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978-1-107-14856-7 — Marriage, Law and Gender in Revolutionary China, 1940–1960
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Marriage, Law, and Gender in Revolutionary China, 1940–1960

Xiaoping Cong examines the social and cultural significance of Chinese revolutionary legal practice in the construction of marriage and gender relations. Her book is an empirically rich investigation of the ways in which a 1943 legal dispute over an arranged marriage in a Chinese village became a legal, political, and cultural exemplar on the national stage. This conceptually ground-breaking study revisits the Chinese revolution and its impact on women and society by presenting a Chinese experience that cannot and should not be theorized in the framework of Western discourse. Taking a cultural historical perspective, Cong shows how the Chinese revolution and its legal practices produced new discourses, neologisms, and cultural symbols that contained China's experience in twentieth-century social movements, and how revolutionary practice was sublimated into the concept of "self-determination," an idea that bridged local experiences with the tendency of the twentieth-century world, and a revolutionary legacy for China today.

XIAOPING CONG is Associate Professor of History at the University of Houston, Texas.

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In memory of Professor Feng Qi 冯契 (1915–95),
who taught me how to think intellectually and
historically.

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Acknowledgments

Although Chinese society bid farewell to the revolution in the 1990s, its legacy in a new historical moment still needs to be reviewed. In the twentieth century the Chinese revolution has been studied through its ideological sources, its political policies, its party leaders, its relations with intellectuals, and its mass mobilization; however, the most significant part of the revolution was its social and legal practices in localities, which has not received enough academic attention. It was from these practices that the revolution developed an effective way of governance and created a set of discourse to speak its own experience. Studying revolutionary legal practice offers a way of looking into the Chinese experience in a particular locality. As the book shows, communism as well as a large amount of new terminology imported from the West (some via Japan) were prevalent in twentieth-century society and intellectual circles. However, it was local practices that digested these neologies, and then new terms such as *zizhu* (self-determination), which contained local experience described in this book, began to emerge. This eventually became the revolutionary legacy for the rest of the century and contemporary China.

This project can be viewed as the continuation of my last book, which ends in the 1930s when young students in teachers' schools became revolutionaries. While looking for a new book topic that could trace the next stage of these students' activities, I encountered a document on the story of "Liu Qiao'er" and her actual prototype. This story triggered my childhood memory of celebratory parties in which the solo of "Qiao'er" was often very popular. It was a symbol of revolution for women who wanted freedom in selecting their marriage mate. I was surprised to learn that the protagonist, Feng Peng'er (Zhiqin), was still alive. This immediately attracted my attention but also made prompt action imperative, given her age. In 2005 I visited Feng Peng'er's home to interview her. It was also on this trip that I learned about the Revolutionary High Court files in the Shaanxi Provincial Archives, and that they were open to the public. This interview and the discovery of this collection of legal documents thus formed a solid foundation for this research project and eventual

book. The story of Feng Peng'er itself presents the changing life of rural women in the Chinese revolution. I thus want to express my great appreciation to Feng Peng'er (Zhiqin), whose life experience became an important part of the history of twentieth-century China. Unfortunately, she passed away on February 12, 2015, and was not able to see the publication of an English-language book about her life. However, this book is a fitting memorial.

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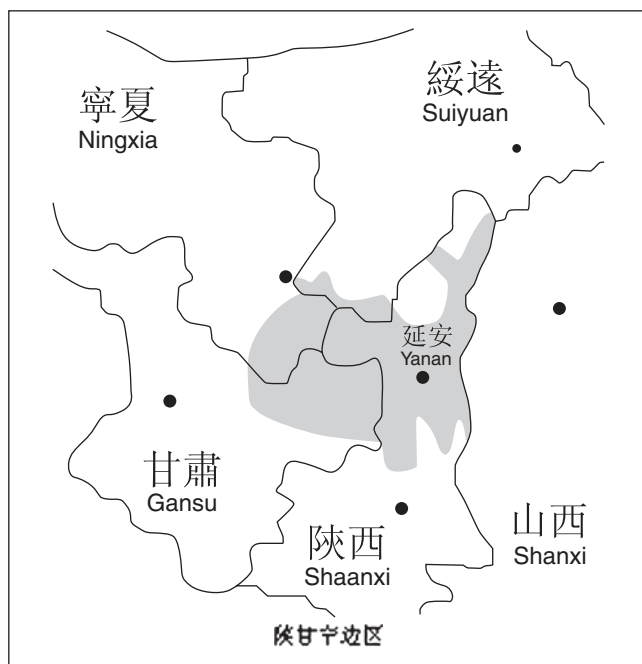
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Map 1 The location of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, 1937–1947

