

EJIDOS IN MEXICO: ACTUAL SITUATION AND PROBLEMS

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OF THE VARIOUS social reforms undertaken after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, agrarian reform can be said to be the most important, in the sense that it has had great influence on the socioeconomic structure of the country. This agrarian reform has consisted of three major elements: dissolution of the *hacienda* ("large estates"), protection and fosterage of the small landholder, and formation of the *ejido*. The last is a unique landholding institution introduced by the Mexican agrarian reform, which constitutes a unit of rural society. Although it coexists side by side with private land in rural areas of present day Mexico, the *ejido* is based on a principle of land tenure totally different from private property.

When one discusses Mexican agriculture in general, it is common to divide it into two sectors: *ejido* and private. According to the data of the Agricultural-and-Ejido Census of 1960, 43.3 per cent of the total arable land in the country belonged to the *ejido* sector, while its share in the agricultural product was 40.8 per cent. The number of *ejidatarios* ("the peasants who have the right to utilize *ejido* land") amounted to 1.5 million in the same year, that is, about 25 per cent of the agricultural labor force [4]. Thus, more than half a century having passed since the beginning of the agrarian reform, the *ejido* seems to have settled as an institution in rural Mexico.

In this article we try to make clear the actual situation and problems of *ejidos* based on three cases studied by the writer between 1967 and 1971. However, before we deal with the actual cases, it is necessary to discuss briefly the characteristics of the *ejido* as a landholding institution, the historical process of the agrarian reform and formation of the *ejidos*, and the general evaluation of the *ejidos*. Section I of this paper deals with these topics. In Section II we will observe the three cases of *ejido*, one in a backward agricultural area and two in advanced agricultural areas. A summary of the problems of the *ejidos*, based on the three case studies is presented in Section III.

I

The fundamental idea of the Mexican agrarian reform was to give to the peasant who lacked land an area adequate to earn a living. The *ejido* institution was designed as one of the means to fulfill this purpose. We can define *ejido* as a group of peasants who are given by the government the usufruct right to a certain area

of land through the procedure of *restitución* ("restitution") or *dotación* ("donation").¹ This group of peasants is, in most cases, composed of the inhabitants of an already existing village, but in other cases, it may be a new population center formed by settlers wishing to apply for an *ejido*. It is decided by law that the *ejido* land, different from private property, is not to be sold, transferred, nor to be the object of lease, mortgage, or taxation. A member of an *ejido*, that is, one who has the right to usufruct the *ejido* land, is called an *ejidatario*, whose right is transferred from a parent to one of his or her children.

Arable *ejido* land is either to be cultivated collectively by all *ejidatarios*, or to be divided into plots for each *ejidatario* to cultivate individually, according to the decision of the *ejidatarios'* assembly. In most cases, however, the arable land is divided and cultivated individually. Pasture and forest lands are not to be divided, but always utilized in common. These are the characteristics of the *ejido* as a landholding institution. However, the actual *ejidos* were not formed in a single period with a single idea. Therefore, when we discuss the actual situation historical background must be taken into account.

Mexican agrarian reform, which began in the 1910s, has not been a consistent process guided by one set of principles, rather it has been carried out in a zigzag course influenced by the ups and downs of various political forces. Therefore, the government's attitude toward the *ejido* has varied considerably in different periods. Although it is impossible here to review these developments in detail, it may be helpful to put the problem in order by defining roughly the following two periods.

(1) Initiative period of agrarian reform (1915-34): In this period, the view seems to have been dominant that the *ejido* was an institution to supplement private landholding. That is, though it was desirable to distribute land to all the peasants who lacked it, it was unpractical actually to do so, consequently the *ejido* should be formed as a substitute and land be given to groups of peasants which meet certain requirements. Management of the *ejido* should be in the hands of autonomous organizations formed by the *ejidatarios* through democratic procedure, under government supervision and guidance. Seen as a type of land tenure, the *ejido* had the advantage that once it was formed, its land was not to be sold or transferred, thus the land would never be returned to private ownership again. That means, the *ejido* land was not to be encroached upon by the *latifundio* ("large landholding"). To summarize, in this period, the government's policy of protecting the lower class peasants by guaranteeing them free use of the minimum land resources necessary for living resulted in the formation of the *ejido*.

¹ Inhabitants of a village which once had its own communal land and was deprived of it by an *hacienda*, can require "restitution" of the land by the government by presenting documentary evidence of the occupancy. The land thus restituted will become the land of an *ejido*. When inhabitants of a village in general, or a group of peasants, ask for the *ejido* land, national or public land surrounding that village or the population center of the peasants is "donated," or private land which exceeds certain limits is taken over to be "donated" as the land of the *ejido*.

(2) Cárdenas period (1935-40): President Lázaro Cárdenas applied the agrarian reform to the large-scale plantations producing commercial crops, which had been exempt from the reform before that time. He took over the land of these plantations and introduced *ejidos* there with the definite idea that the *ejido*, rather than private holding, should be the center of agricultural production of the country. Further, Cárdenas positively promoted the *ejido* by founding the National Ejido Credit Bank to finance exclusively *ejido* peasants, and by introducing a form of collective farming and cooperative management in the *ejido* through the *sociedad*,² an agricultural cooperative organization in each newly established *ejido*.

