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The making of an agricultural classic: farmers of forty centuries or permanent agriculture in China, Korea and Japan, 1911-2011

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ABSTRACT

Few agriculture books achieve the status of 'classic'. F. H. King's book *Farmers of Forty Centuries or Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan* was privately published in Wisconsin, USA, in 1911. The book had an inauspicious start, and the longevity and acclaim that this book has since achieved must have been, then, barely conceivable. The author was dead, the book was incomplete, and there was no commercial publisher. Yet through a combination of perhaps luck and circumstance the book was 'resurrected' in 1927 by a London publisher, Jonathan Cape, who then kept it in print for more than two decades. The London issue of King's book was favourably cited in the 1930s and 1940s by leading agriculture and organic agriculture writers including: Lord Northbourne, Eve Balfour, Viscount Lymington, Albert and Louise Howard in Britain; Ehrenfried Pfeiffer in Switzerland; Jerome Rodale in the USA; and Stanton Hicks in Australia. These endorsements served to entrench King's book as a 'classic'. Jerome Rodale reintroduced the book to a US audience with an edition published by his Organic Gardening Press, c.1949. King's book arose out of his discontent with the views promulgated by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), he differentiated the Asian agriculture he encountered as 'permanent agriculture', he provided a detailed account of the ancient régime organic agriculture of China, Korea and Japan, he called for a "world movement" for agricultural reform, and his book was taken as a validation of the principles of organic agriculture. At least twenty six impressions of *Farmers of Forty Centuries* have been published in the past century, ten of these appeared during the first nine decades, while 16 have appeared in the past decade.

KEYWORDS

Organic Agriculture; Organic Farming; Biodynamic Agriculture; Franklin Hiram King; Cyril Hopkins; Jonathan Cape; London.

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