafts assumed an increasingly important role in the rural economy, especially in Sung-chiang and its vicinity. As this was a relatively new phenomenon in this period, rural responses to its inception are more discernible and hence process of change can be better explored. In the absence of foreign forces and radical technological innovations, some of the major complications besetting analyses of later periods are eliminated, permitting us to isolate and pinpoint the impact of handicraft development alone. The geographic focus of this paper is the Kiangnan region—the area south of Kiangsu (Su-chou and Sung-chiang prefectures) and north of Chekiang (Chia-hsing, Hu-chou and Hang-chou prefectures), where were the centers of cotton industry.

The extent of cotton textile expansion, reasons accounting for the rapid growth and major economic changes are examined in the first and second part of this paper. Growth of regional

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<sup>1</sup> Fei Hsiao-t'ung, *Peasant Life in China* (London, 1947), Chs. 12 and 16.

specialization in commercial crops, intensified interregional exchange, rapid growth of markets and market towns, and general commercial prosperity appear to be areas of change directly linked to cotton production. A large part of this paper, however, is devoted to the changing behavioral pattern and social status of peasantry due to their involvement in cotton production and participation in the commercial world. I attempt to demonstrate that the interlocking phenomena related to cotton production led to the formation of a new social configuration in early modern China.

### The Expansion of Cotton Culture and Manufacture

Before the Ming the so-called "cotton-cloth" (*pu-i*) worn by commoners referred to ramie cloth.<sup>2</sup> However, the cultivation of cotton and the cotton handicraft industry replaced the previous ramie production during the Ming. The prevalence of cotton can be documented as early as the late 15th century when a contemporary scholar, Ch'iu Chün, commented: "In our [Ming] dynasty, cotton has spread throughout the empire. It is used a hundred times more than silk and hemp."<sup>3</sup> Based on the tax returns of 1502 and 1578, Nishijima Sadao concluded that most provinces produced some cotton or cotton cloth in the sixteenth century, and Craig Dietrich's study indicates that between three-fifths and four-fifths of all *hsien*, in the late Ming and early Ch'ing, manufactured some cotton cloth.<sup>4</sup> The extensiveness of the rural engagement in the textile industry is best illustrated by Sung Ying-hsing in his book on technology, *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu* (1637), in which it is stated that the cotton weaving loom "can be found in every tenth household."<sup>5</sup>

Rapid expansion of cotton production should be attributed to government promotion, including the encouragement of local authorities, and the tax/rent institution. As early as in 1365 the founding emperor Ming T'ai-tsu laid down the regulation that each agrarian household with five to ten *mou* of land should devote at least half a *mou* to mulberry trees, hemp or cotton cultivation, and double this amount if landholding exceeded ten *mou*. For annual tax each household had to pay eight *liang* of hemp for each *mou* of hemp land or four *liang* of cotton for each *mou* of cotton field; even those who did not cultivate these crops had to pay one bolt of silk, hemp or cotton cloth.<sup>6</sup> In the famous imperial instructions promulgated in 1398, local *li-chia* leaders and elders (*lao-jen*) were asked to supervise the cultivation of cotton and mulberry trees.<sup>7</sup> Ming T'ai-tsu's policy set the stage for the ensuing developments, and cotton as a tax item was thus first established in early Ming.

Aside from the national rulings, encouragement of cotton production by local administrators is recorded in scattered sources.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the prefect of Chen-chiang invited males

<sup>2</sup> Wu Han, "Ming-ch'ü she-hui sheng-ch'an li ti fa-chan," in *Chung-kuo tzu-pen chu-i meng-ya wen-t'i t'ao-lun chi* (Peking, 1957), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Ch'ü Hua, *Mu-mien p'u* (Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng ed.), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Nishijima Sadao, *Chügoku keizai shi kenkyü* (Tokyo, 1966), pp. 764-804; Craig Dietrich, "Cotton Culture and Manufacture in Early Modern China," in W. E. Willmott (ed.), *Economic Organization in Chinese Society* (Stanford, 1972), p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Sung Ying-hsing, *T'ien-kung k'ai-wu*, tr. by E-tu Sun (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ming shih-lu* (Academia Sinica ed.), T'ai-tsu, 17.3a-b.

<sup>7</sup> *Huang-Ming chih-shu*, cited in Nishijima Sadao, p. 759.

<sup>8</sup> Extensive examples are given in P'eng Che-i (ed.), *Chung-kuo chin-tai shou kung-yeh shih tzu-liao, 1840-1949*, Vol. 1 (Peking, 1957), pp. 223-228; and Yen Chung-p'ing, "Ming-Ch'ing liang-tai ti-fang kuan ch'ang-tao fang-chih shih-li," *Tung-fang tsa-chih*, 42:8 (April 1946), pp. 20-26.

and females who were skilled in spinning and weaving from the neighboring Sung-chiang prefecture to teach the inhabitants of his prefecture in 1486.<sup>9</sup> Lü K'un (1534-1616), Grand Coordinator of Shansi, most explicitly laid down his plans for teaching people the techniques of spinning and weaving, and his plan proved a success:<sup>10</sup>

. . . The prefectural official got around ten carpenters to teach the other carpenters of the province, who were ordered to make spinning wheels and looms for sale. He next ordered the *hsien* and *wei yamen* to command the *yüeh* leaders (*yüeh*, a village unit) to register the manpower of the *yüeh*, excluding wealthy households and employed males and females, such as those involved in crafts like food and wine retailing, but including indiscriminantly military and civilians, and unemployed females. Official money was used to buy 1,000 catties of ginned cotton, one catty given to each such household. . . . Those who finished spinning the cotton quickly and spun fine yarn were exempted from paying for the cotton as a reward; those who took more than ten days but spun rather coarse yarn were exempted from half; those who took more than twenty days and produced coarse yarn had to pay full cost. Those requiring more than one month were penalized by the cost of an extra catty of cotton. . . .

The *yamen* sent out twenty to thirty weavers to teach people weaving. The males and females of the spinning families, on scheduled days, successively studied weaving for a year under these weavers, hence a thousand families learned to weave. Later, those who committed crimes were allowed to pay indemnity in cloth; minor offenders paid fines in cloth. In hardly two years there were many in the province who could weave. Once the skill was acquired, not only did females have an occupation, but also the province could profit.

Promotion of cotton production by national or local authorities, however, was not as effective as one fiscal measure, namely, the tax/rent institution which associated the traditional land system with rural handicraft industry. Ming T'ai-tsu's enforcement of cotton production and tax payment in cotton was to meet the demand of government cotton consumption. Cotton and cotton cloth were needed for soldiers, their families, imperial households, official emoluments and exchange for horses in the frontier markets.

Government cotton consumption was substantial. Based on the figures in the *Veritable Records*, the following table represents the official account of the cotton bolls and cloth provided for soldiers during T'ai-tsu's reign.

TABLE. GOVERNMENT SUPPLY OF COTTON AND COTTON CLOTH TO SOLDIERS

Year	Cotton cloth (bolts)	Cotton bolls (catties)
1385	1,239,990	383,300
1386	1,317,074	424,343
1387	1,159,585	65,600
1388	1,117,800	441,600
1389	1,345,000	560,000
1390	1,489,740	511,100
1396	2,889,900	1,415,200

Source: *Ming shih-lu*, cited in Nishijima Sadao, *Chūgoku keizai shi kenkyū*, p. 760.

The above table indicates that there was a steady increase in the amount of cotton distributed to soldiers. This amount, however, was much too low to represent the actual cotton consumption by soldiers. Yen Chung-p'ing estimates that with about 1,700,000 regular soldiers during the Ming, each receiving two to three bolts of cotton cloth as well as one and a half

<sup>9</sup> *Chen-chiang fu-chih*, cited in Nishijima Sadao, p. 782.

