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**ON THE CARAVAN ROUTE TO URUMQI:
A GLIMPSE OF CURRENT CHINESE ETHNIC MINORITY LANGUAGE PUBLISHING
AT THE 16TH CHINESE NATIONAL BOOK FAIR**

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In June 2006 I took an acquisitions trip to China, and there I also attended the 16th Chinese National Book Fair, held June 16 to 22 in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. I was joined by two US colleagues, Wen-ling Liu, Librarian for East Asian Studies, Indiana University and Qi Xie, Chinese Studies Librarian, New York Public Library, as well as Zhang Ying, Vice Manager of Books Export Department, China National Publishing Industry Trading Corporation, our library's major book vendor.

The book fair was impressive not only in its size and breadth. It had several distinct features. One of them was the choice of the location, the city of Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwestern China, which has a population of 20.10 million, 60% of them minorities, occupies an area of 1.6 million square kilometers, one-sixth of the entire country's land, and borders eight countries, with a borderline extending 5,600 kilometers. Despite the distance, higher costs and slower communication the national and local officials and organizers of the book fair selected the city as the site of the book fair, with a clear mandate to promote minority publishing and emphasize its importance. It was the organizers' hope that a well-organized and successful book fair could promote the minority language publishing industry, strengthen and unite the Chinese ethnic minorities and stimulate cultural and economic development in the minority areas. Also, officials in Xinjiang wanted earnestly to showcase the region's new image and to assume a leading role in minority publishing and set an example for other cities in the western regions of China. Indeed, during the book fair the entire city displayed a festive atmosphere. The press coverage both by national and local media was extensive and unprecedented, just to name a few: *Zhongguo tu shu shang bao* 中国图书商报, *Zhongguo xin wen chu ban bao* 中国新闻出版报, *Xinjiang ri bao* 新疆日报, *Xinjiang jing ji bao* 新疆经济报, and even a local military daily *Bing tuan ri bao* 兵团日报. To reach more audience the book fair also spilt over to other cities, such as Kashi, Yining, Altay, and Turpan.

The Urumqi Convention Center with 1045 display booths was filled to its capacity. It accommodated more than 400 Chinese publishers, who displayed more than 100,000 titles, all 2001-2006 publications, in all formats, including electronic products. The exhibits were selected both for the quality of their contents and their handsome layouts. Notably thirty booths were designated to 70 or so publishers from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan with more than 3,000 publications, their first-time participation in a national book fair in the mainland.

Another distinct feature of the book fair was the emphasis on minority publishing. Ten special display booths, along with the liveliest music, were assigned to 35 minority publishers, free of charge, for 4,000 publications in 23 languages. This was the most comprehensive assembly ever of books published in minority languages. One of the brochures found in just one of the display booths was a catalog of selected titles of books submitted by publishers in autonomous regions, which listed 45 titles in Uighur, 84 in Chinese, 15 in Kazakh, 3 in Mongolian, 4 in Kirghiz, and 2 in Sibo, a Manchu-Tungusic language, covering various subjects.

The focus on minority publishing was also reflected in the programs of several well-organized and well-attended forums. One of them entitled "Accelerate Minority Publishing Industry" featured three speakers from three minority publishers in Beijing, Sichuan and Xinjiang. Another forum, entitled "How to publish outstanding books: experiences and views," was an experience exchange session for the publishers. The by-invitation-only opening session, entitled "High-level Forum on 2006 Chinese Publishing," featured several high-ranking government officials, among them Wu Shulin, Vice Director of the State Press and Publishing Administration, who gave a brief account of current Chinese publishing, calling for improvement and reform. In defining the significance of the publishing in China, Mr. Wu emphasized the publishers' responsibility to present China's achievements globally and to elevate the country's position in the world.

He also called for improvement of the quality of publications and the need to help minority publishing, such as management restructuring, technological innovations, and importing of “any things that are beneficial to the development of the country”¹.

According to Mr. Wu, even though China’s annual publication output in the previous year was 220,000—as opposed to 70,000 in the United States-- only 130,000 of these were new titles. The quality of these publications also lagged far behind. The circulation and distribution present another major problem, with millions of books remaining unsold and languishing in storage. Bottleneck occurs when the bookstores cannot sell enough books, therefore cannot pay the publishers who, in turn, are unable to pay the authors. China’s membership of the WTO has necessitated a series of changes within the publishing industry. The Chinese publishers must now deal with challenges of free trade, global economic freedom, and modern management. They must abide with internationally agreed laws, such as intellectual property rights, copyright, and world standards in publishing. China is also facing an unprecedented influx of foreign products, which has greatly impacted on the publishing industry and challenged it to compete internationally in production cost, quality, price and distribution. One of the responses made by the Chinese publishers was to form publishing syndicates (*chu ban ji tuan* 出版集团) to meet the challenge of market economy and adjust to world competition.