As we have seen, *ejidos* of present day Mexico can be classified into two types, both based on the same legal basis, but differing in their origin and function. One is the *ejido* created in the initiative period of the agrarian reform, which has the traditional corporate community in its background. The other is the new type of *ejido* founded during the Cárdenas regime. For the sake of convenience, we will call them the first type and the second type, respectively. The *ejidos* of the first type form a majority in the whole country, and especially in the central and southern part of Mexico nearly all the *ejidos* belong to this type. *Ejidos* of the second type are found in the relatively less populated areas of the country, mainly in the north, where sedentary villages of indigenous population have been rare and the tradition of the corporate community is lacking.

We must be careful about the relation between the *ejido* of the first type and the traditional corporate community. As the traditional corporate community of Mexico, we can refer first to the autonomous community of the preconquest indigenous population in central Mexico called *calpulli*, and next to the *comunidad indígena* ("indigenous community") reorganized by the Spaniards on the basis of the *calpulli* during the colonial period. The *ejido* is similar to both these forms of traditional community in that it is characterized by communal holding of land, but individual utilization. However, if we take up the actual *ejido* as a local community, what kind of continuity can be found between the *ejido* and the traditional corporate community?

The *comunidad indígena* changed greatly during the more than three hundred years since its formation in colonial times, and especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the *hacienda* expanded so much that it absorbed the land of the *comunidad* and most of the *comunidades* virtually ceased to exist. At the time of the agrarian reform, *comunidades indígenas* which owned communal land were exceptional, remaining only in mountainous and remote places

² *Sociedad*, accurately *sociedad local de crédito ejidal* ("local *ejido* credit society"), is an organization of *ejido* peasants, the primary role of which is to receive loans from the National Ejido Credit Bank. However, the *sociedad* which was organized in newly established *ejidos* during the Cárdenas regime is an agricultural cooperative organization, the function of which is not only to receive loans but also to do the agricultural activities collectively, including collective farming. An *ejido* in which that kind of *sociedad* exists is commonly called a "collective *ejido*." We must be careful not to confuse *ejido* with *sociedad*, for the former is a landholding institution and the latter an organization for agricultural activities.

where the *hacienda's* influence never reached. In the early agrarian reform creation of *ejido* through *restitución*, that is, restitution to the former owner of land which had been expropriated by the *hacienda*, was given first priority. However, most of the *ejido* land was given to the group of peasants through the second procedure, *dotación*. As a consequence, for most of the peasants who constituted an *ejido* local community, *ejido* land meant a donation by the government through agrarian reform. In this sense, it is not proper to exaggerate the continuity between the traditional corporate community and the *ejido*. Nor is it correct to think of the *ejido* as if it were a reversion to the ancient *calpulli*. The relation between the *ejido* and the traditional corporate community is more or less abstract and ideal. Nevertheless, this relation has been intentionally emphasized by the advocates of agrarian reform in order to awaken the self-consciousness of the peasant masses, the majority of which are *indios*, and to encourage them to insist on the legitimacy of their land occupancy.³

Next, let us turn our attention to the areas where the *ejidos* of the second type are found. These are, as stated before, newly developed agricultural areas without a background of traditional corporate community, and have come to be cultivated with the development of irrigation. However, the agricultural laborers of these areas have come from villages in the areas with traditional background.

In the post-Cárdenas period, after 1940, the government's agricultural policy has changed its course, and the principal object has shifted from the redistribution of land and the creation of *ejido*, that is, carrying through the agrarian reform, to the increase of agricultural production. This coincides with the fact that since 1940 Mexican national policy has changed its course and social reform has been substituted by economic development within capitalist regime, as the principal object of policy. In this period, the *ejido* and the small peasant have ceased to be primary concerns of the government, and the collective farming introduced by Cárdenas into the *ejido* has declined. On the other hand, large-scale public investment has been concentrated in certain areas, increasing the extension of irrigated land and agricultural production in the country as a whole. As a result, a dual structure of agriculture has become conspicuous. That is, the majority of the beneficiaries of the agrarian reform continue to grow the same subsistence crops which they grew before, while the production of commercial crops and cattle-raising are left to other agriculturalists who have more resources and capacity. This is, according to Jacques Chonchol, a dual structure of "an agriculture for the poor" and "an agriculture of the rich." In his words, "production for subsistence or of low-value crops for the urban populations remains in the hands of the peasants benefited by agrarian reform, and on the other, cash-crop agriculture or much more profitable farm units remain in the hands of middle-sized or large farmers" [1, p. 171].

This dual structure of agriculture is now most remarkably seen in the form of

³ In the background of this way of thinking we can find the idea of *indigenismo*, that the autonomy of the Indian culture, different from the modern occidental civilization, must be evaluated positively and be utilized in the present age.

regional differences. The central and southern parts of Mexico are generally characterized by high population pressure on land, small-scale landholding and low productivity in agriculture. Here mainly subsistence crops are cultivated, and when commercial crops are produced they are sold only in regional markets, except in the suburbs of metropolitan areas. The unemployed or underemployed population of the rural villages of these areas are obliged to go to large cities or to the advanced agricultural areas to work. Population concentration in the metropolitan areas, especially in Mexico City, is remarkable, and has become the primary source of social problems in the metropolis. It is also to be noted that agricultural laborers without land have been increasing in recent years, both in absolute numbers and in the percentage they occupy in the population engaged in agriculture.

