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EXPLOITATION IN RURAL CLASS RELATIONS: A VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE

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EXPLOITATIONS IN RURAL CLASS RELATIONS:

A VICTIM'S PERSPECTIVE

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This paper is a condensation of part of Professor Scott's final report on his Asia Society-SEADAG research grant project entitled, "The Political Economy of the Peasant Subsistence Ethic in Southeast Asia." An earlier version of it was presented at the SEADAG Rural Development Panel seminar on "Peasants, Land Reform, and Revolutionary Movements" held in Savannah, Georgia, June 2-4, 1974. The paper may not be quoted or reproduced without the author's express permission.

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INTRODUCTION:
TOWARD AN OPERATIONAL MORAL ECONOMY

What is exploitation? What do we mean when we say that landlords exploit peasants? Are some agrarian systems more exploitative than others? If so, how would one set about showing that this was the case?

At the core of the notion of exploitation is the idea "that some individuals, groups, or classes benefit unjustly or unfairly from the labor of, or at the expense of, others."[1] Embedded in this minimal point of departure are at least two characteristics of exploitation which both socialist and nonsocialist schools of thought would accept. First, exploitation is to be seen as a relationship between individuals, groups, or institutions; the existence of an exploited party implies the existence of an exploiter. Second, exploitation is an unfair distribution of effort and rewards, in turn requiring some standard of distributive equity against which actual relationships may be judged. The existence of injustice implies a norm of justice. Beyond this small, shared terrain, however, agreement evaporates and, particularly on the question of what the criteria of justice should be, there are almost as many answers as there are social scientists reckless enough to venture onto such treacherous conceptual ground.

Once the criterion for what constitutes a fair or equitable relationship has been provided, it becomes possible, in principle at least, to say something about how exploitative any particular relationship is by judging how far it departs from that standard. The problem, of course, is that others may not accept the standard as valid. For example, for those within the Marxist tradition, the labor theory of value supplies the conceptual basis for evaluating the level of exploitation. Inasmuch as all value flows ultimately from labor, the surplus value appropriated by the mere ownership of the means of production in the form of rent, profits, and interest provides a measure of exploitation. One hardly need subscribe to the labor theory of value, however, to see exploitation as an objective relationship that allows us to distinguish less exploitative from more exploitative situations. Is there not a difference, Barrington Moore asks, between a landlord who takes a third of the harvest and one who takes nine-tenths?[2] Under

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1. Lewis L. Lorwin, "Exploitation," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, VI, (New York: MacMillan, 1931), p. 16.

2. Barrington Moore, Jr., *The Social Basis of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 471. Moore's question assumes that the services the two hypothetical landlords provide to tenants are more or less comparable.

almost any conceivable definition of exploitation, then, some relationships are so much more massively unequal and coercive than others that they can easily be recognized as objectively more exploitative. Such stark contrasts in the human condition make an objective approach to exploitation very appealing.

Nevertheless, concepts of exploitation that begin deductively by creating an abstract standard of equity suffer from two inherent difficulties. The first is the degree of acceptance of the moral principles on which the criterion of justice is based. The labor theory of value is, after all, not the only touchstone available for building a theory of exploitation. To take an extreme example, marginalist economists in the lassez-faire tradition would equate the normative value of labor with the price it could fetch in the market -- whatever that price happened to be. From this narrow perspective, only relationships founded on fraud or naked coercion -- as distinct from market forces -- could presumably be considered exploitative. Any a priori conception of justice thus presupposes a normative, if not an analytical, tradition. Those who operate outside that tradition will, if they accept the notion of exploitation at all, apply different standards. Ultimately, such disputes over what is exploitative and what is not, are appeals to a normative tradition and not matters to be settled by empirical inquiry.

A second difficulty with deductively reached concepts of exploitation is far more serious because it compromises their analytical utility. This difficulty hinges on the fact that such theories rarely provide a conceptual link between an a priori notion of exploitation and the subjective feelings of the exploited. In the absence of this conceptual bridge, any similarity between the level of exploitation as determined by the theory and the sense of exploitation among victims is largely fortuitous. This potential disparity is not a serious inconvenience if the goal of the theory is merely to classify situations as more or less unjust regardless of the views of participants. On the other hand, if it is hoped that that exploitation as uncovered by the theory and exploitation as felt by victims will have some relationship to each other, the inconvenience is far more serious.

One way of saving the theory when a disparity appears is by erecting another theory to explain the incongruity. This is precisely the function served by the concept of false consciousness. When the perceptions, assuming they can be accurately gauged, of workers or peasants whom the theory tells us are exploited fail to accord with their "objective situation," they are said to be in a state of false consciousness. The misapprehension of their true situation by some or all of the exploited provides the typical revolutionary party with one of its key tasks: to unmask the social myths or religious doctrines that

prevent people from seeing things as they are.[3]

The concept of false consciousness overlooks the very real possibility that the actor's "problem" is not simply one of misperception. It overlooks the possibility that he may, in fact, have his own durable standards of equity and exploitation -- standards that lead him to judgments about his situation that are quite different from those of an outside observer equipped with a deductive theory. To put it bluntly, the actor may have his own durable moral economy. If this is the case, the failure of his views to accord with those of theory is not due to his inability to see things clearly, but to his values. Of course, one may choose to call these values a form of false consciousness as well. But to the extent that they are rooted in the actor's existential needs, to the extent that they are resistant to efforts at "reeducation," to the extent that they continue to define the situation for him, it is they and not the theory which serve as reliable guides to his sentiments and behavior.

If the analytical goal of a theory of exploitation is to reveal something about the perceptions of the exploited -- about <u>their</u> sense of exploitation, <u>their</u> notion of justice, <u>their</u> anger -- it must begin not with an abstract normative standard, but with the values of the real actors. Such an approach must start phenomenologically at the bottom and ask what the peasants' or workers' definition of the situation is. When a peasant considers twenty percent of his harvest a reasonable rent and forty percent an unjust rent, how does he arrive at this judgment? What criterion of fairness does he use? On this basis it should be possible to construct the operational moral economy of a subordinate class.

The aim of this article is to develop the rudiments of such a phenomenological theory of exploitation for a portion of the peasantry. In particular, the analysis focuses on the relationship between the owners of land and their tenants.[4] For reasons that will become obvious, attention is confined to poor tenants not far removed from the subsistence level. The effort throughout will be to discover the constituent elements of this level of peasant's conception of equity and exploitation in its

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3. For the sake of consistency, the term false consciousness should also apply to cases where there is "objectively" no exploitation but where there is nonetheless a lively sense of social injustice among the population in question. Such situations are presumed to be rare, since the distorting values that lead to false consciousness are the products of the ideological hegemony of a ruling elite and thus tend to distort perceptions in the direction of an acceptance of the social order.

4. Both sharecroppers and cash rent tenants are included here.

relation with landlords.[5]

The choice of landlord-tenant relations is not entirely one of analytical convenience and interest. In the still largely agrarian Third World, the relation between the tillers of land and its owners represents the predominant class dyad -- the locus of the livelihood and material well-being for much of the population. It goes without saying that it has also been the historic locus of explosive class tensions.

The remainder of this article is devoted to the meaning of exploitation as it is experienced by tenants.[6] The analysis is thus limited to a single relationship found in societies with private ownership in land. It concerns, furthermore, only tenants living at or near the subsistence level for whom tenancy is the principal, if not sole means of livelihood. These last restrictions are necessary to define a population whose welfare problems and social experience are coherent enough to foster potentially a common view of landlord equity.

Within this context, the article begins by describing the dependency and exchange that are often central features of landlord-tenant systems. It then evaluates a number of possible criteria of "fairness" which tenants might apply to the relationship. The third section of the article

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5. One cautionary note is necessary. The phenomenology of exploitation in landlord-tenant relations amounts to a study of peasant values rather than peasant action. That is, a knowledge of the conditions under which peasants consider themselves to be exploited, can by itself, reveal little about how they can or will react to that exploitation. It is possible, even likely, that much of the world's peasantry labors under circumstances it considers unjust and that it has little choice but to submit to them. While the presence of sensed exploitation is perhaps a necessary condition for peasant protest or revolt, it is hardly a sufficient condition. For this reason the analysis that follows is not so much a contribution to the study of peasant rebellion as it is a study of peasant notions of justice -- of their moral claims on the social order.

6. One objection to a phenomenological approach to exploitation is that one risks having as many definitions of exploitation as there are actors. While the decision to proceed phenomenologically does, in principle, exclude a timeless, culture-free notion of equity, this need not mean that we are reduced to taking individuals one by one. For any given agrarian order, shared values and institutions and the analogous problems of subsistence, rents, and taxes for those who occupy similar positions in the social structure are likely to

is devoted to the argument that notions of balanced reciprocity and the right to subsistence form the moral basis of peasant judgments about exploitation. The norm of reciprocity governs most interpersonal relations in peasant society and is implicit in the justification of virtually any system of stratification. Within the context of reciprocity, the right to subsistence constitutes the critical obligation of elites who control the means of production. On the basis of the existential needs of subsistence-oriented tenants, the author argues that the stability and security of subsistence income are more critical to the tenant's evaluation of the relationship than either his average return or the portion of the crop taken by the landlord as rent. The implications of this criterion of fairness for systems of tenancy are then discussed. Throughout this section evidence is presented to show how both principles are at work in the concrete preferences and choices of peasants. The fourth section attempts to show how the right to subsistence and the norm of reciprocity structure the tenants' understanding of the landlords' moral obligation -- how they place normative boundaries on the role behavior of landlords generally. The next to last section of the article contains a schematic description of how more exploitative forms of tenancy actually developed in Southeast Asia and what are their consequences for agrarian class relations. Finally, with respect to the empirical question of how to distinguish false deference from real deference -- how to tell if peasants judge themselves exploited when the level of oppression makes it impossible for them to speak or act openly -- the author suggests the possibility of finding indications in the language, religion, and culture of subordinate classes which indicate that the deference is coerced and not voluntary.

THE LANDLORD-TENANT DYAD

Land is the defining material link in the landlord-tenant relationship. However variable the link may be, it originates in the transfer of use-rights by the owner in return for some form of payment from the tenant. At a minimum, then, it is an economic exchange based on inequality in the ownership of land.

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foster shared sentiments about justice and exploitation. The actual extent to which a given population shares a common moral economy is, of course, an empirical question. There is nonetheless good reason to believe that structural uniformities promote the growth of common values.

The inequality in control over scarce resources implied by the categories landlord and tenant is a variable, not a constant. Where land is abundant and labor scarce, the tenant may in fact be in a stronger bargaining position than the owner. For the most part, however, the situation is reversed and the landlord, as the owner of the scarce factor of production, has the upper hand. In the absence of tenant organization or state intervention to redress the balance, most landlord-tenant systems are characterized by an imbalance of power; the tenant needs the landlord more than the landlord needs the tenant. Stated more formally, $P\ l \rightarrow P\ t \rightarrow l$, where P = power, l = landlord, and t = tenant. The disparity in power ($P\ l \rightarrow t - P\ t \rightarrow l$) becomes, then, a measure of the relative dependence of the tenant on the resources controlled by the landlord.[7]

Apart from its basis in economic inequality, the second constituent feature of the landlord-tenant relationship is <u>exchange</u>. At a minimum, this involves only the provision of land and the payment of rent. This simplified version of tenancy is approximated in the case of the absentee, rentier landlord whose interaction with the tenant begins and ends with the collection of rent. A tenant who asks himself whether such a relationship is just has only to decide whether the rent he pays is reasonable or unreasonable.[8] Typically, however, the landlord-tenant link is not so one-dimensional. The landlord may, for instance, provide (at a cost, to be sure) plough animals, seed, fertilizer, production loans, and food rations for the tenant family. He may require the tenant to send him firewood or vegetables, to do household work, or to cart grain to market. As the economic exchange becomes steadily more complex and multifaceted, the rent can no longer serve as an adequate barometer to the relationship. Many of these exchanges are reducible in principle to cash values and thus might still be aggregated into a single, overall balance of exchange. When moving to the social dimensions of the relationship, however, it is not easy to find a common measure of

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7. It is plausible to argue that landlord-tenant relationships are by definition exploitative inasmuch as they involve disparities in power and personal dependence. Although the author is inclined to the position that the landlord-tenant relationship does start out, as it were, under a moral cloud because peasants -- other things being equal -- prefer autonomy to dependence, this is not a question to be resolved here. Instead, the author takes the dependence that is built into the relationship as a given and asks what forms of dependence are regarded as more or less exploitative, and by what criterion of judgment.

