

The Campaign to “Open Up the West”: National, Provincial-level and Local Perspectives

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ABSTRACT The campaign to Open Up the West that started in 2000 has been presented as a major state project of nation-building directed at the interior provincial-level jurisdictions in order to encourage endogenous economic growth, to reduce socio-economic inequalities, and to ensure social and political stability in non-Han areas of the PRC. Despite appearances to the contrary it is more of an adjustment to the PRC’s regional development policy than a radical change, not least because of debate and imprecision about its goals, processes and finance. Its impact is perhaps best viewed from provincial and local perspectives. These stress not only the importance of the west’s varied social and economic ecology, but also the significance of the sub-provincial as a focus for analysis.

The announcement of a campaign to “Open Up the West” (*xibu da kaifa*) by the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the second half of 1999 indicated a change in the regional development policy of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The stated goal was the development of the interior and western regions of the PRC, in distinct contrast to the emphasis of regional development policy since 1978 that had favoured its eastern and southern parts. On the surface this change and its likely consequences seem both considerable and significant, suggesting nothing less than a major state project to ensure greater equality across the territory of the PRC, to increase state capacity and to assist dramatically in the process of nation-building. On the other hand, even in the short period since its inception the aims and content of the campaign have often appeared not just complex but also imprecise and hostage to the various elements within the PRC’s decision-making process. In particular, the processes and intended outcomes of the campaign to Open Up the West have been matters of some contestation, not least at the provincial-level and locally. While a national perspective may reveal certain aspects of the causes, processes and potential impact of this campaign, the diversity of the socio-economic environment to be found in the newly defined west region suggests that there is also a need for more provincial-level and local perspectives.

The Dimensions of Change

In mid-1999 both Jiang Zemin (the then PRC President and CCP General Secretary) and Zhu Rongji (then Premier of the State Council) announced that the campaign to Open Up the West would start at the beginning of 2000. The stated goals were the social and economic

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development of the interior and western regions of the PRC, now seen as having become unacceptably disadvantaged by the growth strategy of the previous 20 years. At first sight, the extent of change presaged by this campaign seems to be considerable.¹ The PRC's tripartite regional developmental policy throughout the reform era had previously privileged the coastal economies, as against the central and western regions.² After 1978 the eastern and southern region was targeted as the focus of industrialization, and was intended to develop fastest, largely building on its perceived comparative advantage of proximity to the wider East Asian economies and the outside world. While there had been an expectation that at some time the western region would also develop, not least in the wake of growth on the eastern seaboard, for the previous two decades its role had been as a primary producer to the rest of the country.

The change in the PRC's regional development policy signalled by the call to Open Up the West seems to suggest not simply that resources would be directed to the PRC's interior and the western region, but also that there was now to be a higher degree of state intervention in economic development than had so far characterized the reform era. The previous 20 years had been dominated by an emphasis on the importance of market forces in the determination of both economic development generally and regional development more particularly. For some of the regions now to be designated as part of the "west" to begin closing the gap in economic performance with the provinces of the eastern seaboard there would need to be not only a major state project but also a massive concentration of resources, if indeed it were possible at all. From a provincial perspective, during the 1990s GDP per capita in Guizhou, the poorest provincial-level jurisdiction was only a twelfth of that in Shanghai, the richest.³ Indeed, the change in policy direction and the suggestion of a large-scale diversion of resources even seems similar to the ill-fated "Third Front" regional development policy of the late 1960s and early 1970s that sought to develop a military-industrial heartland away from the PRC's northern borders and eastern coastline.⁴

Despite these indications of dramatic change there is also a need for greater perspective in assessing the intent, processes and potential impact of the campaign to Open Up the West. In the first place, while two decades of economic reform had certainly seen an emphasis on the

1. Yasuo Onishi (ed.), *China's Western Development Strategy: Issues and Prospects* (Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies, December 2001); H.H. Lai, "China's western development program: its rationale, implementation, and prospects," *Modern China*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (October 2002), pp. 432–466.

2. Kjeld Allan Larsen, *Regional Policy of China 1949–85* (Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 1992); and David S. G. Goodman (ed.), *China's Regional Development* (London: Routledge, 1989).

3. Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: The Case of China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 200; Other indicators are also discussed in Joseph Y. S. Cheng and Zhang Mujin, "An analysis of regional differences in China and the delayed development of the central and western regions," *Issues and Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (February 1998), p. 35.

4. Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: defence industrialization in the Chinese interior," *The China Quarterly*, No. 115 (September 1988), p. 351.

importance of market forces, this had not been an exclusive demand of the central leadership, as the development of Shanghai and particularly Pudong during the 1990s bears ample witness. As with the introduction of economic liberalism in Britain during the 19th century, a balance has been established between state and market with specific roles ascribed to each, rather than the replacement of all state economic activity by the market.

In any case, and of greater importance, as the relevant sections of the Tenth Five-year Plan detail, the new emphasis on the interior is intended more as an addendum to the current regional development strategy than its replacement.⁵ Moreover, far from an all-out redirection of state resources to the development of the western region, it seems that such investment has been distinctly limited, and mostly for specific projects where funding was already identified before the campaign was publicly articulated. The stated intention has been that further additional funds will be invested in the western region from private and foreign sources, though there is as yet no evidence that this tactic will prove successful.

