Foreword

The bulk of this book is a translation of Xiangtu Zhongguo, a set of essays written by Fei Xiaotong shortly after World War II. In writings about Fei and his works, the book's title is usually rendered in English as "rural China," but this rendering is inexact. Xiang means "countryside" and tu means "earth"; but the combination, xiangtu, is a set phrase meaning "one's native soil or home village." By using xiangtu to modify Zhongguo (China), Fei is conveying a subtle meaning to his readers: that Chinese society has grown out of its ties to the land. Should any of his readers miss the subtlety, Fei clarifies the meaning of the title in the book's first sentence, "Chinese society is fundamentally rural." "From the soil" captures Fei's meaning in a way that "rural China" does not.

Although this book is virtually unknown in the West, it is a standard text in many Chinese universities and contains ideas that are useful for Western readers as well. In our introduction, we explain why this book remains as fresh and as intellectually gripping today as it was over forty years ago, when it was first written. In fact, it may be even better suited to today's climate of opinion than to the earlier one, because Fei addresses the structural foundations of social pluralism and cultural diversity. By describing the fundamental differences between Chinese and Western societies, Fei helps us to understand the distinctiveness of Chinese society and to look at Western modernity in a new way.

We decided to translate this book because we were engaged in a similar pursuit. We, too, were contrasting China and the West in order to understand the distinctiveness of Chinese society; and on first reading Fei's book (Hamilton in 1985 and Wang in 1986), we were struck by the parallels between what we were trying to do and what Fei had already done forty years earlier. Moreover, once we had studied the book, it became increasingly evident that our subsequent work would have to build on Fei's insights. For this

reason, we realized that we had to produce an English translation of the book and to explain how Fei's ideas open the way for understanding China and indeed other non-Western societies in new

Throughout the book, Fei is attempting to explain to his Chinese readers what the West is like, so that he can show how Chinese society differs from Western societies. In our translation, we find ourselves having to cross the cultural barrier one additional time. Here we have had to convey in English what the West is like from a Chinese point of view, and to show how this Chinese understanding of the West allows the unique qualities of Chinese society to become visible to the very Chinese who would otherwise take those qualities for granted. Multiple levels of discourse needed to be included simultaneously. Throughout our translation, we have tried to emphasize Fei's Chinese point of view and to clarify this point of view for an English-reading public. As Fei himself has said, however, every act of translation is necessarily a new interpretation. We only hope that the English readers of this book will bracket their own taken-for-granted world-their Westemnessand allow themselves not only to enter a different soc.ial world but also to understand that that social world functions as fully as the world they themselves live in.

Xiangtu Zhongguo has been reissued many times in Taiwan and Hong Kong. For our translation, we used two reissued copies of the original edition. One of the reissued editions was printed in Taiwan withol!t publishing information or date of publication. The other edition was published in Hong Kong with publishing information but no date of publication.² Both editions were identical; we subsequently checked this version against a more recent edition published in Hong Kong.³ With one exception, which we note in the text, this version is identical to the version we used in the translation.

For the epilogue, we also translated short passages from Fei's Xiangtu chongjian (Reconstructing rural China).⁴ In the past, this

^{1.} Xiangtu Zhongguo (Shanghai: Shanghai guanchashe, 1947).

^{2.} Xiangtu Zhongguo (Xianggang: Wenxue chubanshe, n.d.).

^{3.} Xiangtu Zhongguo (Xianggang: Sanlian shudian, 1986). 4. Xiangtu chongjian (Reconstructing rural China) (Shanghai: Shanghai guanchashe, 1948).

book has often been published in the same volume as *Xiangtu Zhongguo*, and both the Taiwan and Hong Kong volumes that we used to translate *Xiangtu Zhongguo* also contained the reissued 1948 edition of *Xiangtu chongjian*, which we used as the source of our translation.

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G. *C.H.* **W.Z.**

