

# Reading China from the Villages

- Studying Grassroots  
Change in 20<sup>th</sup> Century  
North China
- Linda Grove
- April 16, 2011



# Puzzle of Studying Modern and Contemporary Chinese History



# How to See China

## **Positive images**

- Chinese Miracle—Rapid Economic Growth
- The Chinese Century—Growing Diplomatic Presence
- World's Factory

## **Negative images**

- Mao's Famine
- One Country/ Two Societies
- State Censorship of the Internet
- Arrests of dissidents

# Reading China from the Villages

- Beginnings: Ph.D. dissertation “Rural Society in Revolution” [History, University of California, Berkeley]
  - Social and economic background of the rise of Chinese Communist party
  - Case study of Gaoyang county on the North China plains

# China Encounters

- 1979-1980: grant from CSCPRC (Committee on Scholarly Communication with the PRC) as a visiting scholar at Nankai University, Tianjin
- First year of Sino-American academic exchange

# Tianjin in 1980

**Street in former English concession**



**Catholic Church in former French concession**



# Tianjin in 1980

## Winter in Tianjin



## Earthquake Temporary Housing



# Nankai, 1979-1980

**Nankai University Library**

**With Prof. Ding and Ms. Long**



# Economy of shortages

## Key Words

- 排队 (wait in line)
- 没有 (don't have it)
- 卖完了 (sold out)

## Lining up to shop



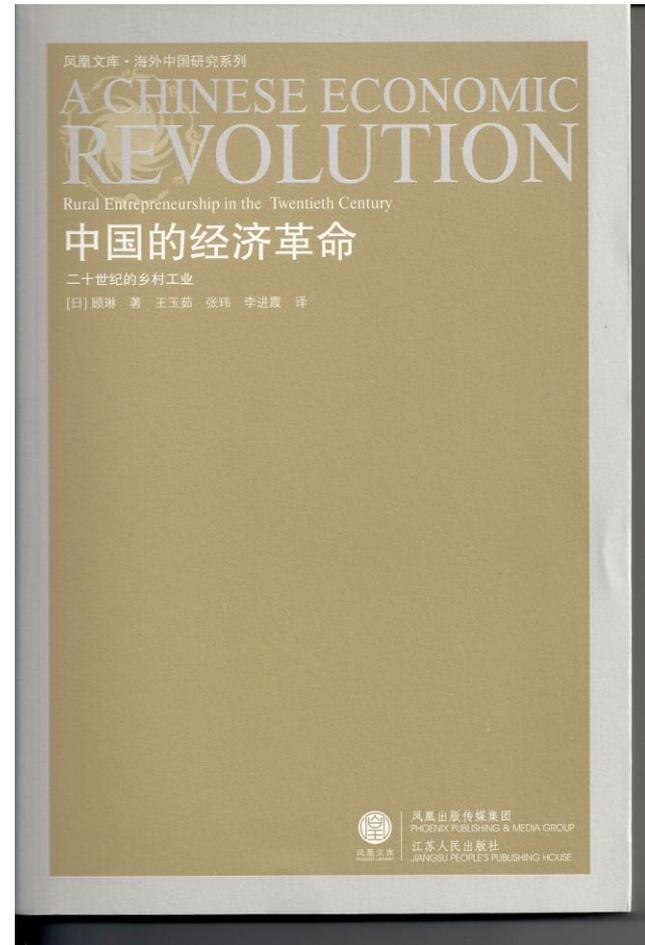
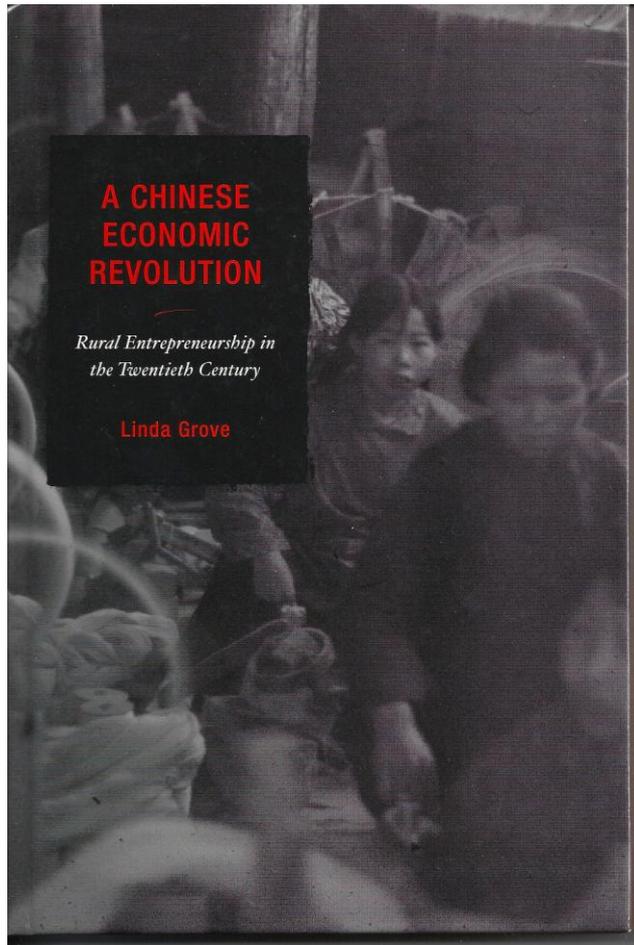
# Research Conditions

