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WOLF ISAAC LADEJINSKY AND THE LAND REFORM IN TAIWAN

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Wolf Issace Ladejinsky

and

The Land Reform in Taiwan

by

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Macomb, Illinois

April 1, 1994
The subject of Wolf Issac and the land Reform in Taiwan is especially appropriate for today’s meeting. It was exactly forty-five years ago, on the 23rd of September in 1949, that Wolf Ladejinsky emerged in Taipei from his two-week field trip (i.e. September 9 - 22) in rural Taiwan. That trip was the first of a series of field investigations he conducted for the US-China Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction. It also marked the beginning of a productive and interesting relationship between this legendary Russian-American agrarian reformer and the JCRR.

In his long fascinating career, his experiences with Taiwan’s land reform programs seemed to occupy a special place in his heart.

Wolf Ladejinsky is perhaps best remembered for his contribution to the land reform program in postwar Japan, which was the most successful among the reforms sponsored by General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. The epoch-making Directive 411 on Rural Land Reform, issued by the SCAP, has often been credited as Ladejinsky’s "brain child". Quite beyond the scope of Washington’s original directives, this Memo ordered the Japanese government "to destroy the economic bondage which enslaved the Japanese farmers for centuries of feudal oppression." While the subsequent redistribution of farm land in Japan received wide attention and its political and social consequences have been the subjects of endless studies, the role Ladejinsky played in a similar reform in Taiwan is almost forgotten even by many of the former Commissioners and staff members of the JCRK.

Take for an example the recently published collective memoirs which comprises some twenty oral-history interviews with former JCRK members, Ladejinsky’s English name and its Chinese transliteration. "Lei Cheng-chi’i", appear only one page in the entire collection of more than 200 pages of interview transcripts. Several publications from
Taiwan on the land reform programs of 1949-52 do not mention the name of Ladejinsky at all.

The inspiration for this study came from a recent book by Frank Gibney, *The Pacific Century: America and Asia in a Changing World* (1992). Following an account of Ladejinsky's role in the postwar land reform in Japan, Gibney told us that "Ladejinsky himself later went to Taiwan and helped direct a similar reform under an economically progressive Nationalist government. As in Japan, the Taiwan reform was accelerated by strong American pressure." These words are from a most venerable reporter on the Far East, who served as the *Time* magazine's Tokyo Bureau Chief when Ladejinsky was posted in Japan. Some sixty pages later, Gibney turned again to the subject of American aid program in East Asia: "...one significant factor needs to be mentioned—their consistent emphasis on land reform. In part this was a direct result of the successful land reform undertaken by Wolf Ladejinsky and other idealistic agriculturalists in MacArthur's Occupation in Japan. Both in China and in Korea—in the midst of the otherwise spectacularly unsuccessful US military involvement there—the Americans pushed land reform as a matter of commonsense policy. Neither Korean nor Taiwan officials needed much convincing on this score. During the Korean War, the Communists' drastic, if bloody land redistribution policies made some further postwar actions by the South Korean government necessary. For their part, (Chinese Nationalists)...in Taipei had rueful memories of the successful colonization of China's peasantry by the Communists under the banner of their land reform." This is the first major textbook surveying the 20th-century history of East Asia in which I found Ladejinsky linked to the land reform in Taiwan.

Gibney's statement aroused my curiosity. In order to pin down Ladejinsky' role in Taiwan, I turned first to his own writings including the in-house memos to JCRR authorities and such public reports as in the US Department of Agriculture's official organ, *Foreign Agriculture* (quarterly). As shown in these documents, the JCRR
repeatedly called upon him for critical advice and other services. After the above-mentioned 1949 field trip to assess the result of the rent reduction program in Taiwan, for instance, he was invited by Premier Chen Cheng in 1951 to make another field trip in Taiwan, as part of the preparation for the Land-to-the-Tiller program.

