Peasant Studies in the Journal *Modern China*, 1979–1991

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《近代中国》（*Modern China*）的农民学研究（1979-1991）

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Abstract

From 1979 to 1991, *Modern China*, a landmark journal of Chinese studies, published a large number of articles in the field of peasant studies. These articles are of two types: studies of peasants in premodern China, which focus on the rural economy, politics, and ideology; and studies on the history of "peasant studies" itself, which focus on the problems, paradigms and directions of the field. Taken together, all these articles reveal the influence of three major approaches to history: the *longue durée* perspective of the French Annales school, the "bottom-up" approach to lived experience of the British new social history movement, and the time, space, and demography frame of reference of G. William Skinner.

Keywords

Modern China, peasant studies, Chinese studies, Philip C. C. Huang

摘要

20 世纪中后期西方新兴的农民学学科与区域研究具有内在的关联。在中美学术交流正常化时期，《近代中国》（1979–1991 年）作为中国学研究的标志性刊物，集中刊发了大量农民学领域的学术成果。这些成果可分为两类：其一是农民问题研究，从乡村经济、政治与思想等方面探讨中国前现代社会时期农民的具体问题；其二是农民学学术史研究，讨论农民学研究本身面临的问题、范式与方向。《近代中国》的农民学研究延续了法国年鉴学派的"长时段"视域和社会史学派"自下而上"的材料意识，以及"施坚雅模式"区域细分的方法，这些学术成果展现了西方农民学发展历程以及美国的中国史研究思路与方法。

关键词

《近代中国》、农民学、中国学、黄宗智

More than forty years ago, Philip C. C. Huang, editor of the journal *Modern China*, noted the importance of peasant studies in the work of the third postwar generation of American historians of China. Scholars of that generation have focused on "the study of pre-capitalist agricultural society" with "natural villages as units" (Huang Zongzhi, 1980: 12). From the fourth issue in 1979 to the third issue in 1991, *Modern China* published no fewer than thirty-eight articles in peasant studies. Temporally speaking, thirty-six of the articles deal with subjects from the Ming dynasty to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and two with subjects before the Ming. In terms of the nature of the issues addressed, these articles fall into two types. One is research on issues concerning peasants. Generally speaking, such articles usually study specific natural villages, and as source materials they rely on field investigation reports, archives, and other primary documents. They typically start from the economic conditions and production relations in rural areas, and cover issues such as banditry, religion, entrepreneurship, and so on. The second type deals with the methods and theories of peasant studies, which involve either the history of peasant studies and the socioeconomic history of various countries, or the analysis of specific research materials, paradigms, and so on. The second type also includes two reviews of monographs on Chinese peasants: Lloyd E. Eastman's "State Building and the Revolutionary Transformation of Rural Society in North China" (a review of Prasenjit Duara's *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942*), and Kwang-Ching Liu's "Imperialism and the Chinese Peasants: The Background of the Boxer Uprising" (a review of Joseph Esherick's *The*

Origins of the Boxer Uprising) (Eastman, 1990; Liu, 1989).

In the present article our object is to explore the history of peasant studies and Chinese studies outside of China, and particularly in the United States, to sort out the issues involved, and to track trends in research. We do so by analyzing the research on peasant studies published in *Modern China* in 1979–1991 and its significance in academic history.

The Origin of Peasant Studies

Although the two English words *peasant* and *farmer* both translate as 农民 (*nongmin*), they have different connotations. *Farmer* refers to "people engaged in agriculture," and thus focuses on occupational attributes, while *peasant* connotes an economically and politically disadvantaged class, and thus focuses on identity. Peasants comprise a class with specific social features in specific historical periods, in particular, premodern societies subject to the heavy hand of landlords and aristocrats. Most international scholars still use the word "farmer" to refer to China's "peasants," but this is misleading: "farmers" emerged in the Western transformation from feudal smallholders to capitalist farmers. The peasants of premodern China were different from the smallholders in the feudal aristocratic system of Western manors. Moreover, the future of agricultural modernization in China will not follow the Western path of highly mechanized capitalist farms worked by hired laborers (Huang Zongzhi, 2021). Thus, Philip Huang insists that when studying small peasant economies such as that of China, the term "peasant" should be used, thus reflecting historical realities (Huang Zongzhi, 2020). Huang defines "peasant studies" as "research on pre-capitalist agricultural society" (Huang Zongzhi, 1980). The historian Qin Hui divides peasant studies into peasant studies "in the narrow sense" and "in the broad sense." The

former consists of studies of "issues," especially the relationship between land systems, peasant movements, and local culture in premodern societies. The latter entails theorizing premodern society as a whole and the process of its modernization (Qin Hui, 2012: 4–5). Although the content of peasant studies is complex and diverse, its raison d'être is to explore the behaviors and life logic of oppressed peasants in premodern societies.

In this article we have selected research articles in peasant studies in *Modern China* based on two criteria. First, the subject is peasants, and thus involves their economic behavior and production relations, religious beliefs, ideological and cultural patterns, and the relationship between the political system and the political actions of peasants. Second, the historical period studied is premodern society—in other words, the historical environment that peasants as a class lived in. From 1946 to 1952, China's Land Reform completely changed the social and economic structure of the countryside, and also changed the status of China's agriculturalists as "peasants." Therefore, we have excluded from our discussion research on land reform and collectivization published in *Modern China*.[1]

The History of Peasant Studies and Area Studies

Peasant studies emerged in Russia early in the twentieth century with the work of populist scholars, most notably Alexander Chayanov. In order to distinguish their research from technical

[1] Because rural development in Taiwan in modern times is very different from that in mainland China, this article also does not discuss articles about rural Taiwan in *Modern China*.

agronomy, Chayanov proposed the concept of "social agronomy" (Zhang Liming, 2016: 161). The contemporary term "peasantology" 农民学, which Chinese scholars in the field tend to use, appeared in the 1960s (see Qin Hui, 1994; Migdal, 1996 [1975]: 2; Qi Tao, 2008: 272). The suffix *-ology* denotes an academic "discipline": something that is built upon a set of commonly accepted theories, problems, fields, and methods. However, in peasant studies there is no consensus. Classical and neoclassical liberalism, Marxism, and neo-populism/postmodernism all exist as separate nodes of scholarship. In contrast to "peasantology," the term "peasant studies" covers a broader field, including not only historical, empirical, and case studies, but also theoretical and methodological explorations. Furthermore, most of the articles on peasant studies in *Modern China* published from 1979 to 1991 are about specific issues, not theories or methodology. Therefore, this article uses the term *peasant studies* to refer to the object of its study.

