China's Minorities on the Move: Selected Case Studies is a pioneering study in ethnic minority migration in China. The collection of articles rejects earlier assumptions that downplay the role of ethnicity in explaining migration dynamics.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first two case studies focus on Inner Mongolia. Iregal Burjigin and Naran Bilik argue that increased cultural transformation of pastureland by Han immigrants into Inner Mongolia has forced an outflow of Mongol herdsmen into the desert and into urban areas. This has a shattering effect not only on the region's environment, but on the identity of the Mongol people who have to shift from nomadic life to settled animal husbandry or urban livelihoods.

Wang Junmin's essay examines patterns of migration, settlement, and social integration among four dominant groups (Mongolian, Hui, Manchu, and Han) in ethnically mixed neighboring Holihat, Inner Mongolia's capital.

The next three chapters analyze migration in Xinjiang, the Chinese region with the largest concentration of ethnic minorities. The essay by Ren Qiang and Yuan Xin shows that most of the new migrants in Xinjiang are Han from the more prosperous provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Other ethnic groups have also moved to Xinjiang. The second chapter reports on thirteen residential nationalities in 1949 and forty-seven in 1990. The high level of multiculturalism, the authors argue, leads to the loss of place identity through greater inter-ethnic interaction. These developments also damage Xinjiang's economy, leading to desertification and desertification.

To the towns

Ma Rong's contribution focuses on the relationship between Uyghur and Han communities in southern Xinjiang. He shows how population distribution patterns are influenced by historical factors. Hence high rates of Han employment in Xinjiang's administrative positions concentrate Han communities in urban areas. Nevertheless, the Han seasonal floating population outnumber permanent residents. Incoming Han migrants concentrate in oil-rich areas and rural areas while Han settle in urban areas associated with residential housing and road construction, agriculture, and the militia corps is formed. Interestingly, most of these enterprises remain under the direct administration of the county or regional government.

The chapter by Tsui Yen Hsu also addresses Uyghur movement in Xinjiang and draws attention to new patterns of migration. Since the early 1990s, young Uyghur girls and women have replaced middle-aged peasants as the leading migrant group. This reflects the growing gap in wealth between urban and rural areas as the Han push for a higher demand for female workers in the service sector, for example in restaurants and in child-minding. Tsui Yen Hsu also explores the new decisive role played by ethnicity, kinship links and education in migrants' job seeking and employment.

The chapter by Zhang Jiajiao shows that minority migration from Guizhou is not a one-way process. Significant numbers return home and improve living conditions by contributing capital, which exceeds the revenue of major Guizhou industries (p. 146). Returned migrants also serve as transmitters of new technological and ideas. Carolyn Hsiou and Ren Qing, in their analysis of predominantly illegal Uyghur migration to Beijing, conclude that the Uyghur tends to engage in a relative migration between the city with the differences from the Han migrants’, as Uyghurs face hostility from local residents and remain unprotected by government authorities. This book fills a gap in migration studies by demonstrating the relevance of ethnicity in understanding population flows in China. The research, however, suffers from certain limitations. While the experiences of other and collectively produce a rich account of minority migration dynamics in China, the analysis is in places repetitive. Also, the experiences of migrant minority women, and social tensions between Muslim migrants and non-Muslim local residents receive insufficient attention. Nevertheless, the book is an invaluable source of primary statistical data and presents an innovative analysis of one of the defining features of contemporary China. China's Minorities on the Move will prove useful to those interested in both migration and Chinese studies.

Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia

Truth, History and Politics in Mongolia examines the political manipulation of history in post-socialist Mongolia. Shifting memories of the historical figures Chinggis Khan, Zanabazar and Sükhbataar illustrate the role academic and popular historiography play within contemporary Mongolian nationalism.

