



Down to Earth: The Territorial Bond in South China

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Bringing local history to bear on major questions in Chinese social history and anthropology, this volume comprises a series of historical and ethnographic studies of the Pearl River Delta from late imperial times through the 1940's. The delta is a rich and socially complex area of south China, and the contributors - scholars from the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, and the United States - have long-standing ties to the region.

The contributors argue that local society in the Delta was integrated into the Chinese state through a series of changes that involved constant redefinition of lineages, territories, and ethnic identities. The emergence of lineages in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the deployment of deities in local alliances, and the shrewd use of ethnic labels provided terms for a discourse that reified the criteria for membership in Chinese local society. The ideology produced by these developments continued to serve as the norm for the legitimization of power in local society through the Republican period.

In reconstructing the 'civilizing process' in the Delta, whereby local inhabitants, both elites and commoners, used symbolic and instrumental means to become part of Chinese culture and polity, the book confronts a central question in history and anthropology: How do we conceptualize the historical development of a state agrarian society with hierarchies of power and authority, attachment to which is both unifying and diversifying?

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