The years from 1960 to 1970 have been described as the "glorious decade" of peasant studies. During this period, a great many monographs on peasant studies were published in the West. These works studied a variety of aspects of peasant societies in the non-Western world, and many of them proved to be very influential. Some of the research focused on the political participation of peasants. For example, Eric R. Wolf's *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (published in 1969), took a Marxist perspective by arguing that the globalization of capitalism undercut the idyllic relations of traditional society, and thus ultimately led to the peasant revolutions in six countries (Algeria, China, Cuba, Mexico, Russia, and Vietnam) in the twentieth century (see Liu Lije, 2020). Other works, in the substantivist tradition, emphasized the "moral economy" of peasants. In his *Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence*

in Southeast Asia (1976), James C. Scott argued that survival ethics is the driving force behind smallholders' economic choices. In reaction, in his *Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (1979), Samuel L. Popkin adopted a formalist perspective and contended that peasants are "economically rational" and hence seek to maximize the benefits of productive activities. (On both Scott and Popkin, see Li Hongtao and Fu Shaoping, 2008.) Also important were, among others, Joel Migdal's theory of "inward-oriented peasant villages and outward-oriented peasant villages," Teodor Shanin's theory of the "awkward class," and Henri Mendras's notion of "the end of the peasants" (Migdal, 1996 [1975]; Shanin, 1972; Mendras, 1967; see also Qin Hui, 2014: 58–64).

The history of peasant studies shows that the field has a close relationship with area studies, which arose in the West after the Second World War. The "pre-capitalist agricultural society" that is at the heart of peasant studies refers to regions other than developed countries in Europe and America, especially regions with profound agricultural traditions, such as East Asia and Southeast Asia. For example, substantivism and formalism, the two opposing approaches in the field of peasant economy, both arose from area studies on Southeast Asia. In their research, Eric R. Wolf and Joel Migdal both selected peasant revolutions in China as case studies. The theoretical achievements in the "golden decade" of peasant studies also had a direct impact on Chinese studies. For example, influenced by formalism, G. William Skinner began with the premise that peasants are rational economic actors and on that basis built a "hexagonal" marketing system model that attributes the structure of rural trade to the peasants' cost of transportation (Skinner, 1998 [1964-1965]: 21–40).

In their discussions of peasant studies and Chinese studies in the United States, Chinese

scholars mainly deal with the influence of well-known American scholars on Chinese academia based on their research monographs translated into Chinese. To cite a few prominent examples, Li Xinsheng and Wang Siming talk about the research monographs of Prasenjit Duara, Philip C. C. Huang, Ramon H. Myers, and other representatives of American Chinese studies in their "Issues Concerning Agriculture, the Countryside, and Peasants since the Ming and Qing Dynasties" (Li Xinsheng and Wang Siming, 2014). Chen Yixin takes the debates among American China scholars on modern China's agricultural economy as the basis for sorting out the history of such scholars' research on modern China's agricultural economy (Chen Yixin, 2001). Ren Fang believes that Philip Huang's studies of rural history have changed both the problem consciousness and methodology of scholars in China. Ren focuses on Huang's "landmark role" in the study of rural history. Huang's *Peasant Economy and Social Change in North China* (1985) and *Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangzi Delta, 1350–1988* (1990) have aroused wide and enthusiastic discussion in China, thus promoting the development of the three fields of revolutionary history, economic history, and social history (Ren Fang, 2011). As is clear in their publications, in their study of the history of peasant studies in the West, Chinese scholars rely more on monographs rather than journal articles. However, since academic journals are important indicators of the scholarly atmosphere of an era, reviewing the literature in peasant studies in *Modern China* (1979–1991) is essential for understanding Chinese studies in the United States.

The Historical Background of the Rise of Peasant Studies

The year 1979 was a crucial turning point in the history of American Chinese studies. In that

year, China's reform and opening up and the normalization of Sino-US relations created a channel for academic exchanges between China and the United States. In June 1979, Evelyn Rawski, Charles O. Hucker, Philip A. Kuhn, and other Chinese researchers formed the Ming and Qing history delegation, with Frederic Wakeman Jr., of the Center for Chinese Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, as the head of the delegation. They visited local historical research institutes and archives in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Nanjing. This was the first large collective academic exchange between American scholars of Chinese studies and Chinese historians since 1949. In the context of the exchanges and dialogues between scholars of the two countries, *Modern China* (founded in January 1975) was at the forefront of Sino-US academic exchanges. Its founding editor, Philip Huang, as a leading figure in Chinese studies in the United States, established a clear mission for the journal from its very inception: to reexamine the ideological and binary oppositional mindset in the tradition of Western Chinese studies, and to conduct objective and neutral research in the social sciences and history of China from a position that excludes politics as much as possible. In its early years, influenced by the mainstream orientation of American Chinese studies, *Modern China* mainly published articles on issues related to contemporary Chinese politics, such as socialist ideology, revolutionary history, Mao Zedong thought, and so on. Beginning in 1979 with the establishment of academic exchanges between China and the United States, the subjects of the articles in *Modern China* gradually expanded into the rural economy and social life of China since the Ming and Qing dynasties, and then to the broad interdisciplinary fields of law, literature, culture, and others. In the process, *Modern China* consistently grappled with the paradigm of Chinese studies, and, since 1979, published five issues on paradigmatic assumptions in Chinese studies. The subjects covered

include social and economic history, modern Chinese literature, the "public sphere," the Chinese Revolution, modern Chinese history, and others (Tang Jiaman and Li Song, 2020).

Academic exchanges between China and the United States have created an open and friendly atmosphere for researchers in the two countries. The two sides try their best to put aside any prejudices arising from academic paradigms and ideologies, communicate with each other, and actively seek new research perspectives. In January 1979, Philip Huang visited China as a member of a delegation from UCLA invited by Sun Yat-sen University, and met with twenty-one representatives from Sun Yat-sen University, Renmin University, and the Academy of Social Sciences. They discussed the status of research by Ming and Qing and modern historians in China. In 1980, Huang published "An Overview of American Studies on Modern (and Ming-Qing) Chinese History in the Past Thirty Years" in 中国史研究动态 *Trends in Research on Chinese History* (or, as the journal calls itself, *Trends of Recent Researches on the History of China*), introducing to China the evolution of three generations of academic paradigms in American research on the history of the Ming and Qing dynasties (Huang Zongzhi, 1980). The first generation of scholars, represented by John King Fairbank, attached great importance to political history and biography. The second generation, represented by G. William Skinner, began to use social science theory to study Chinese history. The third, who published some of their most important work in *Modern China*, extended their research into a variety of fields, including anti-imperialist history, economic history, the history of popular movements, local history, and others, and moved toward the emerging frontiers of peasant studies (Huang Zongzhi, 1980). Later, senior Chinese scholars Fu Zhufu and Fu Yiling also published articles in *Modern China* introducing the latest research in China. In a word, in the context of the restoration of

academic exchanges between China and the United States, *Modern China* actively promoted dialogue between scholars from the two countries, and peasant studies in both countries.

