

**THE MINORITIES OF  
NORTHERN CHINA**  
*A Survey*

**HENRY G. SCHWARZ**



**WESTERN WASHINGTON**

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*Editor:*

Professor Henry G. Schwarz

To

KENJI

# Introduction

This book contains a survey of the twenty-one minorities of Northern China. Northern China comprises the provinces or autonomous regions of Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Hebei, Henan, Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Hubei, Anhui, and Jiangsu. The survey also takes into account small groups of minorities living in Southern China but whose majorities are resident in the North, such as Mongols, Manchus, and Hui. Conversely, Tibetans living in Qinghai, Gansu, and other parts of Northern China are not considered here because most Tibetans live in Tibet which, by our definition, is included in Southern China.

I have been studying the minorities of Northern China since the late 1950s when I began to write my doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Since then I have written and edited several books and articles on the Mongols and other Northern minorities and one book dealing with the Communist Party's policies toward all minorities in China.<sup>2</sup> Much to my regret, very few other scholars have joined me in writing about China's minorities. Knowledge about and even interest in them remains scant in this country and even in China itself.

I decided to write this survey partly in order to stimulate more research in the field, but primarily to provide the interested layman with some basic information on these minorities otherwise not available or only inconveniently available in English.

This book is written primarily for those readers who wish to get a brief summary of information on one or several minorities. Each chapter is devoted to one minority. All chapters are arranged in basically the same manner and usually contain the following subjects: size and location of population, history,



language and literature, society, religion, and recent developments. The last category includes information since 1949 on a variety of subjects, such as the economy and education, that, in my opinion, are of sufficient importance to be included here. It is my hope that this arrangement will benefit both layman and specialist, the former by a presentation of basic facts and the latter by the inclusion of the latest available information.

This survey relies heavily on Chinese sources, especially on those by persons writing about their own nationalities.<sup>3</sup> This reliance on Chinese information is particularly noticeable in subjects where up-to-date data are important, such as language and recent developments and, to a lesser extent, social customs. All information was critically examined, and whenever there was reason for doubt, I chose not to include the material nor to speculate on what might be the true state of the matter. I freely admit that my caution is a reaction against much of what has been written about China's minorities. With some laudable exceptions, especially works by members of the Catholic Scheut mission, foreign accounts are either inaccurate or outdated, and sometimes both.

Much of the Chinese material cited in this survey is based on field notes collected in the late 1950s and printed for internal use (neibu faxing) in the early 1960s. The so-called cultural revolution delayed publication of the final versions of these field notes by more than a decade. Where appropriate, I have checked printed sources against my own observations made over a number of years reaching back to 1973. I have worked at the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing and traveled in several minority areas in Northern China.

The twenty-one minorities are arranged in four broad linguistic groups. The Turkic group includes the seven minorities of Uigur, Kazak, Kirgiz, Salar, Tatar, Uzbek, and Yugur.<sup>4</sup> They live in the western part of Northern China, except the Salars who live in the central part. The Mongolian group comprises the Mongol, Bonan, Daur, Dongxiang, and Tu minorities who live in the central portion of Northern China, but substantial numbers of Mongols are also found in the West, especially in Xinjiang. The Manchu-Tungus group includes the Manchu, Evenk, Hezhen, Oroqen, and Sibe minorities. They live in the eastern portion of Northern China, particularly in what many foreigners still anachronistically call Manchuria. The Sibe are a partial exception because almost half of them live in Xinjiang. All three groups are part of the Altaic family of languages. The fourth group includes minorities who speak other languages. The Hui speak Chinese, the Tajiks and Russians speak Indo-European languages, and the Korean language is considered by some scholars to be part of the Altaic family, but definitely not of the Manchu-Tungus group.

