

### **K. Warikoo (ed.): Xinjiang: China's Northeast Frontier**

Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2016. 211 S., 90,00 GBP

Due to its geo-strategic position and its ethnic-religious complexity, Xinjiang has always been China's vital hub of trans-Asian trade and traffic. Historically, Xinjiang as a frontier region was understood by the Chinese dynastic imagination as the edge of civilization and source of threat. The PRC adheres in many respects to a Han-Chinese nationalist discourse that reads back into history the political unity and territorial extent of the Chinese state to claim that Xinjiang, as Tibet and Inner Mongolia, have been "integral provinces" since "ancient times". The incorporation of Xinjiang, however, is also marked with inherent political, and often violent, contestation. Ongoing episodes of inter-ethnic tension and anti-state violence in Xinjiang, in particular in 2009, bear witness to the enduring nature of this contestation. In *Xinjiang: China's Northeast Frontier*, edited by Jawaharlal Nehru University's Xinjiang-expert K. Warikoo, the authors strive to offer us an all-around understanding of the situation in Xinjiang by presenting coherent and concise, yet detailed, analyses of the ethnic relations, China's policy, local resistance and contestation, and Xinjiang's ethnic-religious and economic connections to its neighbors in an integrated manner.

The volume consists of sixteen chapters, which can be divided into three clusters, which are devoted to Xinjiang's geographical and ethnic settings and historical relations to China, Xinjiang's connections to its neighbors in Central and South Asia, and China's current national narrative and state policy, respectively. The first cluster starts with Chapter 1 by Warikoo serving as an introduction, which outlines Xinjiang's ethnic diversity, its relations to the Chinese state through history, and the role of these factors in shaping today's Xinjiang. Following the narrative, Chapter 2 goes deeper

into Xinjiang's indigenous cultural heritage to underline the interplay of geography and history, which has resulted into Xinjiang's particular rich and variegated ethno-cultural diversity. Chapter 3 turns to the rich natural resources, in particular oil, gas, and coal, to exemplify Xinjiang's special importance to China's industrial system. The next chapter explores the Sino-Xinjiang relations under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) with particular reference to Qing's calculated policy of military conquest, demographic expansion of Han-Chinese, and political maneuvering. Focusing on the decades since the establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, the following two chapters ponder China's ethnic tangle and the concept of "ethnicity" in China. The recent tensions in Urumqi and other parts of Xinjiang invite us to rethink the adaptability of the European theory and policy of nationality and ethnicity in China and based on this consideration more attention shall be given not to the small groups of separatists and collaborators but to the huge middle group which "are for the genuine autonomy for Xinjiang" (p. 55). Concentrating on the years from 1948 to 1978, Chapter 7 surveys China's early state-driven efforts of political, cultural, and economic integration of Xinjiang in the first three decades of the PRC, a period hitherto largely overlooked by academic interests.

Chapters 8 and 10 together recount the historical waves of migrations between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan and the current situation of Kazakh diaspora in Xinjiang and then analyze the ever-growing trade between China and Kazakhstan, noting that Xinjiang will benefit from the recent development and its role in the region will also be significantly strengthened. The ninth and tenth chapters offer an insider view of the growing trade between China and the neighboring Central Asian countries and express the belief that the economic ties will not only "have a certain significance for China" (p. 117) but also "be favourable for the socio-economic development of Central Asian

countries" (p. 118). After briefly picturing Central Asia in pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet connotations, Chapter 11 examines the potentials and existing problems of the "Big Altai Approach" of Russia and points to the promising benefits of this theory for both sides of the Altai Mountain.

The third cluster begins with a succinct discussion of the economic and social situations before and after the riots of 2009 in Urumqi (ch. 12) and their impact on the launching of China's Western Development Programme (*Xibu da kaifa*) (ch. 13), in which Xinjiang is playing a vital role. The whole volume concludes with three chapters, which collectively delve into China's current nationality and religious policies with a particular focus on the ethnic-religious separatism in Xinjiang. The emergence of independent Central Asian states after the demise of the Soviet Union and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism have "created a new awakening among the indigenous Muslims of Xinjiang" (p. 185) but China is also pursuing "an elaborate set of policies in Xinjiang to ensure its political stability" (p. 187).

With the series of unrests and riots since 2009, the recent years have witnessed an immensely growing interest in Xinjiang (see for example: Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke. eds., *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21st Century*. Routledge, 2009; Michael Dillon, *Xinjiang and the Expansion of Communist Power: Kashgar in the Early Twentieth Century*. Routledge, 2014). Consisting of contributions by scholars from China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, India, and Taiwan, this volume is a welcome addition. In particular, it offers many different views on specific topics, such as the advantages and problems of cross-border trade and migration, from different perspectives, displaying third views from both inside and outside Xinjiang.

As many collected volumes, however, the quantity and quality of chapters are not even.

Whereas some (e.g. ch. 7, 13) provide detailed and in-depth analyses, appended with extensive notes, other (e.g. ch. 3, 6, 13, 14) read more like dry summaries of policy papers, comprising merely several pages with no notes at all. Critical readers may suggest that the volume could benefit from better editing, as in various chapters the pinyin transliteration is mingled with the traditional Wage-Giles system (among others p. 5, 31, 186 etc.) and the demographic statistics of the same years (e.g. p. 154, 166) differ from each other. Moreover, only a very small portion of the references of single chapters appear in the final section of general bibliography.

These caveats aside, this volume is a valuable addition to the existing scholarship about Xinjiang, extending our understanding of Xinjiang's history, its ethnic-religious diversity, its relations with neighboring Central Asian countries, and China's efforts in stabilizing this geo-strategic region, both for experts and general readers.

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