Stages of Peasant Studies

We have chosen to analyze *Modern China* from 1979 to 1991 because of two landmark articles by Philip Huang published in the journal: "Current Research on Ming-Qing and Modern History in China" (issue 4, 1979) and "The Paradigmatic Crisis in Chinese Studies: Paradoxes in Social and Economic History" (issue 3, 1991).

From its inception in 1975 to 1979, *Modern China* published several important articles on the history of the Chinese revolution in the modern and contemporary eras. Thus, during this period the journal mainly dealt with rural China in the context of revolution. In 1979, Huang published "Current Research on Ming-Qing and Modern History in China," introducing U.S. scholars to research trends in China and pointing out the rich trove of documents and encouraging research prospects in the field of the history of the Ming and Qing dynasties. His articles had an important influence on the emergence of peasant studies in *Modern China*. From the fourth issue of 1979 to the third issue of 1991, *Modern China* published a total of 203 articles, thirty-eight (or 18.7 percent) of which, as mentioned earlier, were peasant studies. From 1979 to 1983, twenty-five peasant studies articles were published, accounting for 32.9 percent of all the articles in this period, the peak of peasant studies. From 1984 to 1990, two or three peasant studies articles were published each year.

In the third issue of *Modern China* in 1991, Huang published "The Paradigmatic Crisis in Chinese Studies: Paradoxes in Social and Economic History," tracing the history of

socioeconomic research in China and the West, and pointing out the paradoxes in the interpretation of Chinese history in the two research paradigms of Marx and Malthus / Adam Smith, which both Chinese and Western scholars tended to emphasize. These paradoxes are related to the emergence of capitalism, commercialization and development, natural economy and market, law and the public sphere, and many other aspects. Huang declared that "our aim now should be to establish the theoretical autonomy of Chinese studies, not with the exclusivism and isolation of the old sinological studies, but in creative ways that would relate the Chinese experience to the rest of the world" (Huang, 1991: 335–36). From the main theoretical perspective of the West, China's experiences were almost entirely paradoxical, a point that was made by many different studies. Previously, when scholars attempted to apply Western theories to the study of China, they found that they often were of little explanatory value. Thus they resorted to merely discussing empirical examples. But what is really needed is to take into account the special character of China's reality and realize that it usually does not reflect what mainstream Western theory would lead one to believe. Once that is recognized, what is needed is the exploration and establishment of new theories that go beyond the mainstream and come to grips with China's realities. This, in short, is where Huang's reflections on the paradigms of Chinese and Western historiography and the research in peasant studies in the forty years before 1991 led him. It is also the focus of his research in the thirty years after 1991: that is, to rethink mainstream Western theories and establish a new framework more in line with China's realities.[2]

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[2] The authors are grateful to Philip Huang for his advice on deepening and broadening these views.

After 1991, the focus of articles in *Modern China* gradually turned to the "third sphere" between the Chinese state and the people, codified law and judicial practice, and issues surrounding agriculture, the countryside, and peasants since the reform and opening up. At the same time, the number of articles on peasant studies sharply declined.

Research on the Peasant Economy: Land Tenancy and the Market

Premodern rural relations of production has been a topic frequently discussed by articles in *Modern China*. Those articles have mainly explored the role of land tenancy in rural production relations and the role of the rural natural economy in the commodity economy and the world market. Five of our sample of articles on the peasant economy from *Modern China* deal with tenancy and two with the market.

Rural production relations have been the focus of peasant studies following the Marxist paradigm, and the problem of tenancy relations has also been prominent in the study of China's rural land system since the Ming-Qing period. Mi Chu Wiens's "Lord and Peasant: The Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century" uses the *longue durée* perspective of the French Annales school to analyze the evolution of the relationship between landowners and different types of agricultural laborers in Jiangnan in the three centuries from the late Ming dynasty to the early Qing dynasty. Peasants in the sixteenth century, Wiens points out, were divided into three types: slaves, tenants, and farm laborers. The degree of personal dependence on the landlord, and the economic exploitation by the landlord, differed according to the status of the peasant. In general, however, the social and moral connection between landlords, tenants, and farm laborers was relatively harmonious. In the seventeenth century, however, conflicts between landlords and peasants

gradually intensified. The expansion of a commodity economy and the market was conducive to the economic independence of peasants, and slaves, tenants, and farm laborers all strived to improve their economic and social status. This, Wiens argued, in turn led to frequent peasant uprisings in Jiangnan over the issue of rent reduction. In the eighteenth century, government officials intervened in tax and rent relations between landlords and peasants, using state power to ease tensions and secure revenue (Wiens, 1980). Stephen C. Averill's "The Shed People and the Opening of the Yangzi Highlands" also discusses land tenancy. Averill points out that in the Nanling Mountains, which separate the Yangzi River valley from the Pearl River basin, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the tenancy relationship between the so-called shed people 棚民 (peasant migrants) and the local landlords gradually led to a permanent tenancy system known as "two lords per mountain" 一山两主 (Averill, 1983).

Some articles discuss the rural land system and tenancy since the late Qing and the Republican period. Ramon Myers's "North China Villages during the Republican Period: Socioeconomic Relationships" explores the relationship between landlords and tenants in North China villages from the late Qing dynasty into the Republican era. In his reading of archival materials, including a South Manchurian Railway investigation report, Myers found that the mutually beneficial relationship between landlords and tenants "outside the lease contract" before the 1911 Revolution gradually disappeared, and concluded that population growth in North China caused fierce competition for land which in turn drove up rents and exacerbated the widespread poverty (Myers, 1980). Morton H. Fried's "Socioeconomic Relations in Pre-Communist China" takes issue with Myers's interpretation. While Myers believed there was a patronage relationship between landlords and tenants in North China in the late Qing, and that in

