

“Population Invasion” versus Urban Exclusion in the Tibetan Areas of Western China

ANDREW MARTIN FISCHER

AS ELSEWHERE IN the world, demographic changes have been fundamental to the emergence of modernity in the Tibetan areas of western China. These areas hereafter are referred to as Tibet, which includes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Tibetan autonomous areas absorbed into Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces (see Figure 1).¹ The demographic changes include the onset of the demographic transition, urbanization, and increased in-migration of non-Tibetans from other parts of China (largely Han Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Chinese Muslims).² However, the fact that these changes started around the same time as Communist rule in 1950 has led to their conflation with the related but distinct issue of the subjugation of Tibet into the modern Chinese nation state. As a result, some of the most vigorous condemnations as well as defenses of rule by the People’s Republic of China in Tibet have been framed in terms of population.

The reigning view in the Tibetan exile community—as well as among most Western observers and “Tibet Support Groups,” and most Tibetans and even some Chinese whom I interviewed in Tibet—alleges that Han Chinese and Chinese Muslim migrants are quite simply overrunning the existing Tibetan population in Tibet. This phenomenon is typically referred to as “population invasion,” “population swamping,” “population transfer,” “demographic invasion,” or “demographic aggression.”³ Indeed, in 2007 for the first time tourists (mostly domestic Han Chinese) outnumbered the local population in the Tibet Autonomous Region. This is indicative of the sheer volume of Han Chinese movement in and out of this region, including Han migrants to service the tourist traffic and the more general government-subsidized economic boom. Parallel to this, many Tibetans fear that Beijing has been attempting to limit the growth of the Tibetan population through stringent family planning measures, including forced abortions and

FIGURE 1 Tibetan cultural areas and western provinces of China



NOTE: The five shades of gray distinguish the indigenously designated Tibetan regions of Amdo, Kham, Utsang, Jangtang, and Ngari.

SOURCE: The Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library, «www.thdl.org» (University of Virginia Library).

sterilization programs. The concern is that Tibet will soon come to resemble Inner Mongolia, where ethnic Mongolians accounted for only 17 percent of the population in the 2000 census, or Xinjiang, where Han accounted for 40 percent of the population, up from around 6 percent in the early 1950s. Many exiled Tibetan leaders claim that Tibetans may already be a minority in several Tibetan areas.⁴ At the extreme, these concerns led in the past to accusations of genocide, which have since been tempered to accusations of cultural genocide, referring to the disappearance of Tibetans as an identifiable cultural group as the result of Sinicization.⁵

Conversely, Beijing denies that non-Tibetan migrants have been overrunning the local population. The government regularly points out that ethnic Tibetans accounted for about 93 percent of the resident population of the TAR in the 2000 census.⁶ Instead, it argues that migration to Tibet has mostly benefited Tibetans. Migrants have been the ushers of government policies that have improved the quality of life of Tibetans since the 1950s, as demonstrated by rapid population growth (versus stagnation for centuries prior to 1950), a doubling of life expectancy, and impressive improvements in a variety of other human development indicators.⁷ From this perspective, the PRC government argues that the disparities of regional development between Tibet and other regions of China are due to the developmental backwardness and remoteness of Tibet, which Beijing, with the help of migrants and some rich coastal provinces, has sought to overcome by large-scale material and human investment.⁸ The government thus credits itself with benevolently

uplifting the backward and “feudal” social conditions of Tibet.⁹ While the emphasis on population growth within this discourse is ironic in light of government objectives to limit population growth elsewhere in China, it must be understood in the context of accusations by Tibetan exiles of genocide or population control.¹⁰

Both views are partially valid. In the case of population invasion, only in the major cities and towns of Tibet can one plausibly argue that Han are outnumbering Tibetans. Ironically, the perception of population swamping is essentially an urban-centric assessment of the changing ethnic composition of Tibet, even while the Tibetan areas remain some of the most rural in China. In terms of disparities, it is also true that urban–rural inequality is strongly associated with ethnic inequality in Tibet, given that most Tibetans are rural while most Han living in Tibet are urban. This observation leads some scholars, such as Sautman and Eng (2001), to claim that the apparent ethnic bias of development in Tibet is mostly a reflection of an urban bias and, as such, is no different from similar developmental dilemmas elsewhere in China, except that rural Tibet happens to be populated mostly by Tibetans. There are various problems with this argument; most importantly, it distracts attention from ethnic exclusions occurring within the urban areas themselves and from intra-urban inequalities that are among the highest in China.

