## *Research Note*

# The Call of Mao or Money? Han Chinese Settlers on China's South-western Borders

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The trumpet of battle has sounded!
Young people are just about to leave the beautiful city of spring [Kunming], embark on their journey and hurry to the subtropical border regions of the Motherland. There, the land is dark green by nature. It is a mysterious piece of land almost cut off from traces of human presence. It is a large emerald buried in the vast mountains of Yunnan ... The young people are just about to face the sunlight of the subtropics where they will break through brambles and thorns, launching a fierce struggle against nature. They are determined to make use of this emerald and make it shine with unique lustre in the Motherland's era of socialism. (Introduction to the novel *Bianjing xiao ge* (*Song of Dawn at the Borders*)[1]

As a consequence of its economic reforms China is currently experiencing internal migration at an unprecedented scale.[2] An estimated 120 million people, or more than 15 per cent of the total rural labour force in China, have for different lengths of time left their places of origin to settle mainly in urban centres.[3] Most of them go to the southern and eastern economically booming regions, but quite a few have chosen to go to ethnic minority areas in the border regions of the People's Republic. These areas, which have often been described and perceived of as economically and culturally backward, are also subjected to new large-scale in-migrations of mainly Han Chinese. Han Chinese – whether officially classified or identifying themselves as such – make up a considerable proportion of the population in most so-called minority areas in China today. A number of recent (mostly sociological) studies have contributed to knowledge of the policies and consequences of

1. Huang Tianming, *Bianjing xiao ge* (*Song of Dawn at the Borders*) (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1965), p. 1.

2. The research presented in this article is to a large extent based on fieldwork carried out in 1996–97. About 100 Han Chinese migrants participated in one or more interviews. For suggestions and comments on previous versions of this article I especially thank Frank Pieke and Koen Wellens. I am grateful to the Danish Council for Development Research for providing the necessary financial support for the fieldwork.

3. Elisabeth Croll and Huang Ping, "Migration for and against agriculture in eight Chinese villages," *The China Quarterly*, No. 149 (March 1997), pp. 128–29. A large number of other reports and investigations on various aspects of these migrants have been published in and outside China, and the social consequences of these migrations are often debated in Chinese media. See for instance, Frank N. Pieke and Hein Mallee (eds.), *Chinese Migrants and European Chinese: Perspectives on Internal and International Migration* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998); Ma Xia and Wang Weizhi (eds.), *Migration and Urbanization in China* (Beijing: New World Press, 1993).

sending Han to minority areas since 1949.[4] Especially with regard to Tibet, the actual scope of Han migration remains a hotly debated issue.[5] However, while the number of ethnographic studies of various ethnic minorities in China has increased markedly during the last 15 years (since it became possible to do fieldwork in minority areas of the People's Republic), the Han Chinese living in the same areas have rarely been subjected to this kind of fieldwork-based study.[6] Most researchers of ethnic minorities in China have been struck by the pervasiveness of the discourse on the Han as a more "advanced" (*xianjin*) nationality. But this discourse has not been thoroughly analysed in relation with how different groups of Han Chinese, living themselves among non-Han peoples in minority areas, reproduce, neglect, dispute or contribute to this discourse.

On the surface the recent "spontaneous" migrations of Han Chinese to ethnic minority areas in the border regions seem entirely unrelated to the large government-sponsored migrations to same areas in the 1950s to 1970s. However, this article will argue that the Communist official discourse concerning organized migrations to the peripheral minority areas in the 1950s and 1960s plays a crucial role for migrants today. It will especially focus on how the political legitimization for resettlement in minority areas in the Maoist period is reproduced and used as a social resource today, both by government officials arguing in favour of more incoming Han, as well as by the second generation of Han Chinese migrants in dealing with newly arriving "economic" migrants and the local ethnic minorities. The Communist government started in the 1950s to transfer and mobilize large numbers of teachers, cadres, soldiers, workers in state farms and young intellectuals to go to the border

4. For instance; Huang Yasheng, "China's cadre transfer policy toward Tibet in the 1980s," *Modern China*, Vol. 21 No. 2 (April 1995), pp. 184–204, Graham E. Clarke, "The movement of population to the west of China: Tibet and Qinghai," in Judith M. Brown and Rosemary Foot (eds.), *Migration: The Asian Experience* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Ma Rong, "Han and Tibetan residential patterns in Lhasa," *The China Quarterly*, No. 128 (December 1991), pp. 814–836; Yuan Qingli, "Population changes in the Xinjiang Yugur Autonomous Region (1949–1984)," in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1990), pp. 49–73; Ma Rong, "Economic patterns, migration, and ethnic relationships in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China," in Calvin Goldschneider (ed.), *Population, Ethnicity and Nation-building* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995); Ma Rong and Pan Naigu, "Wo guo Zangzu zizhi diqu de Hanzu renkou" ("The Han Chinese population in our country's Tibetan Autonomous Region"), in Beijing daxue shehuixue renleixue yanjiu suo and Zhongguo Zangxu yanjiu zhongxin (eds.), *Xizang shehui fazhan yanjiu* (*Research of Tibet's Social Development*) (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangzu chubanshe, 1997).

5. See for instance Ma Rong and Pan Naigu, "The Han Chinese population."

6. The most important exception being Burton Pasternak and Janet W. Salaff, *Cowboys and Cultivators: The Chinese of Inner Mongolia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993). Recent fieldwork-based studies of ethnic minorities in China include for instance: Melissa J. Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1996); Cai Hua, *Une société sans père ni mari. Les Na de Chine* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997); Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Mette Halskov Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, forthcoming); Stevan Harrell (ed.), *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

regions.[7] The aim was to consolidate power in these regions and promote the integration of the newly defined national minorities who lived there. The government mainly (but not exclusively) recruited the settlers among the ethnic majority, the Han Chinese, who were to be the forefront in the revolution leading the way for the more culturally and economically "backward" minority nationalities. These migrants were colonizers in the sense that they were expected to carry out the government's policy aimed at taking control over natural resources, education, politics, religion, administration and art among the ethnic minorities.[8] At the same time, the migrants were individuals searching for new opportunities and lives in regions far from their own geographically as well as culturally. The policy which caused (sometimes forced) them to migrate in the first place has changed but, as this article argues, their own memories of the reasons for migration and the political motives for their resettlement continue to constitute a resource in their own, and their children's, attempts to establish a way of living and claiming rights as "natives" as opposed to the more recently arrived Han Chinese migrants in the minority region in which they live.