Minority publishers have even more pressing needs to step up their efforts and to overcome the difficulties facing them. Prior to the founding of the PRC there was little minority language publishing. Since then publishers such as Xinjiang People’s Press and Yanbian People’s Publishing House have come into existence, sparsely at first during the 1950s and mushrooming in the last two decades. There are now more publishers who specialize in minority language (*min wen* 民文) works. They have become an integral part of Chinese publishing industry, played a role in promoting and enriching the economic and cultural life of the ethnic minorities and, raising these peoples’ ideological, scientific and cultural quality, and enhancing social development in these areas. A basic system of press, publishing, and distribution is already in existence. Regional and provincial government minority press and publishing bureaus have been set up to ensure quality publications in minority languages and to formulate a contingent of minority language publishers.

According to *Zhongguo chu ban nian jian 2005*, *中国出版年鉴 2005*, there are currently 573 publishing houses in China, 238 of them located in Beijing, the nation’s capital. 220 of them are at national level. Out of the 573 publishers 37 are engaged in minority language publishing, spreading over 14 provinces and regions.² However, they do not exclusively publish minority language works. Minority publishing, though an integral part of the Chinese publishing industry, nevertheless occupies only a very small portion of the entire industry. In 2004 the total publication output was 208,294, out of which 5,457 were minority language publications. Statistics on three largest areas, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and Tibet will serve as an illustration. Xinjiang has twelve presses, with the first one, Xinjiang People’s Press, founded in 1951 and Xinjiang Electronic and Audio Publishing House the latest founded in 1999. These publishing houses put out an average of 3,000 printed books, 70% of them in minority languages, and about 240 electronic products a year mostly in Chinese, Uighur, Kazakh, Mongolian, Kirghiz, and Sibo. The total output in 2004 was 3,933 books in more than 82 million volumes, among them 2,296 were new titles and 1403 textbooks, 204 journal titles, among them 98 in minority languages, and 99 newspapers, with 40 in minority languages. There are seven publishers in Inner Mongolia. Their output in 2004 was 2,329, among them 1032 in Mongolian, 1,165 new titles and 577 textbooks; 149 journals, 44 of them in Mongolian³, and 60 newspapers, 13 of them in Mongolian. The two publishers in Tibet issued 574 publications in 2004, among them 138 new titles, 34 journals (9 in Tibetan) and 21 newspapers (13 in Tibetan).

With a mandate for the 21st-century publishing, minority publishing in China is facing many challenges. One of the speakers at the forums, Abudurehman Aibai 阿不都热合曼·艾白, deputy director of Xinjiang People’s Press, gave an informative, illuminating paper.⁴ It provided valuable information on minority publishing in Xinjiang, one of the five autonomous regions of China. Xinjiang is a region of multi-ethnicity and diversity of languages. Among the population there are 9 million Uighurs, 8 million Han Chinese, 1.35 million Kazakhs, 170,000 Mongolians, 170,000 Kirghiz, and 40,000 Sibos. There is a relatively small and limited book market and readership with relatively low educational background, lower income and lower

living standard, thus weak purchasing power. Even in the capital, Urumqi, the average annual personal spending on books is 80 yuan (\$10.00). It is much lower in other parts of the region. Minority publishing has a number of internal problems as well, such as poor quality of the publications and high percentage of reprints. According to a 2000 statistics, 58% of the total output of publications were popular works while publications on economics, education and science consisted only of 1.7%, 5.3% and 1.7%, respectively, which failed to meet the region's needs. The percentages for publications on economics, education and science and technology have increased in recent years, but there is still a great need for improvement. Within the industry most of the minority publishers are still operating in the old manner of the planned economy era, with outdated multi-layered and overlapping organizations, overstaffing, and uneven and uncoordinated fund allocations, which have resulted in duplication of publications and random selection of subjects. Compounded by rising costs of printing and printing materials is the sluggish system of circulation and distribution and lengthy distribution cycle, which leads to slow recovery of capital. There is also a lack of training of publishing personnel. Because of artificially set low prices, there has been very little or no profit in these minority publishers. The substantial government subsidies have been used to pay salaries and administrative overheads. And ironically, with the improvement of education and the compulsory schooling system as the young receive their education in Chinese language, more and more ethnic minorities, especially the young generation, elect to read in Chinese.