This article seeks to clarify the politicized debate on population and development in Tibet as a means to refocus attention on the dynamics of urban exclusion as they affect Tibetans. It does not offer a comprehensive demographic and population survey of Tibet, which already exists in the literature from both sides of the debate.¹¹ Rather, it analyzes macro-level demographic, spatial, and migration trends in conjunction with developmental trends, drawing from both official population statistics (mainly the 2000 census) and more than a year of cumulated fieldwork in western China from 2003 to 2007. (See the methodological appendix for detail on the methods and data used.) The first section discusses salient issues raised by the debate: the demographic transition in Tibet, the precise spatial delineation of Tibet, and the spatial distributions of ethnic populations within this delineated territory. The second section examines the balance between migration and local demographic trends and reflects on the extent of exclusion faced by Tibetans in urban employment. The conclusion takes issue with the proposition that ethnic inequality is a reflection of an urban bias transposed on the rurality of Tibet, arguing that this logic distracts attention from power relations rooted in urban areas.

Clarifying the debate

Given that population has become a key symbol in the politicized debate over Tibet, many of the assertions about population made by both sides have

been blurred by political posturing and ideology, requiring that we put all of the arguments into context. One terminological clarification is necessary before starting, however. The Tibetan Autonomous Region usually receives most of the attention in these debates, particularly from the Chinese side, for both political and practical reasons. Politically, Beijing insists that the "Tibet Question" is only about the TAR and not the other Tibetan areas in China, even though the latter account for almost half of the Tibetan areas and more than half of the Tibetan population in China. Practically, the official population censuses and surveys of the TAR represent a mostly Tibetan population, unlike Qinghai, the province with the next-highest proportion of Tibetans in its population, where Han Chinese nonetheless dominate the population and thus the survey results. Because detailed time-series data are usually only available at a provincial level of aggregation, the TAR tends to be used to represent Tibet by default.

This approach is arguably valid for the representation of broad structural patterns and trends, at least with respect to rural areas, in light of strong similarities across Tibetan areas and stark differences between these areas and elsewhere in China in terms of topography, population density, patterns of land use and livelihood, education levels, and health indexes.¹² Nonetheless, from the standpoint of the issues addressed here, it is important to understand all of the Tibetan areas in a systemic manner, given that their political and social realities are distinct from those of the rest of China. Creative extrapolation is required to circumvent data limitations in order to avoid acquiescing a priori to certain political positions within the conflict.

Population growth and demographic transition

Life expectancy in the Tibet Autonomous Region, by official estimates, doubled to 64 years between 1951 and 2000. The Tibetan population of the TAR nearly doubled, reaching 2.43 million in 2000.¹³ The Tibetan populations outside the TAR experienced similar trends. The total Tibetan population in China reached 5.42 million according to the 2000 census, including 1.27 million Tibetans in Sichuan, 1.09 million in Qinghai, 0.44 million in Gansu, and 0.13 million in Yunnan (Tabulation 2002: Table 2-5). The changes since 1951 are at best estimates or even guesswork since most of the TAR and many remote Tibetan areas outside the TAR were not directly enumerated in either the 1953 or the 1964 censuses. As a result, the 1982 census is the first broadly accurate record available on the Tibetan population.¹⁴

While the increase in life expectancy is commendable, the level was about the same as the average for all developing countries in 1998, at 65 years according to the World Bank (2002). Similar advances took place in neighboring Himalayan countries. For instance, life expectancy in Bhutan was estimated by the United Nations at 62 years for males and 64.5 years