- Key Words:
  - 外办 (foreign affairs officer)
  - 旅行证 (internal passport)
  - 内部发行 (restricted publications for those with special clearance—not available to foreigners)
  - 批准 (approval)

# First Field Work in China

- Gaoyang Project and Oral History
  - Recovering the “voices” of merchants in a rural industrial district
  - Linking history and contemporary developments[
  - Entrepreneurial Traditions

# Gaoyang Project



# Serendipity

## Conditions

- Timing: Early 80s still possible to interview people who were active in the 1930s
- Framing: Japanese connections
- Opening of Archives (1990)

## Interviewees



# Related Projects

- East Asian Trade History: Market and Networks
- Urban history: Tianjin and its hinterland
- Women's history: women workers; Tianjin women's lifestyles

# Studying Rural China

- Songjiang Project
  - 1982-1985
  - Research Restrictions →
  - Taboo of talking about Movements

Life History Strategy



# North China Village Project

- 1982: wanted to study the Kankô Chôsa villages, but could not get agreement from any university to take it on
  - “conservative” nature of Hebei provincial government
  - Beijing municipality –too close to the center
  - Shandong—target villages were too poor
  - By late 1980s situation improved, Nankai University historians agreed to collaborate

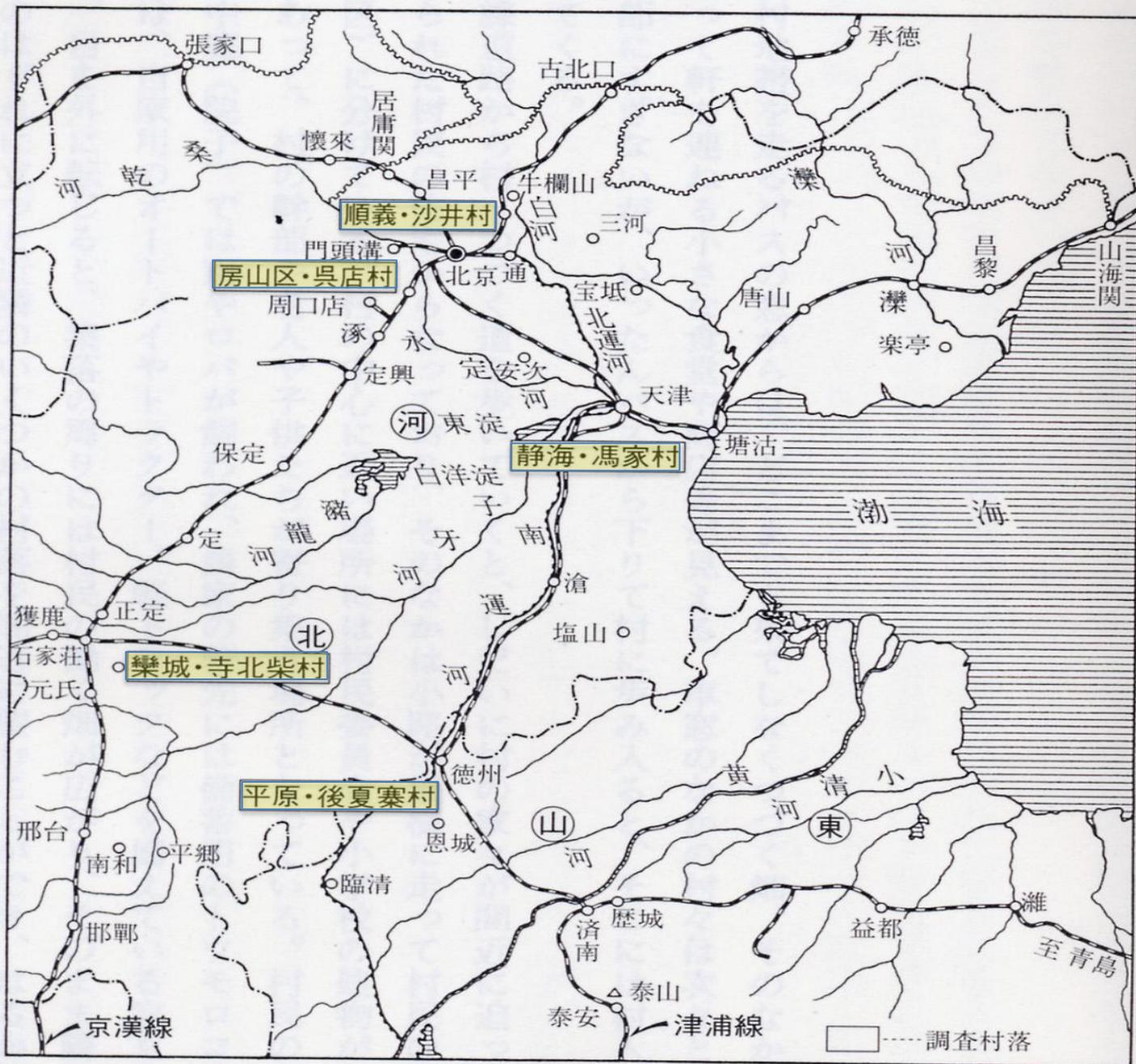
# Why the kankô chôsa villages?

- “Interview Transcripts” –giving voice to the voiceless peasants
- Wide perspective of views: similar questions to large number of informants
- Closest we can get to actually walking in the villages of the 1930s and early 1940s

# Background of the Kankô Chôsa Project in prewar Japan

- Researchers (Tokyo and Kyoto Universities + staff of the Mantetsu Chosabu)
- Choice of villages
- Focus on “customary law”
- Interview data and post-war publication

# 華北農村調查略図



# Sino-Japanese Research Team

- Japan: 中国農村研究会
- China: 南开大学 历史系
- Fieldwork
  - Informal visits: 1986, 1988
  - Formal interviews: 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995
  - Follow-up visits: 1999, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2009,  
– 2010
  - 1990-1995: total of 511 interviews by team members



山东省  
平原县  
柳编基地

# Kankô chôsa villages in discourses on rural China

- 旗田魏、“共同体”理論
- Ramon Myers, 1970
- Philip Huang, 1985
- Prasenjit Duara, 1988
- Uchiyama Masao, Qi Jianmin, etc.

