Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers

Edited by

STEVAN HARRELL

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Contents

INTRODUCTION
Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them
Stevan Harrell
3

PART I
THE HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF ETHNIC IDENTITY
Scholarly and Official Discourses
37

THE NAXI AND THE NATIONALITIES QUESTION
Charles F. McKhann
39

THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORY OF THE YI
Stevan Harrell
63

DEFINING THE MIAO
Ming, Qing, and Contemporary Views
Norma Diamond
92

MAKING HISTORIES
Contending Conceptions of the Yao Past
Ralph A. Litzinger
117
CONTENTS

PÈRE VIAL AND THE GNI-P’À
Orientalist Scholarship and the Christian Project
Margaret Byrne Swain
140

VOICES OF MANCHU IDENTITY, 1635 – 1935
Shelley Rigger
186

PART II
THE HISTORY OF ETHNIC IDENTITY
The Process of Peoples
215

MILLENIANISM, CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS,
AND ETHNIC CHANGE AMONG THE MIAO
IN SOUTHWEST CHINA
Siu-woo Cheung
217

CHINGGIS KHAN
From Imperial Ancestor to Ethnic Hero
Almaz Khan
248

THE IMPACT OF URBAN ETHNIC EDUCATION
ON MODERN MONGOLIAN ETHNICITY, 1949 – 1966
Wurlig Borchigud
278

ON THE DYNAMICS OF TAI/DAI-LUE ETHNICITY
An Ethnohistorical Analysis
Shih-chung Hsieh
301

GLOSSARY
329
Maps

1. China. Provinces and autonomous regions 5

2. Yi areas of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou 64

3. Major Miao groups 93

4. Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and adjacent provinces 118

5. Inner Mongolia and neighboring regions 249

6. Yunnan and neighboring areas 302

7. Historical Tai kingdoms and modern states 305
Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers

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A succession of Chinese governments, as well as Western missionaries, have sought to define, objectify, and “civilize” China’s ethnic minorities—to make them more like the civilizers. In this volume, ten scholars examine some of these attempts involving groups as culturally different and geographically distant as the Mongols in the North and the Yi in the Southwest.

“This absolutely first-rate collection of scholarly essays by nine anthropologists and one political scientist focuses on the problem of ethnic definition and self-definition among China’s peripheral peoples, including the Naxi, Yi, Miao, Mongols, and Manchus. Rejecting the usual catalog of static characteristics as the way to define a people, the authors see national definition as a contentious and negotiated process resulting in a fluid and evolving set of behaviors, customs, linguistic usage, etc. At the core of this process lie Han attempts to impose their values on others in the name of civilization and the struggle of peripheral peoples to resist, adapt, and survive. An important book for students of Chinese society.”

—Library Journal

“This book contains many excellent essays, mainly by anthropologists, on the cultural and social impact of Han colonialism past and present. The authors focus on the heightened sense of ethnic difference that has emerged in the process, and on the invention of ethnic identities that involve the distortion of the past.”

—Far Eastern Economic Review

Stevan Harrell is professor of anthropology at the University of Washington. Other contributors are Wurlig Borchigud, Siu-woo Cheung, Norma Diamond, Shih-chung Hsieh, Almaz Khan, Ralph A. Litzinger, Charles F. McKhann, Shelley Rigger, and Margaret Byrne Swain.

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