<sup>10</sup> Lü K'un, *Shih-cheng lu* (Lü Tzu'i-shu ed., Vols. 18-23; preface 1598), 2.9b-10a.

catties of cotton bolls each year, the total cloth required was five to six million bolts. Including the dependents of military staff, officials and imperial families, and the needs of the horse trade, Yen Chung-p'ing concludes that the government cotton consumption was no less than fifteen million bolts each year.<sup>11</sup>

To acquire enough cotton for government needs, the Ming authority had several times required the conversion of grain payment to cotton. A major ruling for this conversion was introduced by the Kiangnan Regional Inspector Chou Ch'en in 1433, in which one bolt of white "three-shuttles cloth" was treated as equivalent to 2-2.5 *shih* of grain, and one bolt of ordinary cloth to 0.98-1.0 *shih* of grain.<sup>12</sup> Besides this ruling, the commutation was also made on an irregular basis in three situations. First, taxpayers were asked to pay cotton to make up their land tax dues in 1397 in Shensi, 1430 in Ying-t'ien (i.e. Nanking) and Su-chou, and 1433 in Sung-chiang and Su-chou. Secondly, people were asked to pay tax in cotton when the rice harvest fell because of natural calamities, as in 1424 in Su-chou, Sung-chiang and Chia-ting, and 1446 in Sha-ho hsien (Honan). Thirdly, part of the Kiangnan high tax quota and surcharges were subscribed in cotton.<sup>13</sup> The grain-cotton conversion was mostly applied to the Kiangnan provinces and prefectures where the centers of cotton industry were located. The government rulings permitting or requiring tax payment in cotton, especially the 1433 large-scale enforcement, played an important role in the expansion of cotton industry.

Moreover, the Kiangnan area, especially the prefectures of Su-chou and Sung-chiang, were inflicted with a high tax and surcharge quota during the Ming.<sup>14</sup> In order to fulfill the quota, rural households were compelled to engage in subsidiary industry for supplementary income. Ch'en Chi-ju reported in 1588 that people in Su-chou and Sung-chiang heavily depended on cotton spinning and weaving to make ends meet.<sup>15</sup> In his *Nung-cheng ch'üan-shu* (1628), Hsü Kuang-ch'i stated flatly that the fact that the Kiangnan people had survived under a tax quota ten times higher than during the Sung, despite comparable arable acreages under the two dynasties, should be credited entirely to the "spinning wheel and weaving loom." The rural females depended on the sideline industry "to pay high tax on the one hand and to support the family on the other."<sup>16</sup> For the tenant-farmers participation in cotton production helped them to pay the high rents which were a consequence of the increased tax quota. Rent payment in cotton, called "cotton rent" (*hua-tsu*), was accepted by landlords not only on cotton fields but on land with rice as the major crop.<sup>17</sup> The high tax/rent had a direct effect on the "popularization" of the rural cotton industry.

Besides the above factors, the application of beancake fertilizer, best suited for cotton culture, helped to intensify the spread of cotton cultivation and its productivity. The beancake trade from Honan and Shantung to Kiangnan was already important in the sixteenth century, and the imports of fertilizer grew rapidly with the opening up of the Manchurian trade in

<sup>11</sup> Yen Chung-p'ing, *Chung-kuo mien-fang chih shih-kao* (Peking, 1963), pp. 15-17.

<sup>12</sup> Ku Yen-wu, *T'ien-hsia chün-kuo li-ping shu* (Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an ed.), 6.67a.

<sup>13</sup> Yen Chung-p'ing, pp. 32, 34.

<sup>14</sup> The origins and problems of the Kiangnan high tax quota are extensively discussed in Mi Chü Wiens, "Socioeconomic Change during the Ming Dynasty in the Kiangnan Area" (Harvard University Ph.D. dissertation, 1973), Ch. Two.

<sup>15</sup> Ch'en Chi-ju (1558-1639), *Wan-hsiang t'ang hsiao-p'ing* (Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh chen-pen ts'ung-shu ed., Vol. 26; Shanghai, 1936), *chuan* 23, p. 391.

<sup>16</sup> Hsü Kuang-ch'i, *Nung-cheng ch'üan-shu* (preface 1628; Peking, 1956), *chuan* 35, p. 707.

<sup>17</sup> Nishijima Sadao, pp. 748, 812, 868.

the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Lastly and most significantly, the process of commercialization in the late Ming<sup>19</sup> was intimately connected with the growth of cotton production, handicrafts and trade, and was a force precipitating major rural social change.

### Changes in Rural Economy

The prevalence of cotton culture and manufacture in the sixteenth century initiated or intensified changes in several aspects of the rural economy: Enlarged cultivation of cotton increased the extent of regional crop specialization. A nationwide cotton market, and a pattern of north-south exchange of raw materials and finished products gradually emerged. In this process, rice land was crowded out by cotton, necessitating closer interregional dependence for subsistence and commercial goods and in turn stimulating the rapid growth of markets and market towns.

Cotton production in Kiangnan developed along the coast south of the Yangtze River in Sung-chiang, Su-chou and T'ai-ts'ang prefectures. More than half of the 2,000,000 *mou* of cultivated land in Shanghai was devoted to cotton, and in places like T'ai-ts'ang and Chia-ting, rice grew on 30% of the cultivated land and cotton on the remaining 70%.<sup>20</sup> Production here alone, however, could not meet the demands of the booming cotton industry, and the supply of raw material depended heavily on imports from the north. Fang Kuan-ch'eng estimated in the eighteenth century that 20% to 30% of the fields in Hopei were planted with cotton and in central Hopei, 80% to 90% of the peasants were engaged in cotton cultivation.<sup>21</sup> Even larger areas were devoted to cotton in the provinces like Honan and Shantung which were primarily responsible for the Kiangnan supply.

A nationwide cotton market was gradually formulated according to the patterns of the demand and supply of raw materials and finished products. The Kiangnan and Shantung-Honan market exchange is described by Hsü Kuang-ch'i in his *Nung-cheng ch'üan-shu* (1628): "Nowadays in the north the price of raw cotton is low yet that of finished cotton is high, and in the south it is just the reverse. Thus cotton is transported and sold to the south, whereas the finished materials are shipped to the north for sale."<sup>22</sup>

Before getting further into the market exchange of cotton and cotton cloth, it is necessary

<sup>18</sup> The application of beancake fertilizer in cotton field is recorded in Hsü Kuang-ch'i's *Nung-cheng ch'üan-shu* (1628). About the beancake trade, see Mark Elvin, "The High-level Equilibrium Trap," in W. E. Willmott (ed.), *Economic Organization in Chinese Society*, p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> Economic development in the late Ming and early Ch'ing has been characterized by the Chinese Communist historians as "the burgeoning of Chinese capitalism." This characterization carries a political overtone as it is an attempt to prove the possibility of the development of indigenous capitalism without the intervention of Western powers in the 19th century. Whether the extent of the economic advancement in this period can be labelled as nascent capitalism and whether Chinese history can be framed in terms of historical materialism are debatable questions. However, the urban and rural prosperity after the mid-Ming can undoubtedly be viewed at least a boom of commercialization in Chinese history. For works on this subject, see *Chung-kuo tzu-pen chu-i meng-ya wen-t'i t'ao-lun chi* (Peking, 1957) and its sequel (Peking, 1960). Also Shang Yüeh, *Chung-kuo tzu-pen chu-i kuan-hsi fa-sheng chi yen-pien ti ch'u-pu yen-chiu* (Peking, 1956) and Shang Yüeh (comp.), *Ming-Ch'ing she-hui ching-chi hsing-t'ai ti yen-chiu* (Shanghai, 1957).

<sup>20</sup> Sun Ching-chih, *Hua-tung ti-ch'ü ching-chi ti-li* (Peking, 1959), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Fang Kuan-ch'eng (1698-1768), *Yü t'i mien-hua t'u*, cited in Nan-k'ai ta-hsüeh cheng-chih ching-chi hsüeh chiao-yen-tsu, "Chung-kuo feng-chien she-hui nei tzu-pen chü-i yin-su ti meng-ya," *Chung-kuo chin san-pai nien she-hui ching-chi shih lun-chi* (Hong Kong, 1972), p. 346.