the Republican era landlords often collected rents in kind during poor harvests, thus intensifying conflicts between landlords and tenants, Fried, based on his investigation in China, contended that the relationship between landlords and tenants in the late Qing was unequal, and rent in kind within a certain range was generally accepted by peasants (Fried, 1982). Robert Y. Eng's "Institutional and Secondary Landlordism in the Pearl River Delta, 1600–1949" discusses two types of rural landlords—institutional and secondary— in the Pearl River Delta in the late Qing dynasty, a subject that had been little studied by Chinese and Western scholars. An example of the former was the Minglun Association in Dongguan, Guangdong, where local gentry reclaimed and occupied alluvial fields under the guise of educational land to evade land registration and taxes. Secondary landlords played a role in the complex sublease structure of rural land in the Pearl River Delta. They rented land from landlords who were not in the village and then sublet it to others, paying rent and receiving material goods, and made a profit in the market in the early years of the Republican era when rice was expensive and money was cheap. Based on this, Eng argued that the complex structure of China's rural areas cannot be subsumed under a simple landlord-tenant dichotomy, and the reason why China's agriculture did not move toward capitalism was also rooted in structural and systemic features (Eng, 1986). Joseph W. Esherick's "Number Games: A Note on Land Distribution in Prerevolutionary China" uses provincial economic bulletins and a survey of local land councils in 1937 to show that land distribution in China was seriously unequal, with 10 percent of the landlords and rich peasants owning 56 percent of the land. Therefore, Esherick concludes that it was improper to view China as a country with a smallholder peasant economy (Esherick, 1981).

The peasant studies articles in *Modern China* also reexamine the relationship between the

commodity economy in rural China and the world market from the perspective of globalization. In “The Kangxi Depression and Early Qing Local Markets,” Mio Kishimoto, based on the notes and writings of Qing officials and scholars, finds that there was a great depression in the early Kangxi years when “cheap grain hurt the peasants.” The tightening of silver circulation caused the price of grain to fall, and thus the income of landlords from commodity agriculture fell as well, which in turn led to the decline of the income of hired laborers and tenant peasants. These phenomena were rooted in the system of paying the land tax in silver and the early Qing prohibition of foreign trade. At that time, there were two opposing views on solving this problem: the anti-silver group advocated abolishing the payment of tax in silver or even abolishing silver currency and replacing it with copper coins; while the import group advocated lifting the foreign-trade ban and introducing overseas silver to alleviate deflation. What Kishimoto was concerned about is not the rights and wrongs of this debate, but the motivation behind it, which affected the Qing dynasty’s foreign trade policy. Qing officials recognized the importance of foreign trade and the world market to the domestic economy, but they felt they had to restrict contact between the domestic market and the world market to maintain the ruling order. The foreign trade policy in the early and mid-Qing dynasty was formulated under these two contradictory pressures (Kishimoto-Nakayama, 1984). David Faure’s “The Plight of the Farmers: A Study of the Rural Economy of Jiangnan and the Pearl River Delta, 1870–1937” dissects the relationship between China’s rural economy and the world market in two periods, 1870 to 1929 and 1930 to 1937, i.e., before and after the Great Depression. Based on land contracts, customs reports, and other documents, Faure argues that previous studies took the devastation of the countryside in the Great Depression of the 1930s as the starting point and thus

put too much weight on the "rural crisis" and ignored the rural prosperity in Jiangnan and in the Pearl River Delta from 1870 to 1929. The source of this prosperity, Faure contends, was long-distance trade, especially international trade in rice and the demand for industrial cash crops such as silk and cotton. The economic crisis in 1929 led the price of rice and silk to plummet, which in turn led to the ruin of the countryside (Faure, 1985).

All these articles in *Modern China* on the rural economy show how complicated production relations in the countryside were during the long historical period from the Ming and Qing dynasties to the Republican era. The main features of the articles are reflected in their references and research methods. First, they make extensive use of documents collected in China, especially firsthand materials such as those in the Qing palace archives and local chronicles, and they painstakingly and in detail analyze the data. This increased their reliability. Second, they broke down a series of dualistic frameworks such as "the West / China," "market economy / natural economy" and "landlord / peasant," and replaced them with a multilevel explanatory structure. In this way they gained insight into the natural economy in rural areas, and the complex historical factors involved in commodity economy, population fluctuations, wars and turmoil, and international trade.

Research on Peasant Politics: Elites and Bandits

Early works in Chinese studies on such issues as peasant politics, rural movements, and the scope of power and authority in the countryside, were largely shaped by the notion of a "state-society" dualism and often focused on the tensions between the state apparatus and rural self-governing organizations. Research from a Marxist perspective also viewed peasant insurrections

and village elites in China through the lens of class contradictions between peasants and landlords. The peasant studies in *Modern China*, however, reveal the complexity of the composition and nature of two social units of peasant society, elites and bandits. In this area there are three articles about elites, four about bandits, and three mainly about peasant uprisings.

The three articles on elites focus on their role in local rural areas in specific historical periods. Kathryn Bernhardt's "Elite and Peasant during the Taiping Occupation of the Jiangnan, 1860–1864," based on the original documents of the Heavenly Kingdom regime held by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom History Museum and Suzhou Museum, traces the Taiping occupation of the Jiangnan area from 1860 to 1864, and analyzes the two opposing features of the Taiping's "rural officials" 鄉官 during the occupation. The Taiping army continued the pre-war rural governance model in the Jiangnan region, and appointed a large number of local elites as "rural officials" responsible for the collection of taxes, local governance, and the recruitment of talent. However, peasants, peddlers, servants, and vagrants were also recruited as "rural officials" and their assistants, diluting the proportion of gentry among the officials. According to Bernhardt, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was neither a utopia of revolutionary peasants nor a safe haven for conservative elites. The traditional village meritocracy was shaken but not destroyed under the rule of the Taipings (Bernhardt, 1987). Roxann Prazniak's "Tax Protest at Laiyang, Shandong, 1910: Commoner Organization versus the County Political Elite" studies the tax protest in Laiyang County against the background of the New Policies in the late Qing dynasty. At the very beginning, village elites, respected and supported by the peasants, organized the protest and appealed to the yamen on behalf of the peasants. When Laiyang's commercial tax farmers colluded with bureaucrats to raise taxes in the name of the New Policies late in the Qing

dynasty, Laiyang's peasants launched a protest organized by the village leader Qu Shiwen 曲诗文, which later grew into an armed revolt. Prazniak analyzes the causes, actors, and the process of the Laiyang protest and classifies the lower-level elites into two types. The first were county political elites, mainly gentry and commercial tax farmers who participated in the local political organizations created as part of the New Policies. They had a deep connection with the bureaucrats and were more in favor of the "state." The other type consisted of village elites, namely "village chiefs" and the "chairmen" who organized the Laiyang anti-tax movement, demonstrating that Chinese peasants had the ability to organize themselves in a rational and secular way and fight for their legitimate interests (Prazniak, 1980). Aside from these articles, Chen Yung-fa's "Rural Elections in Wartime Central China: Democratization of Subbureaucracy," although not specifically about rural elites, mentions that during the Anti-Japanese War the building of popular support in the base areas involved the participation of local elites as "enlightened gentlemen." Local administrative organizations under the leadership of the Communist Party usually attracted some old gentry with administrative skills and put them to good use (Chen Yung-fa, 1981).