8. His judgment will also depend on how rightful he considers the owner's claim to land in the first place.

exchange value. The landowner may expect the tenant to support him politically or militarily, to farm as he directs, to seek his permission before anyone in the tenant's family marries or takes employment elsewhere. All of these demands involve social costs, the value of which is difficult to calculate. If the landlord, on the other hand, defends the tenant against outsiders, provides local schooling, sponsors local ritual and festivals, and so on, how is the value of such presumed social gains to be measured? At a practical level, this problem is a serious one inasmuch as tenancy in the Third World typically contains "pre-commercial" features which are not expressible in terms of an objective standard of value. The point here is simply that the more complex the pattern of exchange, the more arbitrary becomes any means of judging its exploitiveness that does not consider the values and preferences of tenants.

ALTERNATIVE STANDARDS OF FAIRNESS

What standards of fairness might tenants apply in judging the legitimacy of landlord demands? Before proposing a standard which would reflect both the existential dilemma of peasants and their values, three alternative standards need to be discussed. Each is proposed as a potential assumption about justice that tenants might actually employ and is then evaluated in those terms.

Standard of Living

Conceivably, the tenant's view of equity in exchange with a landlord might be a direct reflection of the tenant's standard of living. A system of tenancy which leaves the peasant relatively well-off would then be seen as generally benign while one that barely provided for his minimal needs would be seen as exploitative. This simplistic formulation is not without merit. For a man at the very edge of subsistence, the basket of grain taken by the landlord represents a far greater sacrifice than it would for a man with a modest surplus. One would expect the former to resent bitterly even a small rent while the latter would find a larger rent perhaps burdensome but not a direct threat to his family's survival. Conditions of tenancy which are thus at least tolerable for some, may be intolerable for others. In this sense, it is hard to conceive of any standard of exploitation that is not related to the material conditions of peasant life -- to the human consequences of a given claim on the resources of a tenant family.

Granting that a tenant's standard of living will necessarily color his vision of exploitation, it is unlikely to be his only guide. In

addition, there is the relational aspect of exploitation to consider, since even tenants at the same level of penury may have markedly different relationships with their landlords. These differences are likely to influence their judgments as well. What happens, for example, when the conclusions a tenant might draw from his standard of living diverge from those he might draw from his exchange relationship with his landlord? Such situations are not historically rare. Scarlett Epstein reports that in periods of near famine in South India the grain was often shared out equally between landowning families and subordinate castes.[9] Here a decline in the standard of living is accompanied by an improvement in the terms of exchange between landlholders and tenants. Epstein claims, moreover, that this distributive pattern is crucial to the legitimization of the caste system in that area. The reverse situation, one in which the standard of living of tenants is improving but their exchange relationship with landowners is deteriorating, is also common and is in fact invoked to explain the situation of the French peasant in the twenty years prior to the Revolution of 1789.

The standard of living of the peasantry taken alone, then, seems an inadequate basis for a phenomenological theory of exploitation because it ignores the relational character of class linkage. It is true that we cannot expect to know whether a tenant will find a given claim on his resources tolerable or intolerable until we know how precarious his subsistence is. It is equally true, however, that a well-off tenant may find exploitative some claims which do not jeopardize his subsistence and that a poor tenant may find some claims tolerable.[10] At a minimum, an adequate theory of exploitation must consider not only the tenant's standard of living but also the nature of the exchange that links him to the landlord.

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9. Scarlett Epstein, "Productive Efficiency and Customary Systems of Rewards in Rural South India," *Themes of Economic Anthropology*, ed., Raymond Firth (London: Tavistock, 1967), pp. 229-252.

10. It is also conceivable, for example, that the relative well-being of the landlord vis-a-vis the tenant may influence the justice or injustice of his claim as viewed by the tenant. Thus a landlord who is as poor as his tenant may be seen as less exploitative than a wealthy landlord, though his claim on the harvest is identical.

Reciprocity or Equal Exchange[11]

Many exchange theorists would claim that a landlord-tenant relationship, like any other human relationship, will be judged to be exploitative or not depending on whether it satisfies the norm of reciprocity.[12] In essence, the moral idea involved is that one should return "favors" out of gratitude and that, consequently, equal exchange defines a fair relationship. Landlord-tenant relations characterized by balanced reciprocity would, in this view, give rise to feelings of gratitude and legitimacy while unequal exchange favoring the landlord would give rise to moral indignation and injustice.

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11. Another way by which the tenant might judge the legitimacy of the landlord-tenant relationship is to ask what the tenant stands to lose if the relationship ends. How much worse is his next best alternative? Here the argument is that the tenant is a realistic man: he compares the net advantages of his present tenancy with the net advantages, say, of becoming an agrarian wage laborer. The difference he perceives is a measure of how fortunate he is, of his relative preference for his present role over the next best alternative and, thus, an indication of the legitimacy he is likely to accord his status as a tenant.

    If peasants actually applied this test of fairness, however, they would accord legitimacy to almost any conceivable relationship. For all except those at the very bottom of the social order, there is a next best alternative which would be even more disadvantageous than their current situation. When the alternative to near-starvation is outright starvation, does this mean that the tenant finds near-starvation acceptable or legitimate? Obviously not. It may indicate how dependent he is on a relationship that at least keeps him alive, or how willing he may be to comply with its terms to avoid a worse fate, but dependency and compelled compliance are hardly the same as legitimacy. To reason otherwise would amount to making what is just a function of what exists. The irreducible quality of human requirements for rest and nourishment, if nothing else, creates nearly universal limits to what is a legitimate claim on tenant labor and crops.

12. Among others, see Alvin W. Gouldner, "The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1960).

Assuming that the norm of reciprocity is a common moral standard, how can it be applied to landlord-tenant relations? The major problem centers around the definition of "equal exchange" which the norm requires. This is the familiar difficulty of comparing "apples and oranges." How much protection, for example, would represent a value equal to twenty percent of a tenant's harvest?

One solution to this dilemma is to take the participant's -- the tenant's -- actions as a guide to his values. What portion of his harvest is he willing to hand over in return for the landlord's protection? The tenant is the best judge of how much he needs and values protection and its importance to him can, in turn, be measured by what he is willing to give up to get it. As Gouldner notes, the value of a service "varies with the intensity of need when the benefit is given."[13] This approach at least has the advantage of avoiding abstract standards of value and focusing instead on the values implied by concrete social choices.

The fatal shortcoming of this procedure, however, is that it confuses the choices which circumstances force on people with choices which they find legitimate. For a tenant on the point of starvation, the value of food will be enormous and he may be willing under the circumstances to surrender all his next harvest, his land, and perhaps even his children in order to survive. Assuming he pays the price exacted, one may wish to call this "equal exchange" -- he presumably could have chosen to starve instead. But one can hardly imagine that a tenant would regard such an exchange as anything but sheer extortion. The value of food for the starving tenant is established by a degree of need that is <u>itself</u> a social product of the existing distribution of wealth and power. He may have little choice but to comply, but he is surely not obliged to accept as legitimate the social arrangements which force such inhuman choices upon him. To reason otherwise would be to fly in the face of common sense and to legitimize any and all of the degrading alternatives which a system of power may impose.

It is clear that the power of some and the vulnerability of others make for bargains which violate common standards of justice. If the exchange of equal values is taken as a touchstone of fairness, the actual bargains men are driven to cannot then be taken as an indication of value and, hence, of equity. A tenant's need for food may be a measure of his dependency and of the power those who control the supply of food can exercise over him, but it can never be a measure of the legitimacy of that power. Tenants, as others, have no trouble distinguishing what is just from what they must accept under duress. In other words, it must

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13. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

be assumed that there are genuinely normative standards of value in exchange that are to some degree independent of the actual alternatives available in a given context.

Just Price and Legitimacy

It may still be possible to take the concept of equal value in exchange as a basis for feelings about equity, provided that the notion of value is not derived from the "going rate" of exchange which circumstances impose. This is the position taken by Peter Blau in the following passage which is applicable, in principle, to landlord-tenant relations:

> But if the power to command services and compliance comes from the supply of needed benefits, its exercise may not be experienced as disadvantageous. If the benefits are greater than what the social norm of fairness leads subordinates to expect in return for their services and compliance, they will consider their position advantageous and express social approval of the ruling group which fortifies its power and legitimates its authority. If subordinates' expectations are barely met, they will neither feel exploited nor express firm legitimating approval of the group in power. If, however, the demands of the ruling group with a monopoly of vital resources far exceed what social norms define as fair and just, subordinates will feel exploited and will seize any opportunity to escape the ruling group's power or oppose it, inasmuch as their situation is, basically no different from that of groups subject to coercive force.[14]

Blau distinguishes between actual rates of exchange and the norms governing fair value. The distance between the two becomes, in effect, the criterion by which men judge the equity or injustice of a relationship. A surplus above fair value in exchange fosters a response of legitimation; a deficit provokes a sense of exploitation.

The justification for assuming that "social norms of fairness" exist apart from actual terms of exchange seems substantial. Durkheim reminds us that "in every society and in all ages, there exists a vague but lively sense of the value of the various services used in society and of the

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14. Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1961), p. 229.

values, too, of things that are the subject of exchange."[15] This "true" price "very rarely coincides with the real price, but these [real prices] cannot go beyond a certain range in any direction without seeming abnormal."[16] The existence of a "fair price" or "true value" is implicit whenever bargains which have been made under duress give offense. A man who surrenders his child for a loan or who sells his birthright for a mess of pottage are extreme examples. The needs of the weaker party have allowed the stronger to impose an exchange that violates the true value of things; the bargain is thus unjust and extortionary. Even contracts which have been freely consented to may not be considered fair if one party has been driven to pay a price which offends its sense of fair value. Minimum wage laws, as Durkheim notes, arise from just such sentiments of fair value. They are designed precisely to preclude employers from taking advantage of their power to force "unjust" bargains.

Evidence for the notion of "fair value" comes not only from such reflections on moral sentiments, but also from concrete historical movements. The venerable tradition of *taxation populaire* and hunger riots in France and England are a striking case in point. There was a shared popular notion of what constituted a fair price for bread which, when it was exceeded, provoked moral indignation and the seizure of markets. "The central action in this pattern is not the sack of granaries and the pilfering of grain and flour, but the action of 'setting the price.'"[17] It was not uncommon for "rioters" to pay what they regarded as a just price in lieu of the market price. Such crowds and agrarian rioters often saw themselves as law-givers (one group called itself "the regulators") who enforced a popular moral consensus.

In any particular agrarian order, there is likely to be a similar moral consensus among tenants. Some balance between what tenants provide in goods and services to landlords and what they receive in return will be seen as reasonable and any substantial departure from that norm in the landlord's favor will appear exploitative. Naturally, such norms will vary from place to place and from one period to the next. Despite these variations, however, there are some constants. First, a single interclass dyad is being dealt with here which everywhere originates in an exchange of land-use rights for rent. Second, if only tenants near the subsistence level are involved, it is likely that the common problems of welfare and security which they all face may foster common moral expectations about landlord behavior.

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15. Emile Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 209.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

17. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 50 (February 1971), p. 108.

RECIPROCITY AND THE RIGHT TO SUBSISTENCE

There are two active moral principles in peasant life which form the basic normative framework within which systems of tenancy are judged. The first of these is the norm of reciprocity. It serves as a central principle of interpersonal conduct both among peasants and between peasants and elites. The second principle is the right to subsistence. This principle, in effect, defines the minimal moral obligation incumbent on the stronger party when reciprocity occurs between unequals, as in the landlord-tenant relationship. Evidence for the operation of each may be found in ethnographic studies of peasant values, in concrete patterns of action, and in the existential givens of peasant life. Although much of the evidence introduced below is drawn from the context of Southeast Asia, with which the author is most familiar, the argument is undoubtedly applicable to tenancy systems in much of the Third World as well.

Reciprocity

The principle of equal reciprocity is at work in a host of peasant activities. It is best observed in villages where differences in wealth are not pronounced, for only in such villages can we assume that social patterns are more a product of collective opinion than an accommodation to power. For example, in the more traditional villages of Southeast Asia a web of reciprocity underpins the typical pattern of labor exchange during the transplanting and harvesting of wet rice. Those who are "invited" to help a villager in his field know, as does the villager who invites them, that they thereby acquire a claim on their host when they need help with their crop. Reciprocity figures at marriage celebrations and other *rites de passage* when ceremonial obligations exceed a family's immediate resources in labor or kind. Those who are called on to assist know likewise that they can expect a comparable return of services at some later date. Finally, the same principle often structures exchange of food resources within a village. A family that has lost part of its crop will ask help from those who fared better, knowing that when the situation is reversed, they will be obliged to return the favor. Anthropologists, noting the importance of mutual exchange among peasants in such diverse contexts as Latin America, Europe, and Asia have often been persuaded that reciprocity is the norm governing social relations among villagers.[18]

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18. See, for example, Herbert Phillips, *Thai Peasant Personality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); George Foster, "The Dyadic Contract in Tzintzuntzan: Patron-Client Relationship," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 65 (1963), pp. 1280-1294; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 60-61; J. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Oxford:

The pattern of reciprocity, it should be emphasized, is not at all motivated by altruistic sentiments of "all for one and one for all," which are sometimes mistakenly attributed to traditional villagers.[19] This misunderstanding is furthered by the efforts of nationalist leaders, such as Sukarno, to appropriate terms like *gotong-rojong* (mutual help) and to see in them a symbol of selfless solidarity. In fact, *gotong-rojong* and other such forms of reciprocity are normally based on a lively sense of mutual self-interest in which each participant is fully aware of what he is owed and what he owes.[20] Between equals, such exchanges are largely self-regulating. One peasant assists another because he knows that only in this way can he elicit the services he himself will need later. Obligations are thus enforced not only by the sanctions of village opinion but also by the concrete reciprocal needs of cultivators. Much of the need for reciprocity is thus inherent in the agricultural and ceremonial cycle. Although the exchanges cited involve the exchange of identical goods or services, this is not necessarily the case. What is required, rather, is the exchange of comparable values as defined by village norms.