## *The "Mysterious Peacock Plain"*

The "emerald" of the introductory quotation refers to the sub-tropical areas of Dehong and Sipsong Panna (Xishuangbanna) in Yunnan province. The focus of this article, Sipsong Panna, was established as a Tai Autonomous Prefecture in 1953. For a long time, Chinese people have regarded Sipsong Panna with ambivalent feelings of attraction and fear. The little former kingdom in the jungle has been described as a "kingdom of plants," the "Peacock Plain" and a "mysterious place." It has also been dreaded for its deadly malaria, which has killed Chinese soldiers and settlers since the times of the Qing. Before the late 1940s the only Han Chinese in Sipsong Panna (apart from a few individual migrants who had come before the 1920s) were the representatives of the Kuomintang government. Li Foyi was an official working for the Kuomintang in Sipsong Panna in the 1920s and 1930s and he argued that since there was plenty of space with only seven people per square kilometre, Panna would easily accommodate 800,000 Chinese migrants from South-East Asia. At that time there were fewer than 200,000 people living in Sipsong Panna.[9] Most were Tai people whose king, princes and government to a

7. The Chinese term *bianjing diqu*, "border regions," is used to describe the vast areas reaching towards the borders of China and historically largely inhabited by non-Han peoples.

8. Concerning colonization of consciousness, for instance through the rationalization of identities in China, see Dru C. Gladney, "Salman Rushdie in China. Religion, ethnicity and state definition in the People's Republic," in Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall and Helen Hardacre (eds.), *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994). See also Koen Wellens, "What's in a name? The Premi in Southwest China and the consequences of defining ethnic identity," in *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1998), pp. 17–34.

9. Hsieh Shih-Chung, "Ethnic-political adaptation and ethnic change of the Sipsong Panna Dai: an ethnohistorical analysis," Ph.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1989, p. 60.

large extent controlled the area, in spite of the simultaneous presence of a Kuomintang administration. To encourage more Han people to go to Panna, Li Foyi praised the Tai for being "peace-loving" and "hospitable," liking the Han people, helping each other and regarding the fields as common property of the villages.[10] However, for most Han Chinese at the time the attractions of the area were overshadowed by fear of the uncivilized and uncontrolled.[11] A recent article characterizes the so-called "old Panna" – that is, the Panna before the Communist "liberation" – in the same way as did several interviewees:

> In the old China Sipsong Panna was not only characterized by having an extremely backward economy and culture and being difficult of access. It was also a wild and barren place where malaria flourished and diseases were like tigers and wolves. It was an awe-inspiring and scary place for many people.[12]

Today the thrilling mixture of mystical attraction and fear of Sipsong Panna is alive in the minds of many Chinese from the heartland and the cities, enforced by numerous TV series and reports. For the local government and inventive entrepreneurs today, these feelings constitute a resource to be exploited for further developing tourism in an area where the economy is largely based on agriculture and rubber production.[13]

After 1949 the new Communist government wanted to establish firm control in the border provinces and consequently nearly 500,000 persons moved, or were directly transferred, to Yunnan province between 1950 and 1958 as military personnel, cadres and workers reclaiming wasteland.[14] As a border region with natural resources and a scarce population, Sipsong Panna was a region of special interest. Whereas the Han Chinese population in Sipsong Panna only made up a few per cent before the 1950s it has been growing ever since. The total population of the area today is 817,000, and according to the most recent population statistics (end of 1995) people officially registered as Han (*Hanzu*) now make up 26 per cent of this. In the county of Jinghong they make up 34 per cent, and in the city of the prefectural capital Jinghong as much as 48 per cent.[15] Since only those who are registered as having permanently moved to Sipsong Panna are counted in these statistics the actual proportion of Han Chinese is considerably higher. In 1990 local government cadres estimated the size of the unregistered "floating population" as more than 32,000 people in Jinghong alone. The figure today is certainly higher since in-migration has increased visibly since 1990. Officially about

10. Hou Zourong, "Li Foyi xiansheng qi ren qi shi" ("Mr Li Foyi, the man and his deeds"), in The Commission for Editing Historical Material (ed.), *Jinghong wenshi ziliao* (Jinghong, 1995), p. 81.
11. *Ibid.* p. 75.
12. *Ibid.* p. 75.
13. The local government is trying to promote tourism and in 1996 more than 1.5 million tourists (most of them Chinese) visited Sipsong Panna.
14. Li Debin, Shi Fang and Gao Lin, *Jindai Zhongguo yimin shiyao* (*The Essentials in the History of Migration in Modern China*) (Harbin: Harbin chubanshe, 1994), p. 364.
15. Information from unpublished reports on the local population from the government's local statistical department.

24,000 people migrated to Jinghong county between 1982 and 1990, most of them construction workers, individual entrepreneurs and farmers.[16] Among the migrants were members of the Bai, Hui, Naxi and other nationalities in Yunnan, but the vast majority were, and still are, Han Chinese. The Han Chinese today constitute at least one-third of the population, the Tai make up one-third, and the final third is made up of various other local ethnic minorities such as Akha, Blang, Lahu and Jinuo.