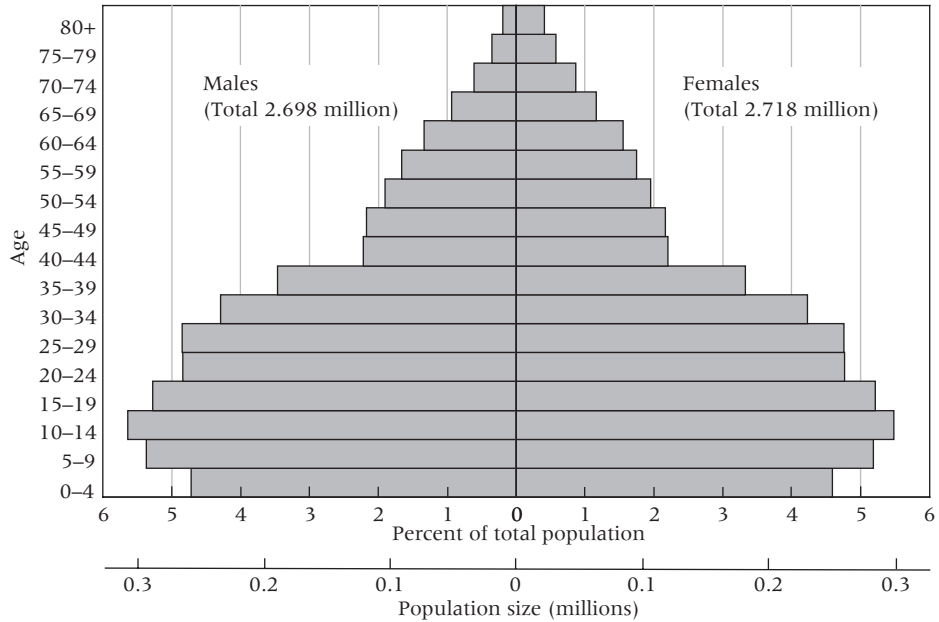
for females in 2000–05. Indeed, the comparison to Bhutan is informative because, with conditions similar to Tibet, comparable levels of health indicators (official in both cases) have been achieved under an entirely different political framework, albeit Bhutan is heavily subsidized by India, just as the TAR is by Beijing. In India the respective life expectancies were 63.2 years for males and 64.6 years for females. Even in conflict-ridden Nepal, one of the most impoverished countries in Asia, the levels were 60.1 and 59.6 years (UN 2002). Similarly, rapid population growth itself is a consequence of the late onset of demographic transition, as observed generally in developing countries over the same period regardless of their level of development.¹⁵

Tibetans have clearly entered the demographic transition, contrary to simplistic explanations sometimes given for the lagging development of Tibet.¹⁶ This fact has been well established in the literature on Tibetan demography. Death rates probably started to fall in the 1950s due to the expansion of modern public health care in Tibetan areas following their absorption into the PRC, although the exact magnitude and timing are difficult to ascertain.¹⁷ Improvements were also probably interrupted by the period of uprising, counterinsurgency, famine, and social upheaval in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁸ Nonetheless, by the late 1960s, sustained improvements in mortality and life expectancy were evident across Tibet, though with a significant lag behind China.¹⁹ Total fertility rates (TFRs) in the TAR, by official estimates, peaked at around 5.5 births per woman in 1968, fell below 5.0 in the 1970s, rose to a lower peak of about 5.0 in the early 1980s, and fell gradually after 1982 and then sharply from the late 1980s onward (Zhang and Zhang 1994: 54; Childs 2008: 202).²⁰ The TFR in the TAR was 4.2 in the 1990 census and 1.9 in the 2000 census (Childs et al. 2005: 343). In Qinghai, TFRs in the more central Tibetan autonomous prefectures were below replacement in the 2000 census, namely 1.7 for Malho and Tsolho and 1.8 for Tsojang, while they were above replacement only in the two most remote nomadic prefectures, 2.3 for Golog and 2.7 for Yushu (Qinghai Tabulation 2002: Table L.6-1).