The apparent relative shortage of resources to support the development of the western region is matched by the lack of coherent and consistent statements that detail the campaign. There is no single policy document that summarizes the drive to Open Up the West. Policy of course is always as much about implementation as design and neither aspect can be considered in isolation. In this case, though, the Open Up the West policy appears more general and aspirational than planned in detail, with every appearance of having emerged from a series of parallel and sometimes competing agendas.⁶ There are some specific passages in the Tenth Five-year Plan, but the call to Open Up the West pre-dates this and the Plan makes no attempt to be comprehensive in dealing with all the issues mentioned elsewhere as essential parts of the wider campaign. Questions of increasing inequality and relative socio-economic (dis)advantage between the coastal and interior regions were highlighted in the Tenth Five-year Plan as the prime reason for developing the western regions. On the other hand, statements by CCP leaders, and discussion (official and otherwise) in the media have often placed the emphasis on developing state capacity and nation-building, especially as it relates to the integration of those non-Han Chinese found in many (though by no means all) parts of the interior and western provinces.

Any problems with policy clarity have certainly not been assisted by the repeated changes in the geographical focus of the new “west” region, as well as its complexity. Neither the boundaries nor the identity of the west are immediately clear. At the start of the reform era it had been defined in terms of nine provincial-level jurisdictions: the Xinjiang Uighur, Tibetan and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Regions, and the

5. Office of the Premier, State Council of the PRC, *Outline of the Tenth Five-year National Economic and Social Development Plan of the People's Republic of China (Draft)* 5 March 2001, in New China News Agency Report, 5 March 2001, ch. 8, s. 1.

6. David S. G. Goodman, “The politics of the west: equality, nation-building and colonisation,” *Provincial China*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 2002).

provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou. The first articulations of the new policy to Open Up the West during late 1999 defined it in terms of these provincial-level jurisdictions plus the more recently (1997) established Chongqing Municipality. However, from about October 2000 the west came to be defined in terms of 12 provincial-level units, with the addition of the Inner Mongolia and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Regions. In September 2001 the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hunan, the Enshi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hubei and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Jilin were also added.⁷

To some extent this uncertainty about the boundaries of the west reflects the wider imprecision about its identity as a region. The rhetoric of policy debate in the PRC would suggest that it was characterized by economic underdevelopment, a lack of economic infrastructure and large numbers of minority nationalities, as well as being in the far interior of the land mass. While it is quite clear that the west, as now defined, has from the perspective of the provincial level some of the greatest concentrations of poverty, ethnic minorities and poor economic infrastructure in the PRC, a description in these terms highlights neither common nor exclusive characteristics. Moreover, while most of its areas are away from the coastline, this is quite clearly not the case for the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, which has a southern coastline.

The provincial-level jurisdictions in the west are generally socially and economically disadvantaged, but they are not exclusively so, and they are not all equally disadvantaged. Table 1 provides comparative data on the socio-economic development of the west by provincial-level jurisdiction. Many of the same difficulties of disadvantage are also faced by the provinces of Anhui, Jiangxi and Shanxi,⁸ while in contrast in the west the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region was an economic success story throughout the 1990s. By the end of the decade it could claim a higher GDP per capita than (amongst others) Hainan or Jilin provinces, the former supposedly at the forefront of the new investment environment in south China, and the latter a centre of earlier industrialization.⁹ Moreover, by any standard it would appear that some provincial-level jurisdictions – the Tibet Autonomous Region and Guizhou and Qinghai provinces provide clear examples – are substantially worse off not simply in terms of economic growth data (which often do not adequately reflect the degree of disadvantage) but also with respect to the provision of welfare (notably health and education) than others in the west. The problems faced by the leaderships of provincial-level jurisdictions with long-estab-

7. Heike Holbig's article in this volume.

8. Sun Wanning, "Anhui: the institutionalisation of poverty," in John Fitzgerald (ed.), *Rethinking China's Provinces* (London: Routledge, 2002); and David S. G. Goodman, "King Coal and Secretary Hu: Shanxi's third modernisation," and Feng Chongyi, "Jiangxi in reform: the fear of exclusion and the search for a new identity," both in Hans Hendrischke and Feng Chongyi (eds.), *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999).

9. Statistics unless otherwise indicated are from National Bureau of Statistics, *PRC China Statistical Yearbook 2002* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2002).

lished industrial bases, such as Sichuan, Shaanxi and Chongqing Municipality, are serious enough but they are more commensurate with those being faced elsewhere (outside the west) in the PRC.