### *Migrations Motivated by Mao, Motherland and Fertile Fields*

*Liberating pioneers.* To fight the Kuomintang who had established a government in Sipsong Panna after 1911 the Communist Party sent a number of guerrilla soldiers and later troops to the area in the late 1940s. They mostly operated in the mountains among the minorities who had the least contact with the Kuomintang. Often they were torn between their zealous urge to participate in the revolution, liberate and help the ethnic minorities, and their own contradictory feelings of despair and loneliness in a rough jungle area where they did not understand the languages and customs of the local people:

> When I first came here [in 1949] I immediately regretted it and wanted to go back. I thought this place was really backward and poor. We only had *nuomi* [local type of rice] to eat and water to drink and nobody understood what we said. The Tai looked down on us female soldiers because we slept together with the male soldiers ... When the children saw us they shouted "the Han have come" and they ran to hide inside the houses ... So I was very much in conflict with myself. I did not feel secure working here. I did not feel well and I wanted to go back. But the leadership insisted that we stay to educate minority cadres and to study the minority language. We had the rule of the "three alike" – we had to eat together, live together and work together with the minorities. (previous guerrilla soldier, now retired government administrator)

The first soldiers and participants in the work teams were trained to promote the "equality of the nationalities," to help them develop class consciousness and acknowledge the fact that they were now geographically, politically and culturally part of the new People's Republic of China. As Bernhard Cohn has described in connection with the British colonization of India, a knowledge of local languages was regarded as a prerequisite for gaining the other kinds of knowledge needed for establishing control of the territory and its peoples – "establishing correspondence could make the unknown and the strange knowable."[17] Knowledge of the area was needed to classify, categorize and bind the social world so that it could be controlled.[18]

The soldiers slowly learned to talk to the locals, became accustomed to their ways of living, and developed rather paternalistic feelings towards

16. All these data are from an unpublished local report.
17. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 4.
18. *Ibid.* p. 5.

the people whom they had learned were in need of help. According to them, the "ordinary people," the *laobaixing*, were helplessly caught in a feudal exploitation by, and dependence on, the headmen, the *tusi*. The fact that the peasants belonged to ethnic minorities made them even more in need of advanced assistance than the Han Chinese peasants in the rest of China. Thus it was possible for young Communist Han Chinese in their early 20s to regard the local, powerful and often much older headmen with a mixture of contempt for their position, and parental responsibility for improving them, educating them and making them accept that others knew what was best for them.

After the Kuomintang was defeated in Sipsong Panna in late 1949 and early 1950, some of the Communist Party troops were sent back while others stayed to work with the newly arrived "work teams" and in the new government. These early revolutionary Han Chinese constitute a special though small group of Han today. Eventually they all received high posts within the administration, Party or government. Most of them married other Han Chinese, a few married local Tai women, and their children were always brought up learning the Chinese language and going to Chinese schools. Most of their children later became "local cadres" (*difang ganbu*[19]) themselves. The pioneering soldiers were among the few Han Chinese who lived in close contact with people belonging to the local ethnic groups, and even today they are among the few Han in the area who can speak and understand the Tai language. By setting up the government administration, persuading part of the Tai nobility and leadership to co-operate with them in exchange for government positions, starting schools and propagating the message of a new People's Republic of which all the people in the area were now part, they paved the way for the large numbers of Han who arrived shortly afterwards to make use of the area's abundant natural resources.

*"Welcome to the sons and daughters of Mao": the first wave.* From the 1950s onwards the new Communist government sent large numbers of mainly Han Chinese from the heartland of China (*neidi*) to establish and work in state farms. Often these were situated in the minority areas where natural resources were unexploited and power needed to be more firmly established. Consequently, many areas such as Sipsong Panna experienced a sudden and unprecedented influx of large groups of Han Chinese migrants dedicated to opening up wasteland and settling down. The Chinese government needed rubber, and experiences from rubber production in Guangzhou and Hainan Island suggested that Sipsong Panna (and Dehong) would also be suitable for rubber plantations. Therefore, the first group of 1,697 soldiers from the People's Liberation Army was sent to Sipsong Panna in 1955 to work in what was to be the first state

19. This term is normally used to distinguish them from cadres in the state farms (*nongchang ganbu*).

– or rather army – farm in the area.[20] By 1959 more than 3,000 workers and cadres had been sent as part of military troops to start up the state farms which were organized as military units.[21]

This policy was welcomed by the revolutionary cadres stationed in the area who saw it as a great potential for further developing the economy, political consciousness, educational level and perceived backward culture of the minorities. Contacts between the local Han Chinese Party leaders and administrators and the newcomers in the state farms were warm and supportive. They were united in a feeling of sharing the same mission. With more people around to share the experience of having left home, being among natives with different social customs and being regarded with a certain scepticism, it was easier to bear the hard physical labour and the primitive conditions. And many more workers were to join in, making the state farms into the most concentrated Han communities in Panna.

The 145,809 people now living in the state farms (that is the people employed and their family members) make up more than 17 per cent of the total population of Sipsong Panna.[22] In some rural areas of Sipsong Panna the Tai people speak Chinese with a clear Hunan accent, or rather, with the accent typical of the county of Qidong in the province of Hunan, because Hunanese workers in Panna were all recruited in Qidong and Liling counties. Between 1959 and 1960 nearly 37,000 people were sent from Liling, Qidong and Qiyang counties in Hunan to work in state farms in different areas of the southern parts of Yunnan. The majority of these (nearly 22,000 people) were sent to Sipsong Panna.[23]

Why was it then that the government decided to find its workers for the new sub-tropical rubber plantations in a province which did not even border on the province of Yunnan? When I put this question to Hunanese workers, retired Hunanese and cadres in the state farms they were puzzled about it themselves. They knew that it was the central government which had made this decision, but they had no authoritative explanation for the reasons behind it. However, most of them had shared notions about what the most *likely* reasons were. Regardless of whether or not they were right in their assumptions, their own interpretation of why people from their county were chosen was very important for the way they perceived their status as migrants and the way in which they related to the local ethnic groups.

20. Later the farms were reorganized from army farms to state farms administered independently from the army and from the local government. To avoid confusion I use the term state farm throughout the paper.

21. Land Reclamation Department, "Zhigong duiwu ("The team of workers"), unpublished draft, 1997.

22. Figure from the end of 1995 from unpublished statistics from the Prefecture Statistical Department.

23. Workers from Qidong, Liling and Qiyang were also sent to the districts of Simao, Honghe, Dehong and Lincang, all in the province of Yunnan. Equally, 60,000 other Hunanese peasants were recruited to go to the province of Xinjiang to work in state farms (Li Debin *et al.*, *The Essentials in the History of Migration*, p. 377).