These findings are supported by data from the 2000 census on the age structure of all Tibetans in China (see Figure 2). These are almost identical to the equivalent data for the TAR analyzed in this journal by Childs et al. (2005: 341), except the total number of Tibetans is more than doubled. In both sets of data, the largest age cohort was aged 10–14 years and the size of the younger cohorts tapered off, indicating that demographic momentum had reached its peak among Tibetans in the mid to late 1980s, both inside and outside the TAR.

To assuage concerns that such official data have been concocted or manipulated, it may be noted that the fertility transition is also self-evident in the field. For instance, declining fertility rates were reflected in a demographic survey of 13 farming villages in the TAR by Goldstein et al. (2002), where TFRs dropped from 6.4 in 1986 to under 2.0 in 1998 (calculated in Childs et

FIGURE 2 The Tibetan population of China, all provinces, by age and sex, 2000



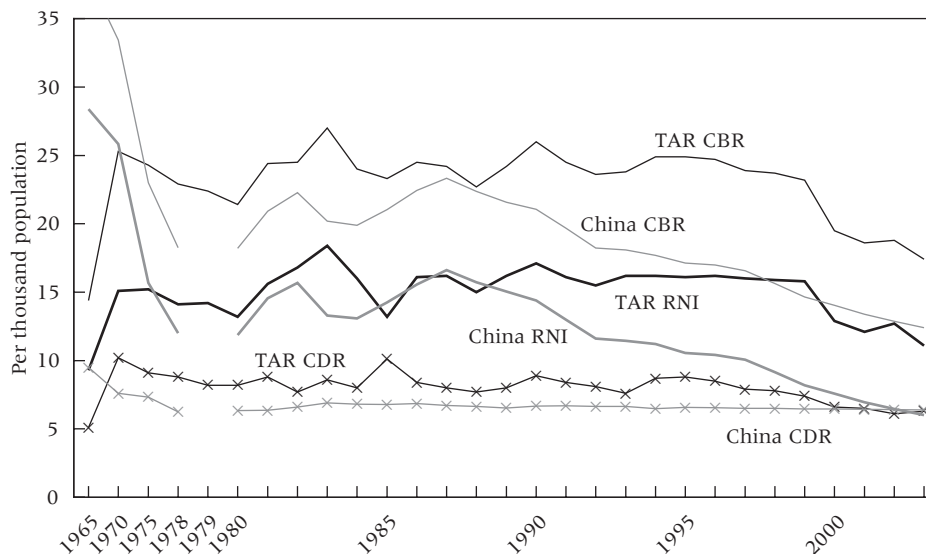
SOURCE: CPSY 2003: Table 2-1.

al. 2005: 343). My own qualitative field observations in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai suggest similar trends. In other words, all indications suggest that Tibetans inside and outside the TAR are currently well advanced along the demographic transition, to an extent that total fertility rates are now below replacement levels in all but the remotest areas.

Rates of natural increase (shown in Figure 3) clarify these processes of demographic transition in comparison to the rest of China. The rate in the TAR (mostly Tibetan) was considerably lower than that for China as a whole (mostly Han) up to the early 1970s, was about the same rate in the late 1970s and 1980s, and was considerably higher since 1989.²¹ The similarity of the TAR and China in the late 1970s and 1980s reflects the fact that lower TFRs among the Han (compared to the rates cited above for Tibetans) were counterbalanced by the Han's greater population momentum from the baby boom in the 1960s following the famine of the Great Leap Forward. In China, the rate of natural increase peaked in 1987 and gradually declined thereafter. In the TAR, the rate peaked in 1983 and then again in 1990, after which it also gradually declined, albeit more slowly than in China until the late 1990s.

These demographic differentials between Tibetans and Han are explained by a variety of structural, sociological, and policy factors, rather than by any intrinsic or "backward" demographic behavior on the part of the Tibetans,

FIGURE 3 Crude birth rates (CBR), crude death rates (CDR), and rates of natural increase (RNI), China and Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) 1965–2003 (years 1965–78 not to scale)



SOURCES: CSY 2004: Table 4-2; CSY 1999: Table 4-2; TSY 2004: Table 3-2.

