SIGNIFICANTLY subtitled “The Adjustments That Take Place as an Agricultural Country is Industrialized,” this David A. Wells’ prize essay surveys an important phase of economic development. And a survey it is for the most part: A purposive historical survey of pertinent theories and substantive data on the course and consequences to agriculture of industrialization—defined broadly to include mechanization and other capital “widenings and deepenings” innovations in agriculture. But the author’s purpose is not to develop a theory of “agricultural industrialization,” in the sense of providing a basis for anticipating or inducing (or retarding) industrialization in a country like China.

Rather the essay deals primarily with the concomitants of economic development. An eclectic, and frequently discursive, review of theories and formal concepts supplemented by empirical evidence drawn largely from the United States serves as means for establishing: What will happen when * * *

Implicitly the author assumes that the impact of industrialization upon agriculture (broadly defined) in any of the “less advanced” countries will follow approximately the same pattern—in terms of concomitant structural changes and adjustment problems—as in other countries during their transition to an industrial economy. Thus he describes these major structural changes and indicates some of the conditions which might cause deviations from the historical pattern. Only in a part of the final chapter is the industrialization of China considered directly. Aside from the conclusion that “* * * stimulus for industrialization must be found in sources other than agriculture,” there is little indication as to what will start this industrialization.

What has this informative treatise to offer research workers in agricultural economics? Those familiar with Clark’s “Conditions of Economic Progress” or Schultz’s “Agriculture in an Unstable Economy” will find little that is new. Recent graduate students will feel at home among the familiar names, concepts, and conclusions. It offers a quick refresher on the general economics of agriculture but is not likely to stimulate interest in this phase of economic research. The postulates are too subtle; the conclusions too vague.

There are some notable exceptions. The “new, general, and dynamic” location theory may prove useful when studying resource adjustments in the South. Some may want to investigate the possibilities of adapting the “optimum population” concept to analyses of resource allocation, or to elaborate its implications to population policy. The discussion of “Trade Between Agricultural and Industrial Countries” lays a theoretical foundation for an inquiry into the long-run effects upon our own economy of ECA and point IV programs.

But perhaps the most stimulating part of the book is the section dealing with the impact of technology upon the welfare of farm people in general. In restating the historical issues of the controversy of “compensatory effects,” the author faces his readers with a fundamental question obscured for nearly a century by the postulates of neoclassical economic doctrine. Agricultural economists will find food for thought in reappraising, in light of present-day politico-economic realities, the divergent theories on the consequences of technological innovations to the welfare of farm people.

This book also provides the basis for an interesting study of research reporting. For example, what purpose is served by the elaboration of formal concepts—location theory, representative firm, optimum population—when they are not used directly in the analysis? Here too are some pointed illustrations of the consequences of “bias” in economic research. Conclusions regarding the impact of industrialization on China’s economy stem largely from the implicit premise that history will repeat itself. But no explanation is offered as to why the pattern necessarily should be that displayed by western countries.

Having read that line in the introduction beginning: “This study was undertaken because of its high pertinence in China * * *,” one finds it exceedingly difficult not to appraise each section as if it were intended as part of an analysis of the Chinese economy. Frequently lost to mind are those key words of the subtitle “* * * that take place as an agricultural country is industrialized.”

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