Each group is clearly dominated by one nationality which in many ways has influenced the other members of this group. As Table 1 shows, the Uigurs, Mongols, and Manchus are by far the largest nationalities in the Turkic, Mongolian and Manchu-Tungus groups, respectively. While also somewhat

Table 1

## THE MINORITIES OF NORTHERN CHINA

Name	Population <sup>5</sup>	Percent Living in China	Percent in China
<u>Turkic Group</u>			
Uigur	5,957,112	98	84.2
Kazak	907,582	13	12.8
Kirgiz	113,999	7	1.6
Salar	69,102	100	<1
Uzbek	12,453	1	<1
Yugur	10,569	100	<1
Tatar	4,127	1	<1
Total	7,074,944		
<u>Mongolian Group</u>			
Mongol	3,411,657	61	86.3
Dongxiang	279,397	100	7.1
Tu	159,426	100	4.0
Daur	94,014	100	2.4
Bonan	9,027	100	<1
Total	3,953,507		
<u>Manchu-Tungus Group</u>			
Manchu	4,299,159	100	97.5
Sibe	83,629	100	1.9
Evenk	19,343	18	<1
Oroqen	4,132	100	<1
Hezhen	1,476	11	<1
Total	4,407,739		
<u>Others</u>			
Hui	6,200,000 <sup>6</sup>	100	
Korean	1,763,870	1.9	
Tajik	26,503	<1	
Russian	2,935	<1	
Total	7,993,308		
Grand Total	23,429,498		



influenced by other members of their own groups, the Uigurs, Mongols, and Manchus have been the chief contributors to the languages, social structures, customs and habits and other aspects of the culture of each group.

In language, the strongest ties are encountered in the Turkic group, where Uigur has been the *lingua franca* not only for the other Turkic nationalities but even for non-Turkic peoples like the Tajiks, Sibe, and Oirat Mongols. Moreover, the phonetics, morphology, and lexicon of other Turkic languages spoken in Xinjiang have grown closer to Uigur; for example, the Kazak spoken in Xinjiang is much closer to Uigur than the Kazak spoken in neighboring Soviet Kazakhstan.

In the Mongolian group, as the tide of the Mongol world empire receded to its homeland in the fourteenth century linguistic ties between the Mongols in Mongolia and those who stayed behind in places like Gansu and Qinghai were severed or at least severely curtailed. The latter developed into separate nationalities who today speak languages that have retained many elements of Middle Mongolian, the language spoken at the time of separation in the fourteenth century. This is especially true of the Dongxiang, Tu, and Bonan languages which have also absorbed phonological, morphological and lexical elements from neighboring, non-Mongolian languages. As a result, unlike the situation in the Turkic group, Mongols cannot communicate in Mongolian with members of the three nationalities just mentioned. The Daurs represent a partial exception to this generalization. Some Daurs have lived close to Mongols and can speak Mongolian, but their own languages cannot be understood by the average Mongol.

Within the Manchu-Tungus group, until the turn of this century Manchus dominated the other members of the group politically, economically and socially, but their linguistic dominance began to wane soon after the Manchu conquest of China in the seventeenth century. As more and more Manchus lost the ability to speak their own language and changed to Chinese, the influence of the Manchu language on the other languages of this group correspondingly waned.

The Turkic group of languages has the most developed literary culture. The Mongolian group comes next, and the Manchu-Tungus group is the weakest. A major but not the sole reason for this is that the Uigur script is the oldest and was only later adopted by the Mongols and still later by the Manchus. Moreover, the Turkic group is also strongest in that not only the Uigurs, but the Kazaks, Kirgiz, Uzbeks and Tajiks have had their own writing systems based on Arabic, and these are virtually identical to the Uigur script. Within the Mongolian group, on the other hand, because of the early severance of ties among the languages of the group, no other nationality ever adopted the Mongol script. Within the Manchu-Tungus group, only the Sibe adopted the Manchu script, but did not produce a substantial literary culture of their own. In any case, as the chapter on the Sibe points out, their script has fallen into disuse, and today only few Sibe can still read and write it.



The survey concludes with a bibliography which has two purposes. One is to list most works used in the preparation of the text. The other is to encourage research on China's minorities by providing up-to-date lists of works on all twenty-one minorities of Northern China. However, a word of caution is in order. The sections on general works as well as those on the Uigurs, Kazaks, Mongols and Manchus are incomplete, because works on them are much more numerous than those on other minorities. A complete, up-to-date bibliography on these four minorities would fill several hundred pages which, given the purpose of this survey, would in my opinion be inappropriate. Consequently, I have limited these sections to works which I had occasion to consult in the course of my research.

