Introduction

The essays in this volume, written and published over a period of more than thirty years, were selected for this book to provide an anthropological overview of major dimensions of Chinese culture and society. They reflect some of my research interests and research procedures, and their overriding theme is the relationship between late imperial and contemporary culture and society in China. By "late imperial," sometimes referred to as "late traditional," I mean the period of the Qing dynasty, usually dated from 1644 to 1911. Of course, culture continually changes in all human societies, and Chinese society during late imperial times was no exception. Yet major and unprecedented dislocations were set in motion starting with the mid-nineteenth-century assault on China by the Western powers, later joined by Japan. So by the time of the dynasty's fall important sectors of society had already begun to experience a process of change in response to these new outside forces, one that was to intensify throughout the twentieth century. Such changes continued through the 1912–49 era of the Republic of China. The establishment of the People's Republic in 1949 marked the expansion of major cultural change to the entire population, encompassing both the vast rural sectors and inland urban centers where, prior to Communist rule, dominant cultural patterns in areas such as family life and religion were still largely of late imperial derivation. With rapid change impacting all of China's population continuing to the present, it should be kept in mind that late imperial culture remains one of the constitutive major elements in the process of change itself.

For a recent example of the important role of late imperial culture in modern Chinese culture I refer to an encounter I experienced in Decem-

ber 2001, during a month-long trip to China and Taiwan. I was traveling in districts of Guangdong and Fujian provinces where, among the Han Chinese, the dominant local language is Hakka, one of several non-Mandarin but nevertheless Chinese languages spoken in the southeastern part of the country, unlike in most other parts of China, where as far as the Han Chinese are concerned the prevalent language is Mandarin.[1] In Fujian I visited a "common ancestral hall" (*gongci*) in Shibi Township, Ninghua County. Built in 1995, this large structure is situated in Shibi because this is the area proclaimed by countless Hakka genealogies of different surnames to be a key stopping point in the movement of their ancestors from north China to Fujian and then to Guangdong.[2] The temple contains exactly 152 ancestral tablets, each dedicated to the ancestors of a particular surname, with the entire assemblage thus held to represent the collective ancestry of the Hakka people as a whole. Likewise, on each side of the broad avenue leading to the main temple hall there are seventy-six stelae, on each of which is given the history of the origin of one surname. Framing the entrance to this avenue from the main road is an archway (*pailou*), across the top of which is engraved an inscription contributed by Yang Chengwu. Born in the area, he was a nationally prominent retired general in the People's Liberation Army before his death in 2004. With his calligraphy providing endorsement from the highest reaches of state power, other inscriptions are attributed to major Hong Kong and overseas Chinese donors. Twice a year major rituals of ancestor worship are carried out, attracting large groups from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese communities. Overall, Shibi Township, and Ninghua County as a whole, still give the appearance of relative poverty and underdevelopment, at least in comparison with nearby southeastern coastal regions centering on Guangzhou, Zhangzhou, Xiamen, and Quanzhou. As a center for the glorification of Hakka ethnic identity, and an attractor of Hakka attention and wealth, especially from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas communities, Ninghua County's Shibi is in competition with the Hakka Museum and cultural center in the Changting county seat, next door, and with major institutions in Meixian, Guangdong. This latter area is better off economically than either Ninghua or Changting, but nevertheless it is far behind the regions centering on Guangzhou and Xiamen.[3]

Interpretation of the above ethnographic tidbit might involve issues of recent and current anthropological concern, such as ethnicity, globalization, and regional analysis, including a kind of reverse cultural flow such