<sup>22</sup> Hsü Kuang-ch'i, *chuan* 35, p. 708.

to make a distinction among the different weaves of cloth. The "three-shuttles cloth" (*san-so pu*), "floral cloth" (*fei-hua pu*), "silk cloth" (*ssu-pu*) and "eye-brow knit" (*mei-chih pu*), made of high quality cotton and with complicated weaving patterns, were the luxury goods, whereas "standard cloth" (*piao-pu*, or called *ta-pu*), "T-cloth" (*k'ou-pu*, or called *hsiao-pu*) and "midloom" (*chung-chi*) were plain and ordinary cloths, produced mostly in rural households.<sup>23</sup>

Honan and Shantung supplied raw materials not only for Kiangnan, but for Hopei and Hunan.<sup>24</sup> The extent of cotton production and trade in Honan was clearly indicated in Chung Hua-min's report in 1594: "Half of the fertile land in Honan is planted with cotton, which all then goes into the hands of the merchants. Cotton cloth worn by people here is provided through the market."<sup>25</sup> However, toward the late Ming, northern provinces also produced cotton cloth and even had a surplus for export as, for example, from Su-ning hsien (Hopei) and Ting-t'ao hsien (Shantung).<sup>26</sup> Kiangnan supplied Fukien and Kwangtung raw materials as the author of the *Cotton Manual* indicated: "People from Fukien and Kwangtung with boatloads of sugar came to Shanghai in the second and third lunar months, and in the fall they purchased ginned cotton and loaded them in hundreds and thousands of boats to bring them back home."<sup>27</sup>

A rough pattern of the raw cotton and cotton cloth circulation during Ming-Ch'ing is mapped out by Nishijima Sadao: Kiangnan purchased cotton bolls from the north (Shantung and Honan) and from the Central Yangtze Valley (Hupei and Hunan), but exported cotton cloth there. Kiangnan exported cotton and finished materials to the southern provinces, such as Kwangtung, Kwangsi and Fukien. Different markets also demanded different weaves: "standard cloth" was sold mostly to the north and "midloom" mostly to central and south China. The boom in the "standard cloth" trade during the Ming, however, was replaced by the affluence of the "midloom" trade in the early Ch'ing, accompanied by the decline of Shensi and Shansi merchants and the rise of Hsin-an (Anhui) merchants, handling the "standard cloth" and "midloom" trades respectively.<sup>28</sup>

The rural cropping pattern was affected by the booming cotton industry. Rice land was gradually replaced by cotton and tinctorial plants, which became a commercial crop as the demand increased. A local record of Yün-ch'eng county (Yen-chou prefecture, Shantung) described the situation in 1573: "Soil here is suited for cotton, which is sold by the merchants

<sup>23</sup> Yeh Meng-chu, *Yüeh shih-pien* (Shanghai chang-ku ts'ung-shu ed., Vols. 3-5; Shanghai, 1935), 7.5a-b; and Nishijima Sadao, pp. 839-845.

<sup>24</sup> Chang Lü-hsiang, *Yang-yüan hsien-sheng ch'üan-chi* (1871 ed., Taipei reprint, 1968), 43.44a.

<sup>25</sup> Chung Hua-min (1537-1597), "Chiu huang t'u-shuo," cited in Nishijima Sadao, p. 774.

<sup>26</sup> Nishijima Sadao, pp. 770, 772.

<sup>27</sup> Ch'u Hua, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Nishijima Sadao, pp. 887-900; Fujii Hiroshi challenges the statement of Nishijima that "standard cloth" was sold to the North and the "midloom" was sold to the South. Fujii argues that *ta-pu* and "three-shuttles cloth" were sold in large quantity from Kiangnan to Kwangtung, and Hupei was noted for producing a kind of "midloom," which was sold to the North and South through Kiangnan merchants.

Fujii also disagrees with Nishijima's generalization that cotton and cotton cloth exchange between North and Kiangnan ceased after the Ming, and the center of gravity of cotton exchange shifted from Kiangnan to South and Central China. Fujii points out that due to the development of weaving industry in Shantung and Honan after Ch'ing, the amount of cotton cloth export to this area had been reduced, yet there were still raw cotton and cotton cloth exchange between North and Kiangnan, and the cotton trade with South and Central China was not phenomenally increased.

However, Fujii does agree with Nishijima that the "standard cloth" trade was replaced by the "midloom" trade during the K'ang-hsi period. (Fujii Hiroshi, "Shin-an shōnin no kenkyū," *Tōyōgaku*, 36:1 [June 1953], pp. 12-17.)

to the Kiangnan markets. Consequently less than half of the land is used for staple crops."<sup>29</sup> The governor-general of Kiangsu and Chekiang, Kao Chin, memorialized in 1775 that only 20% to 30% of the peasants in the counties and prefectures of the lower Yangtze delta cultivated rice. As a result, this area depended heavily on the rice supply from other places. Kao Chin thus recommended that those landowners with more than one *ch'ing* (= 100 *mou*) of land should convert half of their cotton land to rice cultivation.<sup>30</sup>

The extent of rice land ousted by commercial crops in Kiangnan can perhaps be best illustrated by the changing pattern of the supply and demand of rice from Sung to Ming. A popular saying during the Sung was "if Su-chou and Hu-chou have a good harvest then the whole empire has a sufficiency," but toward the late Ming this saying was modified to "when Hukuang (Hupei and Hunan) reaps its harvest, the empire has no want."<sup>31</sup> With the shrinkage of rice land, Kiangnan hence had to expect its rice supply from Hukuang and sometimes from Kiangsi and Szechwan.

Descriptions of the rural markets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate that they were an important source of supply of everyday necessities. Huang Pien, a Hui-chou merchant, wrote about the Su-chou market in the Lung-ch'ing period (1567–1572): "It is hard to count and exhaust the items that are sold here. Besides fabric materials, one can find all the daily commodities that he needs."<sup>32</sup> Not only in the economically advanced south, but in the north basic daily needs also relied on market supply. According to the local record of Yen-chou prefecture (Shantung) in 1586, Kiangnan provided 60% to 70% of its supply of food, clothing and daily utensils.<sup>33</sup> A most explicit account of the extent of trade was given in the record of Ho-chien prefecture (Hopei) in the Chia-ching period (1522–1566).<sup>34</sup>

The merchants who bring goods to Ho-chien sell silk, grain, salt, iron and timber. Those who sell silk come from Nanking, Su-chou and Lin-ch'ing. Those who sell grain come from Wei-hui, Tz'u-chou and the region around Tientsin along the Grand Canal. They come to buy grain or go to sell it, depending on whether our harvest has been good or bad, transporting it in carts. Those who sell iron mostly deal in agricultural implements. They come from Lin-ch'ing and Po-t'ou in small carts. Vendors of salt come from Ts'ang-chou and Tientsin. Sellers of timber come from Chen-ting. Those of porcelain and lacquer objects from Jao-chou and Hui-chou. The resident traders are mostly from the prefectures and counties of Hopei. They are all called "shop-keepers" (*p'u-hu*). . . . Their principle in going to markets is to exchange what they have for what they do not. Markets are held at midday, and everyone gathers at the appointed time. Those in the departmental and county capitals meet five or six times a month. Those in the rural market towns meet two or three times a month. In the prefectural capital there is a market every day.

Studies of Yamane Yukio and Mark Elvin provide evidence that new rural periodic markets multiplied at an accelerated rate, many periodic markets were transformed into permanent ones, and large and active trading took place in the market towns toward the late

<sup>29</sup> *Yen-chou fu chih*, cited in Amano Motonosuke, "Mindai no nōgyō to nōmin," in Yabunchi Kiyoshi (ed.), *Min Shin jidai no kagaku gijitsu shi* (Kyoto, 1970), p. 472.

<sup>30</sup> *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (Taipei, 1964), 37.2a–b.

<sup>31</sup> Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, tr. by Mark Elvin (Michigan Abstracts of Chinese and Japanese Works on Chinese History, No. 2; 1970), pp. 46, 52; and Wu Hsiieh-yen, *Ti-t'u tsung-yao* (1645 preface), Hukuang, 14.116b.

<sup>32</sup> Huang Pien, "I-t'ung lu-ch'eng t'u-chi," cited in Fu I-ling, "Kuan-yü Chung-kuo feng-chien she-hui hou-ch'i ching-chi fa-chan ti jo-kan wen-t'i ti k'o-ch'a," *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 4 (1963), p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> *Yen-chou fu chih*, cited in Amano Motonosuke, p. 508.

<sup>34</sup> *Ku chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng*, *chih fang tien*, 27b; translation follows Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford University Press, 1973), pp. 269, 270.

Ming.<sup>35</sup> The rapid growth of markets derived impetus from the introduction of the Single Whip Tax System, the increased regional specialization of commercial crops and the wide circulation of silver, but also from the development of textile industries. Several market towns in Su-chou and Sung-chiang flourished as a result of the expanding cotton industry. For instance, Feng-ching situated 54 *li* from Hua-t'ing, the prefectural city of Sung-chiang, and 18 *li* from Chia-shan, a cotton production center, and Chu-ching situated 36 *li* southwest of Hua-t'ing had both become large towns with several hundreds of cloth shops and dyeing and calendering houses.<sup>36</sup> The advance of market economy, new patterns of crop cultivation and spread of textile industries in turn precipitated changes in the peasant livelihood.