This brings us to the question of reciprocity between unequals. What is expected of those relatively wealthy villagers whose resources put them in an advantageous bargaining position? Almost without exception, judging from the anthropological literature, the position of well-off villagers is legitimized only to the extent that their resources are employed in ways which meet the broadly defined welfare needs of villagers. Most studies repeatedly emphasize the informal social controls which tend either to redistribute the wealth or to impose specific obligations on its owners. The prosaic, even banal, character of these social controls belies their importance. Well-to-do villagers avoid

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Clarendon Press, 1964); Fredrick Barth, *Political Leadership Among the Swat Pathans*, London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology, No. 19 (London: Athlone Press, 1965), Ch. 1; Eric Wolf, "Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations," *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies*, ed., M. Banton (New York: Praeger, 1966); and Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Its Form and Function in Archaic Societies* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1958).

19. Clifford Geertz, "Rotating Credit Associations: A Middle Rung of Development," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. X, No. 3 (April 1962).

20. Koentjaraningrat, *Some Social-Anthropological Observations on Gotong-Rojong Practices in Two Villages of Central Java*, translated by Claire Holt, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1961).

malicious gossip only at the price of an exaggerated generosity. They are expected to sponsor more conspicuously lavish celebrations at weddings, to show greater charity to kin and neighbors, to sponsor local religious activity, and to take on more dependents and employees than the average household. The generosity enjoined on the rich is not without its compensations. It redounds to their growing prestige and serves to surround them with a grateful clientele which helps validate their position in the community.[21] In addition, it represents a set of social debts which can be converted into goods and services if need be.

What is notable for our purposes is that the normative order of the village imposes certain standards of performace on its better-off members. There is a particular rule of reciprocity -- a set of moral expectations -- which applies to their exchanges with other villagers. Whether or not the wealthy actually live up to these minimal moral requirements of reciprocity is another question, but there can be little doubt that they exist. Their normative character is apparent in the reaction provoked by their violation. In village Thailand, for example,

> A farmer with money is in a position to exert pressure on many other farmers. He is the *phujaj* [big man] in the *phujaj-phunauj* [big man-little man] relationship. It is to him that others must often turn in order to borrow and to rent tools, to obtain cash loans and land to farm. Once the transaction is made, the debtor is obligated in many small ways throughout the year. However, wealth without the proper behavior results in contempt and malicious gossip, and receives only token respect in the poor farmer's moment of need.[22]

A wealthy man who presses his tactical advantage does so at the cost of his reputation and moral standing in the community. The same reaction was noted by Firth in his study of a Malay fishing village.

> These two features [small and ephemeral differences in wealth], combined with the practice of charity enjoined

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21. It should also be recalled that, where strong outside guarantees for wealth and position do not exist, the standing of local elites depended ultimately on the following they could muster in a showdown. There are thus very good reasons for local powerholders to build sizeable clienteles in such circumstances.

22. Howard Keva Kaufman, *Banghuad, A Community Study in Thailand*, Monographs of the Association of Asian Studies, No. 10 (Locust Valley, New York: J. J. Augustin, 1960), p. 36.

> on the rich probably account to a considerable extent for the absence of any marked feeling of resentment towards the wealthy on the part of the poorer elements in the community. . . . Where resentment and criticism do enter is when the rich man does not show himself generous, when "his liver is thin," when he does not practice charity to the poor, build wayside shelters, or prayer houses, or entertain liberally.[23]

Such moral injunctions are hardly confined to Southeast Asia; they seem rather to be typical of the normative order of the peasant community. The principles involved are perhaps most clearly expressed in Julian Pitt-Rivers' analysis of an Andalusian village.

> The idea that he who has must give to him who has not is not only a precept of religion, but a moral imperative of the pueblo. . . . The successful patron, thanks to his wealth, acquires great prestige within the orbit of his influence and escapes, thereby, the condemnation which is reserved for *los ricos*.
>
> The resentment [of *los ricos*] aims not so much at the existence of economic inequality as at the failure of the rich man to care for those who are less fortunate; at his lack of charity. It is not so much the system which is wrong, it is the rich who are evil.[24]

Clearly, neither the power of the wealthy nor the dependency of others which it implies is self-justifying. Such power is condoned only insofar as its possessors conform to the standards of service and generosity expected of them. When they use their wealth in ways which villagers judge to be benign and protective, their status is reinforced and it becomes possible to speak of legitimacy and patronage. When they use their power to violate local norms, they engender hatred and condemnation. They may still be able to have their way but their behavior is no longer regarded as legitimate.

The normative process by which disparities in power are either legitimated or repudiated in a peasant society is not unique. It is but a special case of a more general phenomenon. For any stratification system, the question arises, "Why should some be placed above others?" The explanation may in part be prescriptive: "He is king because he is of divine birth." Without exception, however, it seems that all such

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23. Raymond Firth, *Malay Fishermen: Their Peasant Economy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 295.

24. Pitt-Rivers, *Op. cit.*, pp. 63, 204.

justifications contain a dimension of performance and reciprocity. Thus a king may be responsible for bringing rain, for the first ceremonial ploughing which assures good crops, or for victoriously leading his people in battle. It is largely by reference to its contribution to the welfare of the group that power is legitimated and becomes authority. The notion of reciprocity and obligation is, as Georges Balandier notes, a universal corollary of any system of authority.

> Certain economic privileges (land rights, labor levies, market rights, etc.) and certain economic obligations (of generosity and assistance) are associated with the exercise of power and authority. . . . Power is necessary, but is confined within precise limits. It requires consent and a certain reciprocity. . . . In a more general way, it might be said that power must justify itself by maintaining a state of collective security and prosperity. This is a price to be paid by those who hold it, a price that is never wholly paid.[25]

The difference between power that is validated and power that is endured thus rests on some shared conception of its just use.

Normative claims on powerholders have quite practical consequences in society. Kings might be overthrown if the crops failed to ripen; Russian priests were beaten if the rains did not come;[26] and emperors lost the "mandate of heaven" when famine stalked the land. The tendency for the electorate to turn out any government that has presided over a sharp economic depression is, more speculatively perhaps, another instance of the same phenomenon. Even the widest expressions of authority in society thus imply a normative structure of obligations for those who claim society's privileges. These duties, which are often quite specific, in turn form a standard of reciprocity by which the justice of power -- its demands and prerogatives -- may be judged. The failure to meet these obligations necessarily undermines the normative basis of power.

In society at large as in the village, then, the legitimacy of the claim to a disproportionate share of wealth, land, or status is con-

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25. Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 34, 39.

26. Barrington Moore, Jr., *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 53-54.

ditional, not automatic.[27] While the landlord's or wealthy villager's control of scarce resources may be incontestable, his claim to legitimacy is accorded only insofar as the balance of his claims and services satisfies the moral requirements of reciprocity which his community applies to him.

The Right to Subsistence and Exploitation in Tenancy

The minimal moral requirement of reciprocity which peasant tenants expect of landlords may be summed up in the phrase, "the right to subsistence." This constitutes the core demand of those whose most pressing problem is the ecological precariousness of their subsistence upon those who control the basic means of agrarian production. The first question a tenant asks of a tenure system is: To what extent does it guarantee my family's minimum subsistence even in bad years? An affirmative response does not necessarily assure the system's legitimacy, for the costs of that guarantee may also be enormous. A negative response, however, does virtually assure that the system will be seen as exploitative.

"Safety-First" and the Economics of Subsistence

> . . . the position of the rural population is that of a man standing permanently up to his neck in water, so that even a ripple is sufficient to drown him.[28]

Tawney was describing China in 1931, but his graphic simile could as easily be applied to much of the peasantry throughout the Third World. Living near the thin edge of subsistence, the capital concern of peasants is necessarily with the security of their food supply. That food supply

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27. It is worth noting that the voluntary grant of status to a member of a group is not simply a sign of approval but also a form of social control. The weaker members of the group confer status on the strong member in part to persuade him to use his power for the benefit of the group rather than against it. On this point, see Richard M. Emerson, "Power-Dependence Relations," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (February 1962), pp. 39-41; and John W. Thibaut and Harold H. Kelley, *The Social Psychology of Groups* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1961), p. 231.

28. R. H. Tawney, *Land and Labour in China* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), first published in 1932, p. 77.

is menaced, on the one hand, by a variety of more or less impersonal forces: the vagaries of weather, the quality of the soil, the existing level of techniques, the risk of illness, the availability of arable land. It is menaced, on the other hand, by a variety of social claims which are not impersonal: claims of rent, taxes, and debts. Even if the crop itself is sufficient for subsistence, the claims on it by others may make it insufficient.

Put starkly, the central economic preoccupation of the low-income cultivator is to be able to feed his household. This preoccupation underlies a large number of economic and social choices and reflects a concern with the specter of dearth and hunger which forms an integral part of the experience of most Third World peasantries. In fact, hunger is often an annual experience, in that time of scarcity before a new crop is ready for harvest. It is periodically aggravated even further when crop failure may force a shift to poorer foods and a reduction in consumption for an entire year. A bad crop might not only mean short rations; the price of eating may entail the sale of land and livestock which in turn reduce the possibility of achieving an adequate subsistence the following year. However, it is when scarcity gives way to famine -- when physical survival itself is at stake -- that the ultimate fears of the peasantry are realized. The living memory of many Third World peasants includes such times of great scarcity when the very young and very old perished and others were reduced to eating seedgrain, roots, and bark.[29] If the great depression of the 1930s left an indelible mark on the fears, values, and habits of an entire generation of Americans and Europeans, we can begin to imagine the impact of periodic food crises on the fears, values, and habits of a subsistence peasantry.[30]

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29. Within Southeast Asia the twentieth century has seen such famines in Annam and Tonkin, and near-famine in northern Burma, northeast Thailand, and Java. As recently as the spring of 1974, the signs of famine appeared in Annam once again. See "Ou va le Vietnam du Sud," by Patrice de Beer, *Le Monde*, May 9, 1974.

30. The subject of dearth was a preoccupation of the peasantry of Western Europe not too long ago, as well. R. C. Cobb, in his study of the popular mentality at the time of the French Revolution, found that it was the central issue among the poor. ". . . dearth appeared a subject more suitable than any other, for a number of reasons. It was the problem to which the common people, at all times, devoted the most attention; no other topic took up so much time in popular debate, no other could inspire fiercer passions, greater fears, more hysteria, more envy, more violence, and more unreason. One can find no better illustration of the process of myth and rumor; and attitudes toward dearth conditioned popular attitudes to everything else: government, the countryside, life and death, inequality, deprivation, morality,

The distinctive economic behavior of the subsistence-oriented family arises from the simple fact that, unlike a capitalist enterprise which can liquidate itself, it is a unit of consumption as well as a unit of production. The family begins with a more or less irreducible consumer demand based on its size which it must achieve in order to continue to exist. To meet these minimal human needs, peasants are often driven to act in ways which defy standards of economic rationality established to explain the behavior of capitalist firms. Peasant families which must feed themselves from small plots in overpopulated regions will, for example, work unimaginably hard and long for the smallest increments in production -- well beyond the point at which a prudent capitalist would move on. Chayanov calls this "self-exploitation."[31] In parts of Vietnam and Indonesia this pattern of "agricultural involution" came to characterize whole sectors of the rural economy.[32] That the marginal return to his additional labor is miniscule is of little matter to the capital-poor, land-short peasant who must wring the family's food from what he has.

Family subsistence requirements impel peasants to many other choices which are anomalous in terms of classical economics. Focusing unavoidably on the here and now, they may have no choice but to sell their crop when prices are low. They may also be willing to pay more for land or to offer higher rents than capitalist investment criteria would indicate. A land-poor peasant with a large family and few labor outlets is rationally willing to pay huge prices for land or "hunger rents," as Chayanov calls them, so long as the additional land will make even a small net addition to the family larder. In fact, the less land a family has the <u>more</u> it will be willing to pay for an additional piece -- a competitive process that tends to drive out capitalist agriculture.[33]

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pride, humiliation, self-esteem. It is the central theme in all forms of popular expression. Nor were the common people living solely in a world of myth and panic fear; for dearth and famine were in fact the biggest single threat to their existence." *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xviii.