that "backward" or peripheral regions are feeding through their continuing mastery of "traditional" religious and other procedures into the growing demand for "tradition" precisely in the economically core areas. Shibi's Hakka "common ancestral hall" does not represent a straightforward continuation of late imperial ancestor worship, which had its own history of change, although with the revival of popular religion in many areas of China during recent decades some of the reconstructed ancestral halls do bear a much closer physical and functional resemblance to their late imperial predecessors. The Shibi temple is an ancestral hall built on the basis of constructed identities showing connections with late imperial culture but now mobilized to serve modern concerns. Although "Hakka" as a recognized social and linguistic category can certainly be traced back to early Qing if not before then, during the twentieth century there has been an emergence of the Hakka as a modern ethnic group within the larger category of Han Chinese ethnicity, giving rise to global Hakka associations and many other organizations focusing on and thereby elaborating common Hakka identity (Constable 1996; Lozada 2001). The Shibi temple plays a part in the development of this identity by providing it with an ancestry that can be worshiped. Late imperial ancestor worship did provide a context for the assertion of common ancestry on the basis of common surname, as in some of the larger urban ancestral halls, but by bringing together in one temple 152 surnames found among Hakka speakers, the Shibi temple transforms the worship of different ancestral lines into worship of common ethnic ancestry. In its use and transformation of late imperial cultural elements the Shibi temple exemplifies appeal to traditional verities in the context of modern projects of cultural construction, such projects being responses to and engagements with contemporary political, economic, and other forces. Similar developments in Japan have been labeled "traditionalism" by anthropologists doing research in that county (as in Bestor 1989), and the term can also be usefully employed in a Chinese context, precisely because such uses of "tradition" do not represent the only or, indeed, the major impact of late imperial culture on modern China.[4] This traditionalism, as officially approved or at least officially tolerated during recent years, coexists, as we shall see, with an earlier but still modern heritage of antitraditionalism involving equally modern notions of "backwardness" and "feudalism," with these latter two terms used to characterize various beliefs and practices derivative of late imperial culture, including expressions of traditionalism such as the Hakka temple.

An especially important dimension of the late imperial legacy was the cultural and economic sophistication of ordinary people in China. Extending well beyond the scholarly elite, popular standards valorizing managerial and technical competence in agricultural and nonagricultural livelihoods; in controlling family, community, and the larger network of social ties; and in understanding, confronting, and manipulating money, credit, contracts, and other instruments of economic life were well developed in the highly commodified environment of late imperial times. These standards, and the skills they supported, had major implications for the directions taken by social and economic change among Chinese during the modern era. China's rapid economic development in recent decades forms the acknowledged or unacknowledged backdrop for much of recent China anthropology, be it written by non-Chinese or Chinese anthropologists. Yet in much of this literature it is hardly noted that China has had a commodified economy for centuries, so that the contribution of China's own history to its present-day economic culture often goes unrecognized. Connected to the theme of cultural sophistication is that of groups and institutions as products of social management in interaction with basic orienting ideologies. Chinese organizations did not maintain themselves simply through momentum supplied by tradition, but rather they depended on leaders, managers, and social activists for their continuity. On the one hand, entities such as the family, the lineage, the religious association, or the territorial community are organized on the basis of commonly accepted social, religious, or economic beliefs and standards. On the other, management and leadership often determine the shape such groups take, the extent of their prosperity and solidarity, and whether they survive at all. Their innovations may also add to the fund of beliefs and standards upon which their group and others draw.

The areas of concern I have highlighted here reflect my impressions of the people I have lived and worked with during extended stints of fieldwork in culturally Chinese environments over a period beginning in 1964 and extending through 1990. My earliest fieldwork was in southern Taiwan in 1964–65 and followed by more sojourns there. My later fieldwork was in mainland China villages, first in Hebei in 1986–87, then near Shanghai in 1990, and, finally, in Sichuan, also during 1990.[5] All of these field settings were to varying degrees rural, thus making the interpenetration of late imperial culture with subsequent cultural trends perhaps more apparent than would be the case if I had worked in newer urban districts in Taiwan or China. The Taiwan fieldwork was undertaken when anthropologists from the United States were not permitted to carry out such research on the China mainland, but the locations of my subse-