### Towards a New Social Configuration

Competition between city/town loom houses and the rural cotton households, and the government specifications for tribute textiles were the other two major factors driving peasants to market participation. Peasant dependence on markets and merchants consequently increased, whereas their reliance on landlords decreased as earning opportunities grew. These changes were reflected in the improved status of tenants and hired laborers and the growing aspirations of bondservants (*nu-p'u*), which marked the transition to a new rural order.

Urban loom houses were better equipped and on a larger scale than the rural operation. Cotton ginning, bowing, carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing, and calendering were performed by wage workers on a year-round or seasonal basis. An account of Sung-chiang sock-making provides some idea of the proficiency of urban industry:<sup>37</sup>

After the Wan-li period (1573-1619), Yu-tun cotton cloth was used to make thin summer socks which were extremely light and attractive. People from distant places competed to purchase them. As a result, more than a hundred workshops for summer socks were opened in the hinterland to the west of the prefectural capital, and men and women throughout the prefecture made their living from the manufacture of these socks. They received fixed wages from the workshops. It was a new occupation of benefit to the people.

The city/town loom houses with professionally competent workers and equipped with better looms produced high quality fabrics.

The rural household industries, on the other hand, were operated on a very different scale. They depended mostly on female labor, capital investment was limited and small profit obtained was quickly consumed by family needs. The following picture of rural production is given in the local record of Sung-chiang in the Cheng-te period (1506-1521):<sup>38</sup>

The old ladies of the countryside bring their thread to the market in exchange for raw cotton and come home. The next morning they go forth again with their thread, never wasting a moment. A weaver can finish a bolt of cloth a day, it sometimes being necessary to stay up all night. Harvests from the fields are expended in paying tax and in paying off debts. Incomes are exhausted before the end of the year. Clothing and food are all dependent on [spinning and weaving].

<sup>35</sup> Yamane Yukio, "Min Shin jidai Kahoku ni okeru teiki ichi," *Shiron* 8 (1960), pp. 493-504; Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past*, Ch. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ku Kung-hsieh, *Hsiao hsia hsien-chi che-ch'ao* (Han fen lo pi-chi ed.; Taipei, 1967), *chuan chung*, 13a.

<sup>37</sup> Fan Lien, *Yün chien chü mu ch'ao*, cited in Fu I-ling, *Ming-Ch'ing shih-tai shang-jen chi shang-yeh tzu-pen* (Peking, 1956), p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ku chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng*, chih fang tien, 696.2b.



High quality cloths such as "three-shuttles cloth," "floral cloth" and "eye-brow knit" were produced only in the city/town loom houses, whereas rural households could only produce ordinary fabrics such as "standard cloth," "T-cloth" and "midloom." Because of the difference in quality, rural cloths had difficulty competing with the urban products in the market. Urban fabrics were shipped to the north, to Fukien and Kwangtung, and even to Japan.

Discrimination against rural products was also reflected in the tax requirement. Government had a fixed quota for each region to supply high quality fabrics for imperial and official consumption; the quota set for Hua-t'ing, for instance, was 60,000 bolts, for Shanghai, 40,000 bolts and for Ch'ing-p'u, 20,000 bolts each year.<sup>39</sup> These high quality materials were purchased from the urban loom houses. The mechanism of the government procurement system (*pu-chieh*) can be illustrated by the case of Hua-t'ing: Forty large landholding households in Hua-t'ing, each with more than one thousand *mou* of land, were chosen to be responsible for the purchase of the "three-shuttles cloth." These households were called "delivering households" (*chieh-hu*). This responsibility, however, was later transferred to the urban loom houses as a result of Cheng Yu-hsüan's memorial.<sup>40</sup>

Besides the fixed quota for high quality cloth, the government specifications for ordinary cloth sometimes also disqualified the rural products from being presented to the government. Each bolt, as specified, was to be 4 *chang* long (1 *chang* = 3.3 yards) and 0.25 *chang* wide, with red yarn woven on both ends of the bolt to prevent thievish cutting. The earlier specification of 1393 prescribed the length as 3.2 *chang*, the width as 0.18 *chang* and the weight at three catties; later the weight requirement was removed.<sup>41</sup> These specifications had made it difficult for the rural people, who used manually-operated and rudimentary looms, to meet the high standard. The hand loom could be most comfortably and efficiently operated to weave the cloth of 0.10 *chang* width; both the 0.25 *chang* and 0.18 *chang* requirements meant extra effort and time for their production.

The government procurement system, however, had an effect on the promotion of silver circulation and peasants' participation in the market. The money needed for the purchase of high quality cloth came from the tax payment of the rural households. Peasants would sell their cotton products in the market in order to pay tax, as one late Ming couplet illustrates: "Yesterday a tax was imposed forcefully; today a multitude is selling yarn on the street."<sup>42</sup> Peasants' involvement in the market became more imperative as the government demanded more high quality cloth and required rural households to convert part of their regular tax payment in cotton to silver; for instance, 40% of the tax in cotton was converted to silver from 1504 on in Sung-chiang.<sup>43</sup>

Peasants' increasing dependence on markets and merchants was reflected in several spheres. Peasants purchased raw cotton, ginned cotton or yarn from the market, and sold the finished products to cloth merchants, cloth shops (*pu-hang*, *pa-chuang* or *tzu-hao*) or broker houses (*ya-hang*). Due to the shortage of working capital, peasants had to make frequent trips to the market to exchange their finished products for raw materials as described in the local record of Hai-yen county (Chekiang) in 1624:<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Nishijima Sadao, p. 744.

<sup>40</sup> Ku Yen-wu, 6.79-83.

<sup>41</sup> Ku Yen-wu, 6.67a; Yen Chung-p'ing, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> *Shang-hai hsien chih*, cited in Nishijima Sadao, p. 815.

<sup>43</sup> Nishijima Sadao, p. 818.

<sup>44</sup> *Che-kiang t'ung chih* (1899 ed.), 102.18b.

The raw cotton production in our locality is scanty, yet every household takes spinning and weaving as a permanent engagement (*heng-yeh*). Frequently merchants bring raw cotton from other prefectures to our land. In the morning people go to the market with their yarn or cotton cloth in exchange for raw cotton and come back. They spin and weave at home, and the next morning they go to the market again [with their yarn or cotton cloth] to exchange for [raw cotton]; they have no moment of rest. In one day a spinner can make four ounces of yarn and a weaver can finish one bolt of cotton cloth.

Cotton merchants played an important role in late Ming society. Besides the local merchants (*tso-ku*), who owned or were affiliated with the town shops, there were the guest merchants (*k'o-shang*), also called travelling merchants (*hsing-ku*), who usually managed a large wholesaling business in different localities. Local cloth merchants, as observed in the local gazetteer of Wu-hsi and Chin-k'uei, "carry transactions totalling no less than several tens or hundreds of thousands [of silver] each year, and they can be well-off in a few years."<sup>45</sup> Large local stores, called *tzu-hao*, sometimes controlled a collection of subcontracting shops: for instance, near the Ch'ang gate of Soochow city in the eighteenth century, several shops specializing in cloth washing, dyeing, inspecting and trading depended on one *tzu-hao* for their livelihood.<sup>46</sup>

Wholesale merchants constituted the most powerful business group, influencing brokerage houses and managing branch stores in different market towns and cities. Yeh Meng-chu of Shanghai described the wealth and power of the wholesale cloth merchants in the seventeenth century: "Wealthy merchants came here with a capital of many tens of thousands of taels of silver. The richest may have had several hundreds of thousands and the poorest perhaps ten thousand. For this reason, brokerage houses treat them like kings and marquises and competed for their favor; the brokerage houses could not survive without relying on those influential people."<sup>47</sup> Though the brokerage houses in most cases were to arrange accommodations, purchase and sale for the merchants, they sometimes functioned as the headquarters of the wholesale merchants, handling distribution of goods to branch stores and the supply of raw materials for rural cotton households.