# Interview Methods



- Life history
- Childhood, family, marriage, lineage, etc.
- Economic status of family
- Experience of political movements
- Daily Work, life
- Specific topics

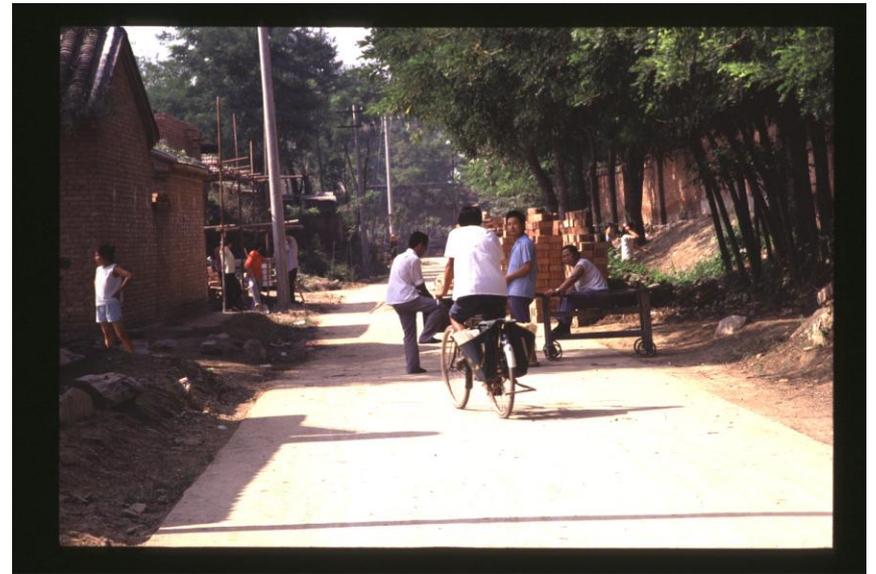


# Shajing (Shunyi District, Beijing)

Shajing in the early 90s



Village street, Shajing



# Shajing (Shunyi county)

-  Location in Beijing municipality, near airport
-  Prewar: classic poor North China village, no major landlords
-  Collectively-owned enterprises
-  Reform era: rapid move away from agriculture--industrial employment, taxi driving, etc.

# Fengjiacun (Jinghai County, Tianjin)

Village street



Music ensemble



# Fengjiacun (Tianjin municipality, Jinghai county)

- 📄 Prewar: land of poor quality, survival on handicraft and outside hired labor
- 📄 Importance of water control
- 📄 “Planned village” following great flood of 1963
- 📄 1990s “suburban” village: supplying vegetables, etc. to city
- 📄 Traditional rural culture –music, dance

# Sibeichai (Luancheng County, Hebei Province)

**Village street**



**Theater at “Temple Fair”**



# Sibeichai

-  Representative of cash-cropping village
-  Cotton production and the rise of tenancy in the pre-war period
-  Problems of “village community”
-  Tribulations of rural industrialization--the village that could not work together
-  Rebuilt temple, revival of “temple fair”

# Houxiashai (Pingyuan County, Shandong)

**Cattle market--1995**



**Basket weaving -1995**



# Houxiashai (Pingyuan, Shandong)

-  In 1980s one of 200 poorest counties in China (Yellow River basin, poor)
-  1990s most “rural” of the villages
-  Downward spiral after Great Leap Forward and famine
-  Water control and village fate: 1960s and 1980s
-  Handicraft and petty trade

# Publications in Japanese [Chinese fieldnotes in press]



# Villages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- 2000: joint volume (each writing a chapter on our special interests)
- Assumptions about what would happen in the future:
  - Shajing would urbanize
  - Fengjiacun would also urbanize, but at a slower pace
  - Sibeichai would have a mixed economy
  - Houxiazhai would remain rural farming village

# Villages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Shajing: High rise apartments
- Fengjiacun: Village factories and vegetable specialization
- Sibeichai: Small-scale commerce
- Houxiashai: migrant labor; 合村并住

