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### Title

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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4gv4v683>

### Journal

Ethnology, 35(3)

### ISSN

0014-1828

### Author

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### Publication Date

1996-07-01

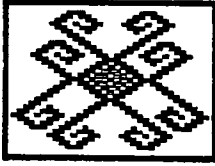
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# THE HAMLET AS MEDIATOR<sup>1</sup>



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Our focus on “the customary social unit that mediates relations between household . . . and community in Mesoamerican Indian and rural society” (Mulhare 1996:93) leads to a rich conceptual space. A mediator is expected to do more than carry clear messages from one party to another. A mediator must somehow shape the connection, transform the message, and enhance or buffer the force of the exchange. And mediation itself is complex, especially because it varies with the relative power of the (minimally three) parties involved. These aspects of mediation raise interesting questions about small rural social forms and their relations to their contexts. This article explores some of those questions by describing hamlets in Zinacantán, Chiapas (Mexico) over recent decades and comparing them with similar social units in Chinese peasant communities during earlier periods. In both places hamlets have been important mediators between households and the larger community through which households are connected to the state.

The goals here are to identify characteristics of hamlets that signal their mediating role, and to explore the conditions under which these characteristics change. In abstract terms, the hamlet of concern is territorially delimited and has a population between several dozen and about 200 households. It has two characteristics that are central to its role as a mediating social form.

First, the hamlet is socially incomplete. That is, the social and public life of its residents extends beyond its boundaries in important ways. For example, marriage partners may be sought from outside the hamlet, and/or public roles taken by hamlet residents may be played out in a larger sociopolitical unit. In Mesoamerica this often means that religious offices (*cargos*) are served at the *municipio* (township) level, not in the hamlet. It means much the same thing in the world described by fat dictionaries, where a hamlet is defined as “a group of houses or a small village, *esp.* one without a church” (Brown 1993). Thus, the incompleteness of social and public life in hamlets is a distinctive characteristic of their social form.<sup>2</sup> Given current ideas about the incompleteness of most aspects of life as we see them, I should emphasize that I mean to characterize hamlets relative to other social forms, not in an absolute way (Cancian 1992:205-08). For example, in Mesoamerica, the *municipio* is a more complete social form than the hamlet.

Second, the hamlet’s public life is not formally organized, and the hamlet is not fully articulated with the larger unit of which it is a part. This often means 1) that its most powerful leaders are called traditional from the point of view of the encompassing state, and/or 2) that relations with the outside world are mediated through residents who are of low status and powerless within the hamlet. Political life in the hamlet is only loosely and/or informally connected with the larger system—in

the Mesoamerican case with officials at the municipio level and beyond.

This kind of hamlet virtually disappeared from Zinacantán between the 1960s and the 1980s. At the beginning of the period Zinacantán's hamlets closely resembled the idealized one just characterized. By the end, they were much more socially complete, formally organized, and closely articulated with the world outside them. Independence based on distance from the municipio's political and religious center and detachment from higher levels of government was replaced by full formal status in a local system organized by local officials and subject to rules dictated from above. Seen from the local and from the household point of view, the hamlet no longer mediated relations with the world outside. In many ways it became a local outpost of that world.

To document this transition in Zinacantán I will 1) give a brief overview of the earlier form of hamlets and of the changes and their proximate causes; 2) review in detail the recent history of formal roles in one hamlet; and 3) summarize a survey of similar transitions in all the other hamlets of the municipio. These sections are based on my fieldwork reported at length in Cancian (1992) and on the work of many others cited there. Comparisons with Chinese rural society based on a few recent published studies of earlier periods follow, and the essay concludes with the tentative generalizations to which these comparisons lead.

#### RECENT CHANGES IN ZINACANTÁN: OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

In 1960, and for at least two decades before that, Zinacantán fit the model that Mulhare (1996) and Nutini (1976:14) describe. The hamlet (*paraje*) was the customary social unit mediating between the household and the community represented by the municipio.<sup>3</sup> Each of about a dozen hamlets had formally appointed officials who collected taxes for municipio fiestas and took them to officials in the Pueblo (the political and religious center of the municipio). Shamans resident in each hamlet performed annual rituals for the hamlet at the municipio's sacred places. Hamlet membership did not change with change of residence; it was more like national citizenship; e.g., a man who went to live in his wife's hamlet continued to pay taxes in his home hamlet.