The extent of cotton trade handled by the wholesale merchants is succinctly illustrated in Ch'u Hua's *Cotton Manual*:<sup>48</sup>

My ancestor of six generations ago, Ch'ang-shih kung, during Ming was skilled in speculative business. Fabric merchants from Shansi and Shensi were all hosted by him. There were several tens of thousands of "household guest" [*meng-hsia k'o*, meaning here his business managers] under him, operating stores to collect goods for him. [When the fabric merchants] were about to leave, fabrics [purchased for them] were bundled and loaded for shipping and the costs were estimated in silver. His profit was very abundant. His wealth topped the whole county [i.e. Shanghai] and this was true until the early Ch'ing.

Ch'ang-shih kung, as indicated in this passage, had handled business for merchants from as far away as Shensi and Shansi, and with the help of several dozen managers for the purchase of cotton products, he might have monopolized the acquisition of cotton from nearby rural producers. Famous Ming-Ch'ing wholesale merchants came mostly from two regions: Shansi and Hui-chou (Anhui). They travelled and carried on trade almost all over the empire. In the Chia-ching period (1522–1566), the Hui-chou merchant Yüan Pi, specializing in dyeing

<sup>45</sup> Huang Ang, *Hsi Chin shih hsiao lu* (1752 preface, 1896 ed.), 1.7a.

<sup>46</sup> *Ch'ang-chou hsien chih*, cited in Fu I-ling, *Ming-tai Chiang-nan shih-min ching-chi shih-t'an* (Shanghai, 1963), p. 129.

<sup>47</sup> Yeh Meng-chu, 7.5b.

<sup>48</sup> Ch'u Hua, p. 10.

business, had his headquarter in Wu-hu (Anhui), whereas his branch stores were spread in Kiangsu, Chekiang, Hupei, Honan and Shantung.<sup>49</sup>

The expansion of market economy and the rise of merchant group had several effects on the conditions of peasants. Rural labor was attracted to towns and cities. The branch stores of wholesale merchants were usually run by close relatives, clan members, household guests or bondservants; the choice of partners and employees indicates that the traditional family ties and localism were important in the commercial performance of the early modern period. "Household guests" were acquaintance of the merchants from the same village or related to the latter through close community ties.

The use of bondservants is worth noting, for they were employed both in agricultural fields and urban stores. Bondservants were originally field laborers and domestic helpers for the landlords in the countryside. Though they were not consanguineously related to their lords, bondservants were considered household members belonging to the inner circle in the traditional family system. Bondservants employed in urban stores as managers or clerks were called *shu-tzu*, *ts'ang-t'ou* or *chia-ting*, which designations were also used for the bondservants working as bailiffs for landlords' rural estates. The wealthy merchant Yüan Pi assigned his bondservants to work in the fields for rice and vegetable cultivation, in rearing fish and in his dyeing business. His two hundred bondservants were equally apportioned between the urban and rural areas of his influence.<sup>50</sup> Toward the late Ming, an increasing number of bondservants were employed by their landlord-merchant masters in urban business, especially among the circle of Hui-chou merchants. The flow of rural-urban migration, as will be demonstrated later, was further strengthened by the urban demand for hired workers.

As markets became a center for the supply of daily commodities and an outlet for textile products, peasants depended on merchants for the supply of raw materials and would be desperate in their absence. For example, in 1554 when cotton merchants did not show up in Sung-chiang, the rural spinning and weaving industry became completely paralyzed.<sup>51</sup> Merchants also served as intermediaries in the exchange of textile products for foodstuff, so during the late Ming wars, as reported by a Shanghai scholar Yeh Meng-chu, "when the cotton cloth merchants failed to come, the inhabitants of Sung-chiang could only stand and wait for death."<sup>52</sup>

The activities of the merchants governed the fluctuation of market prices. In the late Ming years of turmoil, the price of cotton in Sung-chiang fell, whereas the price of rice skyrocketed. In 1642-1644, the price of cotton bolls was 0.5-0.6 ounces of silver per hundred catties (= 1 *tan*; the normal price was 3-4 ounces of silver per *tan*) and the price of "standard cloth" dropped to less than 0.1 ounce of silver per bolt, whereas the price of rice rose to 4-5 ounces of silver per *shih* (the normal price was 1-2 ounces of silver). When the war was over and merchants began to return, the prices quickly returned to their normal relationship: In 1649 and 1650, the price of cotton bolls rose to 3.4-5.0 ounces of silver each hundred catties, and the price of "standard cloth" returned to 0.33-0.50 ounces per bolt, whereas the rice price fell to 1-2 ounces of silver per *shih* (See Appendix). Local merchants could profit greatly from the price vicissitudes, as in the case of 1677 in Shanghai when the price of cotton was inflated

<sup>49</sup> Fujii Hiroshi, "Shin-an shōnin no kenkyū," *Tōyōgaku* 36:3 (December 1953), p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>51</sup> *Sung-chiang fu chih*, cited in Nishijima Sadao, pp. 898, 899.

<sup>52</sup> Yeh Meng-chu, 1.11a-b.

substantially. "The accumulated stocks of cotton were exhausted in an instant; many were the wealthy merchants who profited."<sup>53</sup>

With the market monopoly of the merchants, textile households were subject to their whims. As illustrated in Hsü Hsien-chung's *Prose-poem on Cotton Cloth* written in the middle of the sixteenth century, "the peasant has to flatter the merchants as he would his father. Nor is his burden lifted till the merchant buys."<sup>54</sup> In the peasants' view the merchants manipulated prices to the former's disadvantage. A Ch'ing record reflected the peasants' grievances:<sup>55</sup>

Kiangsu merchants purchased cotton cloth from Sung-chiang, as many as fifteen thousand [bolts] a day in the fall. How great a profit they can make! Peasants . . . exhausted themselves and starved two days out of three to finish weaving. Finished cloth was brought to the market, but the price received was as low as that for mud. [The cloth shops] were called [by the peasants] "cut-throat shops" (*sha-chuang*). Recently cunning merchants gave only two *sheng* of rice for one *chang* of cloth, which used to be worth five *sheng* of rice.

While peasants were increasingly under the influence of market forces, their ties with the rural lords, on the other hand, were gradually loosened. The general setting of the late Ming rural scene in Kiangnan was an unequal distribution of land and a high rate of tenancy. According to Ku Yen-wu, in Su-chou and Sung-chiang prefectures only 10% of the rural population owned land and 90% were agricultural laborers working for the landlords.<sup>56</sup> Tenants, bondservants and hired workers constituted the major labor force on the landed estates.

Extra incomes were gained by peasant households as the market operation penetrated into the rural areas. Depending on the supply of rice from the market, peasant could profit from the cultivation of commercial crops. One local gazetteer of Sung-chiang noted in the seventeenth century: "If the weather conditions are favorable, the yields of cotton and soybeans could be several times higher than that of rice; after purchasing rice and other foodstuffs, there is a surplus."<sup>57</sup> Kao Chin, in his memorial of 1775, pointed out that in the lower Yangtze delta, peasants would switch rice to cotton, for the labor and capital investment in cotton fields was smaller yet profit bigger than in the case of rice.<sup>58</sup>

Handicraft industries became a source of greater income and avenue for turning surplus and slack-season labor into immediate gain. An eighteenth century account of Wu-hsi and Chin-k'uei (Kiangsu) illustrates this point:<sup>59</sup>

The rural people eat on the cultivation of the land only for three winter months. When they have finished paying their rents, then they husk the surplus rice and take it to the pawnshops to exchange for clothing. In the spring months, they close the door of the house and do the spinning and weaving, and use the cloth to exchange for rice. The household has no grain in storage. . . . In the autumn when it is humid, the noise of the looms again spreads throughout the village. They carry the finished fabrics [to the market] to exchange for rice to eat. Therefore in our locality, even if we have a bad year, as long as the cotton ripens, the people will not suffer too much difficulty.

The extensiveness and profitability of the use of rural surplus labor for weaving were also reported in other records. After the autumn harvest, according to Li Hsü in 1695, every house-

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.5a.

<sup>54</sup> Hsü Hsien-chung, "Pu-fu," cited in Nishijima Sadao, p. 853.

<sup>55</sup> *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien*, 28.8.

<sup>56</sup> The process of land concentration from early to late Ming is discussed in Mi Chü Wiens, Ch. Two.

<sup>57</sup> *Sung-chiang fu chih*, cited in Nishijima Sadao, p. 821.