quent field studies reflected deliberate choices on my part. Although the political separation of Taiwan from mainland China is now very real, albeit hotly contested by the mainland government, the island certainly was part of China during the Qing, until it was taken over by Japan in 1895. Before then, Taiwan's overwhelmingly Han Chinese population was formed largely by immigration from the nearby mainland provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. Thus the Taiwan Han Chinese were located in the southeastern portion of the empire, both in terms of the island's geographical position and with respect to the region of the Chinese mainland from which their ancestors came. Hebei, of course, is in north China, Shanghai is near the eastern coast, and Sichuan is on the western side of the area where the Han Chinese population is distributed within the larger empire. Thus my fieldwork represents my interest in working at sites in the northern, southern, eastern, and western areas of the old empire. Each locale was a small rural community, and certainly not taken to be representative of a much larger region. Rather, my intent was to inquire through fieldwork about commonalities among the Han Chinese as a whole. In all four communities local society was still shaped in important ways by late imperial culture, although in the context of obvious and rapid cultural change. My idea was that features shared by all four fieldwork communities could legitimately be considered generally characteristic of the Han Chinese. As it turns out, my fieldwork did show me a common Han Chinese culture. Features of religion, kinship, the family, economic relations and management, and numerous other aspects of life combined to form a shared cultural pattern.

My concern with late imperial culture developed early during my embrace of both anthropology and the study of China. This was during the late 1950s, when anthropological interest in China surged even as fieldwork in the People's Republic of China was banned to U.S. and other social scientists. At that time China anthropology was still largely engaged with issues of research and interpretation derived from fieldwork and analysis carried out before World War II or during that conflict in areas of China not under Japanese occupation. Given the fact that until the Communist victory the vast bulk of the rural Chinese continued to live in a cultural setting overwhelmingly of late imperial vintage, it is not surprising that late imperial cultural patterns were the focus of major anthropological questions concerning matters such as community, class, family, and kinship. Such issues continued to shape and inspire China anthropological research in the decades following World War II and the

Communist victory, when anthropological research was of necessity confined to Taiwan and Hong Kong and would not resume in mainland China until the end of the 1970s. Prior to this closure, work on the China mainland by anthropologists such as Fei Xiaotong (Fei Hsiao-tung), Morton Fried, Francis L. K. Hsu, Lin Yuehua, Cornelius Osgood, G. William Skinner, and Martin Yang all strongly engaged late imperial culture, as did the somewhat later documentary-based writings of Maurice Freedman, even though these scholars were also interested in contemporary culture change.[6] Nevertheless, the availability of ethnographic data and analyses concerned with late imperial culture was one encouragement for further research along the same lines. Another was that with research restricted to Hong Kong and Taiwan, and with the direction of social and cultural change there presumably vastly different from that in mainland China under Communist rule, the extent to which research on modern developments in these two small areas could contribute to larger understandings of China was at that time felt by many in the field of Chinese studies, if not anthropology, to be quite limited.

By focusing on "traditional" aspects of life, those engaged in research on Taiwan and Hong Kong felt that their work would be of immediate relevance to the larger field of sinology, for the field reports of these anthropologists marked contributions in areas such as popular religion, family and kinship, and community organization that enhanced understanding of the late imperial culture of China as a whole.[7] In the 1960s and 1970s these perspectives on late imperial culture were based upon research in Hong Kong and Taiwan settings where that culture still significantly shaped local life. During my first fieldwork in southern Taiwan, for example, I was exposed to religious, family, and economic arrangements matching what I had earlier seen described in works pertaining to late imperial times, including Arthur Smith's *Village Life in China*. So when I was asked to write the introduction to a reprint of that book (included in this volume as chapter 1), my own recently completed fieldwork in Taiwan informed what I had to say. Although I had yet to do fieldwork on the mainland, the fact that Smith's work dealt with rural north China meant that in using my own fieldwork findings from Taiwan to illuminate his text I was able to focus my remarks on what I could take to be Han Chinese rather than simply local cultural characteristics. In other words, what applied equally to south Taiwan in the 1960s and to Shandong Province in north China during late Qing must represent powerfully rooted components of late imperial Han Chinese culture (disre-

garding broader commonalities reflecting East Asian patterns or even the human condition as such). Obviously, that village in south Taiwan was then representative of traditional culture only in certain respects. Yet in numerous others the village also bore the marks of the island's turbulent history, with enhanced political control and efforts at modernization beginning before the 1895 onset of Japanese occupation, and accelerating under Japanese colonial control and during the following period of Chinese Nationalist rule that started in 1945.