On the other hand, in the advanced agricultural areas generally located in the northern or northwestern parts of Mexico, large-scale agricultural production units exist and a new phenomenon of the concentration of private land is going on.⁴ *Ejid*os of the second type are found exclusively in these areas. With regard to the government's technical aid and financial support for agriculture, these areas are given priority over others.

What, then, is the general evaluation of the *ejido* today? Originally the aim of the agrarian reform, especially that of the foundation of the *ejido* was double-faced. It was expected that the *ejido*, as a social system, would promote social justice by liberating the small peasants from the exploitation which they had been suffering under the semi-feudal land system. At the same time it was expected that the *ejido*, as a form of agricultural production, would produce the volume of necessities required to satisfy the demands of the nation [3, p. 73].

Generally speaking, the *ejido* is highly evaluated for its uniqueness as a social system, but is not favorably regarded from an economic point of view as a form of agricultural production. As a form of land tenure, *ejido* land is communally controlled according to a principle different from private land ownership, and matters of the local community must be handled lawfully by the *ejido*'s own elected officials. Therefore, the *ejido* sector possesses the base for organized political and economic action. However, in reality, the majority of *ejidatarios* are functional *minifundistas* ("petty landholders"), and can hardly be distinguished from the subfamily farm⁵ owners of the private sector. Moreover, *ejidatarios* are now increasingly dependent upon the state, and are tied to it through various government agencies such as the Agrarian Department, Ejido Credit Bank, and other institutions. Therefore, the *ejido* sector shows less initiative and dynamism than the private sector in agriculture [5, pp. 258-60, 266].

⁴ By the agrarian reform certain limits were set to the area of private landholding; for instance, one hundred hectares of irrigated land. However, in the advanced agricultural areas there are large estates, the area of which broadly exceeds these limits. These are called *neo-latifundios*. This is possible by dividing the property nominally by the names of family members and relatives.

⁵ "Farm of a size inadequate to give full, year round employment at present levels of technology and resources to 2 people," as defined by CIDA (Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development) [2, p. 83].

With this background in mind, let us try to understand the actual situation and problems of the *ejidos* of the first type in backward agricultural areas and of those of the second type in advanced agricultural areas, based on the field research of the writer.

II

First of all, it is necessary to explain the reason why the writer chose the *ejidos* of these three areas as the object of case study. Among the backward agricultural areas of Mexico, the valley of Oaxaca was chosen for the following reason. While most rural areas of central Mexico, especially those surrounding Mexico City, have been changing considerably under the influence of urbanization and industrialization, the valley of Oaxaca can be said to be a genuine agricultural area without other industries, but is not located in a remote place difficult to reach. Thus it is very likely to find there a rural village typical of the backward agricultural areas.

Next, the Irrigation District of the Yaqui River in the state of Sonora is an area where the most advanced enterprising agriculture has developed, and the collective farming in the *ejido* introduced by Cárdenas to this area has undergone considerable change. So the *ejidos* of this area should offer us a good example for studying how collective farming has changed along with capitalistic development in agriculture. Finally, the Irrigation District of the Fuerte River in the state of Sinaloa is a newly developed agricultural area, like the Yaqui District, to which government has given priority in public investment for irrigation and other facilities. But in this area, compared to Yaqui, enterprising agriculture is less developed, and division of the peasants into dualistic classes is not yet so remarkable. *Ejidos* in this area were created in the 1930s without any background of traditional corporate community, and consequently can be classified as those of the second type, though collective farming in the *sociedad* based on the *ejido* has never been introduced here. In this sense, we take up an *ejido* of this area as another example, considerably different from that of Yaqui, in the advanced agricultural areas. In these two cases *sociedades* based on the *ejido* actually have certain functions as agricultural cooperative organizations.

A. *An Ejido in a Backward Agricultural Area*

Let us begin with the case of Santiago Etna, an *ejido* located in the valley of Oaxaca, as an example of an *ejido* of the first type in the backward agricultural areas. The state of Oaxaca is situated on the southern Pacific coast and is where the indigenous population is the most numerous of the whole country. The topography is generally mountainous, but the central valley of Oaxaca, where the state capital Oaxaca city is situated, is blessed with fertile soil and temperate climate, and has been settled from early times as an agricultural center. Consequently, there exists the tradition of corporate community. Agriculture can be said to be the only industry, and small-scale farming with old-fashioned methods

is common both in the *ejido* and private sectors. The average output per person employed in agriculture is the second lowest in the whole country (Table I).

