Of the two works, Ahern's is ethnographically richer and more satisfying intellectually. She singles out rituals and divinations that involve interpersonal communications (such as those with various kinds of spiritual beings) and then argues that rather than employ a special jargon to talk about them, anthropologists should use ordinary vocabulary pertaining to everyday interactions with this-worldly persons. She demonstrates that the uses of many "religious" charms parallels the Chinese use of personal name cards and official documents. They should not be regarded as "magical" in the traditional senses of contagious or associative magic, as they are communications with and from certain kinds of deities and can be further broken down into functional categories such as "reports, orders, mandates, injunctions, or notices" (p. 30). Yet other "rituals" are a form of etiquette with direct parallels to the polite transactions the Chinese use to lubricate social relations.

Ahern points out that, very often the codes used to communicate with spirits are very restrictive in terms of the answers they can make, if not in terms of the questions that supplicants can ask, especially when dealing with high and remote deities. The analogy with dealings with traditional Chinese officialdom are obvious to those familiar with how it operated. Spirit possession and spirit writing are ways to make communication with spirits less restrictive, as is the use of go-betweens and written documents in secular affairs, but the answers obtained are still often unintelligible in ordinary language or require substantial interpretations. Her analytical distinction between open and closed ritual practices is not demonstrated, to my satisfaction, to be as cogent as the others she employs, although her ensuing discussion of the differences between heterodox and orthodox religious practices and their relation to rebellion and orderly government is excellent.

In her insightful conclusion, Ahern argues that Chinese religion and ritual had different functions depending on whose point of view is taken. As might be expected, beliefs about a supernatural bureaucracy peopled by spirits who occupied positions in hierarchy of offices from the ubiquitous local "earth gods" to awe-inspiring analogues of the emperor and his court did serve to mystify for the peasants the ways in which the literate gentry held and exercised power by dominating the bureaucratic government. However, because it embodied the same kinds of officials as the imperial government and involved the same forms of communication, peasant religious practices constituted a "learning game" that taught the ordinary Chinese how their government operated and, ultimately, how their society worked.

Croll's book is more straightforward reportage, but that characterization is by no means intended to belittle it, as it presents a well-documented and very welcome assertion of how little certain aspects of mainland Chinese marriage practices have changed since 1949. The much-vaunted Marriage Law of 1950, which some have erroneously taken as proof of sexual equality in the PRC, did make it legally possible for young people to freely choose their own spouses. But as should be expected in a society lacking any cultural tradition of romance or any social context of easy familiarity with people of the opposite sex, most young Chinese have not been, and still are not, prepared to do anything except go along with government exhortations to "listen to" their parents' ideas about whom they should marry. As Croll's research attests, there are important differences in such regards between the more "modern" cities and the still-hidebound countryside where some 80 percent of all Chinese are permanently relegated, particularly with respect to "rights of refusal" to go along with parents' first choices and whether "bride price" is still transformed into dowry or takes the form of domestic chattels extracted by the bride herself.

Despite certain changes in contemporary urban Chinese courtship and marriage that Croll describes (and that are paralleled in Hong Kong and on Taiwan), her work should put an end to romanticized, ideologically biased claims that there has been a socialist transformation of marriage practices and family organization in the Peoples Republic of China.

***Ploughshare Village: Culture and Context in Taiwan.* STEVAN HARRELL. Publications on Asia of the School of International Studies 35. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982. ix + 234 pp., maps, photographs, tables, figures, glossary, bibliography, index. $20.00 (cloth).**

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Ploughshare Village is a welcome addition to the growing literature on contemporary China. Although the monograph focuses on one particular village, Harrell's major concern is with legitimizing and explaining the range of variation of Chinese social organization. Harrell rejects a one-sided dependence on cultural determinist explanations or economic materialist explanations. What he attempts to do, I think successfully, is to demonstrate how Chinese social structure, the basic set of shared principles, is utilized in varying socioeconomic contexts. His analysis incorporates the work done by other scholars in the Taibei Basin in the past two decades, with attention to the interconnections within that regional economy and its connection to the wider society.

Most ethnographic work on China, whether carried out on the mainland prior to 1949 or in Taiwan since the late 1950s, has been done within the boundary of the natural village. Moreover, it has usually dealt with long-established communities, dominated by one or two large surname groups (lineages), with an economy based primarily on grain production and secondarily on cash

crops such as tobacco, silk, or peanuts. In addition, our view of rural China has been strongly influenced by the detailed monographs dealing with the multifaceted functions of Chinese lineage organization. In our idealized view, the Chinese village is ancestral halls and rice paddies.