The hamlets were left unmolested and informal as long as they paid their contributions to fiestas and other activities organized at the municipio level. Before the 1960s most formal activities were concentrated in the Pueblo. Many individuals and families from the hamlets visited the Pueblo to use the formal courts or the Catholic churches, and some moved there temporarily to serve in formal civil or religious offices. But they did so as members of the municipio community, not as representatives of their hamlets.

By the 1980s this relationship of individuals and families to the municipio had changed: several hamlets got their own churches and officials, and many more Zinacantecos did formal public business and public service in their hamlets. Hamlets offered more complete social lives to their residents. The informality of the idealized

hamlet was gone.

The proximate causes of this transformation were Mexican government and Catholic Church programs that paid for construction of new schools, roads, water and light systems, community buildings, jails, and churches in the hamlets, and fostered the development of new formal roles that paralleled the construction. The broader context of the change involved indirect causes that ranged from population growth that increased hamlet size to regional and national economic expansion based on petroleum resources discovered in and near the state of Chiapas in the mid-1970s. This economic expansion, in its turn, came toward the end of the activist Echeverría (1970-76) presidency—which itself came on the heels of the political activism of the late 1960s. From the international point of view, the beginning of this activism was marked by the killing of students in clashes with Mexico City police when the 1968 Olympics were held there. Thus, during the early 1970s, the national state had multiple reasons to extend its reach into the hamlets of Zinacantán. Its programs were facilitated by the worldwide movements of capital (in the form of loans to Third-World countries) that eventually contributed to the economic crisis of 1982.

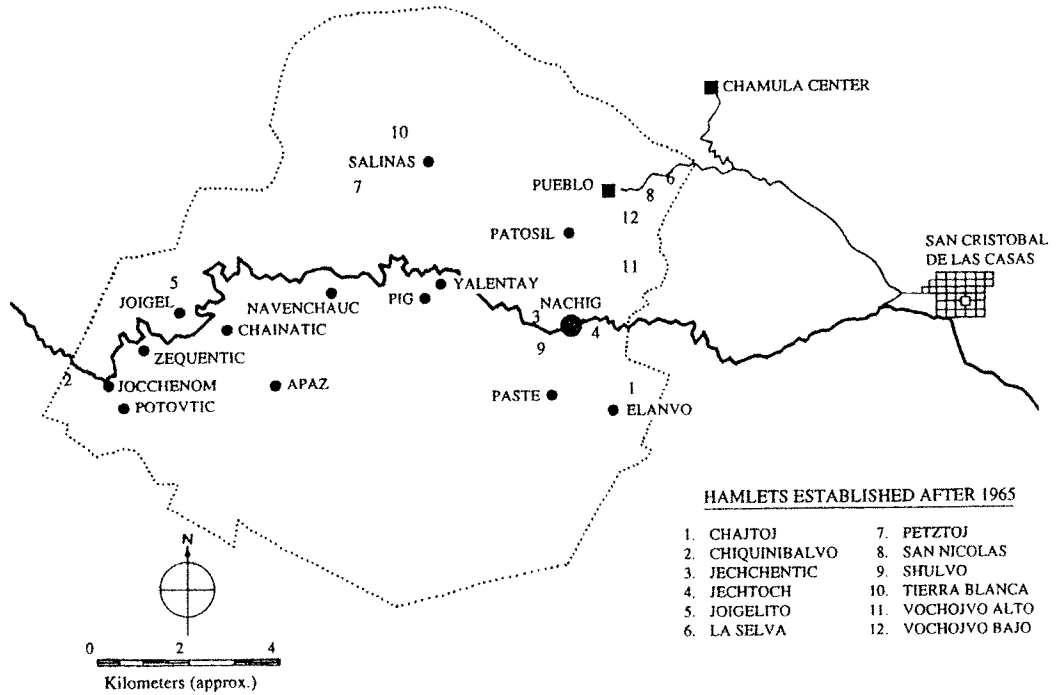
#### THE TRANSFORMATION IN ONE HAMLET: NACHIG

Each hamlet in Zinacantán has a unique history, but the general direction and many of the specifics of the transformation were similar for most of them. Nachig, the hamlet I know best, was medium-sized in 1940. The national census listed its population at 269, and showed that three hamlets were larger, two were about the same size, and three were a little smaller. At that time one could walk from Nachig to the Pueblo of Zinacantán, or the market city of San Cristóbal de las Cases, conduct business, and get home the same day. Both the Pueblo and San Cristóbal were less accessible to the more distant hamlets in the western part of Zinacantán (see Figure 1).