The JCRR’s assignments even led him to China’s deep southwestern hinterlands. Barely three weeks after the September 1949 field trip in Taiwan, he was travelling in Szechwan and Kwangsi to assess the rent reduction program that involved a peasant population many times larger than Taiwan’s. That trip of October 13 - 20 was conducted at the critical moment of the civil war in China, when the Nationalists had lost their control of not only the rural areas in North China but also Nanking, Shanghai and many other cities along the coasts. In Peking, the Communists had just inaugurated their Central Government on October 1. Ladejinsky’s power of concentration was amazing, for in the midst of the catastrophic defeats, he continued to travel with the JCRR’s staff members in the agricultural regions deep in the Szechwan Basin and single-mindedly conducted interviews and held townhall meetings with tenant-peasants and landlords. This field trip more than any other ones underscored his unwavering commitment to the JCRR’s cause.

The value of his field reports. The eleven pieces of his writings on the land tenure conditions in Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, as listed in Table A, are typical from the pen of this superb reporter as well as analyst of the agrarian scene of 20th-century Asia. But, they represent merely a fraction of the considerable body of Ladejinsky’s written work. The respect he earned as the authority on rural conditions in Asia was partly for the voluminous outflow of his writings on the agrarian problems in various Asian countries in a span of almost four decades. From April 1937, when the first fruit of his research on Asia was published under the title of "Agriculture in Manchuria: Possibilities of Expansion" in the USDA journal, Foreign Agriculture, to April 1975--three months before his death, his last report to the World Bank, on
Punjab, was completed, he had produced during that span of thirty-eight years about one million words in writing, in the form of 140 rural survey, field-trip reports, agency memos and conference papers.

Besides its impressive quantity, Ladejinsky's writings often present two distinct features. The first is a sense of great urgency, immediacy and force, often underscored by "the unmistakable stamp of authenticity and realism", as pointed out by Louis Walinsky, his biographer and posthumous editor. This sense of authenticity and realism is based on the fact that he often reported on his direct, personal observations during his field trips, as in the cases of Taiwan and Szechwan: The first-hand information on the attitude of tenants and landlords towards the reform program, the face-to-face contacts with hundreds of peasants in each trip and the vivid quotations from their conversations on the absolutely desperate situation render his writing with an unmistakable force and direction.

The second feature is marked by his efforts for complete and exhaustive coverage of all aspects of a selected subject. He always tried to treat the subject of a paper in a full, round-out fashion. The great value lies in the details of his observation and analysis. For the important, lengthy Memo (15,000 words) on his 1951 field trip, "Observations on Rural Conditions in Taiwan", therefore, I found it necessary and desirable to travel to the Land Tenure Center Library at University of Wisconsin-Madison last summer, in order to obtain the photo-print of the full text on this Memo in the microfiche collection. This trip was necessary, because the more accessible posthumous edition of his selected works, *Agrarian Reforms as Unfinished Business: The Selected Papers of Wolf Ladejinsky*, contains only an abridged version of this Memo. By deleting entirely the detailed, critical and painful account of Taiwan's problems, which forms the most valuable part of this Memo, the abridged version succeeded to reduce this most comprehensive and most perceptive among all of Ladejinsky's writings on Taiwan into a life-less skeleton consisting of its opening
"Summary" and ending "Conclusion". I am not sure if this abridgement was the result of some political consideration among the World Bank authorities in 1976, when the representative of Nationalist China still sat on the Bank's board of directors.

Several of his writings on the rural scene in Taiwan and southwestern China, which bear such hallmarks of Ladejinsky's worked, have unquestionably enriched the existing literature on rural China. The importance of his writings on Chinese peasant life match that of John Lossing Buck's classic works on the 1920s and 30s, although the two giants on China's land problems were different in their approaches, disciplines and work styles. At a more practical level, Ladejinsky's field investigations also provided the model of direct and intensive observations, to be emulated by the next generation of agrarian reforms. Indeed, the JCRR staff were to carry out their own field trips during the Land-to-the-Tillers campaign and afterwards, in the "Ladejinsky style".