<sup>58</sup> *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien*, 37.2b.

<sup>59</sup> Huang Ang, 1.6b-7a.

hold in Shanghai was engaged in weaving.<sup>60</sup> Local records of Sung-chiang indicated in 1512 that “the amount of cloth produced in the slack-season can be counted in [bolts of] ten thousand each day. When weaving supplements cultivation (*i-chih chu-keng*), weaving females are profitable.”<sup>61</sup>

With the opening of new economic opportunities and peasants' more frequent participation in the local markets, peasants in the 16th and 17th centuries became less dependent on their lords than before for sheer survival. As illustrated in the local record of Hsiu-shui county (Chekiang) in 1596, tenants would sell their crops to the market for profit and default on rent payments.<sup>62</sup> A record of Ch'üan-chou (Fukien) also indicated in the Wan-li period (1573–1619): “Tenants, after reaping the crops in the morning, will sell them to the market in the afternoon. They conspire among one another, agreeing not to pay rents to the influential households (*chü-shih*). The slyest of them sometimes make connections with the yamen clerks and runners, seeking protection from them. It is thus very difficult for those who live off their rents.”<sup>63</sup> Examining many other contemporary records, tenants' default on rent and loan payments appears to have been common in the seventeenth century. Writings of landlords in this period frequently complained about the difficulty of getting good tenants. Chang Lü-hsiang of Chekiang observed that only two or three out of ten tenants were honest and trustworthy, and most tenants would seek other opportunities if they found the present tenancy arrangement unsatisfactory.<sup>64</sup> Tensions between the landlord and the tenant were thus generated as the tenants' aspirations grew.

The increase of hired workers toward the late Ming constituted another significant dimension of the social change. The extent of hired workers used in the urban and rural areas in this period was greater than in any previous time. Though various interlocking factors contributed to this trend, the development of handicraft industries and the conversion of conscript government artisans to salaried positions (since the introduction of the Single Whip Tax System) were among the most important causes. The state textile industry gradually declined; thus from the fifteenth century on, the private loom houses took consignment from the government or imperial workshops, and experienced a rapid growth. The boom of the private loom houses not only absorbed a large number of the floating population but created more demand for hired workers.

In the urban areas, workers were hired in the city/town loom houses, in the dyeing and calendering workshops, and in other urban industries. A passage of the Wan-li period described most vividly the hiring procedure for wage workers in the Su-chou silk industry:<sup>65</sup>

In the east of the prefectural capital, the loom houses are numerous. The fabrics produced are sateen (*luan*) and thin gauze (*sha*). Weavers are all equipped with special skills. They usually have fixed employers and are paid on the daily basis. In case of any absenteeism among them, those weavers with no fixed employers are called in, which is called “substitution.” The weavers without regular employers go to the bridges at dawn each day to await the calls. Satin weavers stand on Flower Bridge, damask weavers on Kuang-hua Temple Bridge, and spinners who make silk yarn at Lin-hsi Ward. They congregate by the score and by the hundred, waiting anxiously, and will disperse after the breakfast hour. If the work of the loom houses is reduced, those people will lose the supply of their livelihood.

<sup>60</sup> P'eng Che-i (ed.), *Chung-kuo chin-tai shou kung-yen shih tzu-liao*, Vol. 1, p. 240.

<sup>61</sup> *Sung-chiang fu chih*, cited in Yen Chung-p'ing, p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> *Hsiu-shui hsien chih* (1685 ed.), 1.42a.

<sup>63</sup> *Ch'üan-chou fu chih* (1763 ed.), 20.13a–b.

<sup>64</sup> Chang Lü-hsiang, 8.18a–b.

<sup>65</sup> *Ku chin t'u-shu chi-ch'eng*, *chih fang tien*, 676.1b.

The above record indicates that the loom houses paid a daily wage to the workers, provided living for a large number of people and were operated on the principle of division of labor. Ts'ao Shih-p'ing, in his memorial of 1601, described the employer-worker relation this way: "The owner of the loom house provides the capital and the loom worker provides the labor, each having relied upon the other for a long time."<sup>66</sup>

The textile processing industry presents a most illustrative case of the rapid increase of urban workers. For instance, in 1601 the number of dyers and weavers of Su-chou was about several thousands each, yet by 1723, the number of dyers and calenderers amounted to twenty-odd thousands.<sup>67</sup> The number of calendering workers in Su-chou increased ten times between 1720 and 1730, with the multiplication of the calendering shops.<sup>68</sup> Wage workers were also extensively employed in other industries, such as mining, ironware, ceramic, paper, salt and oil-extracting; the prevalent use of workers in private enterprises was unprecedented in history.

In the rural areas, hired labor was generally used in the busy farming season; a Chekiang record states: "From lunar April to July, which are called busy months, the well-to-do farmers hired long-term workers (*ch'ang-kung*) or short-term workers (*luan-kung*) for cultivation."<sup>69</sup> Hired rural labor in textile handicrafts, however, can only be found in the case of silk production. For example, according to the local gazetteer of Wu-chiang (Kiangsu), "after the Ch'eng-hua and Hung-chih period (1465-1505), villagers were skilled at [silk craft] and this was handed down as a common skill. In between Sheng-che and Huang-ch'i, inhabitants are all keenly pursuing profit in the making of silk products. Well-to-do ones *hired people to weave*, and the poor all do the weaving themselves, with their youngsters sizing the warp. Females do not engage in weaving but specialize in spinning."<sup>70</sup> One also finds that hired workers were used more extensively and assigned a greater variety of jobs in the sericulture region than other areas. The wide cultivation of commercial crops and the advancement of textile industries presumably increased demand for occasional help in most rural households.

The status of hired labor rose together with the increasing demand for their services. The legal status of the hired worker, from the T'ang dynasty on, had been lower than commoners (*fan-jen*) but higher than slaves and semi-slaves (*nu-pi*). According to the Ming Code, the punishment for a hired worker was more severe than in ordinary cases if he scolded, injured, raped or killed his employer or relatives of his employer. Conversely, if an employer injured or killed his hired worker, he was punished more lightly than in the ordinary cases, and he was to be pardoned providing the case was light injury or manslaughter. A hired worker was not permitted to accuse his employer, and would be punished if he did, for it was an action to be considered as "offending against status and violating principles" (*kan-ming fan-i*).<sup>71</sup> The inferior legal status of short-term workers was removed when a new ruling was issued in 1588: "A person, whether hired by an official or a commoner, is legally considered to be a 'hired worker' when the wage and the term of service are defined in the contract; he is considered a 'commoner' (*fan-jen*) when the service is limited to days and months, and the reward is small."<sup>72</sup> The categorization of short-term workers as "commoners" was not incidental, representing a general recognition of the increased number and their elevated social status in the late Ming.

<sup>66</sup> *Ming shih-lu*, Shen-tsung, 361.5a-b.

<sup>67</sup> *Ming shih-lu*, Shen-tsung, 361.5b; and *Yung-cheng chu-p'i yü-chih* (1887 ed.), *ts'e* 48, 101b.

<sup>68</sup> Liu Yung-ch'eng, "Lun Ch'ing-tai ku-yung lao-tung," *Li-shih yen-chiu*, 4 (1962), p. 110.

<sup>69</sup> *Nan-hsün chen chih* (1859 ed.), 21.1a.

<sup>70</sup> *Wu-chiang hsien chih* (1747 ed.), 38.12b.

<sup>71</sup> *Ming-lü chi-chieh fu li* (1605 ed.; Taipei reprint, 1969), 19.5b-8a, 20.22a-28b, 22.31a-b, 25.8b

<sup>72</sup> *Ming shih-lu*, Shen-tsung, 194.9a; *Ming lü chi-chieh fu li*, 20.28b-29a.

As labor became a vendible commodity in the presence of a large number of hired workers, tenants tended to be less willing to accept extra services or payments imposed on them. Chang Lü-hsiang's twelve regulations appended to a "model" contract made in 1661 prescribed that the landlord should extend interest-free loans to the tenant, any extra work imposed on the tenant should be rewarded at the prevailing wage scale, and goods taken from the tenant's farm should be paid at the market price.<sup>73</sup> A wage ticket (*kung-shih p'iao*) issued in Ch'ang-shu (Kiangsu) during the Wan-li period indicates that tenants, together with the wage workers, were paid in grain for their help to the landlord on the river dredging and the construction of river bank.<sup>74</sup>

The attitudes of bondservants were also affected by the social change. In comparing their status with the conditions of tenants and hired workers, bondservants felt a sense of "relative deprivation."<sup>75</sup> They were subject to more extra-economic impositions from the landlords than tenants as well as being legally categorized as "base people" (*chien-min*) and socially inferior to tenants and hired workers; and thus later aspired for emancipation and economic betterment.