In 1940 Nachig's status as a hamlet was marked by its *Principales*. These officials collected contributions (taxes) for public works and fiestas in the Pueblo, and for the monthly salary of the *Ladino* (non-Indian) Municipal Secretary, and took the money to the *Presidente Municipal* (mayor) in the Pueblo. On their weekly trips, they also carried messages to and from the Presidente. Judging from consultants' accounts of the period, and from incumbents observed more recently, Principales were young men, often bachelors, who served for one-year terms. They were responsible community servants but, in keeping with their youth, they had no authority (see also Tax et al. 1947). At that time they represented the entire formal contact of Nachig with the municipio.

There were few other formal roles in the hamlet in the 1940s. In the late 1930s Nachig had become one of the few hamlets to have a school. Thus, there was at least one official (probably a *Presidente de Educación* [Tax et al. 1947:40]) for the school, and probably a school committee with one or two additional members. Judging from activities of recent school committees, most of their duties concerned promoting attendance and maintaining buildings. In the early 1940s, many Nachig men

Figure 1: Hamlets of Zinacantán (Chiapas), 1983



After Vogt 1969:viii and 156, with additions.

(probably about half) were members of the *ejido* (land reform) movement, and there was probably at least one Nachig man on the central organizing committee.<sup>4</sup> During those years the leader of the *ejido* movement that included Nachig and all the major hamlets around it (including the Pueblo) was beginning two decades as political *cacique* of the municipio. Thus the *ejido* delegates, or the informal political leaders behind them, probably were the most powerful political leaders in the hamlet.

By the late 1940s these three roles (Principal, school committee, and *ejido* delegate) involved more men, perhaps as many as eight or nine at a time.<sup>5</sup> While the school and *ejido* officials were important to many people, they did not directly concern every household in Nachig, for not every household had a child in school or a member of the *ejido* movement. Only the Principales connected every household to the municipio.

The formal unity of the hamlet was “ritually expressed by two annual ceremonies performed by all the shamans living within it” (Vogt 1969:148). These ceremonies

emphasized the hamlet's relationship to "ancestral gods in the [municipio] ceremonial center. Significantly enough, the . . . principales serve as mayordomos and play host for the ritual meals which begin and end the ceremonial circuit" (Vogt 1969:148-49). The rituals unified the hamlet and reaffirmed the importance of municipio-wide culture to its participants.

There was no connection between the hamlet and the religious cargo system in the 1940s. Service in religious offices, which was the key to the municipio-wide status system (Cancian 1965, 1967), was not part of public life in Nachig, for the hamlet had no church. Nachig residents who wanted to establish themselves through ritual service had to go to the Pueblo to serve, for three of the four churches where cargos could be served were located there, and all but two of the roughly 40 expensive cargos devoted to sponsorship of fiestas were served entirely in the Pueblo. The fourth church and two cargos that connected the hamlet to the Pueblo every other Sunday (Cancian 1965:221) were in Salinas, a hamlet on the old route from central Mexico through the state capital and the Pueblo of Zinacantán to the market city of San Cristóbal de las Cases. At that time the Pueblo was also home to less than a dozen civil or political offices, including the Presidente Municipal and municipio judges. Both religious and civil offices were served for year-long terms (Tax et al. 1947:41, 52), often by people who, like Nachig people, moved temporarily from their hamlets to the Pueblo. In sum, in the 1940s Nachig was a place of residence that looked like my idealized hamlet. Its population was small, its leadership "informal," or powerless, and social and public life there was incomplete, for the religious cargos and powerful, formal political offices were in the Pueblo. Though many other changes came to Nachig in the next two decades, its formal roles remained essentially the same into the 1960s (Cancian 1992:109).