Ladejinsky's universalistic and programmatic approach. The list of his major writings on the land problems in Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, as you may find in Table A, do not necessarily carry the specific reference to Taiwan or any part of China in their titles. Indeed, a perspective of his relationship with the JCRR emerges, when we take up his life-long work on agrarian reforms in its entirety. In the last three articles as listed in Table A, for instance, the JCRR's accomplishments are discussed in the context of, and in deliberate contrast to, the frustration and inaction of their Indian counterpart. This approach in Ladejinsky's analysis and evaluation of the result of land reforms in Taiwan, Japan, India or other countries had its institutional and bureaucratic basis, especially in the light of Ladejinsky's lengthy career as a skillful, operational bureaucrat in the various disbursement agencies of American aid. As Richard Barrett has pointed out in his seminal article, "Autonomy and Diversity in the American State in Taiwan", the mid-century decades witnessed the trend that "increasingly, [American] aid was apportioned on a programmatic rather than a country basis. Agencies that
evaluated the aid programs were now apt to compare performances of similar aid projects or programs across countries, in order to establish their cost-effectiveness and the efficiency of the staff who administered them. " The land reforms in Taiwan and in Japan, in this programmatic or comparative perspective, were important "case studies" for Ladejinsky's operational purpose. The achievements in the two East Asian countries were used by him not only as the yardstick to measure those similar programs in South and Southeast Asia but also as the stick to nudge recalcitrant administrators of such programs.

This practical, operational approach was, nevertheless, bolstered by Ladejinsky's universalistic and, even moralistic world outlook. During his first field trip in Taiwan, the tenant-farmers and their children he encountered in group meetings as sponsored by the Rent Reduction program or during the casual talks at the roadside he did not see as primarily Taiwanese. He saw them as the same human beings as he had encountered earlier in Japan or as he was to encounter in his future trips to Szechwan or Punjab or Java. In his eyes, they were the human beings in desperate need of help to achieve a bit of economic dignity and security on their farm lot. It was this universalistic approach that underlaid his indignation against the undernourishment, disease and poverty that most of Taiwan's farmer suffered from. And, this sense of universalistic social justice led him to praise highly Governor Chen Cheng's resolute attack at the tenancy in Taiwan. In this report on the Rent Reduction Program of 1949, he made the following observations on what tenancy in Taiwan meant in terms of the farmers' economic well-being.

"Even a brief visit to a tenant's housestead throws much light on this point, and I have made many such visits in the course of my trip. What they have most are children; what they have least are things that spell material well-being."

This observation is immediately followed by the statement which bears the hallmark of his comparative approach:
"Of all the farmyards I have seen in the Far East, Southeast Asia, and in the Middle East, that of the average Taiwanese tenant is among the worst, both in appearance and in equipment. Tenant's huts, so-called barnyards, equipment, and livestock, as well as their health point to nothing but poverty."

Ladejinsky's view can be better appreciated in the perspective of his own life history. The ten years preceding the end of World War II, when he worked as research specialist at USDA's Foreign Agriculture Relations section, may be viewed as his preparatory period. In that period, his voluminous writings had built a solid reputation for him as a specialist of Asian agriculture. Beginning with late 1945, when General Douglas MacArthur called upon him to help plan the postwar land reform in Japan, this legendary Russian-American agrarian reformer spent the last thirty years of his life almost entirely in Asia, and mostly in rural Asia. According to his biographer, Louis Walinsky, "those thirty years was devoted to the case of agrarian reforms, on behalf of the hundreds of millions of people: Sub-marginal farmers, tenants and landless labourers. They had become his human and his professional concerns. Their cause he had made his own.