The first new state farm employees (most of whom were peasants and some of whom were lower cadres, members of the Party and graduates from primary and lower secondary school) were recruited in the immediate aftermath of the Great Leap Forward when people were starving in most parts of the country. In interviews most migrants pointed to their hope for better living conditions as one important reason for responding to the government's call for pioneering workers to leave their homes and settle in far-away unfamiliar areas. However, the guaranteed (though low) wages through employment in a state farm were only part of the explanation. The political climate of the time called upon people to mobilize and show their dedication to the country and the socialist course by going through hardships in the roughest border regions. The migrants from Hunan recalled numerous public meetings where they were told that as sons and daughters of the home province of Mao they were to take the greatest responsibility for developing the socialist country. They were to be pioneers and not to fear going to the roughest, most backward, most underdeveloped parts of the motherland. Mao Zedong, they would be told, was very concerned that his own children were not to be treated better than anybody else. In fact they were to endure more hardship than other people, to be a "model" for them, and so were the people who were born in his home province – the people who were just like his own children. Whatever "logical" arguments one could raise against this reasoning, the point is that the Qidong and Liling migrants themselves put weight on it, and it was apparently widely accepted in Sipsong Panna as a way of legitimating large-scale import of Han Chinese workers from outside Panna. When the large trucks with workers from Qidong and Liling arrived they were welcomed with banners carrying texts like "Welcome to the sons and daughters of Mao" and in welcome speeches their symbolic familiar connection to Mao was emphasized.

The feeling of being personal envoys sent by Chairman Mao himself to help develop the most backward parts of the country was strengthened by the fact that by no means all those who signed up to go to the south-west were accepted by the government. Only people of a proper age, with a clean political record and acceptable class background were allowed to go. According to the interviewees many were turned down, and this strengthened their own feelings of being selected, of being part of an important mission. Whatever the motives of the poor peasants signing up to go to the frontiers were, the availability of political legitimization at the time made it possible for the migrants to justify themselves when they met local resistance against the new rubber plantations and the cutting down of hunting fields in the jungle. The Party had provided them with a sense of purpose which became a psychological resource in their attempts to create space for themselves as a newly established community distinctively different from the indigenous ethnic groups. After an initial period where nearly 20 per cent of Hunanese migrants returned to their places of origin between 1960 and 1962, the workers and cadres tended to stay in Panna. Until 1993, their sons and daughters were guaranteed employment in the state farms as well.

Almost from their beginning the state farms functioned as separate societies and they were never under the local government's administration. Today they have become large enterprises with their own schools, kindergartens, hospitals, leisure-time activities and housing. People in state farms tend to marry other people in state farms. Their surplus output is owned by the state, but the local area gains from the taxes they pay. There is a certain sense of pride of belonging to a state farm – a feeling of having come to Panna with a purpose larger, more admirable and less selfish than the thousands of more recent migrants coming in the wake of the economic reforms. Most workers are also convinced that the area would not have developed without them and the state farms, that the Han have brought in "advanced culture" (*xianjin wenhua*) and that the "local" or "native" minorities" (*bendi de minzu*) themselves are incapable of making the most out of the area they live in. This was expressed in different ways, in various contexts, and by both men and women:

By setting up the state-farms we have helped all the minorities here by bringing in new advanced culture. The local people are very grateful for this (cadre in state farm).

When we came we cut down the huge bamboo here. We used it for building houses and we planted rubber. None of the locals helped. We could not make the Tai do that kind of work. (retired female worker in state farm)

We taught the locals that the land here belonged to the country. We told them about the CCP and we helped them to clean their fields and taught them how to use fertilizers. They were all very grateful and thanked us. We also gave them some land which was prepared for growing rubber. They simply got it from us. We prepared it and then we gave it to them. They live better than we do now. The common people (*laobaixing*) are very happy about the state farms. They get free electricity from them. (cadre and previous worker in state farm)

This place only developed because of all of us who came from outside Panna and started the state farms. We arranged for water, electricity, roads. We contributed a lot to this place. The state farms have had the greatest influence on this place. Now one fourth of all the taxes of Jinghong come from the state farm. (cadre and previous worker in state farm)

We cannot only think about ourselves, but we have to take care of the minorities, take care that they also develop. We can help them to use scientific agricultural methods. We can also help them with schools and all kind of problems. (cadre in state farm)

The main problems here before and now is the land. The Tai saw that the state farms made money out of the rubber trees and they tried to take the rubber. We had to teach them that it belonged to the country and that they could not take it. (retired worker in state farm)

The establishment of the new state farms did cause some resentment among the areas' indigenous inhabitants. State farms did not normally claim areas which were being used as fields, but problems occurred when the jungle was cut down to make way for rubber trees. People used to hunt in the jungle and to collect wild herbs and vegetation used in their diet. Clashes took (and occasionally still take) place in the mountains where Akha people, for instance, felt that state farms threatened their ways of practising slash-and-burn agriculture and hunting in the vast jungle areas. For the ethnic majority in the area, the Tai, land disputes

were a somewhat lesser problem compared to those occurring in connection with the fierce campaigns against religion, "local nationalism" and for enforced collectivization in the periods before and during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.[24]

Very few local minorities were employed at the state farms. Their administration did not encourage the recruitment of local labourers mainly because they were not considered to be qualified as workers. The political motive for using Han Chinese labourers was very strong: the incoming Han were supposed to possess knowledge of so-called "advanced agricultural techniques" and "advanced culture," and to have "political consciousness." To spread this among the presumed "backward" minorities, it was essential that large numbers of Han were sent to the minority areas. After the Cultural Revolution when the relations between the local non-Han and the Han had become very strained after years of cultural suppression, the government demanded that the state farms change their attitudes and start promoting the "unity of the nationalities" in the local context. Each farm thus set up a position for a cadre engaged specifically in developing friendly relationships with the minorities, and leading cadres in the state farms started to participate in local festivals and to invite local village heads to celebrate festivals in the farms. It also suddenly became important for the farms to demonstrate that they had employed non-Han workers. In Jinghong city where the state farm population was 79,240 in 1995, there were 16 per cent non-Han. However, most of these were in fact not local but minorities recruited as labourers in other parts of Yunnan. To the limited degree that local minorities have been employed they have mostly been Akha from poor villages. The state farms present these cases as success stories of the cultural transformation of a backward group of people into an advanced population taking part in the modern economy – all achieved by the influence of the state farm:

> For hundreds of years the Hani [the Akha are officially classified as of Hani nationality] had eaten in the mountains, lived in the mountains and been poor in the mountains. They were satisfied with a full stomach and they found it disgraceful to go out and sell their surplus products. They did not have the slightest ideas about market, prices, commodities or outcome. If you look at today's Hani workers, their understanding of commodities is stronger than that of the Han workers, they are more active than the Han workers in doing sideline business, they become wealthy faster than the Han and their households are more modern ... Old habits have been replaced with modern consciousness. Before they did not use toilets, they did not use fertilizers, they did not eat with chopsticks and they did not wear shoes.... All Hani workers say: "My family is the state farm – the state farm is my family."[25]

Some state farm leaders today maintain that recruitment of minorities for the farms after 1979 was first of all an act of social and political responsibility towards the minorities. Another more pragmatic reason was

24. See Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese*.

25. Sipsong Panna Land Reclamation Department, *Banna qing* (*The Situation in Panna*). (Yunnan: Jinghong, 1990) p. 54–55.

that the farms were in desperate need of labour. During the 1960s and early 1970s more than 60,000 so-called "educated youth" (*zhishi qingnian*) had been sent to Sipsong Panna mainly to work in the state farms. Many of them worked as doctors, teachers, administrators or in broadcasting. In the times of revolutionary passion it was prestigious to go to the most "backward" areas, and the state farms in Sipsong Panna offered the opportunity of feeling courageous and sacrificial without actually ending up in a small, isolated mountain village among ethnic minorities.

> We educated youths had a very big influence on the culture (*wenhua*) and civilization (*wenming*) of the border areas. It was also useful for us to be sent to these areas. We learned a lot of things and we spread a lot of knowledge. Therefore we also got all kinds of work. Most of us did a really good job in spreading advanced culture (*xianjin wenhua*) from the inland. Unlike us, most cadres and locals here had only been to school for a few years (female "educated youth" from Shanghai).

In fact the educated youth rarely interacted with the local non-Han, but had plenty of company among each other and other Han in the state farms. In 1978–79 they were suddenly allowed to leave Panna, with the result that the number of employees in the state farms dropped drastically, by 47 per cent, in 1979.[26] However, although the state farms recruited some new workers among the local Akha minority, they mostly hired peasants from other places in Yunnan, in Hunan and among the second generation of migrants in the state farms.

### *Called by Money? The Second Wave*

The term "floating population" (*liudong renkou*) has in China become a common way of labelling peasants who move around without being registered, keeping their household registration in their place of origin. In the media urban crime and social disorder have often been associated with the presence of a "floating population" difficult to control in terms of housing, schooling and birth control. However, when they settle down in Sipsong Panna or other ethnic minority areas the same kind of rural migrants, searching for an alternative income, are not described or perceived of in such negative terms by the local administration, government, most cadres or the media. On the contrary there is widespread agreement among Han Chinese cadres and leaders in Panna and in the state farms that since the area is "backward" in terms of economic and cultural development, its inhabitants have a lot to gain and only little to lose from large-scale Han Chinese in-migration. Whereas the peasant migrants in the cities of South China are considered to be poorer, less educated and more "backward" than the urban inhabitants, in Panna they are considered to be representing and bringing in "more advanced culture."

26. Land Reclamation Department, "The team of workers," p. 21. In 1993 there were only 1,170 of the educated youth left as employees in units under the Land Reclamation Department.

Most entrepreneurs hiring workers in Panna agree that the local minorities are generally unfit as workers. They complain that they are not used to hard physical work, that they are lazy, that they cannot stand being told by others what to do, and that they cannot "eat bitterness." In comparison, Han Chinese migrant workers are well received. Regardless of how poor and uneducated they may be, they are still regarded as better and more reliable workers than most local ethnic minorities. Many workers are now needed with the attempt to expand the tourist industry, and often entrepreneurs go themselves to poor Han Chinese areas to recruit labour. One relatively successful private investor had lived for many years in Panna; he was a Han and had the following explanation for why he only hires poor Han Chinese peasants from outside Panna:

> All workers for this enterprise are recruited among poor Han Chinese in other areas of Yunnan, especially in Mojiang and Lancang.[27] We only hire Han people because the minorities are not good at working. They are too lazy. There is also no point in employing locals because they already have their own fields, so if they were to take this kind of job they would need higher wages. They are not satisfied with the 300–400 *yuan* that workers from Mojiang and Lancang are content with. We have built some houses for these workers and they are extremely simple. They do not have anything here, but still they find it better than at home because here at least they have their wages.

Apart from the poor Han who are hired specifically to come to Panna and work there are many individual migrants who have deliberately chosen to go to Panna. In that connection, the first-wave migrants (mainly living in the state farms) have a large, indirect impact on where migrants come from today. When interviewing individual migrants it became clear that most of them come from Hunan and Sichuan. Those from Hunan mainly come from Qidong and Liling, the counties from which most state farm workers were recruited in the 1950s and 1960s. Sometimes family members help them to find housing, settle down or later have their children enrolled in the state farm schools. Even when family members do not actively assist the newly arrived migrants, the newcomers often refer to them as sources of knowledge, for instance about how best to settle in Panna, what sort of business is in demand or about housing. Family members in state farms sometimes said that they felt obliged to help these migrants, although they sometimes considered them a burden. The presence of family members in Panna (though often distant ones) often explained why migrants would leave more prosperous, large cities after a few years and go to Panna instead. While acknowledging that they could make more money working in, for instance, a factory in the south, many of them emphasized that by going to a minority area they hoped for a more relaxed and comfortable life in a society which would praise them for coming rather than look down upon them and regard them as a "social problem." Many also hoped for less competition because of the general

27. These are indeed among the poorest areas of Yunnan and many individual migrants, Han and Biyo (*Hanizu*) especially, come from there. Also in the 1950s and 1960s the government recruited workers for the state farms in Mojiang.

assumption among them that for reasons of culture the local minorities were unfit to do business.