A similar variability attends the characterization of the west in terms of its non-Han population. Given the apparent growth dynamic of the new region since 1999, which suggests that the campaign may be targeted at minority nationality populations, it may come as a surprise to find that these are not confined to the west. There are significant minority nationality populations in the north-east, in Hainan province, and elsewhere in the central provinces of the PRC and even along the eastern seaboard. In any case, even within the west the proportions and concentrations of minority nationality populations vary greatly. The Tibetan Autonomous Region (96 per cent), the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (62 per cent) and Qinghai province (46 per cent) all have considerable populations of minority nationalities, while Gansu (8 per cent) Sichuan (5 per cent) and Shaanxi (0.5 per cent) provinces have relatively few. Moreover, there is an almost inherent variability to the concentration of different groups of minority nationalities, even where a substantial proportion of the population is so classified. Almost all those in the Tibet Autonomous Region are Tibetan, and those in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region are mainly either Uighurs or Kazakhs, but in Qinghai, Yunnan and Guizhou provinces there are large numbers of different minority nationality groups.

As these remarks suggest, there are significant social, economic and political differences to be found not only across but also within each of the west’s various provincial-level jurisdictions. Indeed, while the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities (cities directly subordinated to central government) may be a convenient focus for examination of the development of the west, not least because of the administrative hierarchy of the state, they are not necessarily the only units of analysis. A focus on the provincial level helps explain certain aspects of political activity, especially the interaction with the party-state’s planning for the development of the west. On the other hand, as the following studies make abundantly clear, a focus on sub-provincial level regions, social groups, economic interests and even minority nationalities all highlight other aspects of both more local political dynamics and socio-economic development in the west.

In addition, the boundaries of provincial-level and indeed other administrative jurisdictions are often significantly less important for some activities than others. While the disjuncture between areas of economic activity and the state’s administrative boundaries has long been recognized,¹⁰ in the west this is most obviously the case for the existence and operation of the cultures of the various minority nationalities. All five of the PRC’s autonomous regions and many of its other minority nationality areas of self-government are now located in the west, yet few minority

10. Joseph B. R. Whitney, *China: Area, Administration, and Nation Building* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper No. 123, 1969).

Table 1: The West in Comparative Perspective: Socio-economic Indicators

Provincial level jurisdiction	Population 2000 (million)	Minority nationalities 2000 (% of total population)	Population growth rate 2001 (annual % increase)	GDP annual growth rate 1999 (annual % increase)	GDP annual growth rate 2001 (annual % increase)	Foreign trade as proportion of GDP 2001 (%)	Budgetary income per capita 2001 (yuan)	Budgetary expenditure per capita 2001 (yuan)	Industrial production: proportion from state-owned enterprises 2001 (%)
Inner Mongolia	23.8	20.7	5.0 (18)	7.8 (23)	9.6 (10)	11	418	1,341	76.3
Shaanxi	36.6	0.5	4.2 (20)	8.4 (13)	9.1 (16)	9	371	957	77.6
Ningxia	5.6	34.5	11.7 (3)	8.7 (11)	10.1 (8)	15	490	1,662	71.7
Gansu	25.8	8.7	7.2 (11)	8.3 (14)	9.4 (12)	6	272	914	74.7
Xinjiang	18.8	59.4	11.1 (5)	7.1 (29)	8.1 (30)	10	507	1,404	84.5
Qinghai	5.2	45.5	12.6 (1)	8.2 (18)	12.0 (2)	6	379	1,937	87.3

Tibet	2.6	94.1	12.1 (2)	9.6 (8)	12.8 (1)	5,307 (23)	6	232	3,976	69.2
Sichuan	86.4	5.0	4.4 (19)	5.6 (30)	9.2 (15)	5,250 (24)	6	314	688	58.1
Chongqing	31.0	6.4	2.8 (24)	7.6 (26)	9.0 (19)	5,654 (21)	9	343	767	61.0
Yunnan	42.9	33.4	10.9 (6)	7.2 (28)	6.5 (31)	4,866 (28)	8	446	1,158	80.3
Guizhou	38.0	37.9	11.3 (4)	8.3 (15)	8.8 (24)	2,895 (31)	5	263	724	76.9
Guangxi	47.9	38.3	7.7 (10)	7.7 (25)	8.2 (29)	4,668 (29)	7	373	734	61.2
The West	364.5	21.7				5,007	8	357	939	70.6
China	1,276.3	8.4		7.1	7.3	7,543	44	611	1,029	44.4

Note:

Number in brackets indicates ranking among 31 provincial-level jurisdictions.

Sources:

Population and minority nationalities population from Population Census Office, National Bureau of Statistics of the PRC *Major Figures on 2000 Population Census of China* 1 June 2001, p.30. Statistics for 1999 and 2001 from State Statistical Bureau *China Statistical Yearbook* 2002 (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2002); annual population growth rates from Table 4-3; annual GDP growth rates from Table 3-8; GDP per capita from Table 3-9; foreign trade proportions calculated from Table 17-10; budgetary income and expenditure Tables 8-19, 8-20; proportion of industrial production from state owned enterprises calculated from Table 13-3.

nationalities dominate the autonomous areas that bear their name socially let alone politically, and almost all are to be found in more than one administrative jurisdiction.

Any assessment of the potential impact and consequences of the campaign to Open Up the West needs to address the inherent diversity and variety to be found in the west. Certainly it needs to address the specific responses from the leadership of each provincial-level jurisdiction to the call to Open Up the West and the ways in which these interact with wider goals and aspirations. Provincial-level jurisdictions have not only formulated their involvement in the new Five-year Plan (of which the call to Open Up the West forms but one part) but have also started to implement policies and initiatives explicitly framed in the context of the programme of western development. At the same time an assessment also needs to take account of the social and economic environment at more local, sub-provincial-level levels in order to assess the interaction with the processes of change now under way that may result.