Kaplonski’s book belongs to the current wave of anthropological studies on historical imagery and the popular interpretation of historical symbols. Based on data collected during several years of field research in Ulaanbaatar, the author provides insight into the ideological mixture that inhabited the minds of urban intellectuals at the dawn of democratic reforms in the early 1990s.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first two provide the reader with theoretical background, description of fieldwork methods, the main concepts on social memory and nationalism, and terminology. In chapter three, ‘Democracy comes to Mongolia’, Kaplonski addresses the political history of Mongolia in its transition from socialism to what is often believed to be a democratic society. The main hypotheses on the historical symbols of Mongolian democracy appear in chapter four. Chapter five, ‘The icebergs of history’, overviews the role of historiography in shaping Mongol identity over the last one hundred years. Chapters six and seven are crucial as they discuss modern interpretations of three historical figures: Chinggis Khan, Zanabazar and Sükhbataar. The final chapter summarizes the hypotheses of the book.

Nutan and uls in Mongol identity

Kaplonski rightfully points out the importance of nutan (birthplace) for Mongol identity. He argues that nutan has become inseparable from the als (the state and its people) and demonstrates the importance Mongols attach to historical personalities who have contributed to the als. The author becomes so concerned with proving the nutan-als linkage between Chinggis, Zanabazar and Sükhbataar that he overlooks other features of identity.

Kaplonski fails to address traditional and Buddhist concepts of historical time, even as he quotes from Caroline Humphrey’s ‘exemplariness’ of Mongolian historical personalities and the inspiration individuals can draw from them. According to traditional epic and Buddhist concepts, the past is not a closed period. Although Mongolian academics may see a great historical figure as a boundary marker, keeping alive an era in history (Kaplonski, p. 126), most ordinary people perceive a holy image surviving the centuries, capable of reincarnation. The turbulent history of the 1910-1920s provides illuminating cases of such manifestations of historical imagery. Other epic elements of Mongolian historical consciousness, such as the cult of baatar (hero), also remain neglected by the author.

Mongolia’s heroes

As the author points out, Chinggis never vanished from Mongolian consciousness during the socialist period. His image was kept alive in written sources and unofficial narratives, and acquired additional nationalist meaning. Mongols never identified with Chinggis’ tyrannical features, but emphasized his achievements as a political leader – the consolidator of the scattered Mongolian tribes. In the Buddhist historical tradition, the focus was put on Chinggis as lawgiver. I would argue, however, that Chinggis’ military conquests and imperialism are all matters of national pride, evidenced by some peculiar moral justifications for his brutality. 

Emphasizing Buddhism (suppressed during socialism) was part of the search for a new national identity in the early 1990s. As Kaplonski points out, the image of Zanabazar – the first Mongolian ‘Living Buddha’ – is associated with the establishment of Buddhism in Mongolia. In socialist times, Zanabazar was exhibited to the outside world as a cultural figure, a gifted Mongolian artist and intellectual of the past century. The author highlights the dilemma posed by the great Zanabazar’s surrender to the Manchus. However, post-socialist Mongols tend to justify this with the long-term effect on the Buddhist tradition.

As Kaplonski explains, Sükhbaatar gained popularity among Mongols as a fighter against the Chinese and as the commander-in-chief of the Red Mongolian Army. Contemporary Mongolian historians have re-evaluated Sükhbataar and, based on recently available archival data, concluded that his role in the 1921 revolution was no greater than that of other leaders such as Soljins Danzax and Dogosmyr Rodo. At the same time, contemporary Mongolian historians attribute, erroneously, ‘democratic’ credentials to these early revolutionaries. Kaplonski exposes these political motivations. The next question the author could have asked is whether contemporary Mongolian historians’ perceptions of democracy are comparable to Western ones.

The book’s weaknesses derive, first, from the narrowness of the geographical scope of Kaplonski’s nevertheless impressive field data. The author is aware that Halh nationalism is not representative of Mongolia, let alone Mongolian peoples living in China and Russia. Second, while the author addresses the creativity of the Mongolian intelligentsia, other, especially rural, social groups are absent. And finally, as Kaplonski’s achievement is his comprehensive presentation of works by Mongolian historians, it is especially regretful that he seems to be unfamil iar with a number of important works on and around his topic by Russian, German and French scholars.

Despite these drawbacks, the book contributes to our understanding of the recent history of Mongolia and brings innovative research methods to Mongol studies. The book should be especially thought provoking to a Mongolian audience.

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