At the same time, it was not only rational considerations and calculations that determined whether peasants would migrate and where they would go to. Many of the migrants whom I interviewed came from villages in Qidong and Liling where there were only a few people left between 18 and 45 years old. It had become so common for peasants to seek work outside Hunan that "if you are a young man and you stay at home in the village to work in the field, you are strange!"[28] Migrating from those villages and returning to them when older has become a way of life, rather than something extraordinary or in need of explanation for the people involved. When the economic reforms in the 1980s made it possible for peasants to travel and find work, the people living in Qidong and Liling had already experienced large-scale out-migrations initiated by the government in the 1950s and 1960s. They knew of areas such as Sipsong Panna, and the continued presence there of family members or fellow villagers often made it an easy and logical choice of destination for new migrants. In the case of the Hunanese from Qidong and Liling, the first-wave migrations clearly initiated a later pattern of migration from and to the same areas when new economic policies made it possible and attractive.[29]

Unlike the migrants in the state farms the new, "spontaneous" migrants "keep moving" and settle down only for as long as they consider it to be profitable. Nearly all of those I interviewed expected to return to their original villages when older, and their school-aged children mostly stayed in their place of origin with grandparents. Although they would not necessarily go where they could make most money, it was important for all migrants that they were either gaining economically from being in Panna or that they *believed* that they would do so in the not-too-distant future. For most of them, long-term migration to other parts of China was as "normal" as the fact that they would return again to their villages of origin later in their lives. They maintained their close relationship and identification with their place of origin, their *laojia* which was the place of their ancestors and families.

There was also a clear tendency for migrants from similar counties to help each other in work and private matters. Often specific jobs are occupied by people from the same counties and when, for instance, renting rooms from the local Tai it is common that people exchange rooms with new migrants from their own counties. Thus, for instance, most of the nearly 300 tricycle taxi drivers are from one county in Jiangxi, and an important group of butchers buying and reselling meat from the villagers are from the same village in Hunan. It was also

28. Peasant migrant from Qidong.

29. See also Mette Thunoe's study of international Chinese migration in which she argues for the use of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* for going beyond mere strategic economic calculation when trying to understand patterns of migrations: Mette Thunoe, "Moving stones from China to Europe: the dynamics of emigration from Zhejiang to Europe," unpublished paper, 1996, p. 20.

common to hear people from, for instance, one county in Hunan speaking rather negatively about the people from the neighbouring county in the same province:

> There were so many people from Liling [county in Hunan] who became cadres and all kinds of leaders [in Sipsong Panna]. It is not like the people from Qidong [another county in Hunan] [*Lowers his voice:*] Their level of education (*wenhua*) is lower, their "quality" is also somewhat lower (*suzhi ye cha yidianr*). We Liliang people are characterized by being of "high quality" and our level of education is also quite high (*suzhi bijiao gao, wenhua shuiping ye bijiao gao*) (Liliang businessman, related to several cadres in state farms).

At the same time, I was often struck by the common ways in which migrants from different places, of different classes, gender and age would represent their own status as members of the Han Chinese majority, echoing the prevailing discourse in China on the Han as a more "advanced" nationality. The political motives for migrating in the 1950s and 1960s were reproduced by the migrants in the state farms. Often villagers and family members from their places of origin recalled having heard stories about the need in Panna for "advanced" Han to come and do the kind of business of which the local minorities themselves were not capable. Among many of these second-wave migrants and the Han of the first wave, there seemed, at a certain level, to be a feeling of unison expressed in common statements about the "developed Han," the "advanced culture of the Han" and the "backward minorities." Sometimes this was stated in racial terms as exemplified by these remarks of a relatively successful shopkeeper from Hunan:

> Finally, you have to be clever to do business. The people from back home are rather clever and the quality (*suzhi*) of the locals here is rather low. Their brains (*danao*) are ten to 20 years behind those of the people in the inland. So all in all this is a good place for us to do business. The level of culture (*wenhua*[30]) in Hunan is generally speaking good. The brains of the people in Hunan are rather dynamic (*Hunanren de naozi hen huoyue*) (Han Chinese shopkeeper).

However, while many Han cadres in the state farms and government officials would themselves take the initiative to talk at length about their perceptions of the Han versus the minorities, the recent migrants were much less interested in comparing themselves with the minorities and with evaluating their own contribution to the area. When asked for an opinion or judgement they would mainly echo the same phrases about the backwardness of the minorities and the need for the Han's advanced culture which they had heard so often in the media, in school and among the other Han in Panna.[31] In their descriptions of "the Han" and "the

30. By *wenhua* this interviewee did clearly not mean "education," but something broader than that. He had explicitly explained how the "cultural level" (*wenhua shuiping*) of the Hunan people in general was high even in areas where many only went to school for a very short time.

31. Concerning the influence of the content of state education on perceptions of "minorities" and "majority" see Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese*.

minorities" they often shared the same stereotyped and essentialized concepts as the Han in the state farms and the administration. But generally speaking, they were less negative in their comments on the minorities, less paternalistic, and regarded them first of all as people they needed to create a relationship with in order to do business, find customers, buy things to resell, rent houses, rent land and so forth. One woman had come to Panna after working for three years in Guangdong. After having been introduced by family members from Jiangxi she and her husband managed to buy one of the very attractive tricycle taxies (*hongbaoche*):

> It is hard work, but people are more friendly than in Guangdong. I was treated really badly in the job there. Here at least we have the freedom to decide when we want to drive the tricycle. Our host [a Tai who rents out 11 rooms to 11 families under his own house] is quite good. He is friendly and lets us decide who live in the rooms [therefore all families are from one county in Jiangxi]. He also only wants people from our home place because that makes it much more convenient and safe to live here. Of course many people here look down on us who drive tricycles and some try to run away from their bill, but mostly people are quite friendly here.

Even so, the local social status of the second-wave migrants is low in Panna as compared to the other Han and they are the migrants regarded with most scepticism and sometimes contempt by many Tai in the area. Many of the second-generation Han and Tai in Jinghong feel threatened by the large number of new migrants who compete for jobs and set up businesses, making it more difficult for the "locals" to compete. In the streets they are the most visible migrants, they often perform service jobs which many Tai regard as degrading, they live rather poorly, and without household registration they have no way of claiming "local" status. However, they are at the same time part of the "Han nationality" which is locally praised by officials for contributing to economic and cultural development, and in direct economic competition with especially the second generation of the state farm migrants.