An article by R. G. Tiedemann and another by Robert Antony treat banditry in North China and South China, respectively. Tiedemann's "The Persistence of Banditry: Incidents in Border Districts of the North China Plain" discusses the phenomenon of widespread banditry at the junction of Hebei, Shandong, Anhui, and Henan. Based on newspaper reports and consulate reports from missionaries, he analyzes local bandits' living conditions, social composition, and relationship with both local authorities and local peasants. Bandits were mainly peasants in search of a way to eke out a living in the slack season, and maintained close ties with their local

communities. Local authorities for their part generally sought to appease bandits so as to head off trouble within their jurisdictions. Peasants took entirely different attitudes toward different bandits: they acquiesced or even supported bandits from their own communities, while forming self-defense groups against those from outside. Tiedemann believes banditry was a violent survival strategy adopted by peasants in a specific geographical environment (Tiedemann, 1982). Antony's "Peasants, Heroes, and Brigands: The Problems of Social Banditry in Early Nineteenth-Century South China," based on Qing palace memorials and routine memorials from the Jiaqing and Daoguang reigns, revolves around the definition and nature of bandits. Antony's data show that the bandits of South China came from a variety of backgrounds and had complex social roles. His conclusion is similar to Tiedemann's: bandits had diverse social backgrounds. In addition to professional criminals and ordinary peasants, bandits also came from the ranks of fishermen, hired laborers, boatmen and sailors, and others. In the villages they relied on, the Guangdong bandits robbed the rich and helped the poor, protected the environment and the people, and to a certain extent protected the local order and interests. In this context, they were what Eric Hobsbawm dubbed "social bandits." However, outside the village community, these bandits burned, killed, looted, and committed other depredations. They were, in short, what Chinese officialdom condemned as "thieves" (Antony, 1989). Two other articles also discuss social banditry. Elizabeth J. Perry's "Social Banditry Revisited: The Case of Bai Lang, a Chinese Brigand" claims that Bai Lang 白朗, the commander of a rebel army in the early years of the Republic, fit Hobsbawm's model of social banditry, and his banditry was closely related to peasant communities (Perry, 1983). Phil Billingsley's "Bandits, Bosses, and Bare Sticks: Beneath the Surface of Local Control in Early Republican China" also argues that bandits provided a

certain degree of order and personal protection for the people in the areas they controlled (Billingsley, 1981).

These articles on banditry reach similar conclusions: the characteristics of bandits varied from place to place according to their geographic and administrative circumstances; bandits in North China were mainly peasants and professional brigands, while those in the Pearl River Delta had a variety of rural occupations; most bandits were closely related to the local community, and their fortunes were dependent on the acquiescence of the community and even the local authorities; banditry was born of poverty and population mobility. Conversely, when bandits moved away from the rural communities in which they operated, their "social banditry" side diminished and their destructive side emerged.

In addition to these articles on elites and bandits, two articles, one by Jack L. Dull and the other by William G. Crowell, provide new perspectives on peasant uprisings. Dull's "Anti-Qin Rebels: No Peasant Leaders Here" argues that the disintegration of the Qin dynasty did not spring from its brutal oppression of the peasants, but from the inertia of the pluralistic feudal order of the Warring States period (Dull, 1983). Crowell's "Social Unrest and Rebellion in Jiangnan during the Six Dynasties" points out that the peasant uprisings from the third century CE to the seventh century were not onslaughts against any particular ruler nor against the imperial system, but instead were appeals for the state to protest and cherish the people (Crowell, 1983). Elizabeth Perry's "When Peasants Speak: Sources for the Study of Chinese Rebellions" discusses the reliability and applicability of historical materials themselves. Source materials on peasant uprisings mostly consist of folk literature and the testimony of captives. These types of materials, Perry notes, can provide new perspectives on peasant movements, but require careful

use inasmuch as some accounts were fabricated (Perry, 1980a).

Did elites and bandits originate from peasants or were they different from peasants? The above-mentioned articles do not provide a definitive answer. Elites could collect taxes and extract labor from the peasants on behalf of the government, or they could resist the government on behalf of the peasants. Not all bandits were desperate peasants, and the relationship between brigands and village communities or even the government was complicated. However, these articles started a dialogue with the old research paradigm, and used elites and bandits, two groups in the middle ground, to expand and enrich different dimensions and possibilities beyond the dualistic framework of state and society.

Research on Peasant Thinking: Religion and Entrepreneurship

The articles in *Modern China* also encompass research on peasants' spiritual world, ideology, and culture. They mainly examine two dimensions of peasants' thinking: folk religion and entrepreneurial spirit. In our sample of articles are six on folk religion, three on entrepreneurship, and one on Red literature and art in the CCP's border regions.

In the West, works on the spiritual world of peasants often focus on folk religion, which tends to be treated together with peasant uprisings. The latter, inspired by folk religion, sometimes grew into fierce confrontations with the state, the social apparatus, the social order, and orthodox ideology. For example, Susan Naquin's monographs *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (2008 [1981]) and *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (2012 [1976]) discuss two peasant uprisings triggered by the White Lotus Sect, and explore the role of collective consciousness, beliefs, and eschatological

psychology in social life. Some of our sample of articles also explore the relationship between folk religion, secret societies, and peasant insurrection. Daniel L. Overmyer's "Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society" argues that folk religion offered the people an alternative to Confucian orthodoxy. Heterogeneous and innovative factors were a fundamental aspect of consciousness and social organization in China. In fact, the diversity in modern China may be a historical norm rather than a special feature (Overmyer, 1981). Susan Naquin's "Connections between Rebellions: Sect Family Networks in Qing China" continues her research perspective in the two monographs mentioned above. In this article, Naquin focuses on the White Lotus uprisings in the Qing dynasty, which she believes were related to the fact that "the most tightly connected of all sects were those in which sectarianism was hereditarily transmitted within a single family" (Naquin, 1984: 339). These families exercised authority and provided shelter to believers in rural communities, thus ensuring the stability of religious organizations and repeated uprisings (Naquin, 1984).