TABLE I
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION PER PERSON OCCUPIED IN AGRICULTURE, 1960:
COMPARISON BY STATES

High Productive States	Production per Head in Pesos	Low Productive States	Production per Head in Pesos
1. Baja California	33,800	a. Tlaxcala	1,940
2. Sonora	19,600	b. Oaxaca	1,970
3. D.F. (Federal District)	18,850	c. Puebla	2,320
4. Tamaulipas	12,450	d. Querétaro	2,380
5. Baja California Sur	12,100	e. Zacatecas	2,440
6. Sinaloa	8,300	f. México	2,480
7. Coahuila	8,050	g. San Luís Potosí	2,510
8. Chihuahua	7,800	h. Hidalgo	2,520
9. Nayarit	7,750	i. Guanajuato	2,980
National average	4,800		

Source: [6, p. 54].

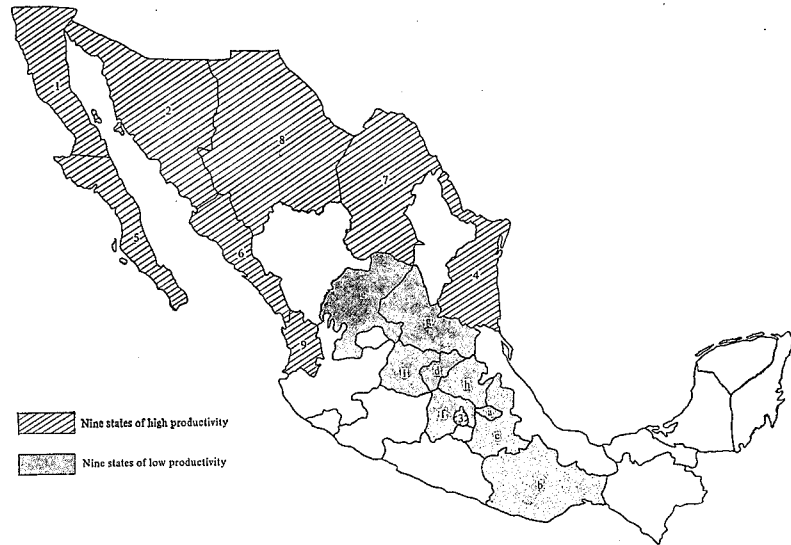
Note: 12.5 pesos=US\$ 1.00.

Santiago Etila is a village situated a little off of the Mexico-Oaxaca highway, and is fourteen kilometers northwest of Oaxaca city. In the village of Santiago Etila is an *ejido* of the same name. This village has existed from colonial times, and has had its own communal land. However, this land had been encroached upon little by little by *haciendas* to the extent that, just before the agrarian reform only residential area remained to the village, and the villagers worked in nearby *haciendas* as *peones*.⁶ In November 1916 the villagers applied for *dotación* of *ejido* land, and in March 1918, 400 hectares of land were given, of which 206 hectares were divided and allotted to the *ejidatarios* as arable land, and the rest has been used in common as pasture land.

At the time of the foundation of the *ejido*, ninety-two persons acquired the right as *ejidatarios* and the allotment of arable land was decided in proportion to the number of the family members. The legal heir to the allotted land of the *ejido* is a single person (firstly life-partner, next sons in order of birth), however, actually it was the custom to subdivide the allotted land among all the sons. In other words, a father subdivided his land among his sons when they were grown up, keeping a portion for himself, though the legal heir to his allotted land was only the eldest son. Thus subdivision of the allotted land went on to the extreme, but the recent trend is that only a single son inherits the allotted land without further subdividing it. In the village, those who were thus given a portion of land by subdivision are equally called *ejidatarios*, though they are not officially titled as such. Including these, there were 141 *ejidatarios* in Santiago Etila at the time of this investigation in 1967, and the average area of their allotted land was 1.46

⁶ Agricultural laborers of *hacienda* who are obliged to offer certain services for the land-owner without remuneration (singular: *peón*).

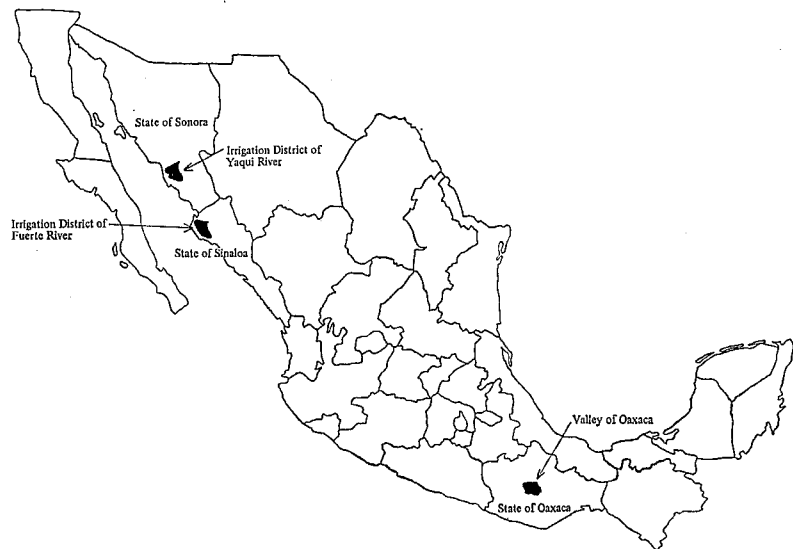
Fig. 1. Agricultural Productivity in Mexico by States



Source: Prepared from Table I.