The relations between lord and peasant, as Hsü Chieh characterized them in the seventeenth century, had degenerated from "mutual assistance and support" (*hsiang-tzu hsiang-yang*) to "mutual suspicion and antagonism" (*hsiang-ch'ou hsiang-ts'ai*).<sup>76</sup> A social-moral relationship, based on the Confucian ethical principle of propriety (*li*), was gradually replaced by a commercial one, and the role of peasants evolved from dependency to autonomy. Commercialization of agriculture and the development of textile industries had a direct effect on the erosion of the conventional ethos. With the intensification of tension between landlords and their laborers, pervasive bondservant revolts and tenant uprisings broke out in South and Southeast China in the seventeenth century. This movement led to eventual emancipation of the bondservant group, elevation of the social and economic status of tenants, and a readjustment of the rural status order.<sup>77</sup>

This paper has tried to demonstrate that cotton textile production directly and indirectly played an important part in the rapid social change between sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, a period characterized as the "burgeoning of Chinese capitalism," and in which bound labor was freed, tenancy arrangement had been readjusted and a proto-proletariat gained social recognition. The expansion of cotton culture and manufacture had reached a plateau by the sixteenth century. Growth of cotton production and peasant involvement in it had provided new employment opportunities, extra income and, most important, an impetus for a new social and family status. Peasant connection with the commercial world on the one hand had exposed them to impersonal market forces and the inflictions of the merchants, but on the other hand shook their traditional ties with the rural lords and strengthened their bargaining position. In the context of an early modern economy in which the sophistication and complications of market structure had not been fully developed and the element of foreign competition had not yet come on the scene, peasant gains from the new social environs could outweigh their losses

<sup>73</sup> Chang Lü-hsiang, 19.23a-24a.

<sup>74</sup> Hsü Kuang-ch'i, *chuan* 15, p. 298.

<sup>75</sup> See Robert Morton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1957), pp. 227-231, 235.

<sup>76</sup> Hsü Chieh, *Shih-ching t'ang chi* (Ming ed.), 22.20b-21b.

<sup>77</sup> I have presented here an oversimplified picture of the changing land tenure. The changing behavioral pattern of the rural social groups, peasant movement and agrarian transformation in this period are extensively studied in my dissertation.

in their encounter with the market. Lossened rural ties between lord and peasant, and the improved status the peasant acquired constituted the most significant facet of the rural social transformation in early modern China.

### Glossary

- |                                       |                                   |                                |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>chang</i> 丈                        | Hsin-an 新安                        | <i>p'u-hu</i> 鋪戶               |
| Chang Lü-hsiang 張履祥                   | <i>hsing-ku</i> 行賈                | <i>san-so pu</i> 三梭布           |
| <i>ch'ang-kung</i> 長工                 | Hsü Chieh 徐階                      | <i>sha</i> 紗                   |
| Ch'ang-shu 常熟                         | Hsü Hsien-chung 徐獻忠               | <i>sha-chuang</i> 殺莊           |
| Chen-chiang 鎮江                        | Hsü Kuang-ch'i 徐光啓                | Sha-ho hsien 沙河縣               |
| Ch'en Chi-ju 陳繼儒                      | Hu-chou 湖州                        | <i>sheng</i> 升                 |
| Chia-hsing 嘉興                         | Hua-t'ing 華亭                      | <i>shih</i> 石                  |
| Chia-shan 嘉善                          | <i>hua-tsu</i> 花租                 | <i>shu-tzu</i> 豎子              |
| Chia-ting 嘉定                          | Huang Pien 黃汴                     | <i>ssu-pu</i> 絲布               |
| <i>chia-ting</i> 家丁                   | <i>i-chih chu-keng</i> 以織助耕       | Su-chou 蘇州                     |
| <i>chieh-hu</i> 解戶                    | <i>kan-ming fan-i</i> 干名犯義        | Su-ning hsien 肅寧縣              |
| <i>chien-min</i> 賤民                   | Kao Chin 高晉                       | Sung-chiang 淞江                 |
| Chin-k'uei 金匱                         | <i>k'o-shang</i> 客商               | Sung Ying-hsing 宋應星            |
| Ch'ing-p'u 青浦                         | <i>k'ou-pu</i> 扣布                 | <i>ta-pu</i> 大布                |
| Ch'iu Chün 邱濬                         | Ku Yen-wu 顧炎武                     | T'ai-ts'ang 太倉                 |
| Chou Ch'en 周忱                         | <i>kung-shih p'iao</i> 工食票        | <i>tan</i> 擔                   |
| Chu-ching 洙涇                          | <i>lao-jen</i> 老人                 | <i>T'ien-kung k'ai-wu</i> 天工開物 |
| <i>chü-shih</i> 巨室                    | <i>li</i> 禮                       | Ting-t'ao hsien 定陶縣            |
| Ch'u Hua 褚華                           | <i>li-chia</i> 里甲                 | <i>ts'ang-t'ou</i> 蒼頭          |
| <i>chung-chi</i> 中機                   | <i>liang</i> 兩                    | Ts'ao Shih-p'ing 曹時聘           |
| Chung Hua-min 鍾化民                     | Lü K'un 呂坤                        | <i>tso-ku</i> 坐賈               |
| <i>fan-jen</i> 凡人                     | <i>mei-chih pu</i> 眉織布            | <i>luan</i> 綬                  |
| Fang Kuan-ch'eng 方觀承                  | <i>meng-hsia k'o</i> 門下客          | <i>luan-kung</i> 短工            |
| Fei Hsiao-t'ung 費孝通                   | <i>mou</i> 畝                      | <i>tzu-hao</i> 字號              |
| <i>fei-hua pu</i> 飛花布                 | Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生              | <i>wei</i> 衛                   |
| Feng-ching 楓涇                         | <i>nu-pi</i> 奴婢                   | Wu-hsi 無錫                      |
| Hai-yen 海鹽                            | <i>nu-p'u</i> 奴僕                  | <i>ya-hang</i> 牙行              |
| Hang-chou 杭州                          | <i>Nung-cheng ch'üan-shu</i> 農政全書 | Yamane Yukio 山根幸夫              |
| <i>heng-yeh</i> 恆業                    | <i>piao-pu</i> 標布                 | Yeh Meng-chu 葉夢珠               |
| Ho-chien 河間                           | <i>pu-chieh</i> 布解                | Yen Chung-p'ing 嚴中平            |
| <i>hsiang-ch'ou hsiang-ts'ai</i> 相饑相猜 | <i>pu-chuang</i> 布莊               | Ying-t'ien 應天                  |
| <i>hsiang-tzu hsiang-yang</i> 相資相養    | <i>pu-hang</i> 布行                 | Yüan Pi 阮弼                     |
| <i>hsiao-pu</i> 小布                    | <i>pu-i</i> 布衣                    | <i>Yüeh</i> 約                  |
| <i>hsien</i> 縣                        |                                   |                                |



## APPENDIX

## RICE AND COTTON PRICES IN SHANGHAI, 1628-1684

Year	Husked rice (silver ounces per shih)	Cotton bolls (silver ounces per tan)	Remarks
before 1628		1.6-1.7	
1628		4.0-5.0	
1632	1.0		
1642	5.0	0.5-0.6	
1647	4.0		
1649	1.2	3.4-3.5	bumper year
1650 (Feb.)	1.0		
(Sept.)	2.0	5.0	glutinous rice: 1.8
1651 (Feb.)	3.0	9.0	
(March)	3.5		
(April)	4.0		
(June)	4.8-4.9		
(July)	2.0		
1652 (summer)	4.0		
(fall)	2.5-2.6		
1657 (Nov.)	0.8	2.5	
1659 (March)	2.0	4.5	
1661 (Oct.)	1.5	2.0	
(Nov.)	1.8		
1662 (Jan.)	2.1	3.0	unhusked rice: 1.9
(July)	1.2	2.0	glutinous rice: 1.3
1670 (June)	1.3		
(Aug.)	0.9	1.7-1.8	
(Sept.)	0.8	2.5	glutinous rice: 0.7
(Oct.)	0.9	3.0	glutinous rice: 0.8
(late Oct.)	1.3	4.0	
1671 (fall)	1.1	3.0	
1673 (fall)	0.63		
1674		1.9	
1677		2.6-2.7	high quality cotton: 3.0
1678	0.73		
1679 (spring)	1.4-1.5		
(Aug.)	2.0	1.5-1.6	
1680 (summer)	2.0	3.0	
1681 (summer)		3.5-3.6	
1682 (May)	0.85	4.1*	*high quality
(winter)	0.56**		**unhusked rice
1684 (fall & winter)	0.90	1.3-1.4	

Source: Yeh Meng-chu, *Yüeh-shih pien*, chuan 7, 1b-2b, 4b, 5a.