31. A. V. Chayanov, *The Theory of Peasant Economy*, eds., Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay, and R. E. F. Smith (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1966), originally published in 1926.

32. This term was coined by Clifford Geertz in his brilliant study *Agricultural Involution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963).

33. Chayanov; *Op. cit.*, pp. 10, 28.

The primordial economic goal of most peasant households is thus to avoid falling below what we might call a subsistence danger level. Strictly speaking, this level is not defined by the minimum food supply necessary to sustain life. It is better envisaged as a threshold below which the qualitative deterioration in subsistence security, family cohesion, and even social status is massive and painful. To fall below this level is as likely to mean having to turn from rice to millet and root crops, to sell plough animals and land, to beg, to send one's children to live with relatives, as it is to mean outright starvation. It is the difference between the "normal" penury of peasant life and a literal hand-to-mouth existence. Such a threshold will not be entirely uniform across cultures. Thus, a poor Thai peasant's notion of the bare essentials of life would probably be slightly more luxurious than what a poor Vietnamese or Javanese peasant would consider rock bottom. Nonetheless, peasant living standards in much of the Third World have remained close enough to the basics that these thresholds are not far removed from brute subsistence levels.

Given the social reality of the subsistence danger level, it makes eminent sense for peasants to follow what Roumasset has called the "safety-first" principle.[34] In the choice of crops, seeds, and techniques of cultivation, this simply means that the cultivator prefers to minimize the probability of having a disaster rather than to maximize his average return.[35] That is, he does not gamble any more than he has to with his subsistence. He thus avoids taking risks that might raise his income if those risks increase the possibility of falling below the subsistence danger level. The rationality of this strategy flows directly from the

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34. James Roumasset, "Risk and Choice of Technique for Peasant Agriculture: Safety-First and Rice Production in the Philippines," Social Systems Research Institute, University of Wisconsin, Economic Development and International Economics 7118 (August 1971).

35. There are a number of knotty operational problems in applying this predictive model. What does the peasant regard as an unacceptable risk? Roumasset puts it at .025, or one failure in forty crops. I suspect it is a bit higher. How much additional risk will peasants run for what increment in expected return? How do peasants judge the risks of techniques and seeds with which they have little experience? One expects they inflate the risk of a given technique in proportion to their ignorance about its performance. Each of these questions is answerable in quantitative terms only for specific categories of peasants whose situation is known. For the purpose of this paper it is enough to know that the marginal peasant has a high relative preference for security over profitability. If the two coincide, so much the better -- that is the technocrat's dream -- but they are more likely to diverge, as will be seen.

fact that peasants are already up to their necks in water and cannot afford the human consequences of such risks.[36]

In one form or another this risk-avoidance principle has been noted by most economists who study low-income agriculture in the Third World. The four statements which follow are taken from the major collection on subsistence agriculture and express the basic accord on this point.

> For near subsistence peasants, risk aversion may be quite strong because the returns above expected values may not offset the severe penalties for returns below the expected values.[37]

> Special value tends to be attached to survival and maintenance of position as opposed to change and the improvement of position. . . . The economic basis for an attitude which is conservative . . . lies with the high risks associated with change in traditional agriculture and the potentially high penalties for failure in change.[38]

The principle is also invoked to explain the preference for subsistence crops over nonedible cash crops.

> It is quite rational for peasants in "overpopulated" countries with very little margin for taking risks above their subsistence level to be content with a lower return for subsistence production than to choose the higher but riskier returns from cash production.[39]

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36. It goes without saying that when subsistence routines are themselves failing to provide for minimal needs and when, therefore, continuing to do the same thing promises ruin, risk-taking again becomes <u>rational</u> and is in the interest of survival.

37. Jere R. Behrman, "Supply Response and the Modernization of Peasant Agriculture: A Study of the Major Annual Crops in Thailand," *Subsistence Agriculture and Economic Development*, ed., Clifford B. Wharton (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), p. 236.

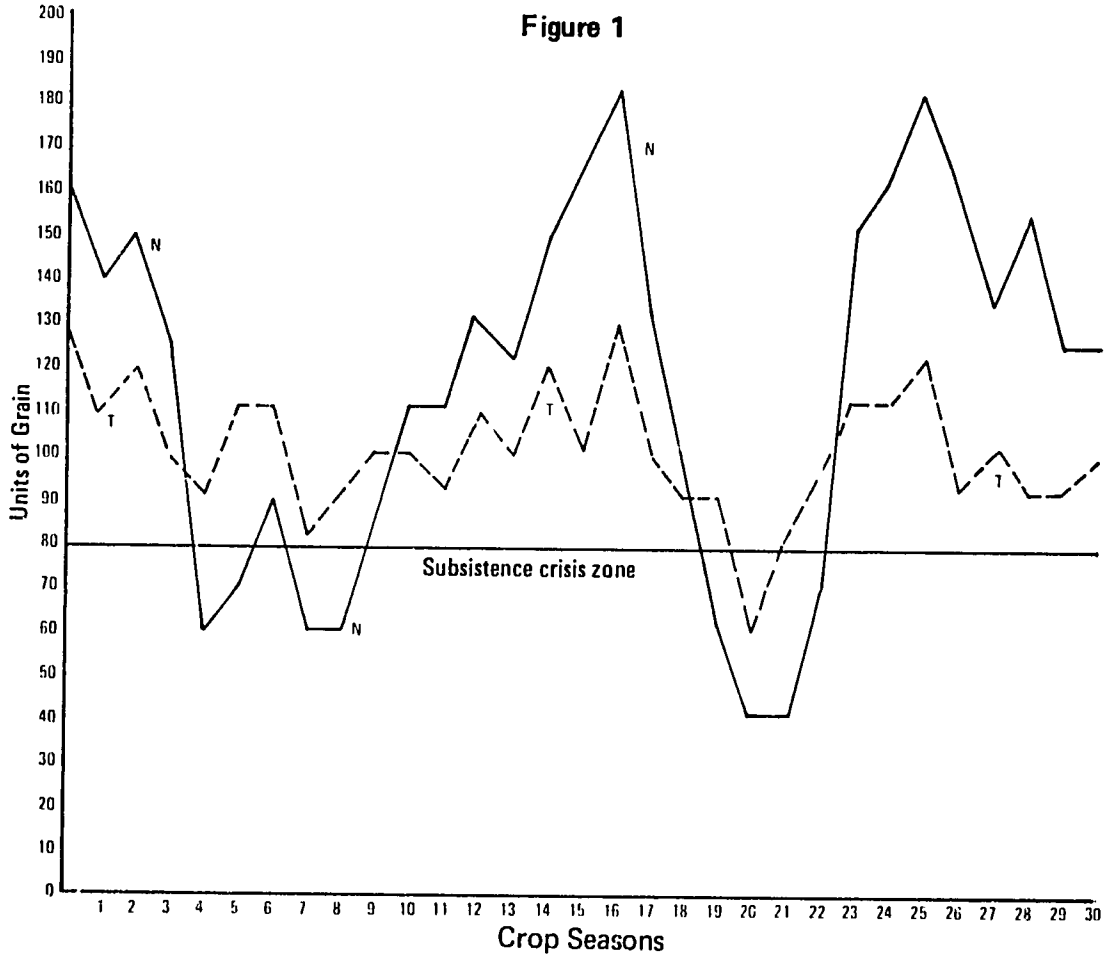
38. John W. Mellor, "The Subsistence Farmer in Traditional Economies," *Ibid.*, p. 214.

39. Hla Myint, "The Peasant Economies of Today's Underdeveloped Areas," Wharton, *Op. cit.*, p. 103.

The most careful formulation, however, is that of Leonard Joy:

> We might postulate that farmers' willingness to innovate for an increase in the long-run average net return is subject to the condition that the risk of reducing the net return in any one year not exceed some given value. Further we might postulate that the degree of risk that farmers are willing to incur is related to their nearness, in some sense, to "biological subsistence". . . . We thus have a hypothesis that subsistence farmers may resist innovation because it means departing from a system that is efficient in minimizing the risk of a catastrophe for one that significantly increases this risk.[40]

The hypothetical dilemma for the subsistence household may be illustrated in more concrete terms in the choice between seeds, and techniques for rice cultivation shown in Figure 1.



40. J. Leonard Joy, "Diagnosis, Prediction, and Policy Formulation," Wharton, *Op. cit.*, pp. 377-378. Joy refers to data from the Punjab that confirm this hypothesis.

The vertical axis of Figure 1 represents the annual rice yield, with a total of eighty baskets defined as a subsistence danger level. Line "T" represents the crop yield figures over thirty years for the traditionally planted variety on a typcial smallholding. The important point to note about the traditional varieties is that their yields only once plunge below the subsistence level, though they skirt it for much of the time. With traditional cultivation, the risk of disaster can be calculated from past experience (assuming it is representative) as one in thirty. Technique "T" is contrasted in Figure 1 with alternative technique "N" (seed, mode of cultivation). Using the latter the cultivator could anticipate a substantially higher return over a thirty year period. The trouble is that peasants using technique "N" would rarely survive past year five to enjoy their bumper crops, for it plunges a family below the subsistence danger level not once but eight times; the probability of going under with it is over twenty-five percent while the comparable figure for "T" is less than four percent. Under "safety-first" assumptions, subsistence-oriented peasants would rationally prefer their low but steady yields to the risks of the higher-yielding technique. Using this model, Roumasset compared the risks associated with four rice varieties: three strains of "miracle" rice and a traditional variety whose yield was two to three times inferior. Setting a disaster level and a permissible level of risk, he then predicted which peasant cultivators would be willing to plant the higher yielding varieties.[41] In fact, the results explained actual adoption patterns in parts of Central Luzon where data were available. Only in irrigated areas, where water supply lessened the risk considerably, did smallholders make the switch. In rainfed areas, however, the new varieties materially increased the risk of crop failure and smallholders were unwilling to abandon traditional varieties.[42]

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41. All of the new seed varieties, moreover, required much larger investments of cash for hiring nonfamily labor in transplating and harvesting. In a bad year the impact of these fixed costs was enormous since a larger yield was required merely to meet production costs.

42. It might be asked why the smallholder does not use the surpluses of the good years to tide him over the bad years. However, this poses several problems. First, unless the initial years are good, there is no surplus. Second, there is an inevitable storage loss for rice which is kept for a long period of time. More importantly, within the peasant community, much of a man's surplus is siphoned off to aid his less fortunate kin and neighbors, or in ceremonial obligations that he avoids only at his peril. Finally, peasants do store up some wealth in plough animals, pigs, gold -- all of which are thrown into the breach in a poor year -- but their savings are typically meager.

In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, the distinctive features of the safety-first rule are strongly evident in the common observation that peasants are reluctant to strike out for profits when doing so might mean upsetting stable subsistence routines that have proved adequate in the past.[43] The goal of a secure subsistence is expressed in a wide array of economic choices: e.g., a preference for crops that can be eaten over crops that must be sold, an inclincation to plant several seed varieties so as to spread risks, a preference for stable, if modest, yields.[44] Safety-first does not imply that peasants are creatures of custom who never take risks. What it does imply is that there is a defensive perimeter around subsistence routines within which any unnecessary risks are avoided as potentially catastrophic. If this line of analysis is correct, it indicates that the stabilization of income is, for those close to subsistence, a more powerful goal than achieving a high average income. It indicates that we will know more about how peasants view their social order if we ask not merely how poor they are but also how precarious their subsistence is.

