FOREWORD

Susan McCarthy's *Communist Multiculturalism*, the eleventh volume in the Studies on Ethnic Groups in China series, exemplifies in many ways the methods and the message that the series employs and delivers. If we want to understand ethnicity, ethnic groups, and ethnic relations in China, we cannot rely on the study of single groups or single time periods, nor can we use the methods and theories of single disciplines. Rather we need to address full-on the complexity of the Chinese nation and its component parts. This means not only context, but detail. We need to recognize that we can understand a group only in relation to others with whom the group interacts; we can understand a historical period only in the context of what happened before and after. And we have to recognize above all that no group is quite like any other group, that no group can stand for "minorities," and that no group's relationship with the state is quite like that of any other group. In short, we need to compare, and to compare the details. And to do this comparison effectively, we need to employ the methods of many disciplines, which is why our series has already included authors and contributors from history, anthropology, political science, literature, linguistics, and geography. But more significantly, all our authors employ concepts and methods from multiple disciplines in single books and chapters.

Communist Multiculturalism embodies this approach and philosophy. McCarthy spent two years in Yunnan, learning through intensive field research and everyday experience just how varied and complex China's ethnic groups and ethnic relations are. In her rich yet rigorous synthesis of her findings among the Dai, Bai, and Hui, she offers a detailed empirical demonstration of some of the most important aspects of ethnicity in China.

To begin with, ethnic groups are not the same. Not only do their cultures differ—a rather obvious point—but their ways of being ethnic differ as well. Dai are very different culturally from Han Chinese and other non-Theravada-Buddhist peoples, as well as being proud of their descent from the formerly independent polity of Sipsong Panna. They are what the Chinese ordinarily think a minority should be—different, but not separatist. The Bai, long subjects of various Han-ruled regimes, are much less different culturally but still take pride in their ethnic uniqueness. The Hui are even less different from the Han—they speak Chinese as their primary language and their major differences relate to their Islamic religion. But they have a reputation for being oppositional to the state and thus rather dangerous.

These different ways of being ethnic may be interesting in and of themselves, but, more important, they serve to point out important truths about relationships between minorities and the state that are otherwise easy to overlook. Difference, celebration of difference, revival of identity, ethnic pride—all may add up to separatism or ethnic conflict in some cases, but they do not need to. There are certainly separatist sentiments and organizations among China's best-known minority ethnic groups—the Tibetans and the Uyghurs—but separatism is unimportant or nonexistent among the groups McCarthy describes. They are all part of the Chinese polity and have made little or no attempt to separate themselves from it. But even counting out separatism, there are varying degrees and different modes of ethnic conflict. In recent years, Hui have had disputes with Han and other ethnic groups in Yunnan and elsewhere, but there has been no overt conflict, and in fact little contention, between Bai and their neighbors. Put succinctly, ethnic identity and nationalism are not synonymous, nor are ethnic conflict and ethnic separatism.

But we would be oversimplistic if we saw these differences merely as a range from conflict with the state to no conflict with the state. A third lesson emphasized in McCarthy's study is that the state can—and in fact is usually wise to—not only not suppress certain forms of ethnic revival and ethnic identity but actively encourage and support them, as it does with

the Bai and Dai in particular. This can promote ethnic groups' support of the state and identification with the multiethnic nation. But still, this does not always work—many Hui, despite being loyal citizens of China, have frequent conflicts with other ethnic groups.

In short, the questions of ethnicity and nation-building in China are complex and cannot be reduced to a simple formula. Nor can they be understood through a single discipline, as McCarthy, a political scientist, shows when she combines theories and concepts mostly from her own discipline with methods drawn heavily from anthropology and with insights from history and the arts.

We are thus delighted to present *Communist Multiculturalism* to the reading public. It tells us many things we need to know if we are to understand today's multiethnic China.

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