### *The Second Generation and New Concepts of "the Local"*

When for the first time a large number of second-generation Han grew up in Sipsong Panna, new concepts of who are "local" or "native" (*bendi*) and who are "from the outside" (*waimian lai de*) developed. This had consequences for the ways in which the Han in Panna regarded their own rights, possibilities and obligations in relation to the people they defined as the "native minorities": the Tai, Akha, Blang and so forth, who obviously had a much longer history of living in the area. The Han people who are locally called "the second generation" (*di er dai*) by Han employees in state farms and in administrative positions outside the farms (the *difang ganbu*), are all sons and daughters of the Han who were recruited in different ways by the government and the state farms to work in Panna. Their parents have transmitted to them feelings of affiliation with their "old home" (*laojia*), they have learned to speak the language

of their parents' place of origin as their mother tongue, they have celebrated the same festivals, they have worshipped the same ancestors and they have heard stories of myths and memories of the "old home." They have learned to share a community consciousness based on solidarity among people identifying with an ancestral home, and their parents have not regarded them as "local" or "native" people of Sipsong Panna. At the same time, they are the first Han Chinese in Panna to feel a strong contradiction between this community feeling and the fact that they are born in, likely to stay in, and officially registered as inhabitants in the Tai Autonomous Prefecture of Sipsong Panna.

How long it takes for a group of migrants to become indigenous (or in this case native or local) is indeed always a political question.[32] The second generation's way of using the term "local" or *bendi* also has political implications. The term *bendi* is sometimes used only to imply that you are born in a certain area. This is, however, too simple an explanation of the second generation's use of the concept. There is more political weight to the identification as a new "local" ethnic group than there would be if individuals were simply maintaining that they were local because they were born in a certain geographical space. Strictly speaking, many Han identifying themselves as the second generation or as "local Han" were not born in Panna but arrived when they were children. Whereas the first wave of Han and their children have the Chinese government and the whole political system to support their settlement in the minority area, the Han of the second generation are faced with political and social realities forcing them to negotiate their identification as a new "local nationality." For their parents it was not important to be identified as "Panna people" (*banna ren*), because although they mostly ended up staying in the area for their entire life, they preserved memories of their "homeland" and anticipated that a day of return would arrive. They were pioneers in a "backward" surrounding among "backward" people, and when their mission was accomplished they would return home – they thought. They had therefore no objections to using the term "local nationalities" or "local ethnic groups" as referring only to the ethnic non-Han groups who claimed historical heritage to the area.

Unlike them, the second generation grew up as part of a large and influential Han Chinese community which clearly had a dominant role in the area. They controlled the political life and directed the development of the economy from an entirely agricultural-based one to an increasingly modernized market-oriented one where the "local minorities" remained mainly occupied in small-scale agriculture. The second generation grew up with the conviction that the clearly demarcated community of Han Chinese, originally made up by their parents' generation, had remade a

32. James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1992), p. 310. For interesting literature concerning the Chinese diaspora and transnationalism see especially Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds.), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

backward wilderness of poverty and humiliating living conditions into a prosperous, modern, civilized area. This, they believed, was to the indisputable benefit of everyone: "This place would not have developed without us." This adds to the explanation of why it is so important for the second generation of migrants to be identified by others as "local Han," not simply as "Han," and certainly not as "migrants." They have "lost" a homeland in the sense that they find it increasingly difficult and unattractive to identify with their parents' place of origin – an area characterized by hard peasant labour, an area where their ancestors have come from but which they have rarely visited themselves. On the other hand, they have not completely been given a new homeland. Because in spite of the fact that the Han to a large extent control the policy and the economy in Panna, the area remains a so-called Tai Autonomous Prefecture and the Han are still faced with resentment (often expressed very subtly) by the Tai (the local numerical majority) and, to a lesser extent, some of the other ethnic minorities. The government has to be headed by a Tai and the majority of government cadres have to be Tai as well.[33] The Tai (that is here the people officially classified as members of the Dai nationality, *Daizu*) have certain advantages in education and in employment in government offices. Especially the last is bothering some of the people belonging to the second generation. They put forward that considering the contribution to the area from their parents, themselves and the "Han nationality" as a whole, they, as the only Han born in the area, should not be prevented from taking part in the political advantages of "other local nationalities":

> The Han here are more clever than the minorities. They learn faster. But the problem is that the Han here do not have a high status (*meiyou diwei*). This is a Tai autonomous prefecture so the Tai and Aini [locally-used name for Akha] are treated specially because they are minorities. When a unit needs to employ cadres the Tai and Aini have an advantage, and it is also easier for them to get an education. Is this fair when we are also born here? (second generation female Han, runs a private business).

Furthermore, people from the second generation believe that due to the second wave of large-scale spontaneous in-migration of Han in search of jobs and business opportunities the local Tai have come to resent the Han in general. Indeed many Tai express a critical view of the Han, criticizing them privately for being in control of the local economy, for being "dirty," for "living poorly," for doing service jobs which they themselves would never let their children do, and so forth. Han Chinese, especially those belonging to the second generation, want to distance themselves from that image of the Han and I often got the impression that they are partly identifying themselves as "local Han" to create an opposition to precisely these new immigrant Han. Furthermore, shops, restaurants and other small-scale businesses are mostly run by newly migrated Han.

33. In spite of the fact that the head of the government and the head of the local Communist Party are officially equals in terms of power, everybody agrees that the highest actual power is with the head of the Party, and this position has always been occupied by a male Han Chinese as in most minority areas.