From this standpoint, Harrell's choice of a fieldwork site is unusual. Ploughshare is a recent settlement, even by Taiwan frontier standards. No more than 150 years old, it was initially settled by late arrivals from Anxi County in Fujian, from elsewhere in the Taibei Basin and from the mainland after 1949. In this hilly, upland region which provided little access to rice lands, the settlers worked as hillside tea growers, woodcutters and makers of charcoal, coal miners, agricultural wage laborers and, in the mid-20th century, as factory workers and small entrepreneurs. The social organization that emerged in this context differs in many ways from that reported for other communities in the Taibei Basin, but it is no less "Chinese" and would be a mistake to regard it as a deviation.

The book divides into two sections, the first of which is concerned with context. Harrell provides an economic history of the region from late Qing through the Japanese colonial period, the initial years of the Guomindang takeover, and the postwar industrial boom. This is followed by a close analysis of the changing occupational structure in Ploughshare, starting with the first decade of this century when detailed records became available. Since the fieldwork itself was spread over several field trips between 1972 and 1978, Harrell can closely chart the shift from the mines to the factories and the development of cottage industries. The section closes with a discussion of class and social stratification, placing these categories within the wider context of the region and Taiwan's economic and political structure as a whole.

The second part of the book deals with social organization in Ploughshare. What is striking, though not surprising, in this setting is the near absence of lineage organization and function and the greater importance of household units and dyadic ties linking households. The organization of local cooperation and competition is based on various dyadic ties, not on blocs of kinsmen. In a sense, the only real corporate group is the household. The modal form has fluctuated over the past century, in response to demographic and economic circumstances, but always in line with the basic principles of family structure. Yet these are also households in which the dominance of males over females is less than that reported for agricultural villages in the region, the number of uxorilocal marriages is higher, the percentages of "adopted daughters-in-law" less, and the patriarchal control over sons considerably modified. In the religious sphere, household-based ancestral memorialization reflects the lack of emphasis on agnatic ties and the relative absence of property: it is purely a domestic cult. The major religious activities are addressed to local gods who define the village and district and differentiate Anxi immigrants from others.

Harrell's book is generally clear and well written, though he sometimes assumes that the reader has considerable prior knowledge of the literature. The blurb on the book jacket says that Ploughshare is "unique": his argument makes it clear that it is not and that we need to rethink our ideas of what constitutes Chinese social structure and social organization. One way of doing this is by moving away from the rice paddies and paying more attention to the range of communities and their articulation within a wider system.

Chinese Village Politics in the Malaysian State. **JUDITH STRAUCH. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. xvi + 187 pp., abbreviations, tables, map, appendixes, bibliography, index. $22.00 (cloth).**

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Two kinds of ideas seem to dominate Western accounts of Chinese political culture. One is that politics is a very dirty business. Those who get caught up in it are not only driven by the basest and most selfish of motives, they are also very likely to get eaten up in the cruel competition of political maneuvering. Hence, ordinary, decent people avoid getting involved. The second is that Chinese political actors, whoever they may be, in whatever political system, tend to form factions and that these factions tend to take on a life of their own, using issues, if any, to serve factional ends rather than the other way around. So there will always be conflicting pressures on Chinese men—to stay out of politics and, once in, to stay in to vindicate themselves. Comparative studies of Chinese politics must thus be concerned with the characteristics of specific political arenas that cause one or the other of these pressures to dominate.

Judith Strauch's book is, I think, best seen as an attempt to answer this comparative question for a single political arena—a primarily Chinese "new village" (originally a counterinsurgency relocation camp) in Perak, West Malaysia. It turns out to be a formidable task. Strauch's basic thesis is that politics within the village can only be understood in terms of the nature of the encapsulation of the village in the larger Malaysian political system, a complex relationship because the village is not only a local system tied into the economy of a developing nation but also a Chinese community in a Malay-dominated polity. This not only means that local leaders must play the customary role of intermediaries between villagers and higher-level political elites; it also means that the higher-level political elites with whom the village leaders have effective ties are themselves Chinese and thus limited in their ability to exert influence in the Malay-dominated bureaucratic structures at levels from the local district all the way up to the national government.