Some scholars argue that folk religion did not necessarily violently confront the state apparatus through peasant uprisings, nor necessarily oppose Confucian orthodoxy. On the contrary, folk religion could encourage patience and self-preservation among peasants, or, alternatively, it could provide organizational resources for peasant protests. But such protests, unlike uprisings, did not necessarily descend into military confrontation with the state apparatus. The relevant articles include Richard Shek's "The Revolt of the Zaili, Jindan Sects in Rehe (Jehol), 1891" (1980) and "Millenarianism without Rebellion: The Huangtian Dao in North China" (1982), Elizabeth Perry and Tom Chang's "The Mystery of Yellow Cliff: A Controversial Rebellion in the Late Qing" (1983), and Roxann Prazniak's "Weavers and Sorceresses of

Chuansha: The Social Origins of Political Activism Among Rural Chinese Women" (1986). Shek's "Millenarianism without Rebellion" takes the Huangtian Dao 黄天道—a North China religious sect that emerged in the mid-sixteenth century and disappeared in the 1940s—as an example of another side of Chinese folk religion: it could offer ultimate salvation and utopian fantasies that required people to endure the existing order rather than rebel (Shek, 1982). His "The Revolt of the Zaili, Jindan Sects in Rehe (Jehol), 1891" also points out that two White Lotus sects, Zaili 在理教 and Jindan 金丹道, had been peaceful for nearly a hundred years. When there was no social crisis, these groups could be law-abiding and require their members to do good deeds and exercise self-control. However, in 1891 the two sects rose up in violent rebellion, a result of a combination of natural disasters, government inaction, and ethnic tensions (Shek, 1980). "The Mystery of Yellow Cliff" recounts a so-called rebellion in 1866. A local gentryman in Shandong formed a religious organization for self-protection during the Nian Rebellion, attracted tens of thousands of followers, and recruited a militia. However, the local government hastily identified this organization as a cult that threatened the state, called up troops, and slaughtered the believers who had gathered at Yellow Cliff, a mountain top in central Shandong (Perry and Chang, 1983). Prazniak's article discusses the 1911 Chuansha Uprising, where rural women adherents of a local Buddhist vegetarian sect engaged in a collective protest against the New Policies reform. The weaving industry in Chuansha (just outside of Shanghai) was developed and women weavers had a certain degree of economic security and social status. The vegetarian sect provided a well-organized foundation for rural women weavers to participate in political life (Prazniak, 1986).

Several other articles in the journal address the Scott-Popkin debate and discuss the

relationship between the ideological world of China's peasants, production, and social life from a secular, rather than religious, perspective. The formalists in the Scott-Popkin debate believe that the thinking of the small peasant is equivalent to that of the "rational man" in classical economics, driven by the desire to maximize his own personal benefit, while the substantivists believe that the thinking of small peasants is driven by the survivalist imperative and its mutual-aid ethos. Some scholars also explore the relationship between Chinese peasants' view of "destiny" and "entrepreneurship" on the basis of firsthand materials such as folk proverbs and local patois obtained from field investigations. R. David Arkush's "'If Man Works Hard the Land Will Not Be Lazy': Entrepreneurial Values in North Chinese Peasant Proverbs" challenges the notion that Chinese peasants were fettered by a passive and fatalistic mentality and argues instead that North China's peasant proverbs not only record the back-breaking work of peasants, the misery of living in poverty, and the anxiety of facing unpredictable and uncontrollable weather, but also embody a kind of "tough-minded realism." The "heaven" in peasant proverbs does not represent destiny, but natural laws. The only way to overcome "heaven" is to work hard. In addition, peasant proverbs also spell out the importance of technical knowledge and planning in farming, and promote the values of self-reliance, solidarity, and cooperation (Arkush, 1984). Stevan Harrell's "Why Do the Chinese Work So Hard? Reflections on an Entrepreneurial Ethic" points out that the Western impression that the people of China are by nature "hard-working" (a characterization that can be traced back at least as early as Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* [1894]) is no more than a stereotype. Drawing on Max Weber's concept of the Protestant ethic, Harrell speaks of a Chinese "entrepreneurial ethic," that is, a person's long-term investment in resources (land, labor, and/or capital) to improve the material well-being and

security of an individual or group. As Harrell puts it, “Chinese will work hard when they see possible long-term benefits, in terms of improved material conditions and / or security, for a group with which they identify” (Harrell, 1985: 217). Another article by Harrell, “The Concept of Fate in Chinese Folk Ideology,” explores the complex meaning of “fate” in Chinese folk thought. In theory, fate is mysterious, predetermined, and irreversible. But in actual use, the word “fate” is employed to describe someone’s circumstances. For example, if one has a comfortable and enjoyable life, that is “good fate”; if, however, one lives a life of drudgery and hard work, that is “bad fate.” The villagers Harrell studied were keen to consult fortune-tellers and learn about their “fate” by means of horoscopes and physiognomy, but at the same time they did not really regard it as a potential factor that dominated their lives, but only as an explanation that comes into play when entrepreneurial and moral values cannot account for a business failure (Harrell, 1987). Taken together, these articles show that the concept of “fate” in Chinese folk thought is not the same as the blind and tragic “fate” of ancient Greece, but is closely related to “entrepreneurial spirit.” In addition to the two important themes of religion and entrepreneurship discussed above, Ellen R. Judd’s “Cultural Articulation in the Chinese Countryside, 1937–1947” focuses on revolutionary rural areas, and examines the confrontation, reconciliation, and blending of folk literature and art and elite literature and art in the northwest border region under the “worker/peasant/soldier orientation” 工农兵方向 policy (Judd, 1990).

It is the exploration of peasants’ mental world that distinguishes peasant studies from disciplines such as history (especially social and economic history) and sociology. Studies of China’s peasants should move beyond the dualistic impact/response model, and should counter the impression in the West that Chinese folk religion amounts to no more than Boxer-style

ignorance, superstition, and chaos. Scholars should also reject the traditional-modern dualism that views peasants as fatalistic and conservative, and recognize the resonance between the entrepreneurial spirit of peasants and the entrepreneurial spirit required for modernization and industrialization in less-developed regions. Only by doing so can they come to grips with Chinese peasants' unique outlook on fate and their entrepreneurial, hardworking ethos.

Research on the History of Peasant Studies

In addition to research on peasant politics, economy, culture, and others, *Modern China* has also published eight articles on the history of peasant studies. These articles introduce the history, themes, and then-current status of peasant studies and social economic history in China, the West, and Japan. They also discuss the paradigms in the literature on peasants as well as archival materials, and look into possible directions for future research.

