

Thomas Hoppe

Die ethnischen Gruppen Xinjiangs: Kulturunterschiede und interethnische Beziehungen

Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, Nr. 258

Institut für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 1995, 564 S., DM 68,--

Jürgen Maurer

Taiwan in den internationalen Beziehungen

Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, Nr. 259

Institut für Asienkunde, Hamburg, 1996, 268 S., DM 36,--

In China, the "Middle Kingdom", the outer marches of that vast land have usually been viewed by those in power as zones to be secured or pacified as part of the empire's domain, or as peripheries to be kept subordinate to the suzerain authority of the celestial throne through tribute relationships or military overlordship. The spatial core of Sinic statehood during the imperial period on the other hand always comprised all or almost all of the numerically preponderant *Han* Chinese population, this constituting traditional China as an essentially *Han* body politic which was not, however, ideologically predicated on race or ethnicity. It was rather the Chinese language and civilisation generally which served as the defining element of 'China', and conquering outside peoples throughout Chinese history have continued to govern the country much along the lines of the *Han* dynasty they had previously subjugated. The secular prestige of *Han* civilisation in imperial times up to the "First Opium War" (1840-42) permitted unquestioned legitimacy of *Han*-style government even under foreign invaders' rule, and the unity of the *Han* during earlier intermittent periods of several independent kingdoms within the ambit of 'China' remained similarly assured in systemic political terms, as such separate and competing regimes were all patterned on the same monarchic model.

Modern China, since the end of the Manchu dynasty in 1911 and in particular since the de-facto partition of the country since 1949, has been faced with a radically different situation. The charismatic aura of the "Son of Heaven" and the august centrality of the "Middle Kingdom" have given way to China's contemporary station as one of many sovereign states, which may no longer credibly pretend to the vocation of inculcating the precepts of good government upon foreign 'barbarians'. Taiwan, already removed from mainland Chinese rule by the treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895 ceding the island to Japan, has now grown into a functioning and prosperous democracy, visibly challenging the myth that 'Asian values' will necessarily make accountable government take a back seat in the order of constitutional priorities. Hong Kong has been catapulted to heights of urban affluence and commercial modernity by its industrious Chinese inhabitants under benevolent British colonial rule and has thus turned into both a setter of glitzy trends in inland Chinese manners and customs and a politico-ideological Sodom-cum-Gomorrah as much execrated as hankered after by the orthodox in Peking. Finally, the disintegration of the Soviet Union

and the re-emergence of central Asian states regrouping the nationalities colonised during Tsarist times have demonstrated to the non-*Han* minorities of northwestern China the possibility of recovering independence or other forms of substantive autonomy. In reaction to this, traditional benign indifference in China to ethnicity as a unifying link of the polity has currently given way in the People's Republic to strident insistence that, in the case of Taiwan, one *ethnos* must live as one *demos* or, rather, as one *imperium*. In relation to the non-*Han* borderlands in the North and West, Peking's claim to undivided control has also become more rigid as competitive manoeuvring over the selection of a new Panchen Lama in Tibet continues to testify.

Dr Hoppe's impressive sociological description of the ethnic groups inhabiting the "Xinjian Uygur Autonomous Region" of the People's Republic of China is a very convenient compendium for those seeking a general introduction as well as a microperspective affording detailed understanding of these groups' contemporary life environments. The thirteen communities examined (Uygurs, Tajiks, Kirghiz, Kazakhs, Chinese, Hui, Sibo, Mongols, Tuvinians, Daur, Tartars, Russians, and Uzbeks) are presented through accounts of their histories and ethnographic data on local customs and the economy. Numerous excursions interspersed as separate sections in the main text discuss methodological issues or offer illustrative details from the author's extensive field work in the region. Maps and diagrams as well as many photographs, mostly taken by Hoppe himself, complement the text. Apart from descriptive presentation of his subject matter, the author was also moved by the wider objective of demonstrating the multifariously contingent nature of ethnic self-definition – often achieved only through adversarial demarcation from other groups – in an attempt to contribute towards mitigating the socially destructive potential of constructs of ethnicity. Collapsing the extensive topics of history and language, along with present-day sociological surveys, into the comparatively brief chapters (between some thirty to sixty pages) on each group often results in synoptic treatment but this is more than compensated by the vividness of the reports from the author's field work. The precarious coexistence of the non-*Han* populations and their Chinese political masters could not have figured largely in the field research and discussion of this remains mostly speculative or is reflected obliquely through investigation of inter-group perception. The nomadic or semi-sedentary life of the autochthonous Xinjiang peoples is under pressure not only from the strained political nexus with the powers that be in Peking but also from the waves of 'modernisation' washing over 'traditional' societies across the globe. Hoppe's sympathies clearly lie with those whose ways stand to be submerged by technologised progress although people as yet excluded from the comforts of industrial civilisation may face its advent with far less trepidation than the denizens of a fully deodorised and shrink-wrapped OECD universe. The colossal panorama of *Han*-ruled Central Asia is, however, all too often lost to outsiders behind the encompassing label of 'China' and we owe to Hoppe's catholic enquiry a rich and empathetically drawn tableau instructive to both expert and general readers.

In comparison with ethnic heterogeneity and its attendant conflicts in non-*Han* China, the apartness of mainland China and Taiwan is at the same time more obvious, by virtue of geography and the political systems prevailing on either side of the Taiwan Strait, and more ambiguous, through the common *Han* ethnicity and the claim, still officially upheld on Taiwan and the mainland, of belonging to one indivisible entity, 'China'. While the non-*Han* minorities discussed by Hoppe have not so far achieved a socio-economic status which would enable them to develop substantial counterweight to their Peking rulers, Taiwan has grown into an internationally active trading country with a standard of living far beyond that of the People's Republic.

Taiwan's efforts to preserve, or regain, international status are extensively described in *Mr. Maurer's* study with particular emphasis on the Taiwan authorities' attempts to participate in legitimising international activities within the ambit of various 'international regimes'. Such regimes are construed by the author as comprising both formal treaty arrangements, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) or the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and not legally defined international alignments, such as the antagonistic blocs during the Cold War period. The survey traces Taiwan's evolution from new redoubt of a beaten Chiang Kai-shek after his flight from the mainland, through the loss of the seat in the UN and the switch of international recognition to Peking, to the present and Taiwan's anomalous existence characterised by economic eminence and diplomatic eclipse. The analytic value added by the concept of 'international regimes' seems negligible to this reviewer. Such regimes are, according to one definition reproduced from the literature of the field, "sets of implicit and explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations". Quite so. Ignoring the background noise of conceptual frameworking, the reader will nevertheless be rewarded with a factually comprehensive account of Taiwan's changeful modern history and efforts to safe guard its position through variously adverse decades.

Both monographs, dealing with opposite corners of Cathay, bring home to us the modern diversity of the Celestial Empire which latter-day Sons of Heaven are unlikely to be able to keep locked in an eternally autarchic embrace.

Wolfgang Kessler