Such changes in Taiwan, like those in Hong Kong under the very different circumstances of British colonial rule, provided extremely valuable data for anthropologists and other social scientists interested in culture change, modernization, or colonialism, but research along such lines always had to contend with the prevalent climate of Chinese studies, in which findings pertaining to contemporary developments in either territory could readily be characterized as "different" from what was going on in mainland China, and therefore somehow of diminished significance in the China research field. Anthropologists wanted to deal with China, but in the massive shadow of the unapproachable People's Republic—where it seemed that rapid social change was moving in directions quite different from those in the areas where anthropologists were doing their fieldwork—the only larger "China" that could be described was that of the late imperial society and its twentieth-century derivatives in parts of the old empire not under Communist control.

Resumption of fieldwork in mainland China by the late 1970s coincided with the emergence of new anthropological interests and theoretical orientations, and under the influence of both developments the earlier fascination with "traditional" or late imperial culture among China anthropologists—especially those based outside China—has largely given way to concern with contemporary society and the modern forces shaping it. Interestingly, with the revival of anthropology in China itself, that country's anthropologists have focused much attention on late imperial culture in their writings on family, lineage, popular religion, and other areas of inquiry that often follow from themes first engaged outside mainland China during the Taiwan–Hong Kong era of anthropological research.[8] But these Chinese scholars certainly are also attentive to developments during the Communist era, and in this latter respect they are closely aligned in their interests with the dominant international trends in China anthropology.[9] In recent years, linked to the accelerating pace of economic development and dislocation in China has been simi-

larly rapid social and cultural change, such that keeping up with the latter is a challenge for anthropological researchers. Despite these developments, however, late imperial culture remains a subject of professional concern to China anthropologists, in terms of research, teaching and expected expertise. Even more important is the uncontested understanding in China anthropology that the legacy of late imperial China continues as a major influence on Chinese culture today.

The three chapters in Section One of this book deal with Han Chinese late imperial culture during Qing, with how that culture continued to influence China after the collapse of the empire and its institutions, and with some of the forces changing this culture. Chapter 1, which in its original version was my introduction to Smith's book, here introduces late imperial culture and society, focusing on life in local communities and on the institutional arrangements and cultural forces linking local communities to each other and to the Qing imperial state. Chapters 2 and 3 were originally written following my fieldwork at the three sites in north, east, and west China. Chapter 2 continues the introduction to late imperial culture, with an increased emphasis on how the shared features of that culture incorporated a cosmic vision such that people were conscious of their place within their communities and larger local settings as well as within a Chinese imperial domain, which itself was seen as an integral component of a total cosmos also including heaven and an underworld. This was a form of identification with nation and empire rejected, ironically, by the new elite nationalism that emerged in reaction to China's defeats and humiliations by European imperialism and mercantilism beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, with the United States and Japan later joining in. The nationalistic rejection of tradition by the modern elite and some of its consequences for Chinese culture and society are taken up in the second part of chapter 2 and in chapter 3. One important component of elite antitraditionalism was a view of late imperial culture as "backward" in many respects, and responsible for China's weakness in the face of imperialistic aggression. Identification of this theme in elite antitraditionalism is important for many reasons, but in this book I stress how this view has tended to strongly deny the very cultural and economic sophistication of ordinary people that was part of the late imperial legacy. Antitraditionalism's notions of backwardness and superstition were epitomized in its vision of the "peasant," yet another modern invention, as discussed in chapter 3. With antitraditionalism providing an important perspective on late imperial culture, displays of traditionalism have been

suppressed until recently, and elements of this culture that might more positively accord with ideas of progress or other notions of modernity have not been given the emphasis they deserve. Thus management, commodification, and contract remain key areas of consideration in the essays that follow.

Section Two of this book consists entirely of chapter 4, which deals with family organization and its changes under Communist rule in the Hebei village where I did fieldwork in 1986–87. This chapter provides an overview of Han Chinese family organization and development, and its frame of reference is based squarely on my analysis of family life in the southern Taiwan village where I had done fieldwork more than twenty years earlier (Cohen 1976). Although this framework was originally developed for interpreting these Taiwan data, the ability to apply it without much difficulty to families in north China was for me a very strong indication of the commonalities of Han Chinese culture. Chapter 4 goes beyond that framework, however, in considering in some detail changes in family organization since the onset of Communist rule. In examining these changes there was another lesson, that change involved a complex interplay between old and new elements, with the corporate family or *jia*, for example, continuing to be of significance throughout the Communist era—despite going through important changes—with even family division contracts of a kind directly derivative of late imperial times continuing to be written. Continuities such as those pertaining to the *jia* were to be seen within a context of major changes in marriage, residence, and other areas of family life such that the entire process involved ongoing interaction between old and new elements rather than the former simply giving way to the latter.