# 明清棉紡織業與農村社會經濟的變化

(中文摘要)

居 蜜

西方機器工業對於中國農村手工業和農民生活的影響，一向是學者們所重視及爭執的問題。在各手工業中，紡織業是最重要的農家副業。費孝通在《江村經濟》一書，特別提出民國後太湖邊江村經濟的崩壞，應歸咎於國外絲織品的大量輸入。機器工業對農村的影響代表新式與傳統技術的衝突、西方對中國的威脅。

本文不擬涉及十九世紀後的中外競爭，僅探討早期棉織業和農村社會經濟的關係。棉花於宋、元間輸入中國，但棉紡織的勃興在晚明，以蘇、松、太地區為最盛。本文專注早期棉業，一方面由於棉業為新興農村手工業，不如絲織歷史悠久，對於短期驟變，社會反應較為顯著，明清史料記載也豐富。另一方面，本文囿於早期發展，則十九世紀後國外衝擊影響農村的因子從畧，使棉織業對農家的真正影響得以清晰看出。

## 一、棉的普及

棉織業到了晚明極為普遍，日本學者西嶋定生據弘治十五年（1502）及萬曆六年（1578）稅糧實徵額，證明當時大多省份出產棉花或棉布，明末《天工開物》一書亦指出「織機十室必有」，表示其普遍程度。

明代棉的推廣，主要是由於中央及地方官提倡，和當時租稅制度。太祖朝即明令規定，「凡農民田五畝至十畝者，栽桑麻、木棉各半畝，以上者倍之。其田多者，率以是為差，有司親臨督勤惰，不如令者有罰。」地方官亦僱人教民紡織。政府為供應軍需、官餉及以布易馬，經由賦稅制度，每年向人民徵收大量布匹，據嚴中平的估計，年每上納布量約一千五百萬匹。宣德八年（1433）江南巡撫周忱下折徵令，部分米額以三梭布

代之，於是布匹納入量，更為增加。江南地區，尤其是蘇、松一帶，明初以來即以賦稅重額著稱。徐光啓《農政全書》曾明白指出，「視息者全賴此一機一杼而已。」可見明代棉業的發展，與賦稅制實有密切的關係。

除此以外，豆餅的大量使用，有助於棉產量的增加。晚明社會已經商業化，各地互通有無，市場城鎮興起，銀幣流通，一切所謂「資本主義萌芽」的跡象，均有助於棉手工業的進展。

## 二、對於農村經濟的影響

最顯著的影響，當在地區專業作物的生產。江南棉花產量不足應當地之需，華北地區，尤其是河南、山東一帶，大量植棉，輸往江南。徐光啓《農政全書》指出，「今北土之吉貝賤而布貴，南方反是；吉貝則泛舟而鬻諸南，布則泛舟而鬻諸北。」

由于植棉推廣，稻作大受影響。兩江總督高晉《請海疆禾棉兼種疏》（乾隆四十年，1775）即指出，「松江府、太倉州、海門廳、通州並所屬各縣，逼近海濱，率以沙之漲地，宜種棉花……以現在各廳州縣農田計之，每村莊知務本種稻者，不過十分之二、三，圖利種棉者，則有十分之七、八。」以「蘇、常熟，天下足」著稱的江蘇，到了明末清初，反而感到糧食不足，須自湖廣（湖南及湖北）、江西及安徽等省輸入來接濟。

地區專業作物的發展和稻作田地的減少，促進各地互通有無，以及市場的發展。山根幸夫和 Mark Elvin 的研究曾經提供一些材料，證實明末不定期市場驟增，有些間歇市場變為永久市鎮，同時市鎮更趨繁華。十六、七世紀的農村市場已成為農民集會之地，供應農民一切日用所需。

## 三、對於農村社會的影響

農民逐漸依賴市場，一方面由于專業作物生產，另一方面和棉織業有關。棉織品來自城鎮機戶和鄉村農戶。機戶由于設備完善，布匹品質較高，且多具花樣；上等布料如三梭布、斜紋布、兼絲布多出自機戶。而粗布類如標布、扣布、稀布等多為農家產品。農村布匹品質低劣，往往不合上供之用。在納稅季節，農民得賣掉自織粗布，換成銀兩，以納賦稅，正如萬曆年間《上海縣志》所說，「昨日官租科正急，街頭多賣木棉紗。」弘治十七年後，政府開始棉布折銀，而折銀量日增，農民與市場交易日益頻繁，以取得足夠銀兩繳納。

農民生活慢慢有些變化，和市場接觸，就受商人的剝削。晚明商人勢力高漲，除鎮

守一地的坐賈外，還有些資本雄厚、各地設肆收買的客商，當時客商集團以來自山西和新安（安徽）為最著。新安大染商阮弼的勢力遍及江蘇、浙江、湖北、河南和山東。這些大小中間商人往往剝削出產棉布的農民。嘉靖年間華亭文人徐獻忠《布賦》形容織布婦對待商販：「媚買師如父，幸而入選如脫重負。」有些布號壓低布價，向農民收購，有「殺莊」之稱。

農民在市場受商人剝削，但和鄉間地主關係卻漸佔優勢。晚明江南地帶，如顧炎武言，「佃作十九」，土地集中在少數人手中，在地主制下的勞動者可分奴僕、佃戶及雇傭三類。農村經濟變化直接影響到社會關係，而對地主制下三種勞動力有下列不同的影響。

雇傭勞動在晚明特別發達。匠戶制度崩壞，改用雇募工匠，於是城鎮雇傭人增加。在鄉間由于絲織和棉織普及，雇傭人需求大增，以達到農忙時分工的要求。鑑於短工人數的增加，雇傭人一向的法律地位，就有再估價的必要。自唐以來，雇工法律地位低於「凡人」。萬曆十六年（1588）明政府規定：「官民之家，凡倩工作之人，立有文券，議有年限者以雇工論，只是短雇受值不多者以凡人論。」由此可見，長工地位雖然仍低，短工在法律上已提昇為「凡人」。這項發展並非偶然，而是反映當時雇工社會需求驟增和地位增進。

棉紡織業有助農家收入，農閒時可有額外收入，婦女、兒童亦可謀得外快。佃戶對於地主的依賴性於是減低。萬曆《秀水縣志》就提到，「邇來富商設米典，佃農將上米質銀，別以下中者抵租，雖豐歲輒稱歉收，遷延逋負。日者苔上奸民聚黨相約，毋得輸租巨室。」清初浙江地主張履祥，屢歎得良佃難。明末清初抗租風潮普遍展開，主佃關係至十八世紀有一重新調整，而佃方得益甚多。

奴僕地位亦有改變。由于商人地主的增加，一些奴僕隨其主人移往城市，經營商業，由此而發達，甚至叛主。有些奴僕為城居地主管理鄉間產業，成為「豪奴」，奴僕抗主事件頻頻發生，稱之為「奴變」。十七世紀後，奴僕只限於家內勞動，農業耕作上的使用幾乎絕跡。

十七世紀時地主與農民的關係，誠如徐階所說，由「相資相養」變成「相讎相猜」。農村商業化侵蝕傳統主佃間的上下之分，也減消地主對農民經濟和禮制的束縛力量。雇傭人法律、社會地位的提高，佃戶新權益的獲得，奴僕的解放，表示當時農村一大巨變。棉紡織業雖只是農村商業化的一環，但這是當時農村最重要的家庭工業，對於農村社會的衝擊，是一股不可忽視的力量。