

Preface

This book is about village governance in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China. It draws on the historical archives of Huailu county, Hebei province in North China. Compared to many other county archives in northern, southeastern, and southwestern China where most collections of the Republican period were limited to the late 1930s and 1940s, as I realized during my travels in three consecutive summers from 1994 to 1996, the Huailu archives are probably the best collection on land taxation and village administration that have consistent coverage of the late Qing and Republican periods. Of particular interest to me were case records that document disputes between villagers over local affairs, such as community service, tax payment, village government, and education during the late Qing and Republican years. These files permit in this book an up-close look at the everyday experience of the villagers in running their communities and dealing with the government. Instead of the familiar image of Chinese peasants engaged in popular protest, collective violence, and mass mobilization, what emerges from the materials is a picture of villagers cooperating for the good of the whole community while conflicting with each other over their respective rights and obligations.

Equally remarkable was the nonviolent, cooperative, and conciliatory relationship between the villagers and the government. The archives show persistent efforts by rural leaders to bargain with bureaucrats through collective petitions and deliberative organs at different levels in the early twentieth century, acts that repeatedly forced the government to make concessions. These legitimate *and* effective actions once again contrasted sharply with armed resistance against taxation found in many parts of rural China that often ended in a crackdown by government. Although collective violence is part and parcel of rural politics during the time of disorder and upheaval, this study calls for attention to the consensual dimensions of intra- and inter-village politics, which in my opinion are essential for understanding *everyday* village governance under normal circumstances and are as im-

portant as the contentious areas for a balanced grasp of the peasant society and village-state relations.

The main body of this book is divided into two parts. The five chapters in the first part explore the operational realities of endogenous institutions pertaining to community service and land taxation. The focus of this part is on the hows and whys of the persistence of cooperative practices in the peasant communities and their implications for understanding the peasant, the peasant community, and rural governance. Chapter 2 surveys the ecological and socioeconomic settings in which the cooperative arrangements came into being. Central to my analysis is a demonstration of south-central Hebei, where Huailu county is located, as a core zone of the North China "macroregion." Chapter 3 discusses the emergence and actual operation of the cooperative practices in a comparative perspective, and underscores the importance of peasant values, in particular reciprocity and survival ethics, that bolstered those practices. To understand peasant behavior and explain the durability of the communal institutions, Chapter 4 scrutinizes disputes over the rotating service of villagers as tax agents and local administrations, focusing on the changing motives and strategies of ordinary villagers and local notables in different circumstances. Chapters 5 and 6 examine various practices in the collection of land taxes and the taxation of land deeds, respectively, and explicate their significance for identifying the traditional pattern of village governance.

The second part of this book centers on changes in the village society caused by the implementation of nationwide administrative systems and modernizing measures after 1900. My purpose is to assess the effects of "state-making" on local communities. Chapter 7 examines disputes over the newly created village government offices in a context in which official systems and state discourse interacted with local institutions to shape the new process of village politics. Chapter 8 moves to the creation and maintenance of primary schools, another project imposed on the villagers by the state. My emphasis is on how the villagers' cooperative tradition continued in the new undertakings of the community, and how local elites combined their traditional privileges with new resources obtained from the state to aggrandize their symbolic and material interests. Chapter 9 discusses the responses of rural elites to the increased tax burden, focusing on their petitions and negotiations with the government in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 10 turns to the reorganization of village administration after 1930 under the Guomindang state. The spotlight is on discursive and institutional changes during the new wave of state-making as well as continuity of local arrangements in the everyday practice of village governance. To evaluate the actual effects of administrative institutionalization in different periods of the early twentieth century, Chapter 11 focuses on the investiga-

tion of untaxed illegal landholdings in the county, especially the campaigns in the early 1930s, which showed both the breakthroughs and limits of government modernization during the Guomindang era. Readers who have no interest in the empirical details in these chapters can refer to Chapter 1 for an outline of major issues addressed in this study and my preliminary findings, and then go to Chapter 12 for a summary of my arguments and further deliberations on those findings.

For my intellectual journey in the United States that led to this book, I owe my greatest debt to Philip Huang, my principal adviser at UCLA and still a warm, untiring mentor. His astute comments, wise counsel, and unfailing support were crucial to the completion of my doctoral dissertation, on which this book is based. I offer my sincere thanks to Kathryn Bernhardt, who greatly helped improve the dissertation with her careful reading and insightful comments. My writing of this book also benefited from several other scholars during my graduate years. David Sabean was helpful in introducing me to studies of peasant communities in European countries. His own studies of German villages inspired my analysis of Chinese peasants in this book. My study of European economic history with Robert Brenner and Japanese history with Fred Notehelfer opened my eyes to new ways of looking at subjects ranging from the agrarian roots of capitalism to modern state-making. Yunxiang Yan offered unwavering support when I was in need. His own ethnographic studies of Chinese villages are a constant source of inspiration to my research.

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H.L.
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