State and Nation-building

The difficulties in describing, and sometimes even discovering, the detail of the campaign to Open Up the West are matched by those concerned with its explanation. The social sciences contain a large lexicon of concepts and terms related to the expansion of space for social, economic and political activity. Their application in this context is entirely appropriate, even where meanings are contested, though sometimes there may also be unnecessary confusion, especially from cross and interdisciplinary perspectives. The notion of integration, which would generally appear to be at the heart of the campaign to Open Up the West, provides a simple but excellent example. Political scientists emphasize the associative aspects of integration as a process that brings entities together organizationally. On the other hand, economists usually regard integration as a process that removes the barriers to interaction. Moreover, as Solinger has pointed out through work on south-west China, there are two dimensions to integration: a need to consider the ways a locality is integrated in itself, and within the wider system of which it is part. Though these two processes often go together they may also occur separately.¹¹

The campaign to Open Up the West has most usually been described, both inside the PRC and even outside (to the limited extent that a literature has started to emerge), in terms of its capacity to build the state and the nation. Particularly since the emergence of modern European nationalism, and with its later development in the 20th century, state and nation have often been equated to such an extent that contemporary states are frequently referred to as “nation-states” regardless of their ethnic composition. The equation is understandable given that one of the tasks

11. Dorothy J. Solinger, *Regional Government and Political Integration in Southwest China, 1949–54* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

of the nation-state so identified has been to ensure the creation of the nation through a process of standardization and homogenization¹²; and that the establishment of a nation-state became during the 20th century a marker of modernization for the countries and societies of the less developed world, as in China. An insistence on the description of a nation-state thus became central to the claim to sovereignty.

While to insist on a strict separation between state and nation would be both extreme and even to some extent misleading, they are not identical concepts. Generally speaking, and certainly within the broad field of China studies, the concept of “state” is used to refer to the infrastructure of government and administration. More specifically it may relate to one of three inter-related concepts: the “state idea” and its attendant power configurations in society; the system of governance of a society; and specific ruling authorities.¹³ In contrast, the concept of nation is more concerned with the characteristics of the population, and specifically their ethnicity, often seen as (and discourse is crucial) defined by a shared language, social customs and patterns of behaviour.¹⁴ Where a people living in a political system may be assumed to share a common ethnicity or to be in the process of developing a common identity then the analytical constructs of state and nation begin to converge, especially where the state idea includes that common identity.

At the same time, such is the sophistry of 20th-century politics, there is apparently no need for a nation-state to be based on a single nation. Essentially citizenship has come to be read as nationality for the basis of membership in the nation-state. This ambiguity helps to some extent to explain the position of contemporary Chinese nationalism, and specifically of the PRC, which would appear for different political reasons to embrace simultaneously the discourse of both the nation-state and multi-nationalism. The former emphasizes the commitment to economic development and modernization; the latter emphasizes the state’s intended inclusivity towards that 8 per cent of the population who are recognized as (minority) nationalities other than Han Chinese. In the view of the state, a citizen of the PRC is in some sense a national (*guomin*) whether they are Han Chinese or not. Necessarily the viability of this position depends on the extent to which the state-idea of the PRC is accepted in the population itself, both Han Chinese and other nationalities (*minzu*.)

State building and nation-building may then be seen as two different but closely inter-related processes. Where state building emphasizes the development of the infrastructure of government and administration –

12. At the same time, it is probably only in Belgium of all the West European countries where the prior existence of state to nation is acknowledged and celebrated to some extent.

13. James Cotton, “The limits to liberalization in industrializing Asia: three views of the state,” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (1991).

14. Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Homi Bhaba, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991, revised ed.).

including of course not only bureaucracy (as both organization and process) but also communications, some aspects of economic infrastructure, and the state's extractive capacity and redistributive mechanisms – nation-building emphasizes the forging of a common identity. Just as the emergence of a common identity and feelings of solidarity assist in the process of state-building, so too the development of state capacity may assist in unifying the population. On the other hand, these are complex processes and there can be no guarantee that state and nation-building will proceed in mutually reinforcing ways, particularly where different nationality identities intervene.¹⁵

Interestingly, discussions of the campaign to Open Up the West in the PRC have polarized around one view that emphasizes state-building, and another which not only highlights the importance of nation-building but sometimes aggressively promotes homogenization. Much of the intellectual justification for the campaign came from two reports written to the State Council by academics Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang during the 1990s, which highlighted the adverse impact of the PRC's post-1978 economic policy on the regions of the interior.¹⁶ Against the background of the East Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s and the PRC's planned entry to the WTO it is not hard to see the attraction of a campaign to Open Up the West to a range of different constituencies within the party-state, all interested in the expansion of state capacity, if in different ways.