The Pan American Highway was the harbinger of the changes that concern us here. Completed in about 1950 and mostly paved by the end of the decade, the new highway passed through Nachig and other hamlets that had been remote. It brought Nachig to within fifteen minutes of San Cristóbal by car.

When a church was built near the highway in the late 1960s, important new public roles came to Nachig. The construction was financed and encouraged by an order of Catholic nuns and led by an important Nachig man. At first a committee cared for the church, but by 1976 there were four sacristans and two religious cargo-holders who sponsored fiestas. Their duties were modeled on those of men serving in the Pueblo,<sup>6</sup> and the religious cargos counted as first-level service in the Pueblo's four-level hierarchy. During the same period, as part of the reforms initiated by Vatican Council II, two Nachig men were named catechists to serve the hamlet. In sum, in a decade Nachig went from a place with no formal Catholic ritual roles to one where eight local men served in such roles at all times.

Nachig's formal political roles expanded in the mid-1970s. The Presidente Municipal appointed an *Agente Municipal*—an official with formal authority to settle disputes. The *Agente* soon had a new community building (Casa del Pueblo) in which to work, and a jail to hold prisoners. Before those changes, disputes were mediated by hamlet elders who served informally and without term (Collier 1973), and cases

they could not settle were taken to the judges and the Presidente Municipal in the Pueblo. In practice the new system included three Agentes, not one, and each of the three had an assistant. This made it possible for the pairs to serve two-week terms and then have four weeks free to earn their livings. Thus, in just a few years, the formal civil roles connected to dispute settlement and local administration went from none to six.

Finally, the 1960s saw construction of the first electric and piped-water systems in Nachig and creation of a committee to administer them and collect fees for delivery to federal offices in San Cristóbal, and the 1970s saw construction of a second school, creation of its school committee, and appointment of local officials in charge of administration of communal lands. Overall, the number of religious and public service roles in Nachig about tripled between 1960 and 1977 (while the population about doubled). More than half of the new roles were added between 1974 and 1977 (Cancian 1992:109).

Events set off by the new pressures to serve public offices in the hamlet made Nachig's status even more formal. The most important change came when men who served in hamlet offices tired of additional demands from municipio officials who wanted them for service at the municipio level. Finally, one man refused the demands of a Nachig nominating meeting unless he was protected from the demands of municipio officials. In response, Nachig officials drafted a resolution and got it approved by municipio officials: it exempted a man who served a year in either Nachig or the Pueblo from taxes for that and the following year and exempted him from other service at both levels for the same period. Service in Nachig was officially on a par with service in the Pueblo.

These changes made Nachig a more socially complete place and a formally organized place, a place where honorable civil and religious service could be done, disputes officially settled, and fiestas enjoyed. It was a place with a church, a bandstand in front of it, and, just across the highway, a public park and a community building with a jail behind it. While many Nachig people still went to the Pueblo for big service, big disputes, and big fiestas, for some there was no longer a need to do so—especially for those who did not aspire to higher levels of the religious hierarchy, encountered no major trouble, and wished to avoid the extra expense of the fiestas at the churches in the Pueblo. At the same time, there were new local fiesta taxes to be paid, hamlet service to be done, and almost no place to avoid the gaze of people in official roles, for they were your neighbors in a large hamlet tucked into a single valley. For all practical purposes, Nachig had become the community, and its role as a mediating level of social organization had receded, at least temporarily.

In addition, by the end of the 1970s Nachig had split into three official hamlets. The separation of Jechtoch, an area on the eastern side of Nachig, was relatively simple. The area was defined in the late 1960s when the Nachig water system was built. Jechtoch was on higher ground than the rest of the hamlet, and was not included in the water system for technical reasons. Later some of its leaders organized the people to take advantage of government programs aimed at small rural

populations and, shortly after the formal break from Nachig in 1977, Jechtoch was able to get its own water system and its own school. Political divisions at the municipio level contributed to the split, and people from the remainder of Nachig played their part by refusing to contribute labor for projects in Jechtoch. The case of Jechchentic, on the western side of Nachig, was more complex, for it involved old political divisions combined with the growing rivalries between political parties (PRI and PAN) at the municipio level.