contrary to what is often implied by some Chinese demographers.²² Family planning policies usually receive most of the attention, although from the perspective of the politicized debates on population in Tibet, their influence is in fact counterintuitive given that birth limits are leniently applied toward China's minorities. As discussed above, TFRs rose in the TAR at the beginning of the reform period, even while they continued to fall in China as a whole because of the implementation of the one-child policy. Even into the 2000s, the official birth limit for minorities in China is two children, rather than the one-child limit applied to Han Chinese, and in many parts of Tibet even this two-child limit is only applied to urban dwellers.²³ These limits have nonetheless contributed to fertility declines, particularly with increased enforcement since the mid-1990s, as analyzed by Goldstein et al. (2002) and Childs et al. (2005: 347). As a result, fertility transition among Tibetans has accelerated since the late 1980s, though with a lag behind the Han Chinese.

These insights are often greeted with incredulity by exiled Tibetans, given their own allegations that the PRC has required Tibetan women to undergo sterilizations and abortions. Falling fertility might be taken as evidence of overzealous family planning, although many of these allegations conflate birth limitation with forced sterilizations and abortions, whereas the former does not necessarily imply the latter.²⁴ The charges of forced sterilizations and abortions were investigated by Goldstein et al. (2002), who concluded that

their fertility data from 13 villages in the TAR suggest no general program of forced birth control (*ibid.*: 25). However, many of the allegations of abusive forced birth control refer to Tibetan areas outside the TAR, albeit mostly with reference to the 1980s and early 1990s. My qualitative field insights in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai tend to support the conclusion that cases of forced sterilizations and abortions do not represent a generalized policy approach but were probably related to events in specific localities or to specific brief periods of policy zealotry.²⁵ Moreover, the overall rate of natural increase for Qinghai has been consistently similar to that of the TAR, both the highest in the country; and, as noted above, TFRs for the Tibetan autonomous prefectures of Qinghai were similar to those of the TAR in the 2000 census.

It is therefore likely that family planning has also been relatively lenient in many minority areas of Qinghai, as suggested by the findings of Goldstein et al. mentioned above, although leniency varies from locality to locality. For instance, Tibetans whom I interviewed in 2004 from Tsolho (in Chinese: Hainan) Prefecture in Qinghai or from Tibetan counties in Gansu reported very strict implementation in these areas, with fines of 1,000 yuan for a third child, and 3,000 yuan and imprisonment for a fourth. Meanwhile, Tibetans interviewed in nearby Chentsa (Ch: Jianza) County in Qinghai did not report any penalties beyond token fines of 100 yuan for a fifth child. Birth control regulations seemed very lax or even ignored in many of the remote pastoral areas of Qinghai, such as in Golok and Yushu Prefectures, where large young families with five or more children were still common, apparently with little or no penalties.

The point here is not to make a judgment about the abusiveness of Chinese family planning policies in Tibet, but rather to show that there is nothing surprising or sinister in the demographic trends of the Tibetan areas. Relative to the rest of China, slower declines in fertility and crude birth rates since the 1980s have been consistent with a more lenient family planning regime in minority areas. Specific cases of abusive family planning methods do not seem to have had much of an impact on these broader trends, although, as noted above, stricter implementation of birth limits in the 1990s definitely bolstered the speed of the decline.

Rather, consistent with recent theoretical work on demographic transitions, sustained mortality decline would seem to be the key remote causal factor determining fertility transitions (for instance, see Dyson 2001). Although research on this issue is limited for Tibet, one can plausibly suggest that both the timing of the fertility transition in Tibet and its subsequent lagging behind the rest of China until the late 1990s were the result of mortality declines in the 1960s and 1970s that, although sustained, were much weaker than those in the rest of China. While birth control policies also influenced trends, the sharpest reductions in fertility in China were witnessed in the 1970s before the introduction of the one-child policy. These reductions were probably more fundamentally facilitated by a sharp mortality decline up to 1970, rather than

by the coerciveness of subsequent family planning policies (see Hussain et al. 2006). Moreover, along with family planning measures, other proximate factors would have moderated the timing and speed of the fertility transition in Tibet once underway, as analyzed at length by Childs (2008: 233–252). Indeed, Childs finds that demographic trends among Tibetans in the TAR and Tibetan refugees in South Asia are remarkably similar in both timing and magnitude despite the fact that the two groups live under completely different political, economic, and social conditions and the exile community is pronatal. In sum, the seemingly contradictory perspectives on population in Tibet can in fact be understood as various aspects of these transitional demographic processes.