Ladejinsky's concerns with the welfare and economic dignity of the peasants in Taiwan and Elsewhere in Asia was to reach a scope beyond his official duties as an administrative bureaucrat of some reimbursement agency of American aid (including the World Bank) or an outside consultant of land redistribution programs. Inevitably, he stepped on the toes of many American aid officers, not to mention his penchant for dramatization in his writings as a publicist. By late 1954, when his responsibility for the work as an agricultural attache in Japan was returned to USDA from the State Department, the Secretary of Agriculture refused to re-employ him on the ground that he was a "national security risk" (for he was born and raised in Russia) and a "pro-Communist" (for his advocacy of land revolution). However, the outpouring of support for Ladejinsky from his former associates of MacArthur's Occupation, the Japanese government, including its Ministry of Agriculture officials, American farmers' association and the press forced Agricultural Secretary Benson to make an
apology and retraction. This unexpected notoriety was a blessing in disguise. The US national security-review procedures were subsequently revised. The nature of Ladejinsky's work in Asia became known to millions, in America and abroad.

By the year of 1964, when his article on "Agrarian reform in Asia" (item #9 in Table A) was published in the prestigious *Foreign Affairs* quarterly, Ladejinsky was unquestionably among the leading opinion-molders of American foreign policy towards Asia. In the same issue of *Foreign Affairs*, for instance, its contributors include a current National Security Advisor, MacGeorge Bundy, and two future National Security Advisors, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski. To many Asianists, Ladejinsky was certainly more relevant than Bundy, while most students of political science from Taiwan and other Asian countries were not yet aware of the importance of the other two names, perhaps with the exception of those few of us who were fortunate to have sat at Professor Kissinger's occasional colloquium at Harvard University's Center for International Studies.

It is against this background that his relationship with the JCRR may be fruitfully explored, perhaps in today's Panel discussion. During his field trips to Taiwan and southwestern China, in 1949 he was so much impressed by the JCRR's structure and function that he even advocated to use the JCRR as a model for US technical assistance program abroad. In a comparative perspective, the achievement of Taiwan's land reform program appeared to him even more significant than the successful land reform program in Japan. This appreciation is clearly implied in his articles written many years later (items #9, #10 and #11 in Table A). When he used the success cases of Japan and Taiwan to contrast the inaction or failure in India, almost all the substantive points were referred to Taiwan rather than Japan. After all, the reform in Taiwan was conducted not under the American military occupation. There was, unquestionably, the American aid in US dollars, which was funnelled through the JCRR operations, but the total amount of American aid spent on the land
reform programs was so small that it had little value other than symbolic. For the Rent Reduction program, carried out in 1949 (April through August) and covering more than 300,000 tenant housesteads, the financial assistance through the JCRR operation amounted to no more than US $30,000. Or, one dime per tenant housestead.

Ladejinsky had nothing but praise to JCRR in this regard. In the conclusion of this field report he said, "JCRR has demonstrated how much can be accomplished with a little money when it is spent for a good purpose and judiciously." In actuality, the financial assistance money went to foot the bill for printing registration forms and leaflets (for public reading) and for American advisors' travel expenses to rural areas.

A dynamic process of growth and interaction. The sketch of Wolf Ladejinsky's life and work, as presented above, is not simply to arouse the interest in some forgotten or neglected aspect of the mid-century land reform in Taiwan. The primary purpose of my presentation is to provide some basic factual information for discussion at this panel session, as time allows, on some aspects of the dynamic relationship of growth and interaction between the United States and Taiwan in a critical period of 20th-century Asian history. The rise of Taiwan among the NICs (Newly-industrialized countries) on the Asian-Pacific rim has attracted quite a number of studies of Taiwan's recent history, if only to test some of the popular theories and paradigms in the field of social sciences. In the recent decade, Taiwan's economic history in general and its land reform programs in particular provided major challenges to the Neo-Marxian "world-systems" theory or "dependency theory". The US-China Joint Commission for Rural Reconstruction and its role in Taiwan's land reform programs directly challenge the theory on the linkage of foreign penetration (US aid) on the one hand and economic stagnation or social inequality on the other. Richard Barrett and, in a sense, his intellectual "god father", Franz Schurmann, further explored the dynamism of the imperialist, or "core", or "metropolitan" side of the power equation, by pointing out the pluralistic and diversified power relationship with the American state. The study of
Ladejinsky's relationship with the JCRR may push further the exploration of the dimension of searching, adjustment and growth on both the American and the Taiwan sides.