Jechtoch and Jechchentic were small. Together their population in the early 1980s was about 20 per cent of "old Nachig."<sup>7</sup> While both had schools, neither had an *Agente* or a community building at that time, but they did have their own *Principales*. They were independent hamlets; as independent as hamlets located on a major highway and served by government-sponsored schools and water and electric systems can be.

Many new hamlets were formed in other parts of Zinacantán during this period. In various ways they recreated local, hamlet autonomy. But, as the next section shows, by the 1980s the vast majority of Zinacantecos lived in hamlets with schools, churches, *cargos*, community buildings, and *Agentes*. Their independence, like that of people in Nachig, was formal independence, independence that depended on connection and rules. The older independence based on distance and detachment had been undone by the reach of the church, and to a greater extent, by the reach of the state.

### THE TRANSFORMATION IN OTHER HAMLETS

Most other hamlets went through changes like those in Nachig. Schools were built in almost all of them. In the larger ones government grants supported construction of plazas bordered by public buildings, and formal religious and civil roles were created. Table 1 gives an overview of the change.

By 1960 virtually all children lived near a school. Somewhat later, as girls joined boys in classes, more and more children attended school. Most new schools built between 1940 and 1960 were part of the INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) educational programs that expanded greatly in the mid-1950s. Later, school construction reached other hamlets and, in hamlets that already had schools, many new classrooms were added and the number of grades increased. By the 1980s most Zinacanteco children attended at least a few grades near their homes.

The formalization of hamlet religion came later. The Nachig church, built in 1969, was the fourth built outside the Center (which includes hamlets near the Pueblo that used its services; see the note to Table 1). As the table shows, by 1983 more than 80 per cent of Zinacantecos living outside the Center were in hamlets with churches, and more than 60 per cent lived in hamlets with local *cargos* that counted as first-level service in the Pueblo.



Table 1: Hamlets Outside the Center {a}

	<u>1940</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1983</u>
Number with School	5	10	18 {b}
Per cent population there	69	100	100
Number with Church	1	2	10
Per cent population there	7	28	81
Number with Cargos	1	3	6
Per cent population there	7	39	63
Number with Building	-	-	11
Per cent population there	-	-	83
Number with Agente M.	-	-	11
Per cent population there	-	-	81
Municipio Population	4509	7650	18000 {c}
Outside the Center			
Population	3427	5997	13500
Number of hamlets	9	10	21
Largest hamlet	819	1227	3100 {d}
Smallest hamlet	182	121	110

Sources: Based on data from Cancian 1992, especially Tables 7.2, 7.3, B.2 (for 1940 and 1960), B.4 (col. A1 for 1960, col. F' for 1983).

a. The Center is defined in Cancian 1992:106. In 1983 it included the Pueblo, La Selva, San Nicolas, Vochojvo Alto, Vochojvo Bajo, and parts of Patosil. For these calculations all Patosil population is included in the Center.

b. Three new, small hamlets (totaling less than 5 per cent of the population) had no schools. Their children had to go to adjoining hamlets.

c. The 1983 population figure is an estimate (see Cancian 1992:214 and Table B.2 for discussion and details). The figures below it are rounded.

d. The population of the 11 hamlets with an Agente in 1983 was: largest=3100, 10 < 1600, 7 < 1200, 5 < 500, 3 < 300.

Formal civil offices (e.g., *Agente Municipal*) arrived in the mid-1970s as the government increased programs that reached into the countryside. Many of the public buildings were built in the early 1980s when extraordinary amounts of state and federal money were funneled into Zinacantán as part of two major initiatives: a national effort to decentralize administration; and a state-wide effort to control unrest, especially guerrilla activity reported in other parts of Chiapas.

Overall, by the early 1980s the great majority of Zinacantecos living outside the Center were in hamlets with public buildings and formal religious and civil roles. Of the nine hamlets outside the Center listed in the 1960 national census, eight had churches and hamlet civil buildings by the early 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Most of the hamlets without formal roles and public buildings had been created recently through the fission of the original nine. With a few exceptions, they were still small.