# Villages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

- Shajing, 2007



# Villages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Fengjiacun factory, 1994**



**Fengjiacun factory, 2010**

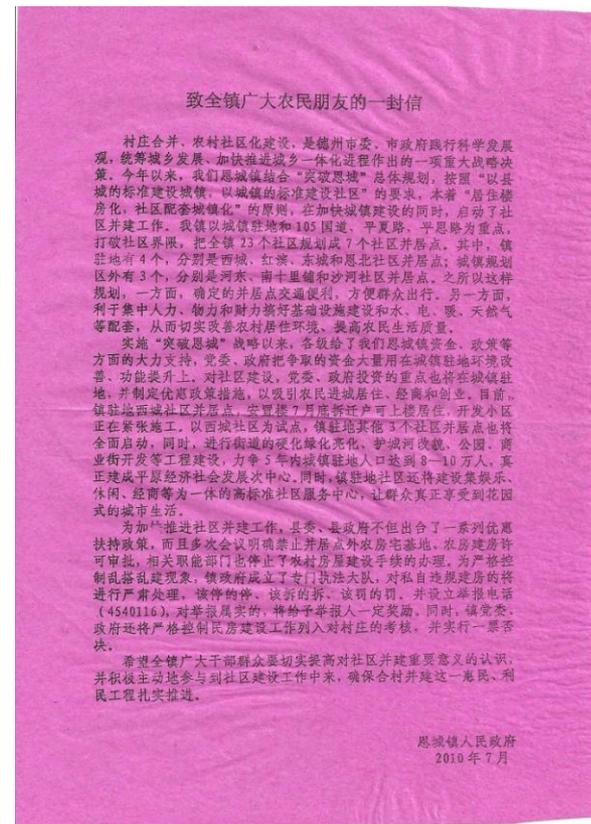


# Villages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

## Houxizhai after summer rain



## Notice to move summer 2010



# The Challenge Ahead

- How to put 100 years of rural change in four villages into one book, while keeping the richness of the data and the individual voices
- Periodization
  - 1900~1937:
    - State building efforts, gradual diminishing of village autonomy (taxation, modern schools, etc)
      - Development of modern infrastructure (roads, railroads, etc.)
      - Incorporation into global markets
    - 1937~1945
    - Anti-Japanese war of resistance

1945/49~ early 1980s

– “Liberation”

– **Key Words:**

- **Class Status** 阶级身份
- **户口system** and restrictions on mobility
- Militarization of Daily Life
- Reorganization : Commune 公社, Brigade生产队, Team 小队
- Mass Movements
- Leadership

# Being a Team Leader

"A brigade head had to watch out for every aspect of the lives of more than 200 people. You had to be sure they had food to eat, water to drink -- and in those days it was often hard to find time to sleep. If some family's house was not well built, when the rainy season came you also had to take time out to be sure the houses would still stand up. There were very few to assist, and not much power to do things, but lots of work to do." (Brigade head, Shajing)

# Making Sense of Contemporary China: Reform Era China

- Economic Development Issues
- Changing patterns of community
- From Collective to Individual and Family Strategies
- New Styles of Leadership

# Personal Profiles

- Wang Weibao—village head at beginning of reforms



# Personal Profiles



- Li Zhixiang
- Overcoming obstacles of “bad class status”
- Entrepreneurial activities
  - Apple orchards
  - Furniture factory
  - Restaurant

# Personal Profiles

- Ma Dechang, Village Party Secretary



# Difficulties of Explaining The Socialist Decades



The photo taken on Feb 28, 2011 shows a bronze Confucius statue at the north square of China's National Museum in Beijing. [Photo/Asianewsphoto]

# Whither Rural China

- Convergence or a Distinctive Chinese model?
- Is the Chinese model sustainable?
- How do different generations of North China rural people talk about their own experiences?