

Kenneth R. Walker: An Appreciation*

Professor Kenneth R. Walker died on 28 July 1989 at the age of 57. He was a pioneer of modern Chinese studies in Britain. His achievements were outstanding as a scholar, teacher, developer of the field and as a contributor to this journal.

After attending school in his home town of Otley, Yorkshire, he studied at the Universities of Leeds and Oxford. He formed an early interest in agrarian economics, stimulated initially by Maurice Beresford and developed fully in his doctoral work on forestry by Colin Clark. It was characteristic of Oxbridge graduate education in those days that Kenneth saw little of Clark as a supervisor, but that one evening, Clark took him aside and, in a never to be forgotten hour, unravelled all the problems of the subject and set his pupil on the road to completing his thesis.

After Oxford, Kenneth took up his first post in the Department of Political Economy at Aberdeen University. Shortly thereafter, however, he read an advertisement inviting economists interested in training as China specialists to apply to the School of Oriental and African Studies. The idea instantly appealed to him, and in April 1959 he began a 30-year career at the School.

To understand Kenneth's contribution in these years it is essential to know something of Chinese studies in the 1960s. In Britain, there was hardly any expertise on the Chinese economy that was firmly based on knowledge of Chinese sources, and popular views of the subject were dominated by debates between uncritical sympathizers and cold-war warriors. But remarkable changes were afoot, brought about by three related factors. First, was the *Hayter Report* of 1961, which advocated an American-style development of Area Studies in Britain, and which was accepted and funded by government. Secondly, was the development of the School under Sir Cyril Philips who had seen that to survive, traditional orientalism had to be expanded by the application of social science disciplines. And thirdly, was the availability of large programme grants from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations to supplement expanding domestic monies. At the School all this led within a decade to the establishment of the Department of Economic and Political Studies (1962), the Contemporary China Institute (1967), and the acquisition of *The China Quarterly* (1968). Within a second decade this structure had produced a group of British China scholars who were at the forefront of the subject. A remarkable achievement, better appreciated abroad than at home and an achievement to which Kenneth contributed leadership and effort in virtually every dimension.

The American contribution to these efforts, and especially in Chinese economics, was academic as well as financial. By the end of the 1960s major activities were under way at Harvard, Berkeley, Ann

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Arbor and the Rand Corporation. Notable leaders were Alexander Eckstein, Li Choh-ming, T. C. Liu, K. C. Yeh, John Aird, and Robert Michael Field, all of whom were to be lifelong associates of Kenneth. This group was encouraged by Simon Kuznets and Walter Galenson, and by the support of the American Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies.

Although active, the field of Chinese economics in America had distinctive and limiting characteristics. The research agenda was heavily influenced by Sovietological concerns and by an excessive emphasis on national income estimation (often required by defence-related financial supporters).

Kenneth entered this scene with a totally different background and strong natural bent that sought concrete answers to practical problems. It was characteristic, therefore, that while the Americans were wrestling with the problems of price imputation in their national product models, Kenneth's first major work, *Planning in Chinese Agriculture* (1965), had as its subject matter the Chinese pig. Following Naum Jasny, Kenneth's early analysis of the Chinese collectivization homed in on the significance of the private plot, but he noticed also the crucial link between the plot and the pig and the vital role of the pig as a supplier of fertilizer in a pre-industrial economy. Thus, Kenneth's overall assessment of China's drive for agricultural reform was fairly positive, but he emphasized strongly the need for caution and for attention to incentives and private interests. Although his views fluctuated somewhat, I believe he maintained this balanced perspective to the end. He certainly could never agree that China's unique agricultural problems would be solved by total *laissez-faire*.

In 1963–64 Kenneth and his wife, June, went to Hong Kong. Although June has been heard to complain of having to sit in dusty, ill-lit bookshops (a goldmine in those days) for too many evening hours, this visit turned out to be a very important. Although bitterly disappointed at being unable to visit China, Kenneth spent his time working on the Union Research Institute (URI) materials at the Universities Service Centre. He also cemented many American friendships, especially that with Lucian Pye. While at the URI, Kenneth grasped the immense significance of their archive and realized that it opened opportunities for lines of economic enquiry undreamt of by the Sovietologists. Indeed, it led, 20 years later, to his finest book, *Food Grain Procurement and Consumption in China* (1984).

Kenneth worked on this book for 14 years. It is not an easy read and has not yet been fully appreciated. To Kenneth's immense pleasure, one person who did appreciate it was Reetsu Kojima. Kojima had thought of a similar project, had looked at the lifetime of reading that would be involved, and then turned to other things. For what in fact was involved included nothing less than the scanning of the the entire American and British collections of Chinese local newspapers, of

which the URI Archive was a stimulating but incomplete selection. The end result, however, was the most important study of Chinese agriculture since Buck's work in the 1930s. By the time it was published, other scholars had been working on local projects, but no one else had the combination of originality and determination that eventually enabled Kenneth not only to assert that China's economic aggregates had to be interpreted by analysis of inter-provincial relationships, but actually to quantify the whole picture and to link the statistical facts to the evolution of policy and institutions.

After the completion of a work that took such a toll of time and energy, one might have expected Kenneth to have continued at a more leisurely pace. No expectation could have been wider of the mark. One reason for this was the pressure engendered by financial cuts, which seemed to him to threaten everything that had been built up and which made the criteria for success in academic life more confusing and ambiguous than ever. Another factor was the opening of China, physically and academically, which suddenly presented extraordinary opportunities to redress frustrations caused by his lack of access in the 1960s and 1970s. Almost every year during the 1980s, therefore, he went to China, at least once, to follow up the data and find local statistical handbooks that finally enabled him to extend his analyses to the *xian* level, as is illustrated in his article included in this issue.

This career of scholarship was always paralleled by the enthusiastic teaching of undergraduates and postgraduates. Although often thought of as an individualist, in fact Kenneth shared the undergraduate teaching throughout the 1980s with Robert Ash, and the postgraduate teaching with me for the past 25 years. He seemed particularly to enjoy the Master's level courses, and it is no accident that his last book was aimed at this level, and is dedicated to our students (with Christopher Howe, *The Foundations of the Chinese Planned Economy*, 1989).

The China Quarterly played an important role in Kenneth's life. He had influential relationships with its Editors: Rod MacFarquhar, David (later Sir David) Wilson, Dick Wilson and its present Editor, Brian Hook, for whom he had a particular affection. He read more manuscripts than any other referee, served on the Executive Committee, and planned and edited two special issues (Issue 100, *The Readjustment of the Chinese Economy*; Issue 116, *Food and Agriculture in China during the post-Mao Era*). His books will be read for years to come, but I believe that the 10,000-word *China Quarterly* article was the form in which he could express himself most successfully. Three articles in particular stand out in my mind: "Collectivisation in retrospect: the 'socialist high tide' of autumn 1955–spring 1956" (No. 26) "Grain self-sufficiency in North China 1953–1975" (No. 71), and his final summing up of 40 years of Chinese socialist agriculture that appears in this issue.

During this summer, then in the final phase of his illness, Kenneth's

concern for China never faltered. He was immensely saddened by China's reversion to repression and witch-hunting, and anxious for friends and institutions with whom he had personal links. And when I last saw him, 11 days before he died, although too weak to remain awake for more than a few minutes at a time, he was still talking about China's agrarian problems.

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