Note: Numbers and letters correspond to those in Table I.

Fig. 2. Regions of the Field Research



hectares. Those sons of *ejidatarios* who had no share in the inheritance, or subdivision, of the allotted land had to work as *jornaleros* ("day laborers") with other *ejidatarios* or private landholders, or to find other employment outside the village. Some *ejidatarios* owned private land as well, but it averaged no more than 1.5–2.0

hectares. Of the villagers of Santiago Etna, two were small landholders in a genuine sense, small farmers who owned about twenty hectares of land each. In this village, small landholders also use the pasture land of the *ejido* in common with the *ejidatarios*.

Maize and alfalfa are the two main agricultural products here. Maize is not only for consumption but also for sale. Alfalfa is entirely consumed in the village to feed cattle, and an additional quantity is bought from neighboring villages. The most common agricultural implement is the *yunta* ("a plough pulled by a pair of oxen"); no machinery is used except tractors for ploughing. Almost all the peasants raise milk cows, and milk and dairy products are the most important sources of cash income. At one time, sixty of the *ejidatarios* organized a *sociedad*, making themselves *socios* ("members of the *sociedad*"), in order to obtain funds from the Ejido Credit Bank, but now this *sociedad* exists only nominally and does not function at all.

As we have seen above, in the Ejido Santiago Etna, each *ejidatario* works on his small plot of land to support himself, and it can be said that he is little different in essence from a *minifundista*. In the village of Santiago Etna, though the *ejido* occupies the central part, there are many non-*ejidatario* residents such as small landholders, agricultural laborers and nonagriculturalists. Storekeepers and a considerable number of employees who commute to Oaxaca city make up the nonagriculturalists. Therefore, two self-government bodies coexist here overlapping each other; one of the *ejido* and the other of the village, the latter being more inclusive than the former. Seen as a community, it may be safe to say that the village, including the *ejido*, constitutes a definite unit. The *fiesta* ("festival") for the patron saint of the village plays an important function to hold the unity of the community which is made up of diverse elements, *ejidatarios*, agricultural laborers, small landholders and nonagriculturalists.

B. Two Ejidos in Advanced Agricultural Areas

As examples of the *ejidos* in the advanced agricultural areas, we have a case in the Irrigation District of the Yaqui River in the southern part of the state of Sonora, and another in the Irrigation District of the Fuerte River in the northern part of the state of Sinaloa. Both are located in the northwestern part of the country, and belong to the second type of *ejido*.

The present Irrigation District of the Yaqui River used to be the area of activity of the deer hunting Yaqui Indians until the nineteenth century. It was not until the land had been irrigated in the present century that settled farming began to develop here. Consequently, the villages in this region have short histories and almost all the inhabitants come from other regions. At present the total area of irrigated land amounts to 220,000 hectares, and cotton, wheat, and maize are the three main products. The *ejido* was introduced to this region in 1937, and at the same time the *sociedad*, acting collectively in various activities of agricultural production (called collective *sociedad* hereafter), was organized in each *ejido*. From the 1940s to the 1950s, however, collective farming gave way to individual farming in the majority of the *sociedades*. This is a phenomenon

observed not only in Yaqui District, but also in other regions as well, though to different degrees.

In 1968, when the writer did field research there, out of forty-nine *sociedades* in Yaqui District which were furnished funds from the Ejido Bank, only three were collective *sociedades* and two were mixed *sociedades*.⁷ All the rest were *sociedades* of individual farming. The reason why the attempt at collective farming failed in most cases can be explained as follows: able leadership was lacking among the *ejidatarios*; there were strong complaints about the pay, that it was not in accordance with one's ability nor the amount of work done; and there was a common desire among the *ejidatarios* to be independent small farmers who could cultivate their own land at their own discretion. Furthermore, the fact that no government after Cárdenas, namely after 1940, took positive action to support and promote collective farming was one of the most important factors to lead to its collapse. In this period, as stated before, commercial agriculture on a capitalistic basis developed, and the dual structure and regional differences in agriculture became marked.

The area under cultivation per *ejidatario* in Yaqui District was 8.3 hectares in 1937, but with the diffusion of irrigation in latter years, it increased to 15.7 hectares in 1967. Naturally, there are some whose allotted land is over 20 hectares. In this case, those *ejidatarios* who are deficient in administrative or management ability tend to lend their allotted land to other *ejidatarios* or private farmers and receive rent from them, working themselves as day laborers at the same time, although this is an illegal act. It is even carried to the point when an *ejidatario* works as a day laborer on his own allotted land which has been rented to another person. On the other hand, able *ejidatarios* multiply the area of his allotted land by renting semi-permanently the land of other *ejidatarios*, and produce crops on a commercial basis, employing a great number of day laborers. Here is the phenomenon of the transformation of the *ejidatarios* into two extremes, farm manager and day laborer. This is true of the *sociedades*, in which the form of farming has been transformed into individual activity.