In sum, most of the people living in the hamlets of Zinacantán experienced changes similar to those that occurred in Nachig. As the hamlets grew in formal importance the *Pueblo* became less important to ordinary citizens. Many people, perhaps most, could play out the public life to which they aspired without leaving their hamlets. On the other hand, the demands of hamlet public life had become very much more a part of everyday experience in Zinacantán. All over the *municipio*, the protection provided by the hamlet as the social unit that mediated between the domestic group and the community was gone.

#### HAMLETS IN CHINA

Studies of Chinese villages and their relation to the larger system reveal many interesting parallels with the situation in Zinacantán. Of course, China is huge, diverse, and complex. I am ignorant of both the basics and the subtleties with which China specialists work. Thus, the parallels are bases for speculation and guides that help clarify what has happened in Zinacantán. I do not intend to generalize about China.

G. William Skinner's classic market papers frame this discussion. In the first (Skinner 1964), he identifies standard marketing areas as systems of villages around a market town, and argues convincingly that they could be seen as culture-bearing units that he labels "standard marketing communities." Skinner (1964:32) says:

Insofar as the Chinese peasant can be said to live in a self-contained world, that world is not the village but the standard marketing community. The effective social field of the peasant, I will argue, is delimited not by the narrow horizons of his village but rather by the boundaries of his standard marketing area.

Thus, life in the village was incomplete. But the standard marketing area/community provided much that the village lacked. It had service specialists, provided opportunities to build patron-client relations and form rotating credit societies that extended beyond the village, and, perhaps most important, it was the unit within which families sought marriage partners for their children. The market town was also

the meeting place for secret societies whose membership was drawn from the standard marketing area surrounding the town, and in North China it was often the site of lineage halls. All this supports Skinner's (1964:35-37) point: to live a complete social life the Chinese peasant had to go beyond the village, but not beyond the standard marketing area. In Skinner's (1964:35-36) words, "a peasant develops a fairly good social map of his standard marketing area whereas the terrain beyond it is largely unexplored."

These standard marketing areas typically covered 50 square kilometers, while those in mountainous regions often extended over more than 100 square kilometers, making mountainous Zinacantán at 117 square kilometers a good fit. Their mean population at "somewhat over 7,000" (Skinner 1964:34) parallels Zinacantán's 7,650 in 1960, and the typical total of about 1,500 households clustered in eighteen villages completes the picture of a marketing community as the municipio and the village as the hamlet. In what follows I substitute village for hamlet because "village" is standard in the literature on China.

Huang (1985), in explicit counterpoint to Skinner, emphasizes the insularity of villages.<sup>9</sup> Huang's description of local leadership and village-state relations speak directly to my second criterion of an ideal hamlet; viz. the informal organization of public life.

Using county archives, Huang (1985:224-25) shows the limits of state/bureaucratic intrusion into village life.

In the nineteenth century, Baodi county had 19 *li*, 46 *bao*, and 900 villages, which were theoretically divided in *jia* of 100 households and 10 *pai* [of 10 households] each. . . . In theory, the county government appointed subcounty officials all the way down to the *paitou*, the man responsible for ten households. But in practice, it did not try to extend its influence down the hierarchy farther than the *xiangbao*, who oversaw a group of 20-odd villages. A *xiangbao* was required to appear before the county *yamen* to take an oath of office, but there was no such requirement for the village-level posts.

Huang shows that the official bureaucratic levels below the *xiangbao* were ineffective and often nonexistent, that the effective (real) village leaders avoided official ties to the state bureaucracy and, most important, that the *xiangbao*, the lowest-level leader tied to the bureaucracy, was usually not a powerful person. "More often, the *xiangbao* was one of the locality's lesser lights, propped up by the real leaders to serve as a buffer between themselves and state power" (Huang 1985:227). Huang (1985:231) concludes, "[T]he Baodi example suggests a kind of equilibrium in power between state and local society, in which taxes could generally be levied to the extent that local leaders and village communities considered tolerable."

In sum, these studies of premodern China document parallels with the situation in Zinacantán during the 1940-1960 period. Skinner shows that the village in China was an incomplete social unit that was in many ways similar to the hamlet in Zinacantán. Huang documents ways in which the effective local-level leadership was not directly responsible to the bureaucratic center (the state), and specifically how it averted direct ties by putting powerless people in roles that mediated contact with the outside world. Thus, from the point of view of the state, village leadership was

informal. From the point of view of local leaders, that informality was local power relatively unfettered by the state.