These articles mainly treat the history and current status of research on the social and economic history of China, including the concerns and specific research conditions of scholarship in China over the preceding thirty years. They can be divided into two categories: research notes by American scholars after visiting China, including Philip Huang's "Current Research on Ming-Qing and Modern History in China" and "County Archives and the Study of Local Social History: Report on a Year's Research in China," and investigative reports by Elizabeth J. Perry and Diana Lary. In his "Current Research on Ming-Qing and Modern History in China" published in 1979, Huang points out the important value for Chinese studies in the West of original source materials, such as documents in the Ming-Qing archives of the Palace Museum, the record books and other materials of the Kong lineage of Qufu, and the Nanjing

(Republican) Archives. “We have become painfully aware of our ignorance of the Chinese academic world,” Huang writes, “an ignorance which individual scholars as well as the Committee on Scholarly Communication and other organized agencies of our profession are actively striving to overcome” (Huang, 1979: 504). In addition, he also mentions the wave of research in China on Ming-Qing economic history at that time, as well as plans for the compilation of works in modern history on such subjects as the Republic of China and the Chinese revolution. He also touches on the possibilities of future research on Ming-Qing and modern history in China, which could provide scholars in the United States with materials and inspiration. In his article on county archives, Huang describes four projects he carried out during his one-year visit to China: reading the memorials of the Ming and Qing Board of Punishments, restudying the same villages that had been investigated by the South Manchurian Railway Company’s field researchers, interacting with Chinese historians and economists, and consulting the government archives of Baodi County, Hebei. He points out that China’s county archives house a wealth of underutilized materials, and that these original materials record a huge amount of information about taxation, creditors’ rights, and leases, and are “gold mines” for the study of social and economic history (Huang, 1982). His two articles were written in the era of the restoration of academic exchanges between China and the United States. They introduced the history and current situation of academic circles in mainland China, which undoubtedly played an important role in acquainting American scholars with research in China and enabling their own research breakthroughs. In addition, Perry’s “Research Conditions at Nanjing University” (1980b) and Lary’s “The Second Historical Archives, Nanjing” (1981) also provide valuable introductions to specific archives.

Another category of articles in *Modern China* consists of introductions by scholars in China to research trends in China. These include "The Economic History of China: Some Special Problems" (1978, 1981) by Fu Zhufu of Nanjing University, and "Capitalism in Chinese Agriculture: On the Laws Governing Its Development" by Fu Yiling of Xiamen University. Unlike Chinese studies in the United States, research in China since 1949 has been influenced by the tradition of Marxist historiography and the five stages of human history thesis. Therefore, the sense of problem in articles by scholars in China is different from that of American scholars of Chinese studies. Fu Yiling's "Capitalism in Chinese Agriculture: On the Laws Governing Its Development" addresses the question of whether capitalism appeared in agriculture in the Ming-Qing period through an investigation of tobacco cultivation in Jiangxi and grain production in Jiangsu. His conclusion is that "the laws of development governing the sprouts of capitalist relations of production in Chinese agriculture from mountain areas to the plains, and from cash-crops to grain production, show that while the late feudal economy of China was controlled by universal laws, at the same time it had its distinctive characteristics. Precisely for this reason, just when capitalist relations of production began to sprout in Chinese agriculture, these laws brought natural limitations" (Fu, 1980: 315). Fu's "The Economic History of China: Some Special Problems," first published in *Economic Research* 经济研究 in 1978 (Fu, 1978), takes a comparative approach to the economic history of China. In comparing China's historical trajectory with that of the West, Fu argues that the two "have been dominated by different economic laws. . . . Some systems . . . were substantially or completely different, though they had identical names or similar patterns. . . . If these particularities are overlooked and things similar in name but different in substance, or similar in pattern but different in character, are

viewed in the same light, one is bound to come to erroneous conclusions" (Fu, 1981: 4). Fu focuses on the development of landlordism, which grew out of the feudal lord system of ownership. The landlord system replaced the natural labor payment of the feudal lord system with rent in kind or money, which increased the exploitation rate of the landlord. Therefore, peasants lost the ability to expand reproduction. Decentralized land management prevented the improvement of social labor productivity, which in turn led to long-term economic stagnation in China (Fu, 1981). These two articles are responses to the "sprouts of capitalism" debate and the "feudal system" debate in Chinese historiography, and are indicative of the achievements of Chinese research on rural social and economic history over the preceding thirty years.

In addition, Linda Grove and Joseph W. Esherick's "From Feudalism to Capitalism: Japanese Scholarship on the Transformation of Chinese Rural Society" analyzes postwar Japanese research on China's rural social transformation. The article reviews the debates in Japanese academia on the relevant issues in each of three historical periods: the origin of a modern landlord economy in China, the landlord economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the class differentiation of the Chinese peasantry in the semi-colonial era (Grove and Esherick, 1980). Huang's "The Paradigmatic Crisis in Chinese Studies: Paradoxes in Social and Economic History" (1991) argues that the old "Chinese stagnation" paradigm and the "impact-response" model in Western studies have been challenged by the "early modern China" paradigm, which holds that "in the centuries before the full onset of Western influence" China underwent the "same kinds of changes as those in Western Europe" (Huang, 1991: 303). However, this paradigm, he also notes, cannot logically integrate the links between imperialism, the Chinese revolution, and incipient modernity in China. The old and new research patterns of

Chinese and Western academia, in Huang's view, are similar: the "feudalism" paradigm regards premodern China as stagnant and unchanging, while the "sprouts of capitalism" paradigm emphasizes the endogenous modern elements of Chinese tradition. He believes there is a self-evident common assumption behind the crisis of Chinese and Western paradigms—"commercialization must usher in capitalist development"—which is inconsistent with the historical fact that China experienced "growth without development."

The Significance of Peasant Studies

To evaluate the significance of the peasant studies articles in *Modern China*, we should first examine them as an organic link in the history of international Chinese studies, and place them in the big context of Western history and the small context of the history of Chinese studies in the United States. Summarizing the common perspectives and methods of these articles reveals their theoretical resonance with trends in Western scholarship at the time and their significance in the history of Chinese studies in the West.