Rather than a monolithic, hardened and omniscient superpower to dominate Taiwan's growth, the American side has gone through a complex process of change and adjustment, even in the aspect of perception and ideology. Take Ladejinsky's field observations on Taiwan's agrarian reforms for an example. His second field report, based on the 1951 trip, remarkably shed off much of the romantic and optimistic evaluation of the "success" of the Rent Reduction reform, as so obvious in the first field report, based on his 1949 trip. The rural conditions appeared to him worse than better in 1951. Most of the writings with high praise of the Rent Reduction program or theoretical exposition based on the inflated assessment of JCRR's role in land reforms in Taiwan indicate that their authors did not have access to the more substantial and more profound analyses contained in the 1951 field report. Some of the authors evidently did not bother even to actually read the earlier report on the 1949 field investigation.

Even more interesting a sign of growth is shown in Ladejinsky's increasing emphasis on the importance of political leadership and "political will". This is a clear and definite development in Ladejinsky as an intellectual and a policy thinker, from his earlier and simpler emphasis on economic equality and economic dignity among the rural people. This shift is also underscored by his emphasis on the role played by Chen Cheng in Taiwan's reform. In spite of the lengthy footnote on the "reformist" aspect of Chen Cheng, which Donald Gillin added at the last minute to his 1964 Journal of Asian Studies article (as a byproduct of his warlord studies), there is yet no serious work on Chen Cheng and Taiwan's land reform. In Ladejinsky's view, however, Chen played no less pivotal a role in Taiwan's reform as MacArthur played in Japan's reform. It could be even more edifying to study the rise or the metamorphosis of an
entire generation of middle-aged middle-ranked technocrats under the protective wing of Chen Cheng. This group could be as much fascinating as the intellectual-bureaucrat-reformers working in MacArthur's Occupation during the postwar years. The former's story could be more interesting, if only because they had to handle the American aid agencies and their backing in Washington, as an dominating, external force.
Ladejinsky’s major writings concerning the land tenure in China and Taiwan.

NOTE: The following eleven items were selected upon scanning the bulk of the 142 items as listed in the Chronological Bibliography of Wolf Ladejinsky, which is appended to his posthumous collection, Agrarian reforms as unfinished business: The selected papers of Wolf Ladejinsky (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1977). This World Bank sponsored publication, including 62 of his writings in abridged or full text, is accessible in most libraries. It is cited as AR, while those bearing two asterisks (**) are not included in AR but may be found in the microfiche collection, which covers 97 of his writings. (The list of the depository libraries holding the microfiche collection is among the appendix of AR.) Page numbers are cited for those journal articles or book chapters of which I have access to the original publication.


*2. "Land Commissions in Japan." (Memo to JCRR Commissioner, Raymond Moyer, as a supplement to item #1 above; presumably done in late September or early October, 1949). [AR, 109-113]

*3 "Land Reform in Formosa." in Foreign Agriculture (USDA) 14:6 (June, 1950), 131-135. [Reprinted in The Program of the Joint Commission of Rural Reconstruction in China, (Taipei: n.d.)]


*5. "Too Late to Save Asia?" in Saturday Review of Literature (July 22, 1950). [AR, 130-135]


*7. "Observations on Rural Conditions in Taiwan." (Memo on the April 27-May 7, 1951, field trip). The microfiche collection contains a photocopy of its full text, while its summary and conclusion may be found in AR, 142-147.

*8. "From a Landlord to a Land Reformer." (Text of a banquet speech in Taipei, after the 1951 field trip [see item 7 above]. AR, 148-151

*9. "Agrarian Reform in Asia." in Foreign Affairs 42:3 (April 1964)