Neither Wang Shaoguang nor Hu Angang, nor any of those writing or speaking later, ignored the diversity of nationalities that is to be found in the west. Indeed, speaking on the topic on his Government Work Report of March 2000, Zhu Rongji made it plain that "common prosperity" would result in the "strengthening of national unity, safeguarding of social stability, and consolidation of border defence,"¹⁷ all of which were barely coded phrases for being concerned about issues surrounding the non-Han Chinese. At the same time, there have been considerably more focused comments from some observers and officials about the need to ensure a higher degree of social homogenization, particularly in terms of the civilizing influence of Chinese culture on the non-Han peoples, in the development of the west. Writing in June 2000, Li Dezhu from the State Ethnic Affairs Commission emphasized the backwardness of the minority nationalities and their need to learn from the more advanced culture of the

15. Fred W. Riggs, "Ethnonationalism, industrialism and the modern state," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (December 1994), p. 583.

16. Published versions of these reports are: Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *Zhongguo guojia nengli baogao (A Report on China's State Capacity)* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1993), translated as, "Strengthening central government's leading role amid China's transition to a market economy," *Chinese Economic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (May-June 1995), and No. 4 (July-August 1995); and Hu Angang, Wang Shaoguang and Kang Xiaoguang, *Zhongguo diqu chaju baogao (A Report on Regional Disparities in China)* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1995). An English-language version of the second report has been published as Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: The Case of China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

17. Premier Zhu Rongji's Government Work Report for 2000 to the third session of the Ninth National People's Congress, 5 March 2000, in *China Daily*, 6 March 2000.

Han Chinese.¹⁸ While it is clear (not least from Zhu Rongji’s comments) that there were concerns about challenges to the integrity of the PRC in the wake of developments in Central Asia and Yugoslavia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the aims of this kind of nation-building go far beyond securing borders towards greater assimilation.

This discussion of the relationship between core and periphery leads inevitably to consideration of the application of terms such as colonialism, internal colonialism and colonization to the development of China’s west. These concepts entail the expansion of a society’s core area of activity, often through the movement of people from the core to the (newly established, as part of the development process) periphery. More contentiously they also indicate the expropriation of the periphery to the greater benefit of the core.

The campaign to Open Up the West would generally seem to have something in common with a colonial enterprise or colonization project, and in certain areas (such as Xinjiang) to have much in common with the colonial experience elsewhere in the world. Within the PRC such endeavours are clearly seen as part and parcel of the developmental processes of state and nation-building in the core (the eastern and coastal regions) as much as in the periphery (the west.) As already noted, through the work of Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang the west was clearly identified to the leadership of the PRC as a significant region of underdevelopment. Moreover, the strategy for change also includes a rhetoric of pioneering to Open Up the West, and the movement of activists in that regard from the eastern seaboard to the western regions. One aim was clearly to reverse the flow of internal migration, which during the 1980s and 1990s had seen workers travelling from the regions of the interior to the eastern and coastal economies in large numbers in search of employment and wealth.¹⁹ According to a member of the State Council, “the phenomenon of ‘the peacock flying to the south-east’” – as this migration was characterized – will be replaced by the “phenomenon of the ‘peacock flying west’.”²⁰

The pejorative and politicized associations of colonial interpretations do though mean that they are generally unacceptable within the PRC. Although some have tried to present terms such as colonialism, internal colonialism and colonization dispassionately, they are all emotive and politically charged. The history of the concepts of colonialism (as in Lenin’s analysis of European capital’s outward expansion), through internal colonization (of the United States’ westward movement), to the identification of internal colonialism (in Britain’s Celtic fringes, as well as South Africa and the countries of Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s) indicates – amongst other things – expropriation or exclusive use

18. Li Dezhu, “Large-scale development of western China and China’s nationality problems,” *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)*, 1 June 2000, in FBIS, 15 June 2000.

19. Delia Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Loraine A. West and Yaohui Zhao (eds.), *Rural Labor Flows in China* (Berkeley: University of California, 2000).

20. Li Dezhu, “Large-scale development of western China.”

of land and resources, and the subjugation of one (or several) people by another (or conceivably others).²¹ Such concerns sit uncomfortably with the worldview of any communist party, and the PRC would also in all probability regard any such interpretation as a challenge to its integrity. All the same this has (somewhat paradoxically) not stopped the model of internal colonization that took place in the 19th-century development of the United States being explicitly discussed and favourably regarded in the context of the campaign to Open Up the West.²²

Even outside the PRC the negative connotations necessarily mask any more positive aspects of colonialism and colonization. Both individually and socially colonialism may bring elements of social and economic improvement to the periphery, regardless of the relationship to the core and the extent to which the political centre dominates. The greater provision of educational opportunities is, in general, one obvious way in which colonial powers have contributed to the development of the periphery, even if this may often be regarded as a forced socialization into the values and society of the core and remains resented.²³ Moreover, a process of colonization led from the political centre may even be preferable to a policy of forcing the periphery to depend on its own resources for its development. This was certainly the case for Guizhou under the PRC as before and (adversely) after the change in regional development policy associated with the Great Leap Forward.²⁴

At the heart of these concerns is the question of which national identity is privileged, and under what conditions. In the PRC, as already noted, national identity is technically not the same as nationality. Since the 1950s the PRC has officially recognized 56 nationalities – the Han Chinese and 55 minority nationalities – as part of its definition of national identity. Yet, it would appear that this multiculturalism is somewhat more limited than that practised in some other political systems.