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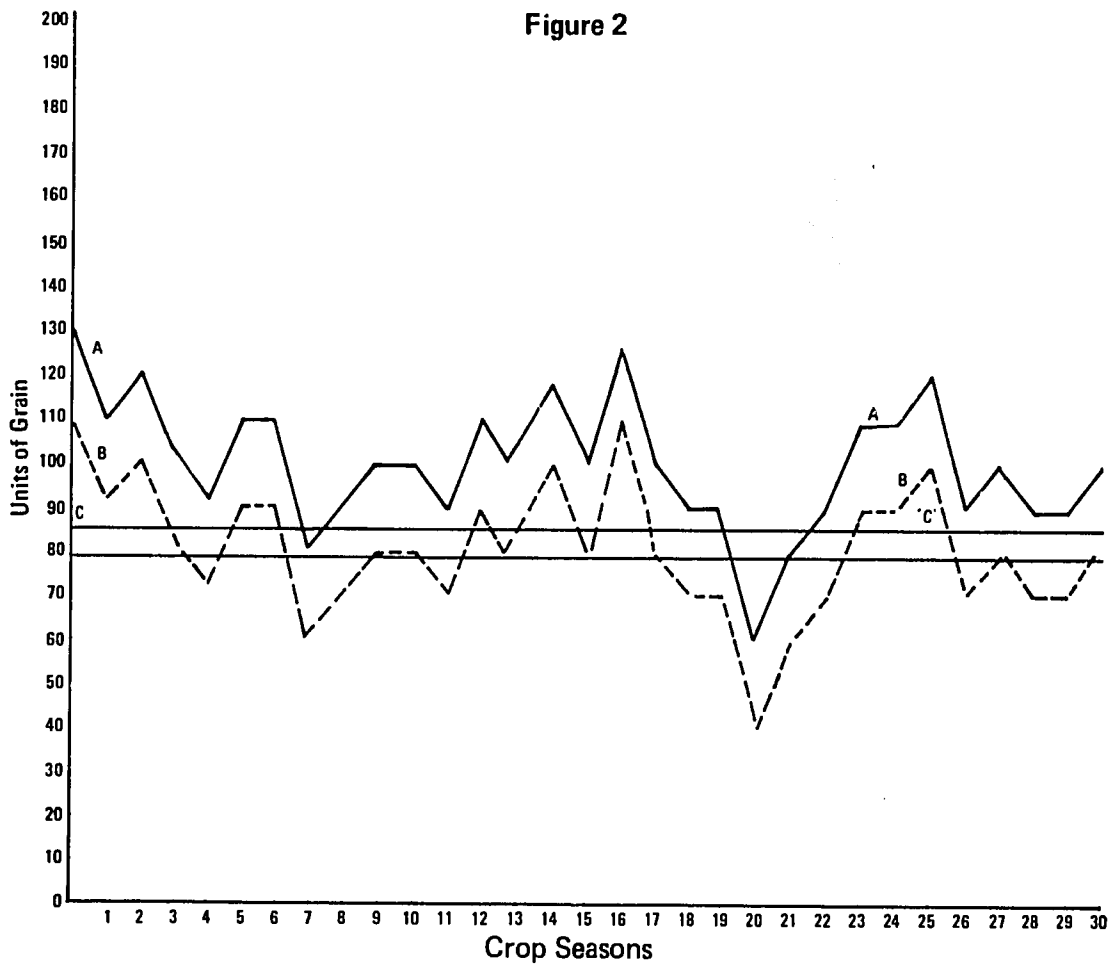
43. See, for example, the excellent study of a northern Thai village by Michael Moerman who concludes, "However acute the peasant's entrepreneurial ambitions, peasant rationality precludes planting commercial crops which threaten subsistence." *Agricultural Change and Peasant Choice in a Thai Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 69. Also, Lucian Hanks, *Rice and Man: Agricultural Ecology in Southeast Asia* (New York: Aldine Atherton, 1972), p. 48; Pierre Gourou, *L'Utilisation du Sol en Indochine Française*, Centre d'Etudes de Politique Etrangère, Travaux des groupes d'études -- Publication XIV (Paris: Paul Hartmann, II rue Cujas, 1940), p. 240; M. G. Swift, *Malay Peasant Society in Jelebu*, London School of Economics Monographs in Social Anthropology (London: Athlone Press, 1965), Ch. 3; Kamol Odd Janlekha, *A Study of the Economy of a Rice Growing Village in Central Thailand* (Bangkok: Division of Agriculture Economics, Office of the Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, 1960), pp. 43, 173; and J. H. Boeke, *The Structure of the Netherlands Indian Economy* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1942), pp. 30-31.

44. Such risk-spreading techniques are not confined to peasants. Fishermen and petty traders living close to the margin also spread risks to help ensure a steady income. Petty traders will, for example, try to develop a number of steady customers to whom they give small "breaks in order to stabilize the relationship. They will avoid selling all their goods to a single customer which would concentrate their dependence as sellers." Cf. Sidney Mintz, "Pratik: Haitian Personal Economic Relationships," *Peasant Society: A Reader*, eds., Jack M. Potter, et al. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), pp. 98-110.

The Right to Subsistence in Tenancy

The subsistence ethic is as applicable to systems of tenancy as it is to the economic decisions of smallholders. It provides a perspective from which the tenant views the claims made on his resources by the landowner. Above all, it implies that such claims are evaluated less in terms of their absolute level than in terms of how they complicate or ease his problem of staying above the subsistence danger level. A high rent after a good crop, for example, may be experienced as less onerous than a low rent following a crop failure. The criteria of peasant judgment tends to be more sharply focused on what is left after the claim is met -- whether it is sufficient for subsistence -- than on the level of the claim per se.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, Figure 2 represents two hypothetical claims on peasant resources. Line "A" reproduces the crop yields of Figure 1, while the horizontal line at eighty units of rice indicates the subsistence danger level.



Lines "B" and "C" then reflect two vastly different forms of extraction which may be thought of as varying forms of land rent or taxation. Line "B" represents the impact on peasant subsistence of an unremittingly fixed rental claim. Year in and year out a steady twenty units of rice is taken from the yield; the effect is simply to retain the shape of the yield line but to lower it twenty units. The net remaining for consumption plunges not once but thirteen times below the danger level. Its impact on peasant life is massive. In this case, the risks of yield fluctuations are borne entirely by the cultivator -- and at a level that is increasingly insupportable. By contrast, the landlord (or the state in the case of taxes) has stabilized his (its) income at the expense of the peasant household.

Line "C" represents the polar opposite of a fixed claim. Each year grain is extracted in variable amounts that leave the peasant household five units above the subsistence danger line. On two occasions when the yield line falls below eighty-five units, this implies an actual subsidy to the peasant household to raise it back to that level. Here the qualitative changes in peasant life are enormously reduced as the subsistence crisis level is never reached.[45] The central ligaments of peasant life remain intact. In this example, the risks of agriculture are borne by the landlord whose income fluctuates to steady the net resources available to the peasant household.

The key element in the peasant's evaluation of the extractions which are an inevitable part of his life is how they affect his "right to subsistence." This is not necessarily identical, by any means, with what might be called the <u>average</u> extraction of resources by agrarian elites. The <u>total</u> resources squeezed from a tenant under variable claim "C", that stabilizes his income, is actually, in this example, greater than under the fixed levey "B". If, as the standard of exploitation, the average take of the landlord from the tenant -- i.e., the average surplus value -- were to be used, then the stabilizing claim would qualify as the most exploitative. The argument here, however, is that, given the subsistence precipice along which the peasant treads, the stabilizing claim (though it may end by taking more) is less resented and is seen as less exploitative, inasmuch as it avoids the outcomes which peasants fear most.[46]

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45. In fact, it is conceivable that the peasant might actually prefer "C" to his original smallholding status, inasmuch as he may be willing to pay a large income premium in order to be guaranteed help in bad years.

46. This conclusion is in keeping with a substantial body of sociological evidence which suggests that an insecure poverty is far more explosive and painful than poverty alone. See, for example, Maurice Zeitlin, "Economic Insecurity and the Attitudes of Cuban Workers,"

The first question a peasant implicitly asks of a tenancy system is, "Does this institution safeguard my minimal social rights; does it provide me a subsistence living regardless of what the land may yield this season?" In this context, land tenure systems can be located along a continuum according to how each distributes risks between the landowner and tenant. Table 1 below compares the protective value of three simplified forms of tenure.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF RISK IN TENANCY SYSTEMS[47]

Landlord Assumes Risk A	Risk Shared B	Tenant Assumes Risk C
Example: traditional (feudal) systems of subsistence insurance	Example: equal-shares sharecropping	Example: fixed-rent tenancy
-cultivator's minimal return fixed and guaranteed	-cultivator's return a fixed share of crop	-cultivator assumes risk and profit of cultivation
-landowner assumes risk and profit of cultivation	-landowner's return a fixed share of crop	-landowner's return fixed and guaranteed

The continuum essentially contrasts the extent to which a tenure system insulates cultivators from crop losses that might ruin them. Toward the "A" end of the continuum the landlord ensures the tenant's livelihood

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American Sociological Review, Vol. 31, No. 1 (February 1966); John C. Leggett, "Economic Insecurity and Working Class Consciousness," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April 1964); and Gaston Rimlinger, "The Legitimation of Protest: A Comparative Study in Labor History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. II, No. 3 (April 1960).

47. In this illustration the focus is primarily on the provisions for dividing the crop. A more accurate scheme for the distribution of risk would also have to include the distribution of production costs. If the landowner provides all equipment, seeds, plough animals, and other cash costs, he assumes this risk while, if these costs are shifted to the tenant, the tenant then assumes an even greater risk than the arrangements for dividing the harvest would indicate.

while, at the "C" end, the tenant, in effect, underwrites the landlord's income come what may. It is assumed, with good reason, that most low-income tenants will prefer arrangements which relieve them of risks which they can ill afford. This preference will be strongest where plots are small, yields highly variable, peasants quite poor, and where few alternative subsistence opportunities exist. It will be weaker where large tenancies, stable yields, a well-off peasantry, and ample outside economic opportunities greatly reduce the likelihood of ruin. The situation of most tenants in the Third World more closely approximates the first set of conditions.

The relative legitimacy of tenure systems that embody subsistence guarantees springs from the fact that the cultivator's needs are taken as the first claim on the harvest. His income is steadied and the risk of the enterprise is shifted to the shoulders of the landlord who is better able to absorb occasional losses. A full subsistence guarantee must go beyond the tenant's prior claim on the crop -- for what if the total crop will not provide for his minimal needs? Thus, complete subsistence insurance implies a personal commitment of the landowner to the basic welfare needs of his tenant. The terms "patron" and "patronage" become applicable here inasmuch as the relationship is ultimately focused on the tenant's needs as a consumer and not on an impersonal economic bargain confined only to the disposition of the crop. In such arrangements, the cultivator is likely to be more than just a tenant; he is likely to be a "client" tied to his landlord by bonds of deference.

The test of tenancy systems in "safety-first" terms is what they will do for the cultivator in a bad year. The traditional or feudal system, barring a total disaster, will keep his head above water; fifty-fifty sharecropping may or may not. Although the tenant and sharecropper share equally the risk of yield fluctuations, there is no assurance that fifty percent of the yield in any given season will meet the tenant's basic needs.[48]

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48. The labels, "sharecropping" and "fixed-rent" are often only an indifferent guide to the actual tenancy relation. The traditional *kasama* tenancy system in the Philippines, for example, nominally describes fifty-fifty sharecropping. In practice, however, owners in some areas often soften the terms considerably in poor years while, elsewhere, no mercy is shown. The key is the actual content of the relationship -- the actual pattern of reciprocity -- and not its formal terms. Sharecroppers who can count on interest-free food loans prior to a harvest, who are given more than their nominal share of the crop in a bad year, who get help in case of illness, and who can count on petty favors from the landowner have a substantially stronger subsistence guarantee than one would infer from the nominal division of the crop.

Fixed rents -- in cash or in kind -- are even more damaging to the tenant's economic security.[49] The full amplitude of crop fluctuations is reflected in the cultivator's income. While sharecropping, at least, claims no rent if there is no harvest, a fixed rent system takes its inexorable due regardless of whether a single grain matures. A brief hypothetical example illustrates what happens in good and bad years under both systems.

TABLE 2. COMPARISONS OF CROP DIVISION UNDER SHARECROPPING AND FIXED RENT

50-50 Sharecropping			
Yield	100	200	50
Landlord's Share	50	100	25
Sharecropper's Share	50	100	25
Fixed Rent (fixed at 50% of average year or 50 baskets)			
Yield	100	200	50
Landlord's Rent	50	50	50
Tenant's Return	50	150	0

In this example shares are divided fifty-fifty and the fixed rent is set at half the yield in an average year. Let us assume that forty baskets of grain are minimum subsistence needs of a cultivating family. In an average year both systems net the peasant fifty baskets of rice, a small margin over minimal needs. In a bumper year, of course, the tenant does well under both systems, but exceptionally well under fixed rent. Let the total yield fall below ninety baskets, however, and every subsequent basket handed over as fixed rent comes directly out of the tenant's subsistence needs. In a poor season when the total yield is only fifty baskets, the tenant is left with absolutely nothing.[50] The

49. This is particularly true of fixed cash rents, which expose the tenant to the risks of the price system as well as to the risks of yield fluctuations.

50. As with sharecropping, a nominal system of fixed rents might approximate sharecropping to the extent that the landlord gave remissions in poor years.

chances of going under are thus maximized with the fixed rent system. There is every reason for marginal tenants to regard such an arrangement as exploitative inasmuch as it is heedless of their elementary needs and asks the weak to guarantee the income of the strong.