What is the situation in the *sociedad* which still maintains collective farming? Let us observe the case of the Sociedad Quechhueca Colectiva. The village Quechhueca is situated at about the center of the irrigation district, and twenty-four kilometers south of Ciudad Obregón, central city of this region. This village is built around two *ejidos*, namely Ejido Quechhueca and Ejido El Aguila, and in each *ejido* there are two *sociedades*. In the 1930s, before the agrarian reform in this region, there were only fifteen or so peasant houses in Quechhueca, and the peasants worked as *peones* in the nearby estate. In 1933, twenty peasants gathered together to apply for an *ejido*. In October 1937 land was actually ceded to them and the *ejido* started with 183 *ejidatarios*. The total area of the land donated was 5,152 hectares (of which 2,208 hectares were irrigated), and the

⁷ A *sociedad* of the intermediate type in which the form of collective farming is partly transformed into individual activities. For instance, in some cases part of the agricultural activities are carried out collectively and others individually. In other cases some crops are cultivated collectively and other crops individually.

area per head was 28 hectares (12 hectares of irrigated land). Later all the land of the *ejido* was irrigated. On establishment of the *ejido*, a collective *sociedad* was organized under the leadership of the regional branch of the National Ejido Credit Bank, but in 1948 the *ejido* (consequently the *sociedad* too) was divided into two, Quechehuca and El Aguila. The former maintained collective farming with 103 *ejidatarios* and the latter changed to individual farming with 80 *ejidatarios*. In 1952 the Sociedad Quechehuca in the Ejido Quechehuca was subdivided into the Sociedad Quechehuca Colectiva (with forty-three *socios*, of whom three fell off later) and Sociedad Quechehuca Número Uno (with sixty *socios*). Only the former maintains collective farming to this day. On the subdivision of the *ejido* or *sociedad*, the land was divided in proportion to the number of *ejidatarios* or *socios*.

In Sociedad Quechehuca Colectiva, forty *socios* are engaged fully in collective farming on 1,200 hectares of land, and earnings are equally divided among themselves. All agricultural work is mechanized except for weeding and a part of the harvesting, and the *sociedad* owns all the agricultural machinery. The *sociedad* always employs day laborers, and the number reaches as many as five hundred in the cotton picking season when manpower is most needed. The majority of the pickers are seasonally employed workers who come to work here from backward agricultural areas, especially from the states in central Mexico. Among them are some called *golondrinos* ("migratory birds") who migrate through the advanced agricultural areas in search of cotton picking work, and others who have settled here with their families.

The right of the *ejidatario* is legally inherited by one person, firstly life-partner, next sons in the order of birth, and is never inherited by more than two persons. Consequently, there is little possibility for sons other than the first or second to be *ejidatario* (and *socio* of the *sociedad*). Those sons of an *ejidatario* (*socio*) who have no share in the inheritance generally work as agricultural laborers and are paid daily wages by the *sociedad*. The majority of the forty *socios* have been in that position since the establishment of the *sociedad* in 1937. This means a high average age of the *socios*, and actually fifteen *socios* are not engaged in the agricultural work because of old age, illness or being women, while their sons work in their places.

It is a characteristic of this *sociedad* that the *socios* are strongly united with good comradeship under a competent leader. But the greatest problem here is the lack of a good successor to the leader. As the *socios* of the first generation grow older, differences in opinion about the collective farming arise between them and the younger generation. Furthermore, the difference between *socios* and non-*socios* has become a great problem. In this *sociedad*, being a *socio* means having a right to an annual share of the profit, and consequently there is an economic and social difference between *socios* and non-*socios*. Setting aside the first generation who have been *socios* since the establishment of the *ejido*, the difference among the sons of *socios* who become *socios* and others who become agricultural laborers is a serious one. It can be said that this will be a factor leading collective farming itself to a collapse. Observing this, we can easily under-

stand how difficult it is to maintain collective farming, surrounded by other *sociedades*, most of which have changed to individual farming.

The Irrigation District of the Fuerte River is a new agricultural region which covers an area of 228,500 hectares. Within twenty-kilometer-radius of the central city Los Mochis, mainly sugar cane is cultivated. This zone is called *zona de abastecimiento* ("supply zone") where the cultivation of sugar cane is compulsory. In the outer area the main commercial crops are cotton and wheat. Besides these crops, maize, rice, beans, fruits, etc. are cultivated throughout the region. *Sociedades* based on the *ejido*, which are to be furnished funds from the Ejido Bank, were organized in 1935 and took the form of individual farming from the beginning. Apart from these, *sociedades* which took the form of collective farming were organized among the *cañeros* ("cane producers") in 1939, but continued only three years before breaking up in 1941. At present the *cañeros* are furnished funds from the government through the intermediary of a sugar company in Los Mochis.

The village Mochis is situated seven kilometers northwest of Los Mochis. This village has Ejido Mochis as its nucleus. As this *ejido* is located within the *zona de abastecimiento*, it includes groups of *cañeros* who cultivate sugar cane, and at the same time there is also a *sociedad* which receives funds from the Ejido Bank to cultivate crops other than sugar cane. The Ejido Mochis was established in May 1933, and is the oldest *ejido* in the Fuerte District. The number of *ejidatarios* at present is 256, and the area under cultivation is 2,565 hectares, all of which is irrigated and is equally parcelled out to all *ejidatarios* in lots of 10 hectares. Of the total land under cultivation, a contiguous area of 1,000 hectares is dedicated to the cultivation of sugar cane.

