



Iredale Robyn, Bilik Naran and Guo Fei (eds.),
China's Minorities on the Move. Selected Case
Studies

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NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Philip Liddell

- 1 Regional disparities, brought about by the reforms of the past twenty years, have exacerbated the at times disastrous plight of the peoples inhabiting the western half of China. The slow pace of economic development, the influx of Han migrants (adding to political tension in Xinjiang and Tibet especially), and huge governmental projects have induced Chinese and Western researchers to pay more sustained attention to these sensitive regions because of their strategic position as border areas. The first of the books presented here looks at a still unfamiliar theme, the migration of minority populations; the second, more political, analyses the policies being followed in the western provinces of the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- 2 The first book is based on surveys carried out by collaborating researchers from three establishments: one Australian (University of Wollongong), and two Chinese (the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the China National Institute for Educational Research). The overall results have already been published, in 2001. This book, like its predecessor, is focused on education and ethnicity, and is divided into four parts. The introduction sketches the general characteristics of the migration of minority populations, as well as the difficulties such people face with regard to education. Their situation, according to the writers, is broadly the same as that of the Han. The research was carried out in 1997-98 on the basis of questionnaires and official statistics, the latter applying only to persons claiming a year or more of residence. The writers note a

high preponderance of young people and women among those migrants coming mainly from Guangxi, the outflow of migrants from that province exceeding the outflow from any other province. Where education is concerned, migrants of whatever nationality (*minzu*) encounter the same difficulties as the Han, mainly for lack of the *hukou* (residence permit) and because of the very high schooling costs. They too attempt to set up their own private schools.

- 3 Two articles are devoted to Inner Mongolia. The first is a remarkable historical overview of the Mongolian people, of how its identity has been made up and of the extensive interpenetration of the Mongols and the Han. It explains how the Mongolian population has recently increased through inter-marriage with the Han and how numbers of Han have changed their nationality. The second part deals with the relations between the Mongols, the Manchu, the Hui and the Han. The writer concludes that the good relations founded upon sharing a collective environment at the workplace (*danwei*) have been put at risk by the present dynamic. Indeed, the reforms and the continuing migrations are hastening the revival of groupings based strictly on ethnic communities, as was usual under the empire.
- 4 Three articles are devoted to Xinjiang. The first examines the impact of migration on Xinjiang since 1950. The writers identify two forms of migration, organised and spontaneous. The latter has been rapidly increasing since the 1990s, with migrants coming mainly from Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Also noted is a tendency towards permanent settlement. As a migratory destination, Xinjiang is in fourth place after Peking, Shanghai and Guangdong. Attention is drawn to the contradictions that mark the development of migration. While it has brought new land under the plough and maintained the industrial development of the region, it has also led to environmental pollution, in particular through desertification and deforestation. The writers cite a 1983 estimate that more than 73% of families in the south of Xinjiang lacked firewood for three to six months of every year (p. 103). There follows a study of the interethnic relations in the Kashgar region; the writer observes that the only places where Han and Uyghur children attend the same schools are the state farms and market gardens. The third study is devoted to Uyghur migration within Xinjiang. Land shortage and the poverty of local resources lead to growing migration from the southern oases towards towns and cities in the north of the province. Among the migrants, mainly the young, the study notes a growing number of girls and young women (aged from 15 to 19) who go to work in shops and with families. The writer emphasises the fact that ethnic identities and links with the village of origin are vigorously maintained by migrants.
- 5 The two closing studies deal with, firstly, the migrants of Guizhou and, secondly, with the Uyghurs of Peking. The first points to the major role in influencing migration played by the policy of the Guizhou provincial authorities; they are anxious to get rid of the surplus of rural manpower estimated for that province at 6.5 million in 1995 (p. 143). The final study concentrates on two Peking districts associated with the Uyghur population (*Xinjiangcun*), both of which have since been dismantled (in 2001 and 2002). The Uyghurs there were mostly male (80%). The study emphasises the Uyghurs' rejection of intermarriage and the strength of their community links.
- 6 The studies presented in this book describe the general characteristics of the migrations of minority populations. They illustrate well the difficulties in explaining, starting from quantitative data, what lies behind the tendencies shown. For example, a deeper analysis of the causes and conditions of the migration of women from Guangxi

or girls from Xinjiang would have been useful. It shows thus how necessary it is to pursue observations, especially in qualitative studies and probably also by making helpful comparisons with migratory data in general.