To face these formidable challenges, Mr. Aibai proposed to forcefully restructure and fundamentally change the existing minority publishing industry, modernize it and transform it to the needs of market economy. Nationally on the average one publishing house serves 2.3 million people, but Xinjiang has one for every 820,000 people. Ten of the twelve publishers, along with Minority Publishing House in Beijing, all publish books in Uighur language. There are two publishers that publish Sibo language books for a total population of 40,000. He questioned the need to have more than one publisher publishing Sibo language materials and more than ten publishers publishing Uighur language books. Such unplanned and uncoordinated publishing would further lead to duplicate titles while valuable resources are often ignored. A conglomeration of coordinated functions would centralize available fund, rationally distribute resources, including human resources, and systematically coordinate the selection of book titles, thus eliminating duplicates.

He also called for modern management and the publishers' ability to compete. Government subsidies must be used to publish books, not be used to pay salaries and administrative overheads. Currently the minority publishers rely a great deal on government support and favorable status in taxation to relieve their burden. Among the twelve publishers in Xinjiang only two (Xinjiang Education Press and Xinjiang Electronic and Audio Publisher) are self-supporting. Nine of them receive partial funding, and one is supported entirely by government subsidy. For years the State Press and Publishing Administration and the Ethnic Affairs Commission have established publication funds to support publication of outstanding minority works. Since 2002, 102 projects in 11 languages have been funded a total of 3,350,000 yuan. As the gap between developed publishing enterprises and minority publishers is widening, Mr. Aibai called for joint cooperative projects with inland and more successful publishers. He also proposed to establish a bureau, within Xinjiang People's Press, equipped with new ideology and management skills, to deal with fund allocations, centralizing and fully utilizing available resources, including publishing personnel, coordinating and selecting appropriate publication subjects, thus avoiding overlapping and duplication of publications and wasting money. In addition, he also proposed to establish a special publication fund, or a foundation. The funds should come from the central and local governments' subsidies for minority language publishing and out of the profit of the publishers themselves. Xinjiang is not only rich in oil, natural gas and minerals, but also has rich cultural resources. With economic progress and higher living standards that Great Development of Western Regions has brought to the region, there will be new demands for education, cultural cultivation, and preservation of the minorities' heritage. The minority publishers must be ready to meet the demands.

Despite the difficulties and problems described by the speakers at the forums, the book fair highlighted an impressive parade of minority publications. Some of these leaned heavily towards politics, as would be expected, since one of the mandates of the minority publishing is to spread the party and government policies and to educate politically the ethnic groups living in the minority areas.

One could find many publications in political science. Since its founding in 1953, the Minority Publishing House in Beijing has published selected works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping; reading materials for understanding “Three Represents,” a policy developed by Jiang Zemin for the Chinese Communist Party; and documents and proceedings of the congresses of the Party, the People’s Congress, and the People’s Political Consultative Congress, as well as legal documents. Some of them were published in various minority languages, such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Uighur, Kazakh and Korean. Political literature could also be found, written originally in Chinese but translated into minority languages, with titles, such as *Ba yi qie xian gei dang* 把一切献给党 [Dedicate all to the party], *Hong yan* 红岩 [Red rocks], and *Qing chu zhi ge* 青春之歌 [Song of youth].

In a concerted effort to protect and preserve the diverse ethnic minorities’ heritage the Chinese publishers have tapped rich cultural resources, such as historical manuscripts, documents, official records, music, etc. and these were systematically collected, carefully arranged, researched, translated and published. Decades of studies have resulted in an impressive number of titles covering a wide range of subjects. Already in 1983 a planning group to collect, arrange and publish ancient works of Xinjiang minorities was formed and by 2002, eight thousand works of research value had been collected, among them rare and single editions, covering history, language, literature, philosophy, religion, astrology, and medicine. More than 100 titles were published during the late 90s, including works in Uighur, Mongolian, Kirghiz, and Manchu, such as *Fu le zhi hui* 福乐智慧, a translation of a Uighur work *Kutadgu bilig*, published by Minority Publishing House in Beijing. Other works included *Zang chuan li suan xue da quan* 藏传历算学大全 [Sources of Tibetan Astrology], published in 1998; *Yi wen jing ji wen hua ci dian* 彝文经典文化词典 [Dictionary of Yi classics]; and the 100-volume *Zhongguo shao shu min zu gu ji ji cheng* 中国少数民族古籍集成 [Collected ancient works of Chinese minorities], published in 2002. Already in 1997 a project to compile a bibliography, in multiple volumes, of these collected ancient works, entitled *Zhongguo shao shu min zu gu ji zong mu ti yao* 中国少数民族古籍总目提要, was launched, with each volume dealing with one minority. Another large project was the compilation and publication of five series, in 403 volumes, on minorities in China, entitled *Zhongguo shao shu min zu* 中国少数民族 [Chinese minorities]; *Zhongguo shao shu min zu jian shi cong shu* 中国少数民族简史丛书 [Brief histories of Chinese minorities series]; *Zhongguo shao shu min zu zi zhi di fang gai kuang cong shu* 中国少数民族自治地方概况丛书 [Surveys of the Chinese minority autonomous regions]; *Zhongguo shao shu min zu yu yan jian zhi cong shu* 中国少数民族语言简志丛书 [Brief histories of Chinese minority languages series]; and *Zhongguo shao shu min zu she hui li shi diao cha zi liao zongkan* 中国少数民族社会历史调查资料丛刊 [Surveys of the Chinese minority social histories]. Three thousand staff have been working on the project, engaged in researching, compiling, and translating the materials.