In the 1970s, research on Ming-Qing and modern history in the United States was influenced by the work of historians who drew on the *longue durée* perspective of the Annales school and the "bottom-up" approach of the new social history movement (Zhu Zhenghui, 2014). The key concepts in Fernand Braudel's masterpiece *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1996; original French edition 1949) are "structure" and "time" (Sun Jing, 2002). According to Braudel, structure is an organic, rigorous, and fairly fixed relationship between reality and everyday life. For historians, structure is no doubt a component of a metaphorical architecture, but it is also a very durable reality (Braudel, 1987 [1958]). "Structure"

includes such things as physical geography, folk culture, and daily life. It plays a deep and decisive role in human society over the *longue durée* of history. “Time” can be divided into long, medium, and short periods. “Long periods” are measured in centuries, a time span suitable for examining the relationship between “structure,” “situation,” and “event,” all concerns of traditional historiography. Marxist historiography holds that the production and life experiences of the common people are more worthy of historians’ attention than the actions of the ruling class, and advocates rediscovering, through scientific methods and with the help of grassroots historical materials, the lives of the people that have been covered up by traditional historiography (Liang Minsu, 2002). The new social history movement also investigates the psychological structure of social groups and group consciousness, focusing on the cultural psychology of ordinary people (Tu Zhiyong, 1986). Under the influence of Western historiography, the second generation of American China scholars, including G. William Skinner, emerged in the 1970s. In his “Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China” (1998 [1964–1965]) and *The City in Late Imperial China* (1977), Skinner established a research model that combines anthropology, geography, sociology, and other social science methods. Unlike the first generation of Chinese studies scholars, Skinner shifted his focus from the study of the lives of modern and contemporary Chinese political figures to the socioeconomic structure of Chinese cities and towns. He proposed to divide the large-scale concept of “China” into nine specific “physiographic macroregions” defined by four factors: the drainage basins of the major rivers, population density, urban economic networks, and urban systems. In addition, Skinner used quantitative analysis, comparative research, and other methods to reveal the changes Chinese society had undergone, and emphasized historical evidence and the use of interdisciplinary

methods (Liu Zhaocheng, 2009: 157–70).

Works by American Chinese studies scholars bearing the imprint of the Annales school began appearing in the 1970s. For example, two anthologies, *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China* (Wakeman and Grant, 1975) and *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (Spence and Wills, 1979) both regard the Ming and Qing period as a whole, emphasizing the inherent continuity of history. Peasant studies also have made use of the *longue durée* perspective. For example, Mi Chu Wiens's "Lord and Peasant," Ramon Myers's "North China Villages during the Republican Period," and David Faure's "The Plight of the Farmers," all of which are discussed earlier in this article, may not be strictly studies of the *longue durée* since their subjects do not stretch over multiple centuries, but they do treat the historical period from the late Qing to the Republic as a whole.

Peasant studies, as we have already noted, have also been influenced by the bottom-up perspective of the new social history school. Scholars have made good use of detailed firsthand historical materials, which basically come directly from grassroots administrative agencies with direct contact with the people. These sources consist of materials in government archives, the massive collection of Board of Punishments memorials, customs records, and reports of field investigations by Chinese and foreign researchers. On the basis of these documents, data have been collected and sorted into charts for analysis. In addition to easily quantifiable economic and political indicators, peasants' cultural psychology can also be subjected to rigorous analysis. For example, David Arkush's "'If Man Works Hard the Land Will Not Be Lazy'" argues for the entrepreneurial culture in the Chinese peasant tradition by citing peasant proverbs that local scholars, students, and revolutionaries of the late Qing and the Republic collected and compiled.

The "third generation" of American China scholars who produced the peasant studies articles published in *Modern China* inherited the macroregional Skinner model. They are very aware of the "regional" attributes of Chinese peasants, and thus their articles can come to grips with the regional disparities caused by the vastness of China's territory and its complex cultural and geographical conditions. They do not, in other words, limit their purview to a homogenized "China," but instead study specific regions, such as North China, Jiangnan, and the Pearl River Delta, and explore the role of specific geographical and agricultural factors of a region, such as the alluvial fields of the Pearl River Delta and the commercialized agriculture in Jiangnan, in a particular historical period. Through reading *Modern China*'s articles from different domains, we can gain a good understanding of the economic, political, and cultural dimensions of the living conditions of peasants in natural villages in various regions of China and on that basis compare manifestations of the same phenomenon in different regions. For example, the articles on banditry show that its particular features at the junction of the four provinces of North China differed from those of South China. Articulating these specific differences yields a deeper understanding of how, for example, social forms and class structures in North China diverged from those in South China.

In short, the peasant studies in *Modern China* continue the academic tradition of Western historiography and American Chinese studies. From a disciplinary perspective, peasant studies emerged from the margins to explore peasant issues in premodern society. This is closely in line with the bottom-up approach of the new social history school, which attempts to examine all of premodern society through the political and economic circumstances of its largest underclass, the peasants. As for research methods, both the *longue durée* and macroregional approaches provide

a multifaceted lens through which researchers can observe not only all aspects of the broad historical processes under consideration, but also the historical space of specific cases.

Conclusion

Through a close reading, we divide the peasant studies articles in *Modern China* from the years 1979 to 1991 into three types according to their area of concern: peasant economy, peasant power, and peasant ideology. Then, following the keyword-generalization method, based on the historical background of Chinese studies in these articles, we use six keywords—leasing and markets, elites and bandits, folk religion and entrepreneurship—to summarize the issues discussed by the articles. In the short thirty years from its establishment to its flourishing, American Chinese studies has yielded many explanatory models, such as the impact-response, the tradition-modernity, and the state-society models. All these are usually concerned with two opposing points of conflict in China's social structure, historical stage, and peasant culture, and use the conflict and transformation of these binary oppositions as the interpretive framework. Some of our sample of articles in *Modern China* attempt to break free of this kind of dualism. From a Marxist perspective, the binary opposition between landlords and peasants was at the heart of China's rural economic relations, but this opposition cannot completely explain China's complex multilayered tenancy relationships, nor personal protection relationships, nor even the profound impact of the international market on the rural economy since the Ming-Qing period. The state-society binary opposition highlights the clash between the state apparatus and social organizations in premodern China, but in fact rural elites and local bandits played a regulatory role in the gray area between the state and society. They were not simply artifacts of "society,"

but explicitly or implicitly challenged the power of the "state." Studies on folk religion often regard secret religions as symbols representing the "people" in their confrontation with the state apparatus and Confucian ideology. However, folk religions contained the notion of restraint and self-preservation. The point of contention in the Scott-Popkin debate is whether peasants are economically "rational," and thus act to maximize their personal interests, or, alternatively, whether they believe in a "moral economy" and thus act out of the survival imperative. But in fact the entrepreneurial spirit of China's peasants arises from neither of these, and has its own origins.

Scholarly journals reflect the specialization and maturity of disciplines, and also provide timely feedback on the scholarly trends over a certain period of time. Reading the peasant research literature in *Modern China* clarifies the historical context of American Chinese studies in the 1980s, allowing us to better observe the continuing development of the emerging discipline of peasant studies after the "glorious decade" of the 1960s, and to better understand the interaction between the two "marginal" disciplines of peasant studies and Chinese studies and the mainstream Western disciplines of history and sociology.

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