



## Contract and Property in Early Modern China

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The role of contract in early modern Chinese economic life, when acknowledged at all, is usually presented as a minor one. This volume demonstrates that contract actually played a critical role in the everyday structure of many kinds of relationships and transactions; contracts are, moreover, of enormous value to present-day scholars as transcriptions of the fine details of day-to-day economic activity.

Offering a new perspective on economic and legal institutions, particularly the closely related institutions of contract and property, in Qing and Republican China, the papers in this volume spell out how these institutions worked in specific social contexts. Drawing on recent research in far-flung archives, the contributors take as givens both the embeddedness of contract in Chinese social and economic discourse and its role in the spread of commodification. Two papers deal with broad issues: Zelin's argues for a distinctively Chinese heritage of strong property rights, and Ocko's examines the usefulness of American legal scholarship as a comparative analytic framework.

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