Some parallels between changes in Zinacantán and changes in China are also useful in understanding what happened in Zinacantán. Huang shows that in the early twentieth century, during the end of the Qing dynasty (to 1911) and the beginning of the Republican period, the state created military units, expanded schools, and established a modern police force—all institutions that increased its presence in villages—and increased taxes. These changes “fundamentally altered the relationship between state and village” (Huang 1985:275).

Focusing on the later period of state expansion into the countryside, Duara (1988) documents changes in the roles of village leaders as the state sought to extract greater revenues from peasant villages. He shows that, just as the state’s need for funds was increasing, land tax revenues became undependable because more frequent land sales undermined the land registries on which taxation was based. Supplementary levies were assessed on the village as a unit (as opposed to the individual landowner). As a consequence, village leaders were forced to give up their roles as protectors of local interests, as honored, powerful people who brokered relations with the outside. Duara (1988:249) says they had to “side either with the state or with the communities they led. No village leader who cared about his status in the community could survive under such circumstances.” Many relinquished office, and yielded to self-interested individuals, often tax farmers, who had no social ties to the village. Especially while war lords dominated in the 1920s, the traditional system of leadership in the countryside was in disarray.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of this period, the role of the village as a mediator between rural Chinese households and the state had been transformed. A system that taxed landowners through a network of obscure negotiations and powerless intermediaries had become more demanding, reached more people, and was no longer buffered by powerful people with local ties or powerless local intermediaries that limited the state’s reach. Schools, police, and other expressions of modernization increased direct contact with the state. In China too it was harder to avoid observation by formal people.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This article was intended 1) to explore the role of hamlets as social forms that mediate between households and larger, more formal communities, and 2) to discuss the demise of hamlets under pressures created by expanding states. When hamlets flourish they have small populations that are socially incomplete from the point of view of their residents and politically informal from the point of view of the state. These characteristics—small size, social incompleteness, and political informality—make the mediating roles of hamlets possible.

In 1940 to 1960 in Zinacantán and in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries in China, hamlets/villages were an important social form.<sup>11</sup> Their social incompleteness was marked in Zinacantán by the roles residents took in the

municipio-wide ritual system, and in China by both supravillage religious associations (Duara 1988) and village exogamy (Huang 1985; Skinner 1964, 1971). In both places the state's formal reach faded before it touched the hamlets, and there was a disjunction between hamlet leadership and formal offices. Powerful local people were traditional and informal from the point of view of the community (Zinacantán) and the state (China). In both places the appointment of low-status local people to officially represent the hamlets/villages to the larger, formal system buffered powerful local people against direct manipulation by outside powers, and permitted them to more freely influence local affairs. Thus, hamlets as a social form mediated between households and the community/state in a number of ways. In these periods hamlets were an important level of social organization for what they made possible for residents and what they made impossible for nonresidents.

Change later came to both Zinacantán and to the parts of China discussed here. The expansions of the state into the countryside, especially in the 1970s in Zinacantán and in the early decades of this century in China, were parallel in many ways. They followed the route taken by many agrarian societies in this century: schools (along with the schoolteacher who is an outsider), police, better communications, and more roads.

The apparent contrasts between Zinacantán and China are also interesting. The China described by Huang and Duara was an agrarian economy, so state expansion depended on increased extraction from village-based producers. The Mexican state did not have the same economic needs. In recent decades commerce and manufacturing have provided tax revenues (like the value-added tax imposed after the economic crisis of 1982); and since the late 1970s petroleum and hydroelectric power from the state of Chiapas have added to national wealth. Direct taxation of poor rural people was unnecessary. It was the desire to maintain political control that required the state to increase direct contact with the countryside.

Despite the important differences between Zinacantán and China the result was the same: the state reached into hamlets and touched households more directly. The social incompleteness and political informality that made hamlets effective mediators between households and larger, more formal social forms disappeared, at least temporarily.

