



The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China

Kate Merkel-Hess

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Discussions of China's early twentieth-century modernization efforts tend to focus almost exclusively on cities, and the changes, both cultural and industrial, seen there. As a result, the communist peasant revolution appears as a decisive historical break. Kate Merkel-Hess corrects that misconception by demonstrating how crucial the countryside was for reformers in China long before the success of the communist revolution.

In *The Rural Modern*, Merkel-Hess shows that Chinese reformers and intellectuals created an idea of modernity that was not simply about what was foreign and new, as in Shanghai and other cities, but instead captured the Chinese people's desire for social and political change rooted in rural traditions and institutions. She traces efforts to remake village education, economics, and politics, analyzing how these efforts contributed to a new, inclusive vision of rural Chinese life. Merkel-Hess argues that as China sought to redefine itself, such rural reform efforts played a major role, and tensions that emerged between rural and urban ways deeply informed social relations, government policies, and subsequent efforts to create a modern nation during the communist period.

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