In the first place, the history of the state in China (as it became known during the 20th century) suggests a certain dynamic relationship as well as tension between identity as a subject of the Emperor or citizen, and identity in terms of Han Chinese culture.²⁵ Full social and political acceptance as the former entailed the latter. As the remarks already noted

21. Andre Gundar Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536–1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); B. Potter, R. Binns, T. Elliott and S. Smith, *Understanding Colonialism* (London: Longman, 1999).

22. See, for example, China Western Development Research Institute, Shaanxi, *Lun xibu da kaiifa (On “Open Up the West”)* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000).

23. See, for example, Truong Buu Lam, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism 1900–1931* (Chicago: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

24. David S. G. Goodman, “Guizhou and the People’s Republic of China: the development of an internal colony,” in D. Drakakis-Smith and S. William (eds.), *Internal Colonialism: Essays Around a Theme* (Edinburgh: IBG Development Areas Research Group Monograph No. 3, Edinburgh University, 1983), pp. 107–124.

25. Stevan Harrell, “Introduction,” in Melissa J. Brown (ed.), *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1996).

by Li Dezhu bear witness, it seems likely that the current Chinese state continues the belief of its predecessors in recognizing a civilizing imperative in Han Chinese culture.²⁶

In the second place, while the categories of nationality employed in the PRC clearly bear some relationship to ethnicity, they are not identical. The 56 nationality designations are constructs of the state for managing its perceived problems and nationality policy. For the non-Han Chinese population the official nationality designation may well be part of their negotiation of ethnicity and identity, but they are not the sole determinant. At the local level, as Harrell (amongst others) has pointed out, ethnic identity is considerably more fluid for most minority nationality people.²⁷ For the Han Chinese too their categorization as a nationality imposes a layer of identity that is not quite a total explanation of ethnicity, if with perhaps a longer historical justification for the categorization.²⁸

The tension between local and national constructions of identity highlight (once again) the importance of appreciating the scales of interaction involved in the campaign to Open Up the West. As already noted, there are interactions at, and amongst, the local, sub-provincial and provincial-level in the west, as well as between the west and both the central government and other regions in the PRC. In addition, the processes of state and nation-building within the PRC have wider international and transnational contexts.

Ideationally, the campaign to Open Up the West is shaped by specific notions of modernization and socio-economic development that only partly come from the heritage of communism. The PRC’s senses of international position and purpose helped determine the articulation of the campaign as a major state project, explicitly compared to other grand state projects (and regardless of their eventual success) such as Russia’s development of Siberia, Japan’s resurgence after defeat in the Pacific War, and the development of poor inland areas in Brazil and India during the 1950s.²⁹ Interestingly some other possible comparisons such as Qing expansion and Japan’s developmental project in Manchuria do not feature in this analysis³⁰; and while California is widely seen as a suitable model for emulation and the result of the United States’ push to develop its west,

26. Suzanne Ogden, *Inklings of Democracy in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 21ff; Chih-yu Shih, *Negotiating Ethnicity in China: Citizenship as a Response to the State* (London: Routledge), pp. 2ff.

27. Most recently, Stevan Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001). See also Katherine Palmer Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

28. Patricia Ebrey, “Surnames and Han Chinese identity,” in Brown, *Negotiating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*; David S. G. Goodman, “Centre and periphery after 20 years of reform: redefining the Chinese polity,” *China Perspectives*, No. 31 (September–October 2000).

29. China Western Development Research Institute, Shaanxi, *On “Open Up the West.”*

30. Thomas Scharping, “The integration of Manchuria: political change, demographic development, and ethnic structure from the early Qing period to present times (1610–1993),” in Lutz Bieg, Erling von Mende and Martina Siebert (eds.), *Ad Seres et Tungosos: Festschrift für Martin Gimm* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), p. 343.

no mention is made of that landmass's seashore. Economically, it also seems likely that the more short-term causes of the decision to develop the west included the probable onset of WTO membership and the late 1990s financial crisis in East Asia.

In more immediate terms the world outside the PRC has been seen as crucial to the campaign. A large part of the planning for the development of the west has assumed that foreign direct investment would be forthcoming from the East Asian region, and finance through aid projects from the more developed world. Almost every provincial-level jurisdiction in the west has arranged trade fairs and visits from potential investors during 2001–2002. Some provinces, such as Yunnan, have made the earning of foreign exchange through aid projects and related NGO projects a central part of their economic development strategy.³¹ It would be misleading though to see aid or investment as a one-way process.

Provincial and Local Perspectives

The following contributions consider the introduction and potential impact of the campaign to Open Up the West. After Heike Holbig's consideration of its emergence through national politics, there are seven specific studies of local and provincial-level interaction with the campaign. In particular, there are three studies of the north-west and four of the south-west. In the north-west, Nicolas Becquelin examines the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, David Goodman considers Qinghai province and Eduard Vermeer discusses Shaanxi. In the south-west, Christopher McNally discusses the development of Sichuan and Lijian Hong the relatively new provincial-level Chongqing Municipality, previously subordinated to Sichuan province. Elsewhere in the south-west, Tim Oakes is concerned with Guizhou, and Ralph Litzinger with north-west Yunnan.