#### NOTES

1. I am indebted to Francesca Cancian for comments on this essay.
2. The incompleteness of social life in the hamlet is one of the features that distinguishes it from the closed corporate peasant community (Wolf 1957).
3. Vogt's (1969, Chapters 7 and 8) extensive discussion of social groupings and settlement patterns in Zinacantán identifies 1) the household; 2) the SNA (Tzotzil), a localized patrilineage; 3) the waterhole group formed by multiple SNAs that took water from the same waterhole (before the installation of piped water in the last two or three decades); and 4) the hamlet. There are no generic names in Tzotzil for the first three units. The hamlet is *paraje* in Spanish or *parahel* in Tzotzil. Vogt's (1969) description is mainly built on detailed knowledge of Paste and other hamlets in that area of Zinacantán, and he (Vogt 1969:149) notes that over time hamlets within the municipio have become differentiated in culture. Collier (1975:79-82), working with detailed knowledge of Apaz, notes that the

SNA and the waterhole group worked somewhat differently there. Most important, "only about half the households are included in [SNAs, and] . . . they differ from their counterparts in other Zinacanteco hamlets in having no corporate ritual functions" (Collier 1975:81). That is, SNAs were not consistently important to the majority of the people of Apaz when Collier made his observations. Since change, like that brought to waterhole groups by piped water systems, is ubiquitous, observed differences between hamlets may reflect the time of observation, the individual history of the hamlet, or both. Wasserstrom (1983, Chapters 5 and 6) and Collier (1975) are especially good on historical sources of differences between hamlets. Many other publications on Zinacantán include observations on settlement patterns and life in hamlets (see Vogt 1978; Bricker and Gossen 1989 for references).

In this article the term *municipio* is used in its Spanish form because the *municipio* is so politically, and often ethnically, important in Mexico. Since the customary social unit is, as Mulhare shows, much more diverse than the *municipio*, I will use the abstraction "hamlets" in Zinacantán to mean units that Zinacantecos see as "parajes." The next section summarizes the more detailed description in Cancian (1992) and adds some details from Tax et al. (1947).

4. Not all Nachig men were members of the ejido movement. When land was distributed in 1961, only 43 per cent (n=98) of Nachig families received land (Wasserstrom 1983:171). In my 1983 census (Cancian 1992, Appendix C), 103 (32 per cent) had full shares and a few more (n=19, 6.0 per cent) had informal partial shares of ejido land.

5. Figures in Table 7.1 in Cancian (1992) are for the 1980s. Tax et al. (1947:52) shows two *Principales* for Nachig; Vogt (1969:148n) shows three.

6. In 1976 there were also cargos in three other hamlets (Cancian 1965). All the roles discussed here were served by men. About this time women began to take official roles in political party organizations that brought national norms to Zinacantán. Roles in the cargo system filled by women before this period are described in Cancian (1965).

7. In 1983 Nachig had 210 households, Jechtoch 27, and Jechchentic 29 (Cancian 1992:220, column F').

8. Salinas, which was near the Pueblo, had only the church located there since the nineteenth century, and Chianatic, the smallest of the nine, had only a civil building and an *Agente*.

9. Huang (1985:220ff.) says that villages on the north China plain were larger than those in the Chengdu plain studied by Skinner, that villagers went to market less frequently, and that when they were there they interacted less with people from other villages. He argues that the north China plain villages were quite insular, that men seldom talked with men from other villages, even when the villages were adjacent and the men as youngsters had been classmates in a joint school. Yet, though he makes little of it, Huang (1985:222n) notes that north China plain villages are typically exogamous. How people find mates without talking is hard to explain, unless, of course, the women, who are not the players in most of this peasant talk, get it done. But then, their connections across village boundaries must count.

10. Duara seeks to revise both Skinner and Huang. He argues that their work leads to an oversimplification of the situation in the Chinese countryside in the early decades of this century, and he shows that extravillage relationships such as those in irrigation associations were often very important to local life. He sees rural people as embedded in a "cultural nexus" that includes religious cults that are not localized, and he asserts that "an exclusive analytical focus—whether on the village or on the market town—is an arbitrary and abstract procedure" (Duara 1988:247).

11. As Skinner (1971) makes clear for China, this form may represent a recurrent stage in cycles of changing village-state relations, not a point on a unilinear evolutionary path.

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