Section Three of this book (chapters 5 to 7) turns to lineage, a subject attracting less attention nowadays than previously, but of traditional interest to anthropologists, including those focusing on China. Lineage and other kinship matters need consideration in any work seeking to look at Chinese culture and society in the round, for far too much of Chinese social life clusters around kinship issues for these to be ignored or treated lightly. The patrilineal lineage or "descent group" was a basic formation in Chinese society, and in recent decades it has reemerged as such in rural China. In China people may feel they are related through shared patrilineal descent from an ancestor, but this does not necessarily mean that they are members of the same lineage. Likewise they may identify themselves as members of a particular local community, such as a village or village

neighborhood, but this identification may not involve kinship elements. It is only when community elements and patrilineal kinship elements coincide that a lineage can be identified. Another manifestation of links based upon acceptance of common ancestry could be the ancestral halls found in many larger towns, briefly noted earlier; often these halls were collectively built and subsidized by rural lineages in the surrounding area and focused on an ancestor they believed they shared. Insofar as a "group" can be identified this would comprise those periodically worshiping or meeting together in the hall. Such a group might be better identified as a "congregation" rather than a lineage or any other residentially based community, it being understood that from within lineages or other kinds of local communities congregations could also form during religious undertakings. There were also religious associations of many kinds, some with their own temples, and each of these also comprised a congregation: it was quite common for a person to belong to various congregations at the same time, some involving the kinship religion of ancestor worship and others focusing on the gods of Chinese popular religion. All such congregations were groupings that could be involved in social, economic, and political activities, as well as in religious matters. Another factor to consider is corporate ownership. Many but certainly not all congregations in late imperial times were anchored to corporations owning land, other income-producing assets, or at least a temple serving as the congregation's religious focus. A congregation supported by corporate wealth was better able to arrange elaborate religious rituals and feasting for its membership and play a larger role in the affairs of the local community. So just as a lineage was only one kind of local community, so did it produce members for only one kind of congregation, and it might or might not have corporate holdings. But because a lineage was a community, lineage membership was a condition of daily life in religious, economic, and social terms. Also, because a lineage was a residential community it could not be as readily dissolved during the height of the Maoist suppression of "feudal superstition" as could a religious congregation which was not at the same time a local community. Since the post-Maoist liberalization of the Communist state's religious policy, many lineages remaining in place during the Maoist era have resumed religious activities.

The essays in Section Three depart from the earlier model of lineage organization in southeastern China developed in the first instance by Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966), whose powerful impact on the field of

Chinese anthropology, even to the present, can hardly be overestimated. Thus interaction with the Freedman model, positive or negative, remains characteristic of much of China anthropology, at least insofar as matters connected with late imperial culture and society are concerned. Although the first essay expands upon that older model with reference to the interconnections between lineage and family organization, the following essays on lineage organization in north and east China represent original modes of analysis I have developed in ethnographic confrontation with lineage arrangements vastly different from those made familiar by Freedman and others. Thus this section provides an analysis of lineage as a component of Chinese culture rather than as a characteristic of southeastern Chinese social organization. While these essays show regional variation in lineage arrangements, at the same time they confirm how in each region there was considerable variation in lineage size, wealth, and organization. Finally, by showing how the lineage was widely distributed, they confirm again its general importance in Han Chinese culture.

In chapter 5 the large, well-endowed lineages of southeastern China are viewed from the vantage point of the corporate aspects of the family. This chapter was originally written before I had an opportunity to do fieldwork in mainland China. It represents an effort to make the best of anthropology's confinement to Taiwan and to Hong Kong, where lineages of the kind introduced to a large anthropological audience by Freedman, writing on this subject mainly on the basis of documentary research, were still found largely intact in Hong Kong's rural New Territories. This chapter explores the implications for the corporate family of membership in lineages so well endowed with land and other holdings that they in effect subvert the corporate solidarity of member families. Drawing upon my own Taiwan data to fill out the family's characteristics as a corporate group, I relied on Freedman and on the work done by anthropologists in the New Territories to bring lineage corporate features into the discussion.