A study of this kind cannot hope to be comprehensive in its treatment of the campaign to Open Up the West, not least because of its relative novelty. With the passage of time it is hoped that the issues it raises will set the research agenda for the future, and eventually through the emergence of more local and provincial-level studies contribute to a wider understanding of both the campaign and the processes of social and political change in the regions of the west. At this stage, the focus has been on providing a wide overview of the range of change to provide a framework for further research. Even so there are several aspects of social and political change in the regions of the west, and in the interactions with the rest of the PRC, that are clearly absent. These include considerations of gender, sexual politics, ideology, symbolism and popular culture. More generally, as is almost inevitable at this stage of analysis, just over three years since its introduction, there is a tendency to concentrate

31. Ingrid d'Hooghe, "Regional economic integration in Yunnan," in David S. G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.), *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 286.

on the advantages to be found from the campaign to Open Up the West and the activities of those who have benefited. Yet all processes of social and economic change also have losers and disadvantages, whose existence may take longer to appear.

In her discussion of the formation of the campaign to Open Up the West at the national level of politics, Heike Holbig emphasizes the extent to which it has become “soft policy” capable of appealing to as many decision-makers as possible without necessarily committing large amounts of resources. She describes how the ideological underpinnings of the CCP before the late 1990s bequeathed a legacy of commitment to develop the “interior.” This commitment became a more acute political reality after the extent of increasing socio-economic inequality between coastal and inland China during the 1980s became clear to senior CCP leaders, particularly as concerns grew in Beijing about both the possible impact of the PRC’s entry to the WTO and the potential for increased ethno-political conflict in non-Han areas of the country. Imprecision and uncertainty about the campaign directs attention to provincial-level and local implementation of policy to Open Up the West.

Although the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region is widely regarded as the outlier in terms of the economic performance of provincial-level jurisdictions in the west during the 1980s and 1990s, this was achieved under somewhat unusual circumstances. As Nicolas Becquelin details, Xinjiang was and is the object of colonization by the state, through the agency of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The campaign to Open Up the West has heralded a consolidation of state and nation-building by the centre in this part of its periphery. For Xinjiang the most significant change wrought by the campaign has been that the state’s agenda has been made more open. This is a display of some considerable confidence that there may be no counter-reaction, a contestable perspective in Becquelin’s view.

Qinghai’s social complexity and fragile environment have repeatedly presented Beijing with significant political and economic problems, which were then exacerbated by attempted solutions that rapidly proved over-simplistic and counter-productive. David Goodman details the ways in which the call to Open Up the West has provided the provincial leadership with the opportunity to resolve some of the long-term difficulties through adopting markedly different perspectives on development. Nevertheless, he argues that there remains a danger in concentrating almost exclusively on economic solutions to the province’s problems, and that its inherent political, social and cultural contestations require more sophisticated management if wider goals of social stability and economic development are to be achieved.

Shaanxi does not share many of the newly-defined west’s apparent key characteristics. It has almost no non-Han peoples and a relatively long experience of industrial development. As Eduard Vermeer argues, its interaction with the campaign to Open Up the West is best seen as the latest in a series of attempts to bring the province, and its role as a gateway to the rest of north-west China, into closer proximity to the rest

of the national economy. To this end the province has received considerable central financial support. While this may prove efficacious, especially in dealing with the consequences of restructuring state-owned enterprises, it may not provide a sustainable development strategy in the longer term. Further doubts about the impact of current policy, as Vermeer details, relate to the need for a more differentiated approach to the development of each of the province's three sub-regions.

Sichuan is the west's largest provincial-level jurisdiction in terms of both population and the size of its economy. Although the Sichuan Basin is an area of historical wealth, the province also contains considerably poorer mountain areas to the north-east and in the west. In his analysis of the potential impact of the campaign to Open Up the West on Sichuan, Christopher McNally focuses on the attempt to reduce the developmental gap between rich and poor within the province. He concludes that in this particular regard the results have been mixed: some positive results are starting to be felt in mountainous districts, but the disproportionate costs in those areas are high. In particular, as elsewhere in Sichuan, a major problem is the need for industrial restructuring centred on state-owned enterprises that are in the main the legacy of the PRC's Third Front.

Industrial restructuring is also a major problem facing Chongqing Municipality, and largely for the same reason. As Lijian Hong explains, Chongqing was separated from Sichuan province and given provincial-level status in 1997 in large part because of the scale of the problems it faced with inefficient state-owned enterprises and the intended solutions to their reform. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam and associated programmes of population relocation was a second significant part of that change. However, elevation to the provincial level presented other problems of economic development and poor performance to its leadership that have merely sought to underline the extent to which Chongqing is financially dependent on Beijing. The campaign to Open Up the West has given it a temporary lifeline by providing additional subsidies, but its future prosperity depends on their continuation and the leadership's ability to manage change.

