

ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

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Tibetans and Uyghurs in Socialist China

Edited by
Trine Brox and Ildikó Bellér-Hann

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Preface

China's rise from a poor developing country to a major global player both in economic and in political terms over the last decades has been spectacular, but inevitably it has also created new tensions and problems. The overall growth and accompanying policies have resulted in increasing social inequalities, serious challenges to the environment, demographic problems with a rapidly aging population, and tensions between the demands of the market and the absence of democratic structures and institutions. The complexities involved in the implementation of the Open Up the West campaign launched in 2000 have been aptly illustrated by Nicolas Becquelin's elaboration of what he has dubbed a 'staged development' in terms of both 'a temporally phased development strategy (by stages)' and a theatrical stage which mobilizes an array of symbols in order to legitimize CCP rule (Becquelin 2004: 361). Formulated specifically for the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), we believe that Becquelin's 'staged development' is equally applicable to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and raises the question of the extent to which the recent change in leadership also indicates that China is about to enter a new stage of policy making. China watchers predict that the current development model as well as the conservative one-party system will need to be reformed in order to keep up with the new and pressing challenges. However, there are indications that the leadership's twin priorities are likely to remain economic growth and the maintenance of overall stability; this is aptly exemplified by Beijing's policies in its two large autonomous regions situated in the country's far west.

Discussing the ongoing implementation of economic, political, and cultural policies serving the twin targets of stability and development and ensuing local strategies in these two regions is an urgent desideratum for all those wishing to understand the complex web of challenges faced by China's leadership. Our volume aims to do exactly this. The

chapters give insights into current transformations in specific localities and social milieus, seeking to explore the role of Xinjiang and the regions inhabited by Tibetans within contemporary China from a comparative perspective.

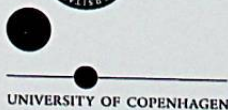
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Trine Brox and Ildikó Bellér-Hann

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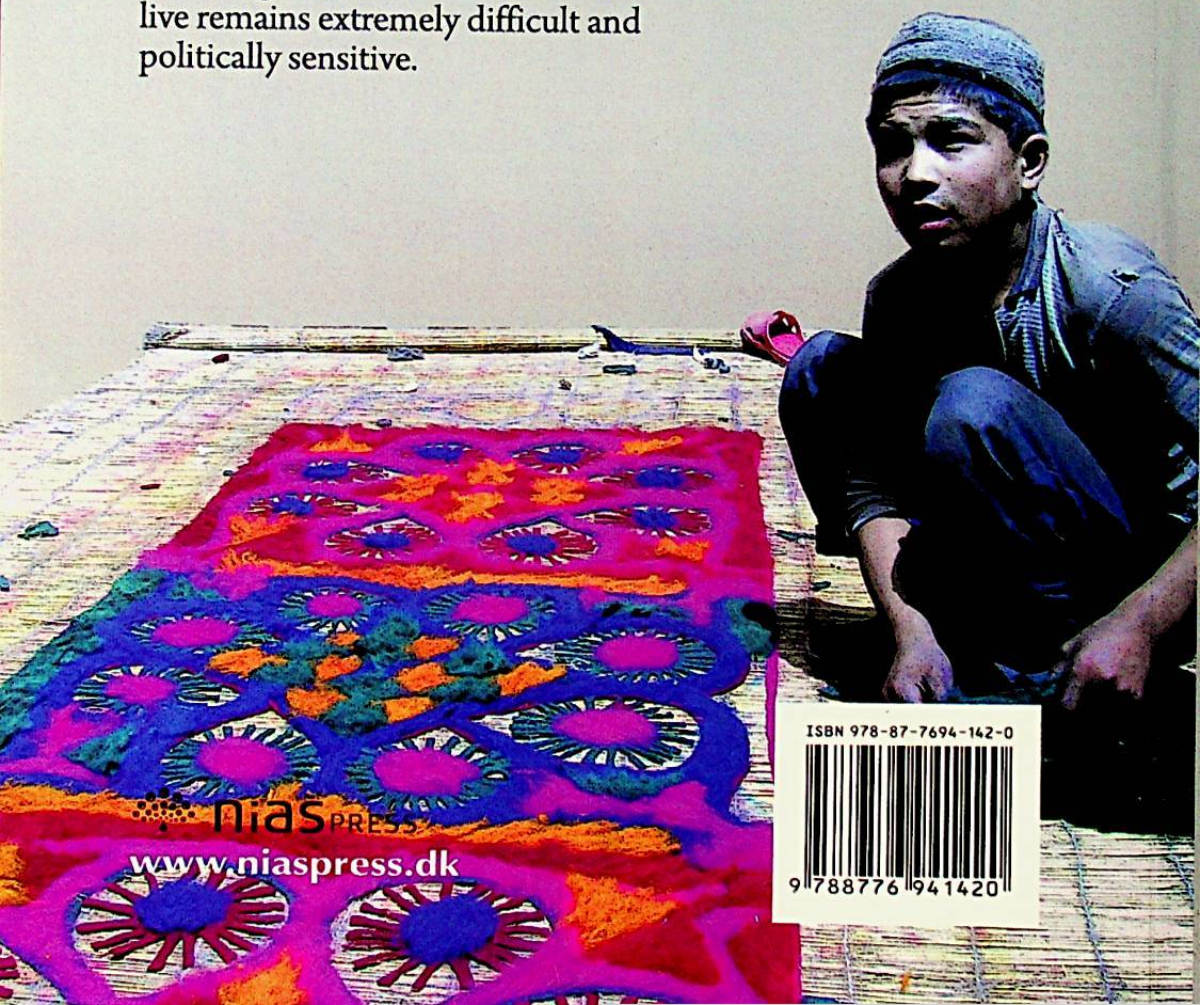


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Since 1949, Tibetans and Uyghurs generally have been perceived as the two most problematic members of the PRC's great family of peoples and been the targets of 'carrot and stick' measures designed to facilitate their integration into the PRC. In recent years, a solution to the problems of Xinjiang and Tibet has been sought in accelerated economic development, yet this is perceived by both groups with great suspicion. Addressing this situation, the volume explores the arenas of socio-economic development and market liberalization, popular culture, urban planning and relocation, environment and ecological migration, civil society, education and language, ethno-nationalism, as well as religious policies and practices. It is especially topical at a time when fieldwork in the regions where these two minorities live remains extremely difficult and politically sensitive.



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