The existential dilemma of peasants, the author has argued, imposes upon them a particular conception of their minimal social rights within tenancy. In the exchange relationship with landlords, the key reciprocal service which they claim in return for their labor is the social guarantee of subsistence security. Arrangements which honor this central need are likely to retain a modicum of legitimacy. Arrangements which abrogate this right, which fail to meet the elementary needs of tenants, are justifiably seen as unfair and exploitative. To ask if the balance of exchange protects subsistence rights directs attention not simply to the balance of reciprocity per se, but to its effects on the consumption patterns of the tenant household. The balance of exchange may actually remain the same and yet suddenly constitute a direct subsistence threat. For a landlord to demand the same share of the harvest or the same amount of grain after a crop failure as he demands in an average year may well be, as has been shown, insupportable. The criterion of the subsistence guarantee is based not on what the landlord takes, but on what is left. Similarly, a tolerable pattern of landlord exactions may become intolerable when other circumstances change. For example, many tenants in nineteenth-century China found their customary rents unbearable when the handicraft employment, which had once provided a margin of economic safety, disappeared. Landlords were not taking any more but the impact of their traditional claim was now catastrophic.[51] The loss of common grazing land, a sudden rise in the price of consumer necessities, or a marked reduction in the size of tenant plots may, in the same manner, suddenly render unacceptable tenancy arrangements that were once acceptable.[52] It is necessary to ask, as the tenant surely does, not only what the terms of tenancy are, but what effect they have on the constituent elements of his livelihood.

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51. Hsiao-tung Fei, *China's Gentry: Essays on Rural-urban Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

52. The reverse is also the case. That is, a threatening tenancy arrangement may suddenly become more tolerable if, for example, alternative employment and subsistence opportunities became available. The same landlord's claim, under the circumstances, no longer constitutes an immediate threat to subsistence though it may remain as stiff as before.

It should be clear at this point that what is being proposed is a fundamentally different concept of exploitation than is normally used -- one that is more in accord with the existential problems of peasant life. The usual procedure is to ask how much elites expropriate from peasants and to measure the level of exploitation in terms of the proportion of the product extracted. While this is quite in keeping with the Marxist notion of surplus value, it is unlikely to accord with peasant perceptions. There are radically different ways, as has been shown, for elites to take, say, an average of twenty-five percent from peasant incomes. Thus the manner of exploitation makes all the difference in the world. Who stabilizes his income at the expense of whom is a critical question. Forms of extraction that tend to offer built-in subsistence security -- that respect the consumption needs of tenants -- are, and are seen to be, far less malign than claims which are pressed without regard to the central existential dilemmas of peasant life.

The Claim to Subsistence as an Operational Value

Abstractly, it has been shown that it is logical for most peasant households to maximize the security of their subsistence even if that security entails a sacrifice in average income. Concretely, many of the economic decisions of smallholders seem to make sense only in this context. Furthermore, the logic of the subsistence ethic allows inferences to be drawn about the perceived equity of various systems of tenancy which would not otherwise be obvious. If this line of reasoning is correct, it should be possible to observe the safety-first ethos at work in concrete social values and choices. The evidence from Southeast Asia, at any rate, seems quite persuasive on this score. Subsistence values permeate both village social relations and the attitudes of peasants toward different forms of economic dependency.

At the village level, the subsistence ethos seems apparent in the redistributive pressures described earlier. They operate to ensure that, insofar as village resources make it possible, village families are accorded a subsistence niche. Again, it is instructive that the protective power of leveling pressures has been greatest precisely in those areas where the village was most autonomous and cohesive -- i.e., where the social values of poorer villagers was backed with a modicum of social power. Thus, in East and Central Java this has meant the growth of a Byzantine tangle of sharecropping, labor, and gleaning rights which, until recently, have provided most villagers with a bare subsistence, albeit at declining average levels of welfare. Much the same could be said for Tonkin, Vietnam, prior to World War II. Gourou tells of a Tonkin commune in which only the even distribution of hunger in a period of famine prevented anyone from starving.[53] Elsewhere such

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53. Pierre Gourou, *Peasants of the Tonkin Delta*, II, translated by Human Relations Area Files (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1955), p. 659.

guarantees were less reliable but they generally helped "poorer families to manage through periods of difficulty."[54]

In some areas, notably Tonkin, Annam, and Java, subsistence rights were reinforced through the institution of communal land which was occasionally redistributed or rented to village poor. More informally, local landowners were typically obliged by social pressures to let tenancies or provide jobs to the poor of their own village before outsiders. A popular tradition of local rights to harvest labor, gleaning privileges, and the expectation of generosity normally supplemented these local subsistence rights. Most important, the force of local custom also favored tenancy arrangements that protected the cultivator against the effects of a poor harvest. Thus, in Tonkin the normal division of the grain was customarily waived after a crop failure and the entire harvest was left to the sharecropper.[55] Early rubber share-tapping practices reflected the same concern for the prior subsistence claim of the tapper. Under the *bagi dua* (roughly, "half-shares") system in Indonesia, the tapper actually got less than half the proceeds when the price was high and a good deal more than half when the price was low.[56] More generally, there was a popular expectation of remissions, or "tolerance," as it was known in Vietnam, in rent collection whenever a poor harvest threatened tenant subsistence.

The primacy of subsistence concerns is also mirrored in the preference of peasants for a stable, if poor, tenancy over an occasionally higher but much riskier return from wage labor. In parts of Central Luzon, according to Takahashi, peasants remained tenants on small patches of land that yielded them very little, only because of the economic insurance the landlord provided.

> So long as they remain tenants they can expect to borrow living expenses from their landlords, in other words, the minimum level of livelihood is ensured by the landlords.[57]

For sharecroppers, Takahashi explained, "Farmland was not so much a means of creating a profit from agricultural production as the means of

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54. Swift, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

55. Yves Henry, *Economie Agricole de l'Indochine*, (Hanoi: Governement Général de l'Indochine, 1932), p. 35.

56. Boeke, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

57. Akira Takahashi, *Land and Peasants in Central Luzon* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1969), p. 137.

having a dependable patron in the person of the *proprietaryo*."[58] A study of tenancy in Pangasinan, also in Central Luzon, reaches almost identical conclusions about the importance of subsistence security for cultivators. "Tenants under the traditional system [of sharecropping] seem willing to put up with its injustices for this compensating security."[59] Even in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, where tenancy was less stable than in Central Luzon, it was nevertheless valued for the security which its fringe benefits provided.

> . . . Small tenants are not much better off than simple coolies; the land they rent provides them only . . . 48% of their total resources. . . . But the great superiority of the small tenant over the coolie is his certainty of getting advances if he needs them. While the coolie does not inspire the confidence of the moneylender, the tenant has an assured credit source in his landlord. The life of a small tenant is not much more brilliant than that of the coolie, but he is better protected against the blackest misery.[60]

The tenant's claim to subsistence security in Southeast Asia is also strikingly evident in the general resistance to fixed rents following a poor harvest. Noting the many suits brought against tenants in Lower Burma who withheld their rents in the 1920s, an official concluded, "a large proportion of the suits had to be filed because the tenant, considering that he was not receiving fair treatment in years of crop failure, refused to pay the rent in full."[61] Comparable instances might be multiplied, but the point is clear. The preference for even marginal tenancies over wage labor was predicated on the relative economic security it often afforded in the form of remissions of rent, pre-harvest loans,

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58. Akira Takahashi and Brian Fegan, "Two Views of the Kasama-Leasee Shift in Bulacan," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1972), p. 130.

59. J. H. Anderson, "Some Aspects of Land and Society in a Pangasinan Community," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1966), p. 38.

60. Gourou, *L'Utilisation du Sol en Indochine Française*, pp. 404-405.

61. T. Couper, ICS, *Report of Inquiry into the Conditions of Agricultural Tenants and Labourers* (Rangoon: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1924), p. 41.

and crisis help. When that security was violated, tenants resisted as best they could. Such subsistence services were what tenants minimally expected in return for the onerous dependence and labor which tenancy implied.[62]

The centrality of subsistence concerns is finally and remarkably illustrated in Luzon where the Philippine government has recently attempted to transform rice sharecroppers into fixed-rent tenants.[63] In an effort to make the switch attractive, rents were to be fixed at a figure that corresponded to one-quarter of the average net yield (after subtracting seed, harvesting, threshing, loading, hauling, and milling costs) prior to the date of the change. Sharecropping rents had been one-half of the gross harvest with the landlord and tenant typically splitting production costs fifty-fifty. Under the new system the tenant could thus expect to realize roughly double his previous income in an average year and, with the use of new seed strains, perhaps more than that. Despite the considerable gain in average income which the new system promised, many peasants were reluctant to switch. The reasons for this reluctance were the new subsistence risks inherent in tenancy reform. First, there was the risk of a fixed rent after a meager crop.

> For while under share tenancy he paid a percentage of whatever he managed to reap in a particular year, good or bad, under leasehold he must pay the same amount whether the harvest is abundant or not, and what he cannot pay at harvest time will accrue as debt to be paid at the next crop harvest.[64]

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62. Within the category of wage labor, a similar preference schedule may be detected; the rural poor tend to prefer work by the season or by the year with meals provided over day labor which is far less secure. Similarly, in rural Europe not so long ago, the shepherd, the permanent farm laborer, or the domestic gained economic security at the cost of average income. See, for example, Pitt-Rivers, *Op. cit.*, Ch. 2, and F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 194. Where a capitalist labor market exists, one might even measure the relative preference for security over average income by the wage premium sacrificed for successively more secure positions, inasmuch as employers can take full economic advantage of the subsistence ethic.

63. See the articles in the *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1966).

64. Brian Fegan, "Between the Lord and the Law! Tenants' Dilemmas," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1972).

While the tenant might do far better in a good year, the new leasehold arrangements shielded him less against disaster. Second, and most important, leasehold frequently meant the end of a wide array of landlord services that were critical to tenants' subsistence security. These included the landlord's share of production costs, low interest production loans, food loans, help in time of illness, access to bamboo, wood, and water from the owner's holding, and the right to plant hillside and vegetable crops. On the one hand, the tenant could thus choose leasehold with a low, legal rent and greater autonomy but at the cost of most previous landlord services and an unvarying charge on his harvest. On the other hand, he could remain a sharecropper paying a high, nonlegal rent which nevertheless varied with his yield and could expect a continuation of landlord credit and assistance.[65] The options were agonizing ones for peasants and many preferred to remain sharecroppers or to sign "compromise leases" which retained much of the security of the old system. Actual patterns of choice, moreover, reflected the subsistence concerns of tenants. Those moving to leasehold were precisely those for whom the shift was least threatening; they farmed in areas where yields were steadiest, they rented larger and more profitable tenancies which reduced their need for credit, they tended already to have landlords who were strict and who granted them few customary rights, and they were more likely to have outside employment to fall back upon. For these tenants, the risks were minimized. Sharecroppers with small plots, variable yields, no savings or steady outside employment, and lenient landlords, by contrast, had most to lose in terms of subsistence security and were most reluctant to change. As one tenant explained, "I will have to pay higher rent all my life [under sharecropping] but I can at least get food to live on now."[66]

Both the patterns of choice and the values which peasants brought to bear on that choice betray a constant preoccupation with subsistence

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65. *Ibid.*, p. 119. It should be added that landlords were also wary of the switch, for they feared losing the profits of new high-yielding varieties under the fixed rent system. For this reason they often penalized those who made the change as severely as possible. The crop yields that were to be used to calculate the fixed rent were often the subject of prolonged litigation, thereby adding to the tenant's problems. Finally, the success of the reform hinged on the provision of state credit to replace landlord funding. From the tenant's comments it is evident that state credit was too meager and too late, if it arrived at all, thus jeopardizing the financial stability of the new leaseholders.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

risks. The overriding goal was "security" and "food and money for subsistence."[67] When leasehold involved no greater risks it was naturally very attractive, but where it threatened to uncut the existing subsistence guarantees of share tenancy, its potential rewards seemed, and were, a dangerous gamble.

JUSTICE AND THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIAL ROLES

An analysis which begins, as this one has, with the givens of peasants' household budgets and deduces their needs and interests from them, runs the risk of what has been called "methodological individualism."[68] To be sure, the goal of assuring subsistence exists as an irreducible given in the lives of most peasants. But to stop there is to miss the critical social context of peasant values. The difference between the "need" for subsistence and the "right" to subsistence lies ultimately in a set of social role expectations. While a need can exist more or less independently of society, a right presupposes some agency which is responsible for its observance and enforcement. That agency may be the kin group or village, in which case the right imposes certain obligations on relatives and fellow villagers. If that agency is the landlord, the right similarly creates a set of normative expectations about how landlords should behave.

The essential point here is that while peasant rights vis-a-vis landowners grow out of peasant needs, these rights are socially crystallized as concrete role expectations which are applied normatively to landlords both individually and collectively. The role expectations thus created have a life of their own and are passed on as a part of the institutional tradition. They provide a kind of moral boundary to the role of landowner -- a boundary formed of shared norms by which any performer of the role may be judged.[69]

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67. Romana Pahilanga-de los Reyes and Frank Lynch, "Reluctant Rebels: Leasehold Converts in Nueva Ecija," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1972), pp. 37, 46.