The West to East Electricity Transfer Project has been the major feature of the campaign to Open Up the West in Guizhou. Tim Oakes examines this project in his discussion of Guizhou's reaction to the campaign and its potential impact. He highlights the extent to which the campaign is designed to develop the west, and specifically Guizhou, economically, for the greater benefit of the provinces to the east and on the coast. Oakes sees this relationship in the context of the province's long history of internal colonization, as well as part of the state's attempt to recentralize under the specific conditions of relatively increased provincial autonomy generated by reform since 1978. The concern for Guizhou is that through its role as a supplier of energy to Guangdong it may be less able to meet the challenges of diversification that result from WTO membership.

Ralph Litzinger's study of an environmental project in north-west Yunnan, the Yunnan Great Rivers Project, provides a useful counter-

weight to analysis of the campaign to Open Up the West in a number of ways. Most importantly it draws attention to transnational influences and involvement beyond concerns of international finance. At the same time, it emphasizes themes at an even more local level that have already emerged in analysing the impact, realized and potential, of the campaign to Open Up the West: the attempt to colonize non-Han peoples; the significance of the sub-provincial level of analysis for understanding the impact of the campaign; the drive to extend the reach of the state; and local resistance to change, especially when sourced from somewhere else.

Each of the studies looking at the experience of the campaign to Open Up the West in a provincial-level jurisdiction is clearly specific to its territory of enquiry. All the same, one of the more obvious conclusions to emerge overall is confirmation of the usefulness and importance of proceeding from a provincial-level and local perspective in analysing the campaign. Without this, the danger of over-generalization is all too readily apparent. For example, in Xinjiang the campaign to Open Up the West appears inherently related to the colonization project of the Chinese state, central to which is an attempt to reduce and sinify the non-Han proportion of the population. In Qinghai, by contrast, it is clear that there are different considerations about managing minority nationality populations. There, without overstating the degree of local community autonomy, it is clear that there has been and continues increasingly to be considerably greater freedom of expression for the non-Han, as well as severe restrictions on inward migration and an increase in the non-Han proportion of the population. Another example reinforcing the message to disaggregate the west rests with consideration of the lack of large-scale funding, particularly from central government sources, for the scale of operation suggested by the goals of the campaign to Open Up the West. This has been and is frequently noted, and in several different localities. Yet, the absence of such funding has clearly not been the case in Chongqing, where by all accounts a large part of the viability of the municipal leadership rests on its ability to extract central government subsidies, or in Shaanxi.

At the same time, this overall confirmation should not be taken as a conclusion about the importance of the provincial level as the only focus for analysis. Clearly the provincial level plays a central role in political explanations of change, not least because of the structure of the state. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that in many ways the sub-provincial may be at least as significant politically, and is possibly more important in understanding economic and social interactions. In Sichuan and Chongqing the poorer, rural and mountain areas pose different challenges (and interact differently with the campaign to Open Up the West) from the richer, large metropolitan areas that dominate these provincial-level jurisdictions. Shaanxi province has three distinct regional geographies each of whose development requires different management strategies. In Xinjiang, despite the relative success of the state’s colonization project, the reactions of the minority nationalities are a crucial other aspect to the outcome for the region. Ethnic groups and local communities feature in

the explanation of change and assessment of the impact of the campaign to Open Up the West in Qinghai and Yunnan. There is the prospect that the campaign may increase inter-provincial inequalities at the same time as bringing each provincial jurisdiction's core closer to Beijing and the eastern seaboard of the PRC.

The variability of the socio-economic environment across the west necessarily means that few commonalities have been observed across the various case studies of the provincial level and the local, and that those that do begin to emerge should perhaps be highlighted only tentatively at this stage in research, given the limited number of case studies. One is the relatively high profile of a discourse of state environmentalism that lurks within each provincial-level jurisdiction's engagement with the campaign to Open Up the West. Undoubtedly part of the genesis for this concern is Jiang Zemin's call to construct a "Green Great Wall" from Xinjiang to Heilongjiang to resist environmental degradation. At the same time, there can be little doubt that some parts of the party-state at provincial and local levels may have learnt that there are likely to be environmental constraints on agendas for development. Another apparent commonality is the feeling in the west that the major beneficiary of the campaign is more likely to be the rest of the PRC. This feeling is not always allied to resistance but it does appear to be quite widespread, even at times within the leadership of the party-state at provincial and local levels.

In dealing with the PRC social scientists have long faced a difficult paradox: they would like to use the plentiful statistical data produced in the PRC to support and illustrate their arguments, yet they recognize there are inherent difficulties in using official data, not the least of which is different bases of calculation for apparently similar data.³² Accordingly, the contributors have attempted to use statistics sparingly, considering those that explain to be more useful than those that attempt to describe. In addition, and not least to minimize statistical overload and repetition, Table 1 provides a comparative summary of some main socio-economic indicators in the provincial-level jurisdictions of the west, noting where appropriate national comparators and relativities to elsewhere in the PRC.

32. Carsten Herrmann-Pillath, "Einfuehrung" ("Introduction"), in *Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in China's Provinzen und Regionen (Economic Development in China's Provinces and Regions)* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995), p. cix.