In 1917 the application for an *ejido* was made, but it took a long time for the formalities to be completed because of political struggles and the government's delay in carrying out the agrarian reform. It was not until in 1933 that the *ejido* was authorized. Before the reform the land and water rights of this district belonged to an American sugar company. From 1932 to 1934 armed conflict occurred between the peasants who desired the agrarian reform and the sugar company which wanted to check it. The conflict came to an end with the intervention of the federal government, as the land of the company was taken over by the government and the factory purchased by a Mexican company. This is the Los Mochis Sugar Company which is now in existence. The number of *ejidatarios* at the time of the establishment of the *ejido* in 1933 was 185, and the area of land allotted per head was ten hectares, five hectares of irrigated land, and five hectares of "pasture land for summer" which also was irrigated later.

In 1935 a *sociedad* to be furnished funds from the Ejido Bank was organized. Another *sociedad* which adopted the form of collective farming was organized among eighty *cañeros* in 1939, but broke up in 1941. The reason for its failure was said to be the lack of administrative ability of the leaders and their dishonest acts and corruption. In 1937-38 an *ampliación* ("amplification")⁸ of the land

⁸ After an *ejido* has been founded by the procedure of *restitución* or *dotación*, as the population of the community and the number of persons qualified for *ejidatario* increases that *ejido* community can ask for the *ampliación* of the *ejido* land.

of the *ejido* was carried out and the number of *ejidatarios* increased. Only five of the present *ejidatarios* reach back to the time of establishment of the *ejido*; the others are of the second generation or are new *ejidatarios* after the *ampliación* of the *ejido*.

In the Ejido Mochis there exists one *sociedad* at present which is furnished funds from the Ejido Bank. One hundred eighty-eight *ejidatarios* are registered as *socios*, of whom 122 actually function as such. They cultivate mainly cotton, safflower, kidney beans and rice as commercial crops, and maize for their own consumption. They are completely free to decide what kind of crops they cultivate on their allotted land, and the cultivation is carried out individually. The functions of the *sociedad* are to receive loans from the bank collectively, and to undertake jointly such activities as purchasing of seeds and fertilizers, and marketing of the crops. On selling the crops, the *sociedad* can freely choose the buyer, however, the Ejido Bank intervenes in the dealings. That is to say, the buyer draws a check in favor of each *socio* on the Ejido Bank instead of paying him personally in cash. On cashing the check, the bank pays to the *socio* the difference after deducting his loan and interest.

In the Ejido Mochis, 130 *ejidatarios* are cultivating sugar cane as *cañeros* on one thousand hectares of land. Some appropriate all their allotted land of ten hectares to the cultivation of sugar cane, and others apportion only five hectares to sugar cane and cultivate other crops on the other five hectares, receiving loans from the bank. The *cañeros* are divided into ten groups, and each group makes a contract with the company to receive a loan. Each group owns the machinery necessary for production, and all the agricultural work is done collectively within the group. The profits are divided in proportion to the area of land apportioned to the cultivation of sugar cane. At harvest time the group employs a great number of day laborers.

In this *ejido* too, renting of allotted land is common. A considerable number of *ejidatarios* let their allotted land for rent, while they themselves are engaged not in agriculture but in other occupations, for instance, as salaried men who commute to Los Mochis. Indeed, there were only 185 persons, when the population census was taken on the community level in 1970, who answered their occupation as *ejidatarios*. This number is considerably less than the number of *ejidatarios* in the official record, 256. The difference indicates the number of *ejidatarios* who actually engaged in occupations other than agriculture. Among them are *ejidatarios* who do not even live in the village of Mochis any more.

When we consider the above-mentioned *ejidos* in advanced agricultural areas as communities, we can understand that in both cases, Quechhueca in the Irrigation District of the Yaqui River and Mochis in the Irrigation District of the Fuerte River, the village is composed with the *ejido* as the nucleus around which the community is constituted. In the prior example of Oaxaca in a backward agricultural area, the *ejido* was introduced into the already existing village. On the contrary, in the case of the *ejidos* of the second type, it may be said that a new community is formed on the basis of the *ejido*. This is clearly shown in the *fiestas*, the important events at which the unity of the community displays itself.

In the village of Santiago Etla in Oaxaca like any other traditional village in Latin America, the *fiesta* for the patron saint of the village is the most important one, while in Quechhueca or Mochis the anniversary of the founding of the *ejido* is the most important *fiesta*.

III

Now let us summarize the problems of the *ejidos*, based on the three cases described. First of all, in the case of Ejido Santiago Etla in the valley of Oaxaca, each *ejidatario* independently cultivates his small allotment of land. They are, in substance, not very much different from *minifundistas*, as stated in Section I. Then what is the *raison d'être* of the *ejido* for an *ejidatario* here? Once he is given the right to cultivate a part of the *ejido* land, the government guarantees that this land will never be transferred to others. However small the land may be, an *ejidatario* with his allotted land to cultivate can be called a "propertied man" in the rural village, and as such he would become a supporter of the present political order. Thus, the *ejido* constitutes a stabilizing factor in rural village.