68. Hamza Alavi, "Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1973), pp. 22-62.

69. On role expectations and legitimacy, see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), pp. 62-75.

The Good Landlord in Central Luzon

Thanks to a large-scale opinion survey of cultivators in Nueva Ecija, Central Luzon, it is possible to construct the moral economy of tenant-landlord relations from the perspective of the subordinate classes there.[70] The results of this survey are very much in keeping with two of the major themes in our analysis. First, they show clearly that there is a shared, normative conception of the landlord role among tenants which serves as a criterion for their judgments. Second, the substantive content of landlord obligation is very sharply focused on his responsibility for the minimum welfare needs of his tenants.

Peasants were asked directly what qualities a "good landlord" should have. Taken together, their responses amount to a phenomenological standard of justice in agrarian class relations. The landlord is expected, first, to help with farm expenses. Most tenants do not have the financial wherewithal to shoulder all production costs and they thus expect landlords to provide their fair share of the cash needed to see a crop through to harvest. Moreover, this expectation is an integral conceptual part of the *kasama* system in which both the crop and production expenses are equally divided. The next major expectation among sharecroppers concerned "fringe benefits" -- a misnomer, given their critical value to the cultivating household.[71] Included in this category were medicine and medical services, free housing and house lot, a subsistence food ration (*rasyions*, *abasto*, or *bugnós*), and pre-threshing rice allowances (*agad*). Finally, share tenants demanded the provision of "credit" including lenient terms following a poor harvest. The expectations of "fringe benefits" and "credit" represent what we have called "the right to subsistence" -- the belief that tenancy arrangements should provide a guaranteed food supply to the tenant and make allowances for his capacity to pay rent in any given year. Subsistence preoccupations are also reflected in the major complaint against landlords and overseers (*katiwala*), namely, that they were too "strict."[72] By strictness, tenants meant the rigid enforcement of tenancy terms regardless of the yield or the difficulties of the cultivator.

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70. Pahilanga and Lynch, *Op. cit.*

71. *Ibid.* Production cost-sharing was the first expectation among lease-tenants, too, but their second expectation was that landlords be "pleasant, cordial, and soft-spoken." This may reflect, in part, the strict and impersonal treatment generally accorded those who switched to leasehold. It also carries the connotation of a desire for lenient, understanding landlords who would make allowances for tenant problems in difficult periods.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

There is thus a direct link between the economic needs of the peasant and the role of landlord. As the tenant is habitually short of cash, the landlord is expected to supply a portion of production expenses while the tenant supplies the labor. As the tenant's livelihood is precarious, the landlord is expected to adjust his terms to the tenant's minimal needs and to assist him in a crisis. No doubt the clear formulation of these role obligations is in part a consequence of the fact that they are increasingly violated in Central Luzon. If such norms were uniformly honored, one would expect them to remain unconscious and latent. Once they are broken, however -- once they become problematic rather than assumed -- they are likely to find conscious articulation as rights to be defended. The active defense of these rights is observable in Central Luzon in tenant stratagems to deceive strict landlords, in tenant-initiated court cases, and in the growth of tenant movements. Where possible, it is also clear that tenants enforce their vision of decent landlord behavior. Thus, in the swampy areas of Bulacan which have a long history of agrarian violence, landlords and overseers are afraid to be too strict in the division of the crop or the collection of debts for fear of physical reprisals.[73]

As in any agrarian system, the Filipino tenant has a moral conception of the duties and responsibilities of his landlord toward him. These duties are not particular to a single relationship but are inherent in what tenants take to be the social role of the landlord. The link between duties and role is nowhere clearer than in this statement by a Nueva Ecija sharecropper: "A man of his [wealthy landlord's] means was supposed to loan his tenants rice and help when times were hard. That's part of being a landlord."[74] A landlord who fails to honor his reciprocal obligations becomes a "bad" landlord. So long as the failure is an isolated case, this judgment will reflect only on the legitimacy of that particular landlord and not on the category of landlord as a whole. Once the failure becomes general, however, the collective legitimacy of landlords is called into question. Thus, the legitimacy of a given tenure system or landlord class depends ultimately on how closely the modal behavior of landowners

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73. Fegan, *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

74. Ben Kerkvliet, *Peasant Rebellion in the Philippines: The Origins and Growth of the HMB*, Mss., Ch. 1, p. 12. It is worth noting that the sharecropper defines the social duty of the landlord by reference to his "means" much as the social duty of wealthy villagers is also defined by their "means" and the needs of their neighbors.

approximates what the tenantry takes to be their moral duties.[75] For Filipino tenants, as for tenants in similar circumstances elsewhere in the Third World, the central criterion of judgment hinges on the right to subsistence.

> If sharecropping arrangements are such that subsistence is assured, then it is seen as a good system. For the major complaint about share tenancy is not the dependency which it implies, but that often the share is insufficient to meet subsistence needs.[76]

Dependence with Subsistence

There is good reason for believing that the nexus of dependency with the right to subsistence (or protection) is a classical feature of traditional systems of subordination. A study of life in pre-industrial England reminds us that all cottagers and rural poor could expect at one time or another in their lives to need economic relief. The permanent threat of scarcity made the search for social arrangements which would ensure an adequate food supply a paramount concern.[77] Feudal society in the West was itself a prototype of this nexus. Both physical and economic insecurity compelled much of the population to seek the shelter of personal subordination. The system of feudal subordination involved both personal deference and dues in labor or kind, on the one hand, and a more reliable livelihood and military protection on the other. As Marc Bloch has shown, the feudal bond implied a diffuse and therefore comprehensive duty on the part of the lord to see that his men were defended and taken care of.[78] His obligations were his men's rights, owed them as repayment

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75. Pahilanga and Lynch, *Op. cit.*, p. 28, note in this connection that "for most respondents their opinion about share tenancy will depend closely on the kind of landlord involved in the relationship. Relatively few object to the system as such." When the authors say that "relatively few object to the system as such," they refer to share tenancy in which the landlord does, in fact, meet the normative claims upon him.

76. David Christenson, "Reflections on the IPC/BA Econ Study," *Philippine Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, Nos. 1-2 (January-April 1972), p. 169.

77. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Scribners and Son, 1965), Ch. 2 and pp. 116-118.

78. "In the Frankish period, the majority of those who commended themselves sought from their new master something more than protection. Since this powerful man was at the same time a wealthy man, they

for their labor and allegiance, and stoutly defended against violation. Essentially, this pre-capitalist normative order was based on the guarantee of minimal social rights in the absence of political or civil rights.[79] Peasants expected of elites the generosity and assistance which they imposed on their better-off village neighbors; social rights were, in this sense, village morals writ large.

The economic protection which peasants require of elites in an avowedly paternalistic social order are often precisely those duties which the rhetoric of the ruling class itself accepts. In the feudal order the denial of political and civil rights was justified by the elite by reference to its social responsibility (noblesse oblige) for the material well-being of subordinates. The very logic which excluded lower class political participation therefore added moral force to the right to subsistence. Feudal elites typically recognized their duty to "do all that is necessary to ensure their [serfs] being, in return for labor and attachment, properly fed, clothed, housed . . . ."[80] The paradigm of dependence with material security is perfectly echoed by a Vietnamese landlord recalling the good old days:

> In the past, the relationship between the landlord and his tenants was paternalistic. The landlord considered the tenant as an inferior member of his extended family.

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also expected him to contribute to their support." *Feudal Society*, I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 163.

79. The right to subsistence is emphasized by many scholars of preindustrial Europe. Thus Alan Everitt states, "For since man occupied an appointed place or degree in the body politic, every man had a claim on that body to provide him with the means of livelihood. Transactions or contracts that militated against his right to subsistence, however arrived at, were unjust and invalid. For most people, the ultimate appeal was to social, in contrast to economic, duty." "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce," *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV 1540-1640*, ed., Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 569-570, cited in Charles Tilly, "Food Supply and Public Order in Modern Europe," *The Building of States in Western Europe*, ed., Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). See also, Anton Menger, *The Right to the Whole Product of Labour*, (New York: Augustus Kelly, 1962), originally published 1899.

80. Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1969), p. 49.

> When the tenant's father died, it was the duty of the landlord to give money to the tenant for the funeral; if his wife was pregnant, the landlord gave money for the birth; if he was in financial ruin the landlord gave assistance; therefore the tenant had to behave as an inferior member of the extended family.[81]

The picture painted here is how elites would have it seem, not necessarily how it was or is. For that reason, the power of the rhetoric must not be missed. It represents a standard of performance by which elites themselves justify their rule and to which they can, by the same token, be held accountable. The very terms "patron" or "lord" convey a general responsibility for the basic welfare of subordinates. In China, the central court was quite aware of the duties of agrarian elites and of the dangerous consequences likely when the minimal social rights of the poor were violated. An eighteenth-century court edict advised rural gentry accordingly -- albeit in vain:

> As soon as famine occurs, destitute people freely plunder and rob -- those families that have made their fortune by unkindly methods invariably suffer damages before all other [property owners]. For this reason we advise all wealthy families to give, in their everyday life, sympathetic considerations to the poor. They should be reasonable and accommodating toward any tenant family in their neighborhood that is in need, confronted by a bad harvest, or hard pressed during the season when last year's grain has been exhausted and the new crop is yet to come. They should never refuse to extend a helping hand to it.[82]

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81. Robert L. Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1970), p. 29.

82. Hsiao, *Op. cit.*, p. 392. For an example of how tenants in a later period attempted to create a relationship with their landlords which would shield tenants from the worst misfortune, see Morton H. Fried, *The Fabric of Chinese Society: The Study of the Social Life of a Chinese County Seat* (New York: Praeger, 1953), *passim*.

In any agrarian system which contains both stark poverty and personal subordination, the right to subsistence is likely to form the logical complement of dependence. This right is embodied in a pattern of moral claims which peasants make on those who control scarce resources. To say that subsistence rights are implicitly a part of dependence is not to say that such relationships are not exploitative. They generally are. There is, however, no contradiction between the insistence on the important residual rights which exist in an exploitative context and the recognition that the context is, after all, unjust. For example, factory workers may consider the system of authority and rewards in industry to be unfair and might support a fundamentally new structure of power if the opportunity presented itself. But this hardly prevents them from defending, at the same time, their existing rights or appealing to the obligations of employers within the existing system. Similarly, tenants may chafe at the dependency and burdens of their status, but this hardly prevents them from ferociously protecting what they take to be their basic rights to food loans or relief under existing tenancy arrangements. In almost any agrarian system, there is some standard package of moral rights which represent the minimal standards of obligations for which elites are morally accountable. The right to subsistence is classically at the core of these rights because it is central to peasant life and because it is morally embedded in most stratified agrarian orders.

The Moral Polarities of Power

The power that control of land and its product confers on landowners has a double face. While its effects may be inescapable, it may either be seen as legitimate and even beneficial or as illegitimate and extortive. For subsistence-oriented tenants, the normative test of power tends to center on its use as a shield from inevitable crises of food supply.

The moral dimension of the landlord role is evident in the terms which tenants employ to label both the owners of land and their behavior. The power wielded by landlords is potentially "seen in terms of two opposed and complementary notions, one entirely benificent (an order that ensures peace and prosperity) and the other dangerous (a superiority acquired at the expense of others)."[83] When landowners are described by tenants in terms of patronage and protection and when their behavior is seen as open-handed, their status and legitimacy is validated. On the other hand, when they are described as land-grabbers and as cruel and exacting, the image becomes one of immoral power which may be suffered but not condoned. Pitt-Rivers speaks of this moral polarity of power in his discussion of patronage in Andalusia.

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83. Balandier, *Op. cit.*, p. 104.

> Patronage is good when the patron is good, but like the friendship upon which it is based, it has two faces. It can either confirm the superiority of the *senorito* or it can be exploited by the rich man to obtain a nefarious advantage over poor people. It covers a range of relationships from noble protection of dependents in accordance with the moral solidarity of the pueblo to the scurrilous coercions of the later period of *caciquismo*. The system is, clearly, only to be judged good insofar as it ensures that people do not go hungry.[84]

Landowners who transgress the moral boundaries of "patronage" roles are no longer patrons; they are *caciques* or simply *los ricos*. In Argentina, large ranchowners may be favorably seen as the *clase alta* or *la familia*, or unfavorably labeled the *oligarchia*. The label applied is, in effect, a description of role behavior. Elites are accorded the status of *clase alta* only to the extent that they actually live up to the standards of economic assistance and generosity that are expected of them.[85]

The role labels which tenants attach to landlords is thus a good indication of whether they view the relationship as generally fair and collaborative or as unjust and exploitative. In some cases the term may remain the same while its connotations change to reflect a new reality. The word *cacique* in nineteenth-century Luzon, for example, had a generally favorable emotive content in keeping with the reciprocal assistance and protection which tenants could generally expect from the local *principalia*. As landowners imposed more rigid terms of tenancy and withdrew from the barrios, however, the word *cacique* became a "term of opprobrium for the first time."[86] The term for sharecropping in Central Luzon has undergone an analogous transformation. *Kasama* may be translated as "partners" or "sharing together" and implies a relationship of egalitarianism and friendship. As share tenancy has become increasingly one-sided, however, the term has become more and more dissonant with reality. To cope with this social fact, tenants in some areas increasingly use the traditional term only when addressing landlords or authorities directly. Among themselves, though, they add a cynical suffix

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84. Pitt-Rivers, *Op. cit.*, p. 204.