- 7 The second book widens geopolitical thinking on western China to include the dimension of the central Asian region. David Goodman offers a pertinent analysis of the development policy for the west (*Xibu dakaifa*) that Peking has pursued since January 2000. He picks out the aims of this campaign which, in his view, is in reality a political readjustment going back to Maoist principles of egalitarian redistribution. In the perspective of building the nation, the central power has to assure provinces such as Sichuan or Shaanxi of their place in the nation, after a twenty-year policy of unequal development. Moreover, this is a means of reminding the non-Han communities of the integrity of the PRC. Colonisation is the third aim: to bring the inflow of population to the east back into balance with an outflow towards the west, and also to fend off the threat to social stability represented, in the central government view, by some ethnic minorities. Lastly, the writer points out the minor part that the development of the west occupies in the Tenth Five Year Plan (p. 41).
- 8 Two articles deal with the question of Xinjiang. Peter Perdue explains how the policy of the Ming emperors developed under the last empire, the Qing Dynasty. The former sought to establish trading links with independent oases; the latter adopted an expansionist policy in order to break the growing strength of the Mongols and to establish Qing domination over the region that became the province of Xinjiang. This territory, which in Qing eyes was a vital strategic possession, has never been made really secure because the local people have always rebelled, and has never been a source of profit. This view of Xinjiang was to be shared by the Republic and later by the communists.
- 9 Nicolas Becquelin shows how the influx of Han migrants (more than a million in ten years) has brought them into growing competition with the local communities for land, water resources and urban jobs. He points to the falling living standards of the local minorities, which has led them to greater rejection of Chinese domination. He notes that Uyghur reaction is ethno-nationalist rather than religious, despite official claims.
- 10 Xavier Crombé retraces the twists and turns of Chinese policy on Tibet over the past fifty years. Since the popular risings of 1987, the Chinese state has decided to pursue a policy of economic development, hoping thus to win Tibetan support. This change of policy is accompanied by a big inflow of migrants, mostly from the neighbouring provinces (Han immigrants from Qinghai and Sichuan and Chinese-speaking Muslims—Hui—from Gansu) and also a floating population from the other provinces attracted by the prospect of work. But, in reality, economic development affects only the towns, leaving rural areas and Tibet's nomad communities untouched. Yet, the writer points out the contradictions within Tibetan society, which now includes a modern elite that is composed of civil servants and entrepreneurs and is closely connected to the Chinese world. As with Xinjiang, Peking seeks to integrate Tibet into the economy of the rest of the country. While the central power may have been hoping by these means to win over the Tibetans, the changes to the Tibetan world and the inflow of migrants are creating a strong sense of dispossession.
- 11 The last two articles tackle the geopolitical dimension of Central Asia. Olivier Roy asks the question: has China a card to play in Central Asia? Since The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) was formed in June 2001 (replacing the Shanghai Group created in

1996), China has committed itself to a process of regional co-operation with Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan and Tajikistan. China wanted action against frontier regulations and support in its struggle against Uyghur separatism; the other states wanted support in their struggle against radical Islamic movements. Thus, Peking cleared away the bone of contention along its frontiers, and succeeded in having the activities of Uyghur organisations banned in each of these neighbouring countries, which can be explained by the lack of any Pan-Turkish solidarity in the region. Roy notes the SCO's inability to take co-ordinated action against Islamic groups because their members' aims—and the groups' aims—are so diverse. For example, China has maintained good relations with the Afghanistan of the Taliban and has also remained loyal to its links with Pakistan. Roy shows how the radicalism of the Islamic groups is an endogenous reaction to Central Asia, even though the latter have been influenced by the Pakistani madrasas and more recently by Saudi Wahhabism. He retraces the history of the Uzbek and Tajik branches of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) to illustrate their "Islamic-nationalist" character. In fact, he confirms that the Uyghur radical movements have no connections with those in Central Asia. Lastly, he shows that, after the American intervention in Afghanistan and the failure of the armed Islamic movements, two other problems have arisen. The first is that a hard-line but unarmed Muslim movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir, has emerged and developed in Central Asia; the second is the American military presence there. The Mongol diplomat, Jagvaral Hanibal, emphasises the growing significance of Central Asia where, he says, the strategic interests of the great powers are at odds.

- 12 Thus, this edition of the *Cahiers de l'Asie* offers an extremely rich survey and an analytical starting-point for all those interested in China and its western frontier.