Generally speaking, *ejidos* of the first type respond to a certain extent to the objective of the policy in the initiative period of the agrarian reform: to liberate the lower-class peasants from exploitation under the semi-feudal land system, to provide them with the minimum necessary means of living, and to stabilize the people's livelihood in rural areas. Further, the government has succeeded in incorporating the peasant mass into the federal administrative system through organization of the *ejido*. However, the emergence of a great number of agricultural laborers without land, who have been pushed out from the *ejido* sector, gives rise to a new problem.

Next, the government's financing to the *ejido* through the *sociedad* system has hardly been successful in backward agricultural areas, for most *ejidatarios* who have received loans spend them immediately for consumption and are unable to pay them back. As the land of the *ejido* cannot be subject to mortgage, the Ejido Bank has no security for its loans and there is no way left but to stop financing from the next year when it is not paid back. As a consequence, we can find many *sociedades* which are existing only nominally and are not functioning at all. In these cases *ejidatarios* who need money are obliged to rely on local usurers.

In the case of the Irrigation District of the Yaqui River in the state of Sonora, as enterprising agriculture developed in this region, division of the peasants into dualistic classes has taken place within the *ejido* sector. Among *ejidatarios*, there are those who make themselves virtually farm managers and others who become agricultural laborers, letting their own allotted land to rent. This phenomenon shows, more than anything else, that the *ejido* as a social system has become only nominal here. The attempt at collective farming introduced by Cárdenas has failed in most cases. This failure may be explained variously, but it can finally be attributed to the "incompatibility between a collective form of organization of production and the capitalist regime in the country" [5, p. 255]. In the Sociedad Quechhueca Colectiva, one of the few *sociedades* which still maintain collective

farming, besides the problem of the lack of a successor to the leader, differences between *socios* and non-*socios* have come to be a great problem.

In the Ejido Mochis in the Irrigation District of the Fuerte River in the Sinaloa State, a considerable number of *ejidarios* let their allotted land to rent and engage in other occupations than agriculture, though remaining legally as *ejidatarios*. This also leads to only a nominal existence of the *ejido*. Concerning those *ejidatarios* who are affiliated with the *sociedad* and are engaged in agricultural production, or those who are producing sugar cane in groups, making a contract with the sugar company, activities of agricultural production seem to be carried out satisfactorily. However, looking at these *ejidatarios*, the government's leadership and intervention in their agricultural activities, not only financing, is so strong that it is no exaggeration to say that they are agricultural laborers employed by the government or agriculturalists who have made a contract with the government, in accordance with the national policy of increasing agricultural production.

Actual conditions of the *ejidos* that we have seen in the three cases studied seem to reflect the government agrarian policies of recent years. The first case shows the result of a policy, or lack of policy. Having introduced the *ejido* as a landholding system in the agrarian reform, the government had no definite vision of what kind of management of agriculture is most desirable, and so the *ejidos* were left behind as an object of minor interest in agricultural policy thereafter. The second and third cases illustrate the effects of the shift in emphasis in the governments' agricultural policy since 1940, when it has given priority to certain areas in public investment so as to increase agricultural production. The former case shows that, while large-scale private farms are developing, the *ejido* is being transformed from the original concept, not only in form but also in substance, and is actually in the process of breaking down. The latter case shows that the *ejido* itself is incorporated into the government's policy of increasing agricultural production, especially of sugar cane, and *ejidatarios* are utilized for this purpose.

Now we can say that the actual situation and problems of the *ejidos* we have summarized are not inconsistent in basic points with the general evaluation of *ejidos* stated in Section I. Here we would like to add one point; the general evaluation is more true of the *ejidos* of the first type which comprise a majority in the country, while *ejidos* of the second type, especially in the case of Yaqui District, have been transformed from the originally intended social system.

Finally, what can we expect for the future of the *ejido*? According to our observations the *ejido* has been established as an institution only nominally and is not very much different from the *minifundio* ("petty landholding") in the private sector (in the backward agricultural area). Other *ejidos* are in the process of breaking down, with peasants in the *ejido* sector being divided into classes (in the advanced agricultural areas). Hence, only a pessimistic prospect can be seen for the future. Then, is it possible to say that the *ejido*'s role in history, as means of giving land to landless peasants, is already over, and that the *ejido* will be replaced by the private farm, especially the large-scale farm in the advanced agricultural areas, as a producer of high-yielding commercial crops? Is it also possible to say that the attempt at collective farming in the *sociedad* based on

the *ejido* is no more than an experiment, and that it can hardly survive in a capitalist economic regime?

Before we draw conclusions about these questions, more studies need to be done. Especially, the actual situation and problems of the private sector which shares Mexico's agricultural sector with the *ejido* sector must be studied. Needless to say, the government's agricultural policy hereafter, in particular policies toward the *ejido*, will play an important role.

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