Previously that was no problem for the second generation of Han, because until 1993 they were guaranteed secured jobs in the state farms. Now, however, it has become much more difficult for the "local Han" to find jobs, and they have started to compete with the new migrants to get into the same market. Many of them feel that as "local Han" they have more legitimate rights than the new migrants to the opportunities offered by new economic development, to buy cheap agricultural products from the non-Han peasants and to get access to the best located shopping stalls. They use their "local" identity to make a distinction between themselves and the new migrants when trying to attract customers among the local minorities, when dealing with authorities about matters related to doing business, and in the tourist industry where it is an advantage to be "local."[34]

This was also reflected in the attitudes towards the Chinese term *yimin* (migrant or resettler). When I introduced myself to the interviewees, telling them the purpose of my study, those who had arrived during the 1950s and 1960s, and their children, corrected me when I used *yimin* to include all the people who had, for one reason or another, moved to Sipsong Panna. They first of all objected to the term *yimin* being used to include themselves.[35] They explained that only recently arrived individual workers, entrepreneurs, traders and so on were *yimin*. They themselves had moved to the area in order to "support the construction of the borderland" and therefore they were exactly "supporters of the borderland," *zhibian*. They had of course also moved from one place to another to live and to work, but for them the term *yimin* was associated with something negative, namely that movement had taken place for one's own sake, to improve one's own economy, and not for the sake of the country and the development of a perceived "backward" minority area.[36] Whatever their actual motivations were for signing up to go to the borders is less important here than the way they perceived of, formulated and judged their own and others' reasons for going. For expressing the common experience of all Han Chinese who had – for whatever reason – moved to Sipsong Panna, they came up with the term "people from the outside" (*waimian lai de*) as a neutral term not implying anything about the reason for coming. This concept was rejected by the second generation because, as they argued, unlike their parents they were "local" (*bendi*) not from "the outside."

34. There are several hundred small travel agencies in Jinghong and many of them are run by Han from the second generation.

35. Even so, Chinese scholars writing about the peasants and workers who went to work in the state farms also mostly use the term *yimin*. See Lu Li and Wang Xiuyin, "Cong wo guo wushi niandai you zuzhi de yimin kenhuang tanxi yimin gonggu wenti" ("An exploration and analysis of the stability of the migrants organized to open up wasteland in our country during the 1950s"), *Renkou yanjiu*, No. 4 (1986), pp. 28–31. Sometimes the term *kenmin*, people claiming wasteland, is used to describe that kind of migration organized by governments since the time of the Qing Dynasty. See Li Debin *et al.*, *The Essentials in the History of Migration*.

36. Also people transferred to new job positions in India were, according to Myron Weiner's study, reluctant to use the word migrant about themselves because it had "lower-class overtones." Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 41.

An important asset in the second generations' attempts to be accepted as local Han was the reproduction of their parents' concepts of *their* own motives for coming. I have argued that the Han Chinese of the first wave of migration were able to use the political argumentation for why they should migrate – sacrifice for the motherland, help the backward, show revolutionary spirit – as a resource while establishing themselves and legitimizing their being in Sipsong Panna. Their children, the second generation of Han, have taken over this way of legitimizing their claims towards the new migrants. Regardless of what the original reasons were for peasants leaving Hunan for Panna in the 1950s and 1960s, the younger generation tend to highlight their parents' contributions to the economic and cultural development of Panna as an argument for their own status as "local Han." To be worthy of living (and especially staying) as a migrant in Panna, one has preferably both to be born there and to be able to argue that one is there for a purpose larger and more admirable than merely one's own need for money. In this context parents' motives for coming are as important as their children's. If parents have come (or believe they have come) for reasons other than selfish ones, their children, born in the area, ought to be considered of "local nationality." The way in which the second generation of Han present themselves as "local Han" suggests that they consider it negative to be "from the outside" or are influenced by many Tai's critical view of "Han from the outside." Thus, even in Panna where the government praises the in-migrations, the term "migrant," *yimin*, is to a certain extent a stigma.

## *Conclusion*

Like many other migrant communities around the world, the Han Chinese in Sipsong Panna did not move merely on the basis of individual choice. Migrants of the first wave were transferred by the government, under strong political pressure to make a sacrifice for the revolution, or signing up in order to escape poverty or even starvation after the disastrous Great Leap Forward. Migrants of the second wave left their villages more spontaneously in the wake of the economic reforms which made it attractive and possible to search in the border region for an alternative income. However, unlike many other migrant communities elsewhere in the world, the Han Chinese migrants were never under pressure to adapt to the cultural practice or learn the dominant language of the receiving community. They were a numerical minority in their new home place, but socially and politically they represented a dominant majority. They were expected and supposed to influence and eventually change the society to which they had moved. When large numbers of Han Chinese signed up to go to the minority and border regions in the 1950s to 1970s they were persuaded by the propaganda of the Party that they were participating in a national project in which the "more developed" people (who happened mainly to be Han Chinese), by migrating to the borders, would contribute to the economic development of the whole country while, at the same time, they would be helping and assisting the

"more backward" ethnic minorities. It was glorious to go to the borders, *and* for many it was a solution to acute poverty. Thus the government provided the migrants with a strong political legitimization for resettlement. This became a powerful and lasting asset also for later migrant Han Chinese in their struggle to create new livelihoods and establish themselves as a community in an area predominantly inhabited by non-Han. The previous political discourse on the Han Chinese supporters of the borderlands had been reproduced among the migrants themselves, transmitted to their offspring and turned into a resource in the negotiation of a new identity as a new local, or indigenized, ethnic group.

The political message concerning the local advantages of large-scale Han Chinese in-migrations was transmitted in schools, by the media and among the migrants themselves. When millions of peasants, in the wake of the economic reforms, started to migrate to cities and other economically booming areas of China, many of those who came to minority areas such as Sipsong Panna had relatives, neighbours or friends who had participated in the first wave migration. The political legitimization for the first wave of migrants had been so strongly reproduced among them, and had been transmitted to relatives and friends from their places of origin as well as through official channels, that it became an asset also for the migrants of the second wave. While peasant migrants in large cities of China were used to being criticized for creating social instability, they were welcomed in Sipsong Panna (and many other minority areas) as people who brought in "advanced culture," thereby helping to modernize areas which would otherwise remain underdeveloped. Although this level of a discourse propagating the unison of a majority nationality, the Han, was to a certain extent represented by all the different groups of Han migrants regardless of class, gender and age, there were at the same time relationships of power and competition among themselves. Thus, at other levels of interaction than that between "Han" and "minorities," place of origin, reasons for coming, occupation, political status, gender and so on became of vital importance and resulted, for instance, in the second generation's negotiation of a status as a "local nationality."