

China



Chenghao An, *Zu Qun She Hui Fa Zhan Yu Bian Qian: Chao Xian Zu She Hui Diao Cha Yan Jiu* 族群社会发展与变迁—朝鲜族社会调查研究 [Ethnic group social development and transformation: A perspective on Chinese Korean social survey research]

Hangzhou: Zhejiang University, 2014. 169 pages. 5 illustrations, 16 tables, preface, notes, bibliography, postscript. Paperback, RMB300. ISBN 978-7-3081-2821-6.

CHENGHAO AN'S *Ethnic Group Social Development and Transformation* is an impressive account of how Korean Chinese rural society in Heilongjiang province, Northeast China, has changed in the last one hundred years, and an elaborate analysis of the reasons behind such a historical and social transformation. As a member of the Korean Chinese community, An was born and brought up in a typical ethnic village and has dedicated himself to studying the development of ethnic groups. He offers profound insights into the Korean Chinese ethnic group through growing up in China, overseas study in Japan, and consecutive family visits to North Korea.

This volume touches upon a topic that has broad appeal in academia, and is a socio-historical study of Korean Chinese rural society over the past century. Based on a combination of ethnographic fieldwork and analyses of a wide range of historical materials, An explores the formation and development of Korean Chinese villages in China and the corresponding changes in the context of urbanization.

Korean Chinese rural society is characterized by agricultural immigrants who developed rural communities that rely heavily on collective labor and rice-centered cultivation, the core of their farming culture. In the process of urbanization and globalization, rural societies tend to disintegrate; however, the social networks constituted by a rural community, geographical relationships, and blood ties constructed in premodern agricultural society became inseparable during the movement of the population; and more importantly, these ties are significant social resources in the sustainable development of Korean Chinese society in an era of post-village communities and new urbanizations. An states, “A rural social community comes into being and begins to evolve during the process of regional social development. It will adapt itself to the dynamic changes of society. But the major transition in the modern period has posed a tremendous challenge to rural social communities; therefore, it is crucial to respect and grasp the intrinsic relations between economic structures and social communities” (168).

An believes that traditional East Asian society is rural, taking regional social community as its core. But with modernization, urbanization, and globalization, most East Asian farming villages cannot remain as per the conventional social order. To our regret, millions and millions of natural villages with strong cultural values are vanishing at the rate of nearly one hundred every day. The Japanese “One Village One Product Movement,” the Korean “New Village Campaign,” and the Chinese “New Rural Construction” are, to some extent, conducive to the changing situation in the countryside. On the other hand, more convenient transportation and ever-widening exchanges with the outside world have resulted in the increasingly drastic flow of the rural population to urban areas, a lack of a young labor force, the empty nest phenomenon, left behind children, and other social problems more severe than before. According to An’s experience, since the mid-1980s, some Korean Chinese who have left their ethnic villages have started to live as migrant workers abroad or have gone into business in big cities. During the 1990s, more and more Korean Chinese have been driven by this powerful social trend. Is it any wonder that the development of Korean Chinese ethnic villages has been somewhat restricted? Korean Chinese rural society is classified as an immigrant one, with typical rice-centered grain cultivation agriculture and a history of development difficult to fully comprehend. An deliberately picked a Korean Chinese rural village as the subject of social transition and conducted an in-depth study in “Central village,” Hailin county, Mudanjiang, for one of the important reasons is that this case study reveals some commonly shared features of other ethnic communities. An shows great ingenuity in his particular choice, for those residents in Korean Chinese villages are not only faced with the same outside world as Han Chinese farmers, but also a similar language and culture shared by the same ethnic group in Korea.

An agrees with the opinion generally held within academia that, since the mid-nineteenth century, Korean Chinese began to immigrate to the territory of China from the Korean Peninsula. At the beginning, some Korean refugees settled as pioneering farmers in the northeastern part of China, avoiding natural disasters and reclaimed wasteland; and later some Koreans escaped from their homeland at

the time when Korea was encroached upon and colonized, and so they attempted to seek political asylum in China. With the fall of three northeastern provinces of China including Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning, colonists further manipulated the Manchukuo area by setting up a special “colonization” agency in the 1930s and forced jobless immigrants to work on rice cultivation and development in Northeast China by means of institutionalization on a large scale. In the ten years from 1935 onward, there was a dramatic increase in the Korean Chinese population, from 1.36 million to 2.16 million. These Korean immigrants became integral members of the fifty-six ethnic groups of China and lived in the same areas as other minorities. The changes that took place in their villages were much the same as those of Han Chinese villages. It is worth noting that there are some distinctive characteristics in Korean Chinese ethnic society, for its people are assimilated into the Chinese population while still driven by elements of an exotic (Korean) culture.

In view of the above, Korean Chinese feel confused about their self-identity, especially the older generation. Some of them were born in Korea which, emotionally speaking, can be regarded as the motherland; however, legally speaking they are Chinese nationals. Since establishing a diplomatic relationship, China and Korea have been cooperating in many fields. More Korean Chinese have tried to make their way back to their purported homeland, but for Korean citizens, Korean Chinese are their overseas compatriots; undoubtedly it is hard for this unique ethnic group to gain a sense of belonging or a sense of acceptance.

Korean Chinese may also feel uncertain about cultural customs. For a long time in administrative autonomous regions they inherited traditional Korean culture such as language and lifestyle, but they have also been affected or assimilated by the dominant Han Chinese culture due to its long-term isolation from the Korean Peninsula. During the Cultural Revolution, political campaigns brought a fatal blow to so-called feudalistic superstitions, devastating much of Korean Chinese culture and forming a distance between the Korean Chinese and the Koreans across the border. Many scholars have reached a consensus that Korean Chinese culture is a marginal culture among China, South Korea, and North Korea. More interestingly and vividly, An uses the term “apple pear” to describe something that looks like an apple, but tastes like a pear, to describe this unusual cultural trait.

An takes a positive attitude towards such a phenomenon and draws the conclusion that “Under the premise of similar self-identity, Korean Chinese societies in different places try to reconstruct their ethnic community in some ways. Despite the type, size, and mode of organization, a variety of clubs or groups have formed around the world to facilitate the exchange of regional ethnic groups, such as associations for entrepreneurs, senior citizens clubs, religious organizations, internet companies, and so on, and they play a pivotal role in enhancing internal communication among ethnic groups. This is because ethnic commonality often times acts as a precondition of territorial, social, and ethnic community reconstruction” (144). However, from my perspective it is still hard to reconstruct ethnic communities because most Korean Chinese are greatly influenced by the dominant Han Chinese culture and are losing their ethnic identity, especially the young genera-

tion. However, the central government is trying to give financial assistance and policy support to make this come true—only time will tell.

An also visited rural villages on the outskirts of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and found that East Asian rural villages share a lot in common regarding their development and transition. So he began to consider possible approaches to address this current phenomenon against urbanization. This book, which is one part of research of a project supported by China's National Social Science Foundation, makes every endeavor to integrate a macroscopic social background with a microscopic historical analysis of rural life, probing the social transition of Korean Chinese from multiple perspectives based on multi-discipline research methods such as history, ethnology, sociology, economics, and so on, and is important for the study of the interdisciplinary research of the history of ethnic minorities in China. It could be used as reference for researchers engaged in ethnic studies within East Asian countries. Readers of this book will benefit immensely from An's keen observations and penetrating analysis of Korean Chinese ethnic group development and transformation.

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