The rich cultures in minority areas provide inexhaustible resources for the publishing industry. There were works on minority languages, folk culture, folk religion, and medicine, most notably the three famous epics, *Epic of Gesar* in Tibetan, *Epic of Jangar* in Mongolian, and *Manas*, an epic poem in Kirghiz. Funded by the government, all three works were first researched by distinguished scholars who collected, researched, edited, and translated the materials. Studies focusing on minorities in Tibet, Mongolia, Western Regions, and other parts of the country, such as the Yi people, have also brought researchers from abroad. With ever increasing flourishing tourism in these areas the cultures of the minorities have received further exposure and intense interest, prompting scholarly research both nationally and internationally. The minority publishers have realized that they must explore these resources and turn their attention to the international market as well. Vice Director Wu aptly phrased in his speech such an opportunity by using a humorous slogan, *Zhuan lao wai de qian* 赚老外的钱 (Make profit off the foreigners.)

Among other impressive publications at the book fair were several literary works in Chinese and minority languages of famous Chinese and ethnic minorities. We could see *Lu Xun wen ji* 鲁迅文集, in the first Uighur edition; works by Liang Heng 梁衡, who lived in Inner Mongolia, and by Zhubaibai 朱巴拜, a Kazakh author. Other works on literature were *Weiwu'er wen xue da dian* 维吾尔文学大典 [Anthology of Uighur

literature], and the just-published *Weiwu'er min jian wen xue da dian* 维吾尔民间文学大典 [Anthology of Uighur folk literature]. Among the books on history and collected historical documents were *Zhong Ya tong shi* 中亚通史 [History of Central Asia], *Gu dai Weiwu'er wen xian xuan* 古代维吾尔文献选 [Selected ancient Uighur documents], and *Zhongguo Xinjiang : li shi yu xian zhuang* 中国新疆: 历史与现状 [China's Xinjiang: past and present], which was also published in English, French Russian, German, Japanese, Arabic and Turkish and has been translated into Uighur and Kazakh. A much talked about and admired publication at the book fair was *Faguo guo jia tu shu guan cang Dunhuang Zang wen wen xian* 法国国家图书馆藏敦煌藏文文献 [Tibetan language documents from Dunhuang in the collections of the French National Library], jointly compiled by Chinese Northwestern Minority University, Shanghai Classical Books Press and Bibliothèque nationale de France, containing 10,000 records from the eighth to ninth centuries in Tibetan, Uighur, Sogdan, Sankrit, and Hebrew languages, which had been studied and authenticated by experts. It is considered a great resource for the study of the history of Central Plains and Turpan. Other publications worth mentioning here were the 150-volume *Zhonghua da zang jing* 中华大藏经; *Han Wei ci dian* 汉维词典, published by Xinjiang People's Press; and *Meng yao xue* 蒙药学 [Mongolian medicine], which received a prize at the 2nd international conference of traditional medicine.

I was particularly charmed by three popular collections on minorities and/or by minority authors. They were *Bian jiang hua yu* 边疆话语 [Conversations on the borders], masterminded by Wang Zu 王族, a poet in Xinjiang and published by Xinjiang Art Press; *Xinjiang xiao xiang* 新疆肖像 [Portraits of Xinjiang], published by Xinjiang People's Press, with 320 paintings and photographic images, and *Xiyu feng yue* 西域风月 [Romance of Western Regions], also a publication of Xinjiang People's Press, on women by five women authors of Xinjiang.

1. Based on my notes taken during his speech.

2. *Zhongguo chu ban nian jian* 中国出版年鉴 2005 [China publishers' yearbook].—Beijing : Zhongguo chu ban nian jian she, 2005. p. 695.

³ Ibid. p. 169, 257, and 695.

⁴ “Guan yu Xinjiang shao shu min zu chu ban gong zuo xian zhuang yu fa zhan chu lu de si kao 关于新疆少数民族出版工作现状与发展出路的思考” [On current situation of Xinjiang minority publishing and thoughts on the way of its development], 10 p. (distributed at the forums)