Preface

This book is a revised and shortened account of *Jacqueries et révolution dans la Chine du XXe siècle* (Paris, 2005). It may also be read as a sequel to *Peasants Without the Party* (M. E. Sharpe, 2001; hereinafter *PWP*) and is based upon the same range of material that was introduced and evaluated there (*PWP*, xviii–xxi). The book excludes from consideration the same kind of big events, those that “made history” either before 1911 (such as the Boxer and Tongmenghui uprisings), or, under the Republic, the GMD-led Peasant Unions, the CCP-led peasant movements, the anti-Japanese guerrilla campaigns, and so on.

In the first three chapters, I introduce the subject of peasant resistance, leaving detailed description for later in the book. Chapters 1 and 2 set out the various categories of resistance, separately identified according to their targets and their motivations. Chapter 3 describes the range or repertoire of its forms of protest, in the terms defined by Charles Tilly (1986).

Chapters 4 to 7 are more thematic, systematizing the questions raised in *PWP*. These were inspired by the preoccupations of Chinese revolutionaries themselves: preoccupations before they won power (the class consciousness of the peasants) and their concerns of today over how to modernize their country.

The low level of class consciousness among the peasant masses is illustrated by a striking contrast. On the one hand, antitax resistance was ubiquitous; on the other, tenant farmers’ riots were infrequent and confined within narrow geographical limits. Riots against taxation outnum-
bered by seven times those against rents, whereas land rent charges averaged seven times more than land tax—which, admittedly, represented only a portion of the tax burden. Examined as a category, only the poorest (apart from farm laborers) were involved in resistance to land rent, while antitax resistance brought together a broad front of taxpayers including the landlords themselves. Pillaging and food riots made up the other great movement of the poor (apart from that of the tenants), but the rebels attacked not so much the persons of the rich as their grain reserves, or in other words, their means to live through hard times. Chapter 4 lists the other categories of social movements that, in one way or another, set the poor against the rich. Twin lessons may be drawn from them. In the first place, resistance to rich people’s exploitation of the poor was less significant than resistance to the oppression of the weak by the powerful—even though, naturally enough, those in power were also rich or became so thanks to the legal or illegal authority they exercised at the local level. Secondly, social questions as desperate as the poverty of farm laborers or as weighty as the torments suffered by insolvent debtors practically never gave rise (unless exploited by the CCP) to collective or violent resistance. At the same time, the frequency of xièdōu (armed conflicts) comes into stronger relief, since they involved two camps mixed in social composition but alike in that very heterogeneity, each acquiring the unanimity of “our side” against the outsiders (a clan or neighboring village).

Chapter 5 merges two chapters of Jacqueries. Antitax resistance was touched on in my earlier book in relation to a particular revolt (PWP, Chapter 5), but is here the focus of the central chapter: it is the book’s longest, yet still hardly long enough to do justice to the subject. More than looting, which was merely a short-term means of survival, antitax resistance is the fullest expression of peasant protest. And it is present as well in a significant proportion of the various categories of unrest explored in the book’s remaining chapters.

This is particularly true of resistance to the late Qing New Policies (xīnzhēng) recalled at the start of Chapter 6. Did peasant resistance hamper, time and time again, the efforts undertaken to modernize and strengthen the country? I venture this sacrilegious hypothesis in Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 first examines the forms of and motivations behind rural opposition to the New Policies, an audacious but belated
project that precipitated the fall of the Dynasty. A quarter of a century later, the resistance of silkworm cultivators to the modernization of their trade left it still less fit to survive the Great Depression or to overcome the competition from Japanese silk (though I make absolutely no claim that these “technocratic” reforms would have been on either count successful had there been no peasant resistance at all). Five years later, the Japanese invasion was of a wholly different order: it proved a challenge utterly beyond China’s capacity to defend herself. So there is no question that peasants were responsible for the inadequacies of the Chinese defense, still less for masking the ill-treatment of conscripts, who were nearly all of peasant origin, or the tragic suffering (economic and human) inflicted on farming families by the unequal imposition of military service. The fact remains that draft-dodging and desertion did seriously handicap the nation’s resistance (Chapter 7).

