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## Ethnicity and Nationalism : Comments on papers by Professor Matsumoto and Professor Gladney

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## **Ethnicity and Nationalism: Comments on the Papers of Matsumoto Kotaro and Dru Gladney**

**Jerry Eades**

These two papers complement each other. Both are concerned with the problems of ethnicity and nationalism, one in the south, and one in the northwest of the country. In addition, Matsumoto's paper raises some interesting questions which Gladney's paper partly answers. So I will deal with Professor Matsumoto's paper first.

Professor Matsumoto's paper deals with the ethnic and national identification policy of the Chinese government, which is one of the main recurring themes of this conference. He describes well some of the problems which emerged from this policy, and which have led to its apparent slowdown or end since the 1970s.

Some minorities do not want to be identified as such, for local historical and/or political reasons, e.g. the fear of discrimination by the host community. These are contradictions in the process: some groups have been recognised as minorities, while others with very similar claims have not.

There are inequalities between the Han and the minorities, which may persist despite high rates of economic growth in some areas. For instance, Xinjiang has one of the highest economic growth rates in China, but clearly there is still ethnic and religious discontent there. This suggests that it is worth considering in detail the flow of Han Chinese migrants into minority areas, and the distribution of economic rewards between the Han and the local ethnic minorities.

Regarding the disruptions caused by the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, there is substantial ethnographic and other evidence available on these in different parts of the country and a comparative survey would be very interesting.

Finally, Professor Matsumoto reminds us that Muslim identity is a problem in the south as well as the north of China, and this is clearly linked to Professor Gladney's paper to which I now turn.

Professor Gladney's work is of quite breathtaking geographical scope, from Istanbul to Beijing and southern China. The Hui and Kazakh are everywhere it seems. Globalisation has serious implications for ethnographic fieldwork, and this research is a very interesting example.

I like the idea of path dependency, the idea that once innovations have been made or accidents have happened, people continue along that path, even if it is not the most beneficial or rational. In my own work on trading diasporas and the state in West Africa, I found many similar examples. I think his underlying point – that theories that assume

that people or the state are rational are clearly wrong – is very important and this of course undermines the kind of “stage” theories of Marx, Morgan, Engels and Stalin on which much Chinese policy has been based in the past. If he is right, then it means that social science is probably unable to predict anything! All we can do is write better theoretical histories of what has happened in the past.

The paper is divided into three sections, which deal in turn with theory; the comparison of the Uighur, the Hui and the Kazakh; and with education.

In the theoretical section, though I like the discussion of path analysis, I am not so sure about the notion of relational alterity. It derives from segmentary theory in functionalist anthropology, and I do find it too formalised to be of much explanatory value. Perhaps I have been too much influenced by people like Abner Cohen, whose work on trading diasporas may be of interest in the analysis of the Kazakh. In my own work on ethnicity and trade, I found that it was possible to distinguish broadly between five different areas in which the question of ethnicity was important:

- (i) Family and marriage.
- (ii) The accumulation of capital.
- (iii) Formation of social networks, in which actually religion, not ethnicity, seemed to be the main factor among the Yoruba migrants I studied.
- (iv) Education.
- (v) Relations between the minorities and the state.

Professor Gladney’s paper concentrates on the last two of these, though he provides some hints about the others. I would be particularly interested in his comments on entrepreneurship, important both among the Kazakh and the Hui, and its relationship to ethnicity and ethnic boundaries.

The comparison of the three groups, Hui, Uighur and Kazakh, is fascinating. The Hui he has described at great length in his splendid 1991 book, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Council on East Asian Studies), so it is interesting to see this new comparative dimension to his research. The Hui are a religious group in all but official designation, and are scattered all over China. The Uighur have a sense of place which is official recognised, while the Kazakh are organised around genealogies. I can think of many West African examples – where religious transnational and transethnic networks of the kind represented by the Hui clearly exist. So do ethnic groups looking rather like the Uighur and the Kazakh, both in the ways in which they are structured internally and in the ways in which the boundaries with outsiders are drawn. Clearly there are many parallels to be drawn between the situation in China and other parts of the Islamic world.

Finally there is the discussion of education, in which four main points struck me:

- (i) While there is a long tradition of Islamic education in China, from the point of view of

the Han majority and its government, the minorities are in need of “guidance” and leadership.

- (ii) State education levels vary widely between Muslim groups, some of which have levels higher than those of the Han Chinese.
- (iii) This is in turn linked to the rural-urban divide in Chinese education provision: minority groups which are more urbanised have higher rates of education.
- (iv) The gender gap is of major importance.

Again I can see many parallels elsewhere, e.g. in West Africa. The most literate area in the precolonial period, Northern Nigeria with its long tradition of Islamic learning, also became educationally marginalised during the colonial period. This was partly because of the refusal of the British to spend money on a government education system, and partly because of the refusal of the local Islamic rulers to let in the Christian missionaries who were the main alternative. But in the south of Nigeria, in contrast, one of the highest rates of education of both males and females to be found anywhere in Africa occurs among the Ijebu Yoruba, despite the fact that they are also predominantly Muslim. Clearly the relationship between gender, education, Islam and the state is a fascinating and historically complex one, in which a comparative analytical perspective promises to be most valuable.

In conclusion, these two papers raise many interesting and important comparative questions, and I would like to congratulate the speakers on raising them through the presentation of such interesting ethnographic material.

