

Cheung Siu-Keung, Joseph Lee Tse-Hei, Lida Nedilsky (editors), *Marginalization in China: Recasting Minority Politics*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, 263 pages

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At first glance, the papers collected in this book seem to be interesting, but disconnected. The papers concern minority groups in mainland China and in Hong Kong during the imperial, republican, and communist periods. Their minorities are by gender, across the rural-urban divide, by ethnicity, by religion, by citizenship and by other divisions, or by some multiple of these. Yet the editors have managed to find common themes which link these diverse topics.

The first theme relates to the major title chosen by the editors. This is the theme of marginalization. There are marginalized groups, where the marginalization is created by others, or is a product of others' responses to the special characteristics of the group. Indeed the final paper concerns Chinese-Malaysian students studying in Guangzhou: these students were already to some extent marginalized in their Malaysian homeland by race and lower socio-economic status, and then further marginalized by policies and by the responses of local students when they became *huaqiao* students in Guangzhou.

But marginalization is not necessarily the fate of minorities. Sometimes it is majorities who are marginalized by a minority who control the organs of power. The rural majority in China are marginalized by the *hukou* system, which dooms the majority to rural work, status, and resources, while preserving richer work opportunities, status, and resources such as education for the powerful urban minority. Marginalization of women is better known, and Cheung Siu-Keung's article of one woman's struggle against a patriarchal Chinese society in the New Territories of Hong Kong, shows how that marginalization could work when the men controlled the organs of local power. But were women actually a minority? Or if in a small minority, did that matter? It is gender that mattered in the way in which power was exercised, not population. And it was the protagonist Deng A-mei's female relative, A-jin, who manipulated the patriarchal organs of power against her.

The second theme relates to the minor title chosen by the editors. This is the theme of policy creation by those in authority. For example, in studying the situation of Chinese-Malaysian students in Guangzhou, the writers note that the university authorities (and presumably other authorities within China's bureaucracy for managing the overseas Chinese) failed to understand the thinking of the students, and failed to assist them to integrate with local students, so that they sought friendships and identity with other outsiders, such as Hong Kong students.

The situation of 'comfort women' and other sexual slaves during the period of the anti-Japanese war is now well known. The rejection of these women in their families and local societies is brutal but not unexpected. Yet another disturbing aspect recorded in Yuki Terazawa's paper is that 'comfort woman' Nan Erpu was mistreated by China's own authorities for 'historically anti-revolutionary activities', imprisoned for two years, and suffered further persecution during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This maltreatment of the victim by those in authority no doubt reinforced popular rejection, and eventually led to her suicide. The further victimization of victims remains a disturbing theme in the activities of popular society and policy makers alike.

The third emphasises the continuity of policy style over different administrations: imperial, republican, and communist. In recent years, I have visited schools established by volunteers and NGOs for the children of migrant workers who have come from the north to work in Guangdong province. Without a regular *hukou*, the children are excluded from the regular school system, and have to rely on makeshift buildings without properly qualified teachers. This situation is not very different from that described by Puk Wing-kin in his study of the exclusion of salt merchants in Yangzhou (Jiangsu), Hakka people in Guangdong, and Dan fishing people in Guangdong from the Imperial examinations – essential steps on the ladder to success.

Professor Xia's study of the criminal underclass in modern China indicates a society where order has broken down, and the marginalized, especially migrant workers and urban unemployed, can find strength and profit in joining organised criminal gangs. Has this greatly changed since Fei Xiaotong described the role of bandit gangs in China's disintegrating society of the 1930s?

It is not necessary to continue through all of the papers to give further examples of these three themes. And the editors, and some of the contributors, seek to give a theoretical base to the studies through brief notes on some of the theoretical issues relating to minorities and the marginalized.

The editors had a further aim: to show how minority politics are being recast, through constant negotiation by state and grass-roots society. One overtly political study is that by Joseph Lee Tse-Hei, of Chaozhou Christians during the Maoist period. But other studies ignore or only remotely refer to the politics of the minorities, and to political interaction with the state or Party. Perhaps the editors could have provided a concluding chapter where they brought together this recasting.

Nevertheless, although the book partly fails to meet one of its objectives, it surely will be of assistance to sociologists in coming years. It is likely to be a book for purchase by a specialist or an institution, and yet the general reader could benefit from the diverse chapters. The very diversity makes each paper interesting in its own right, while the collection together enables the reader to grasp something of the common themes.