Chapters 6 and 7 were written on the basis of fieldwork in two mainland China villages. Although my main focus at both sites was contemporary society, the research behind these chapters can be characterized as "historical anthropology," for when I was in Hebei Province in 1986–87 and then in Shanghai County in 1990, it had already been many years since lineages in the Hebei village ceased to function as congregations. In the village near Shanghai, where lineages seemed to have never developed socially significant corporate or congregational characteristics, they had

lost many of the important community attributes that had previously identified them as lineages. In these villages, most lineage activities ended by 1955, when the still new Communist government fully collectivized agriculture. However, given the dominance in China anthropology of the southeastern model of lineage organization, I wanted to take advantage of my location in these field settings to explore what had been the characteristics of lineages there and how these might relate to the findings in Taiwan and Hong Kong that had earlier loomed so large in anthropological writings. As with the family, I wanted to take advantage of my research in diverse settings to develop a comparative understanding of lineage arrangements and patrilineality as fundamental orientations in Han Chinese culture. Thus largely on the basis of informant interviews, supplemented by whatever relevant written sources I could find, I was able to develop the analyses of north China lineage organization found in chapter 6. Among the major challenges to received wisdom posed by the north China lineages was their ability to display considerable congregational solidarity even in the absence of significant corporate holdings, thus inviting reconsideration of the southeastern lineage "model" with respect to its emphasis on the importance of corporate property. Chapter 7's consideration of lineage arrangements in eastern China shows how groups without corporate holdings or much organizational solidarity and even lacking congregations could nevertheless constitute themselves to the extent that recognized leadership positions were defined within the lineage context; here, the lineage is of greatest significance as a level of community organization. In an addendum to this chapter, I briefly consider lineage arrangements in a Sichuanese community, and I am especially concerned with how lineages were organized in the context of the dispersed residential patterns characteristic of this area in west China.

Section Four (chapters 8–9) brings together two essays that resulted from my most recent project, the study of the historical anthropology of Minong (as Meinong Township was known during Qing and until its name was changed in 1920), in southern Taiwan. Within this particular community setting the first essay deals with commodification as a fundamental attribute of late imperial economic culture and, among many other things, addresses the role contracts played in this commodified environment. The second focuses on contracts and other transaction documents in order to explicate their vital role not only in society and economy, but also in the very process of social reproduction. None of the twenty contracts and other documents presented and analyzed in this sec-

ond essay duplicates the far smaller number used in the first. These two essays represent an exploration of anthropologically fresh terrain, concerning the conduct of practical affairs and the competence of ordinary people in late imperial China. They link with the earlier essays and powerfully confirm that China's modernity has deep roots in its own traditions.

The two chapters in Section Four represent the practice of historical anthropology to a far greater extent than do the preceding essays on lineage. The historical dimension of the lineage essays is based primarily on oral reports by informants, with relatively little backup from local documentary sources. Yet historical anthropology as illustrated by the essays in Section Four is not in the first instance the product of archival research, for it requires long-term fieldwork at a particular site for which ample documentation is also available. Indeed, it is the anthropologist doing this fieldwork who must obtain the documents from a wide variety of sources, usually through borrowing, copying, and returning papers, the most important of which are the various documents of their ancestors still held onto by local families. It thus requires considerable fieldwork simply to create the archive, which will have its greatest value precisely in that it can be linked to the ethnographic findings also resulting from that fieldwork. For such historical anthropology, documentation should be informative regarding intimate social relations of the kind that anthropologists otherwise seek to identify and describe through ethnographic study (as illustrated in this book especially in chapter 4). Historical anthropology of this kind cannot be done everywhere. Late imperial China was notable for the importance of written documents in everyday life, with the result that Chinese sites are potentially advantageous for historical anthropological research. Unfortunately, given China's tumultuous history during recent centuries, documents such as land transfer contracts, family division agreements, temple records, family or association account books, and genealogies have not always survived, nor are they always available in quantities sufficient to provide the basis for a detailed exploration of social relations and cultural patterns within a community setting. It appears that Taiwan may be better off than much of mainland China in this respect, for although that island has certainly had its share of suffering, it at least escaped certain recent calamities, such as the protracted land campaigns of World War II and the subsequent Nationalist-Communist civil war, not to speak of the vast destruction of documents on the mainland after the Communist victory, as during the land reform