85. Arnold Strickon, "Folk Models of Stratification, Political Ideology, and Socio-Cultural Systems," *The Sociological Review Monographs*, No. 11 (1967), pp. 93-117.

86. David R. Sturtevant, *The Last Shall Be First: Millennial Movements in the Philippines 1840-1940*, Mss., Chs. 4 and 5.

which mocks its literal meaning and makes it clear that they hardly consider the bargain fair or equal. When they may talk safely, the tenants' views of sharecropping thus reveal a contempt and ridicule for the pretensions of the word *kasama*.

The need for subsistence, then, is not simply a physical fact; it is a perceived right which finds social and moral expression in the organization of role expectations within tenancy. Deference and subordination are justifiable only to the extent that landlords actually meet the reciprocal obligations which their claim to status implies. These obligations are apparent in the Filipino sharecroppers' vision of the "good landlord," in the classical association of dependence with social rights, in elite homilies, and in the moral ambivalence of power roles. The need for subsistence alone does not define any social responsibilities or moral obligations. The right to subsistence, on the other hand, is both an ethical and relational claim and provides the basis for the moral indignation which its violation arouses. By refusing to honor the basic social rights of tenants, a landowning elite forfeits any moral claim it may have had to peasant production and, in effect, dissolves the last normative basis for continued deference. Defiance is now normatively justified though it may be impossible in practice. A tenant whose subsistence hangs in the balance thus faces more than an economic problem: he faces a social failure. The social and moral context of his judgment is critical. It implies that the tenant, as a political actor, is more than a statistical abstract of available calories and outgoing rent charges -- more than a consuming organism whose politics may be deduced from his daily food level. It confers on him, as is conferred on elites as a matter of course, a political consciousness and a perception of the moral structure of his society. It implies, then, that his sense of what is just allows him to judge others as morally responsible or not for his plight and to act, not merely to restore his subsistence, but to claim his rights.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND EXPLOITATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Actual patterns of landlord tenant relations in colonial Southeast Asia tended to become progressively more exploitative in terms of both the balance of exchange and rights to subsistence. The explanation for this deterioration is to be sought in a combination of demographic and political factors which steadily undermined the relative bargaining power of the tenant. Inasmuch as analogous forces lay behind the evolution of tenancy in much of the Third World, they merit brief, schematic treatment here. This discussion is meant to capture only the main structural changes which increase the potential for rural exploitation and thus

glosses over much regional variation.[87]

To ask how much more the tenant needs the landlord than the landlord needs the tenant provides a rough gauge of the potential for exploitation. Throughout the colonial period, the major changes in agrarian life produced a growing tenant class that was increasingly at the mercy of landowners for its livelihood and security. The growth of markets and the cash economy meant new instabilities in tenant income due to price fluctuations. At the same time, redistributive pressures within the village became less reliable forms of subsistence inasmuch as more land was owned by absentee landlords who could ignore local norms with relative impunity. Perhaps the most decisive factor in the colonial transformation, however, was the growth of population and the closing of the agrarian frontier connected with it. As demographic pressure on arable land mounted, and as a growing class of landless competed for tenancies, the landowner could use his tactical advantage to impose more onerous conditions. And, the central role of the colonial political order in making new levels of exploitation possible must not be overlooked. Through its legal system and coercive force, the colonial state enforced contracts, put down unrest, and made it politically possible for the landowner to extract the maximum advantage from his economic power.[88]

The bargaining advantage of the landlord was reflected in the evolution of tenancy. Rents took an expanding proportion of the crop and production costs were shifted increasingly to tenants. However, it was in the changing forms of tenancy and the revocation of subsistence guarantees that the full impact of landlord power was felt. Flexible sharecropping was replaced by a more rigid division of the crop and share tenancy itself increasingly gave way to fixed rents in cash or kind, collected irrespective of the harvest. Apart from the question of rent itself, other forms of subsistence security deteriorated. In one area landlords might refuse customary pre-harvest loans, in another they were no longer lenient if the tenant fell ill, in another gleaning rights might be suspended. The signs varied to suit the peculiarities of each region, but they all pointed in the same direction. The balance of exchange moved steadily in favor of the landlord and, in the case of ab-

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87. The author has attempted an extended discussion of this variation in *The Political Economy of the Peasant Subsistence Ethic in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), Chs. 2-4.

88. All of these changes are discussed in more detail in James C. Scott, "The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds in Rural Southeast Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1 (November 1972), pp. 5-37.

sentee, rentier landlords, it is hard to speak of exchange at all except for the rental of land at a high and invariable rate. Landowners generally succeeded in stabilizing their income at the expense of tenants and in stripping away most of the subsistence rights that had once provided some economic security.[89]

The stiffening of tenancy terms was accompanied by signs of tension and unrest in class relations. Whenever possible, tenants manifested their disapproval by refusing to pay rents, by insisting on their rights to loans or "tolerance," and by devising stratagems to evade the full impact of the tenancy system (e.g., harvesting and selling a portion of their crop secretly). As defiance grew, landlords relied more heavily on the courts and colonial police to maintain order and hired bands of toughs and watchmen to enforce the terms of tenancy. Indications that the legitimacy of the tenancy system had seriously eroded were apparent by the 1920s in much of the region. The year 1930 marked a watershed, however, since the integrative force of the world market had, for the first time, made possible the large-scale failure of subsistence guarantees which occurred then. Landlords themselves were hard-pressed by the economic crisis and tried to stay afloat by passing on as much of the cost as possible. They called in existing debts, refused further loans, tightened tenancy provisions, and dismissed defaulting tenants. These new hardships often constituted a direct threat to subsistence, for they came on top of a collapse in crop prices and subsidiary employment opportunities. Peasants also faced colonial head taxes which, like rents, had become an onerous claim on their resources that did not vary with their ability to pay.

The response to these new subsistence pressures was often violent. Major rebellions developed in Burma, Vietnam (both Cochinchina and Annam), and the Philippines. In each of these rebellions, the major targets were the colonial tax system and landowners -- the two principal sources of fixed claims on declining peasant resources. Delays or reductions in taxes were demanded on the basis of the hardship created by the crisis. Failing that, tax rolls were burned and collection resisted. Tenants demanded financial assistance from landlords and more lenient treatment which, if refused, led to attacks on owners' granaries and the withholding of all or a portion of the rent. The implicit theme

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89. Marx, in the European context, was particularly attentive to the question of the loss of economic security under agrarian capitalism. "But on the other hand these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire." *Capital*, I (New York: New World Paperbacks, 1966), p. 715.

in most of the tumult was that neither the landlord's nor the state's claim on peasant income was legitimate now that it directly threatened subsistence.[90] In this sense, the uprisings represented, as do most peasant rebellions with which the author is familiar, a largely defensive effort to protect existing subsistence rights.

FALSE-CONSCIOUSNESS REVISITED

The analysis presented above raises one final problem that is of both conceptual and operational importance. How can the existence of a sense of exploitation among tenants and peasants be determined in situations where repression makes it especially dangerous for them to speak or act openly? Assume, for example, that a given tenantry is exploited in the sense in which that term has been defined here. Assume further that the power of the state and landlords make defiance virtually impossible. At least two divergent interpretations of this situation are possible. It could be argued, on the one hand, that tenants accept this exploitation as a normal, even justifiable, part of the social order. This explanation for the absence of dissent -- for passivity -- rests on the peasantry's fatalistic acceptance of the social order -- on what Marxists would call "false-consciousness." Mystification of this sort is invoked as the reason for resignation particularly in societies such as India where a venerable system of stratification is reinforced by religious sanctions and elaborate social codes. The same explanation is also invoked in Java where a tradition of passivity and deference is presumed to represent a cognitive obstacle to dissent. On the other hand, it could be claimed that the reason for passivity is to be found, not in values, but in the relationships of force in the countryside.[91] Is there an empirical solution to this thorny issue; is there any way of deciding, in a given context, what weight to assign values as an obstacle to dissent and what weight to assign repression? How can the

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90. For a lengthy account of the breakdown of patronage, and the rebellions which followed, see Scott, *The Political Economy of the Peasant Subsistence Ethic.*

91. Occasionally when those relationships of force suddenly change, there is a sudden and spontaneous explosion of peasant violence which suggests that prior passivity was a matter of repression rather than of false consciousness. For example, rebellions that have followed the fall of a repressive government or a defeat in war, are often of a scale that provides post hoc evidence for the repression theory.

difference between false deference and real deference be determined when the relative weakness of tenants may make dissimulation necessary? Without underestimating the problems involved, it is the author's belief that there are a number of ways in which this issue can be attacked.

The argument for mystification or false-consciousness depends, in fact, on the symbolic alignment of landlord values and peasant values -- on the assumption that the peasantry accepts the landowners' vision of the social order. What does mystification mean, if not a group's belief in the social ideology which justifies its exploitation? If, indeed, mystification is the major reason for tenant compliance, it should be possible to substantiate this by reference to peasant beliefs and values. However, if mystification is not the problem, that too should be evident from an examination of peasant culture. The evidence will seldom be cut-and-dried inasmuch as any group's values will contain diverse and even contradictory currents. Despite this problem, it is conceivable that a careful examination of peasant values can tell us just how harmonious their values and elite values are, and along what dimensions contraditions exist. A few brief illustrations will help point to the kinds of evidence which would be relevant to this issue.

At the level of language, the terms used to describe landlords and tenancy arrangements might be considered. The changing connotations of *kasama* and *cacique*, for example, are a strong indication that rural class relations are regarded as exploitative. Inquiries into class relations that begin at this level can disclose much about the symbolic alignment or opposition of landowners and tenants. The study of proverbs, folksongs, oral history, and jokes can similarly help to gauge the symbolic distance between classes.[92] Since the freedom of peasants to elaborate their own culture is almost always greater than their capacity to remake society, it is to their culture that we must look to discern how much their moral universe overlaps with that of the elite.

The religious beliefs and practices of the peasantry offer another rich field of evidence. Folk religion may undergo a transformation which places it in sharp symbolic opposition to the social doctrines of the elite. Around the turn of the century, for example, the Saminist sect in the Rembang area of Java explicitly rejected the existing social hierarchy. They refused on principle to pay taxes, insisted on their

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92. The content of peasant folksongs in Vietnam, for example, reveals a growth of bitterness and anger toward grasping landowners and tax collectors. See Hong Giap Nguyen, *La Condition des Paysans au Vietnam pendant la Periode Coloniale à travers les Chansons Populaires*, 3è cycle, Paris VII, Lettres, 1971.

rights to take wood from the forest, and abandoned all status-laden terms of address -- instead employing "low" Javanese (*ngoko*) and addressing all as "brother."[93] Their religious doctrine and practices had much in common with the egalitarian and plain-talking sects of seventeenth-century England which also explicitly rejected the social and agrarian order of their day.[94] To cite another example, in contemporary Java it is reported that Buddhism has made strong inroads among peasants in areas most decimated by the repression of late 1965. Not much is known yet about this religious transformation, but it seems likely that many poor peasants have chosen to formalize their opposition to the dominant and often-well-to-do Moslem community by leaving Islam altogether. In the wake of political disaster, its significance cannot be underestimated as a symbolic expression of withdrawal and cleavage.

For any agrarian system a set of key values can be identified which justify the rights of the elite to the deference, land, grain, and taxes which they claim. It is largely an empirical matter whether these values find support or opposition within the subculture of subordinate classes. If bandits are made into folk heroes, fallen rebels are treated with reverence, poaching is celebrated, defiant tenants are admired, this constitutes good evidence that, at a minimum, violations of elite norms evoke a vicarious sympathy among peasants. If the forms of outward deference and homage toward landlords are privately mocked, it is evidence, at a minimum, that tenants are hardly in the thrall of a naturally-ordained social order. If peasant sects proclaim the equal division of wealth and the right of all to the land and its products in the midst of a society in which things are very much otherwise, it is, at a minimum, evidence that their notion of social justice does not correspond with the existing distribution of resources.

The problem of whether peasants submit to exploitation because of mystification or because they have no other choice is, then, not an analytical *cul de sac*. It can be resolved in large part by asking whether the values of tenants, in fact, accord with the dominant values embodied in the existing system of landownership and tenancy. For it is especially at this level of culture that a defeated or intimidated tenantry may nurture its stubborn moral dissent from an elite-created social order.

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93. Harry J. Benda and Lance Castles, "The Samin Movement," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-Land-, en Volkenkunde*, Vol. 125, Pt. 2 (1969), *passim*.

94. Cf. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: M. T. Smith, 1972), *passim*.