Readers who wish to acquaint themselves with more works than listed here can turn to several reference aids. To mention only a few, for the Uigurs and Kazaks, the Center for East Asian Studies of Western Washington University has prepared a preliminary list of Turkic materials housed at that university. Its main value rests, I believe, with about 200 books written in Uigur, Kazak and Kirgiz and recently published in China. The list also includes other works relating to all Turkic nationalities in China as well as a few items on Turkic groups in other countries.<sup>7</sup> The Center has also published a catalog of Mongolian Publications at Western Washington University with over 2,100 entries.<sup>8</sup> It is my hope that it will serve as a modest foundation for a national union catalog of works on Mongolia in all languages. Such a national catalog is needed to advance Mongolian Studies in this country, and I hope that enough scholars and librarians can be persuaded to participate in this task so that today's dream can be turned into tomorrow's reality. In addition, readers can also consult the Bibliotheca Mongolica for works published in English, French, and German up to 1975.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to the Manchus, the relatively few works published during the past decade have all been listed here, but many of the numerous older works on the Manchus have been omitted. In the absence of a comprehensive bibliography, the reader is referred to a list compiled more than thirty years ago by Peter A. Berton, entitled Manchuria: An Annotated Bibliography (Washington: Library of Congress, 1951), xii, 187 p.

Place names are spelled according to the orthography used in the Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fensheng ditu (Hanyu pinyinban) (Beijing, 1977). Thus the capital of Inner Mongolia is spelled Hohhot instead of Huhohot'e, Khukhekhota, etc. In cases where the atlas lists two names for a given place, I have used the native name and placed the alternate name in parentheses at first occurrence in a chapter. With regard to other proper names, I have transliterated as closely as possible to the actual pronunciation whenever I could find a sufficiently informed native speaker. In other cases, I have used Chinese transliterations as found in written sources.



In the preparation of this survey, I have had the good fortune of being able to consult materials in various parts of Northern China. These were generously provided by many persons too numerous to be mentioned here individually. I wish to express my deep gratitude to all of them. My thanks go also to many persons in Beijing and in the minority areas who unstintingly shared with me their recollections, views, and interpretations. In this country, I received much valuable advice from my colleagues when I submitted, chapter by chapter, the draft of this survey in meetings of the East Asian Colloquium of Western Washington University. Finally, it is my pleasure to thank Joy Dabney and her staff for preparing the outline maps, and the Bureau for Faculty Research for meticulously typing the final version of the manuscript. Responsibility for any remaining errors of fact and interpretations rests entirely with me.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>"Policies and administration of minority areas in Northwest China and Inner Mongolia, 1949-1959," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1962, 692 leaves.

<sup>2</sup>China's Policies Towards Minorities. Bellingham: Western Washington University, Center for East Asian Studies, 1971. 200 p. (Studies on East Asia, v. 2).

<sup>3</sup>Unless explicitly stated to include the majority Han (generally but inaccurately referred to as ethnic Chinese), the term "nationality" (minzu 民族) is interchangeable with "minority" (shaoshu minzu 少数民族).

<sup>4</sup>Spelling of all ethnic names follows the orthography adopted by the Third All-China Nationalities Language Conference in January 1980. See Minzu yuwen 5 (1980), 78.

<sup>5</sup>According to the census of June 1982. Minzu yanjiu 23 (1983), 80-81.

<sup>6</sup>My estimate. The figure for the entire country is 7,219,352.

<sup>7</sup>The list includes sections for twenty-four Turkic groups, bibliographies, periodicals, collected works, history and archeology, and general works.

<sup>8</sup>The catalog is arranged by main entry. The Center can also provide, on demand, lists arranged according to any or all of sixty-nine subject categories including reference works, the humanities, social and natural sciences.

<sup>9</sup>Henry G. Schwarz, Bibliotheca Mongolica (Bellingham: Western Washington University, Center for East Asian Studies, 1978), ix, 355 p. (Studies on East Asia, v. 12).

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#### ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

Jiankuang	=	Zhongguo shaoshu minzu jiankuang.
Xinjiang	=	Xinjiang xiongdi minzu minjian gushi xuan.
Zhongguo	=	Zhongguo shaoshu minzu.
Zuopin xuan	=	Zhongguo shaoshu minzu wenxue zuopin xuan.