campaigns and the Cultural Revolution. In any event, in Taiwan's Meinong Township and surrounding areas many documents predating the Japanese occupation had survived and were preserved in the homes of their owners. These could be usefully supplemented by the household registration data the Japanese began to gather early during their rule, in 1906. For Meinong Township in particular, the availability of the even earlier plot-by-plot cadastral survey carried out by the Japanese in 1902 is especially notable both because it comprises a description of Qing-era land relations for every plot in the present-day township and because the original cadastral survey books for most of Taiwan were destroyed in the mid-1980s to make way for newer documents in the government storage facility where they had been kept (but this was well after the Meinong records used in my research had been copied from the original files).

These final chapters, written only recently, nevertheless are based primarily on fieldwork carried out jointly with Professor Burton Pasternak in Meinong Township in 1971–72 (Pasternak 1983). We were interested in both the contemporary society and in Meinong's earlier history and development. I was especially concerned with the Qing period, such that familiarity with the field site on the basis of participant observation, and conducting many interviews focusing explicitly on Qing rather than later developments in Meinong society went together with a far greater reliance on documentary materials than is usually the case during anthropological fieldwork. Japanese sources such as the cadastral survey and the household registration data provide context to the Qing-period contracts and other documents used in these chapters. These documents are part of a much larger body of such materials, most of which were borrowed from their owners and copied during the 1971–72 fieldwork, but in later years I obtained additional material of this sort during shorter trips to Meinong, most recently in 2002.

Chapter 8 brings into focus within the setting of my historical study of the Meinong community the theme of economic sophistication that runs throughout this book. Linked to this sophistication was the high value placed on superior managerial capabilities, all in the context of the deeply rooted commodification generally prevalent in late imperial culture. Commodification during this period was not the product of an industrial economy hell-bent on producing items for sale, but rather it was a dimension of late imperial economic culture involving the creation of things to be bought and sold, some on the basis of preindustrial production, to be sure, but others through the definition and transfer of different kinds of access rights, such as to land or via corporate shares. As such, this late

imperial commodification was not disruptive of social relations but, on the contrary, depended on such relations to serve as the protective framework within which commodity transactions could take place.

In chapter 9, I focus attention on a crucial aspect of Meinong's commodified late imperial economic culture, the documents that facilitated, legitimized, and provided evidence of major transactions. Most of these documents are contracts, long considered important indicators of "modernity" and contrasted to "traditional" or "backward" economic relationships based upon "status," which is presumably inherited. In spite of the fact that contracts were endemic to late imperial economic and social life, their importance was until recently vastly underestimated if not denied altogether. This was under the impact of modern antitraditionalism, which held that because Chinese traditional culture was backward and feudal it could not have been characterized by the wide use of such symbols of modernity as contracts. In fact, the use of contracts went far beyond land and other real estate transactions and commerce. Contracts were involved in matters such as family division, certain kinds of marriage and adoption, the setting up of various shareholding corporations geared toward worship of gods or ancestors, and the sale or bondage of human beings. But not all documents fixing transactions were contracts: some were more like affidavits, and others were authoritarian depositions regarding the distribution of property. In any event, there was a heavy reliance on the documentation of transactions. This documentation involved the mobilization of social relations, including ties of kinship or common membership in a lineage, community, or congregation. The main parties to the transaction and those participating as middlemen or witnesses were connected to each other through such ties, thereby increasing the likelihood that the transaction would be executed as described in the document. The significance of such ties becomes more apparent in light of the fact that the vast majority of land-related contracts were "white," or unregistered, and only a small minority were the "red" contracts registered with the local government office. So the propensity for contractual behavior—whatever the impact of government regulations—was a fundamental attribute of late imperial economic culture. Surely, this economic culture is one legacy of obvious import to contemporary China.

For those with less background in Chinese studies, it might be advisable to read the chapters in this book in the order they are arranged. Others can proceed according to their own interests.