I should indicate briefly those chapters of *Jacqueries* that have been omitted from this abridged edition. Firstly, Chapter 5, devoted to the leaders (the initiators and organizers) of collective actions. A fair number of them were not peasants; among those who were, the “poor peasants” celebrated in communist historiography were far fewer than either the so-called middle or rich peasants. Yet, I concede that my count cannot possibly represent a true quantitative analysis; quite soon, that will become a feasible project, thanks to the ever-growing abundance of evidence and biographical details available from a multiplicity of studies and compilations—and also from the less grudging opening of archives (police archives, among others). Similarly, I have left out the bulk of Chapter 6, a rather restrictive estimate of the strength of the insurgent peasants and the danger they represented for those in power. The response by authorities at various levels to rural unrest, their vertical or horizontal divisions (internal conflicts within the elite), their handling of disturbances, and the combination of concessions with pitiless repression (inherited from imperial prescriptions) were the subject of *Jacqueries* Chapter 7.

The content of the other *Jacqueries* chapters not retained for the English-language edition has been more or less treated in *PWP*. In one case, however, the earlier treatment of “Peasant Responses to CCP Mobilization Policies” has been appreciably changed. Chapter 11 of *PWP*—the reprinted text of a paper presented in Leiden in 1990 and
revised in 1993 for publication in Saich and Van de Ven eds. 1995—
did not take into account the monumental study by Odoric Wou that
came out immediately afterwards (1994) or (for obvious reasons) later
studies, such as Benton (1999), DeVido (1995 and 2000), Esherick
(1994, 1995, 2000), Feng Chongyi and Goodman eds. (2000), Good-
(1996), Selden (1995), and Wou (2004). The development of the sub-
discipline “rural communist bases” was not interrupted in 2004, the
year when the manuscript of Jacqueries was passed to the publishers. The
studies published between 1994 and 2004 have nevertheless enabled
me to flesh out, and on one point (PWP, 233, item 2), to correct my
initial treatment of “peasant responses.”

All in all, the chapters that I have left out of the present edition are
those that seemed to me the least important. I trust that I have retained
the essentials. In addition, I have added a final chapter, written specially
for this new edition: Chapter 8 outlines a number of permanent fea-
tures of collective actions by the peasantry. These features are common
to French peasants in the seventeenth century and Chinese peasants in
the twentieth century, revealing as well many continuities between the
actions of the latter and those that make today’s headlines.

Let me finally express my thanks to at least a handful of people and
institutions. My research has benefited greatly as a result of the decision
by the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales to grant me in
1992 the half-time collaboration of a research assistant. The zeal and
competence of this assistant, Madame Hua Chang-ming, have fulfilled
all my expectations. In particular, she helped me to draw upon the
wealth contained in Wenshi ziliao, now rendered easily accessible thanks
to the precious five-volume index published by Yantai shifan xueyuan
1992, as presented by Sherman Cochran (1996, 92) and extolled in
PWP (xx and xxvi). I should add that after she retired in 1997, Madame
Hua continued for several years her collaboration with me on a purely
generous basis.

Dr. Fu Hung-chung, who is the author of an excellent doctoral
thesis entitled “Le service militaire en Chine à la veille de la Révolution
chinoise” (Military Service in China on the Eve of the Chinese Rev-
olution, Paris, 2007), located and made available to me a variety of
material from the Taiwan archives referred to in Chapter 7 of the
present work. Further discoveries presented in his thesis encouraged me to redraft and flesh out this chapter.

I wish also to thank Mark Selden and Elizabeth Perry for having taken the initiative in submitting *Jacqueries* to the Harvard University Asia Center, as well as the anonymous reader for the publications program, whose pertinent suggestions greatly improved the manuscript. Lastly, working with Philip Liddell has been a constant pleasure—and not only because of the excellence of his translation.