Minority or majority? Spatial delineations and distributions

Population growth aside, the assertions by exiles that Tibetans are becoming a minority in their homeland, or have already become a minority in certain regions, should also be taken with a grain of salt. Two spatial issues must be considered: one is the precise delineation of “Tibet,” the other is the rural–urban distribution of ethnic populations within these delineated areas.

The delineation of Tibet in the borderlands where eastern Tibet meets western China proper is critical to any ethnic population count because of the sudden changes in topography, ethnicity, and population density that occur within frontier counties. Key in this regard is the northeast corner of Qinghai, namely, Xining District and Haidong District, the area between the capital cities of Xining and Lanzhou. These two districts account for about 2.8 percent of the provincial land area; the five Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) and one Tibetan–Mongolian autonomous prefecture (TMAP) account for the remaining 97.2 percent. The exile government usually defines Xining and Haidong Districts as part of Tibet, reflecting the fact that much of the area was historically composed of Tibetan farming and pastoral communities, albeit intermixed with Muslim farming communities and some Han Chinese garrison settlements. The current Dalai Lama was born in this region, although it was controlled by a Muslim warlord at the time. Even today, both Xining and Haidong contain a patchwork of Tibetan counties, townships, and religious centers, and together account for about one-quarter of the total Tibetan population of Qinghai Province in 2000 (calculated from Qinghai Tabulation 2002). Regardless of the legitimacy of historical claims, both districts were the main destinations of Chinese migration to the province following the creation of Qinghai in 1928 and especially during the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, today these two districts are relatively urbanized and account for two-thirds of Qinghai’s population, largely Han with a Muslim minority (QSY 2005: Table 4-4).

Outside this core northeast area of Qinghai, the bulk of the remaining Han population in Qinghai is concentrated in several strategic pockets of Chi-

nese interest, such as the mining towns of northern and western Qinghai (Haibei TAP and Haixi TMAP). Both prefectures are arid and largely composed of desert but offer a rich supply of minerals and hydrocarbons. Haixi in particular includes the mineral-rich Tsaidam (Ch: Qaidamu) Basin, which became infamous in 1999 when the "Qinghai Project" of the World Bank came under concerted attack by the Tibetan Government in Exile and Tibet Support Groups for promoting population-transfer policies. Mineral resource development in these areas has resulted in the rapid expansion of several mining towns since the 1950s, populated mostly by Han, whose numbers dwarf the indigenous and extremely sparse populations of nomadic Tibetans and Mongolians.

Leaving aside the historically contested northeast corner of Qinghai and the mining areas, which are exceptional cases with little applicability outside the highly mineralized north and west of the province, the rest of Qinghai is essentially Tibetan. Tibetans accounted for 66 percent of the population of Malho TAP in the 2000 census, 63 percent of Tsolho TAP, 92 percent of Golog TAP, and 97 percent of Yushu TAP. Outside Qinghai, Tibetans accounted for 54 percent of Ngawa TQAP (Tibetan–Qiang Autonomous Prefecture) and 78 percent of Kardze TAP, both in Sichuan, and 51 percent of Gannan TAP in Gansu (calculated from county-level tabulations). If we include the pockets of closely related Mongolian and Mongour (Ch: Tu) minorities in Qinghai, and the Qiang in Sichuan—all three of which are Tibetan-speaking, Tibetan Buddhist, and mostly rural—it is clear that indigenous Tibetan Buddhists are a large majority in these prefectures, and overwhelmingly so in the rural areas, similar to the situation in the TAR. Debates on population shares rarely distinguish this point.

Precise delineation therefore becomes critical for a proper evaluation of the actual Chinese population within the definitively Tibetan areas. The exercise is complicated by the fact that borderland counties often contain mixed ethnic groups. In such cases, a higher-density population of non-Tibetans in the lowlands of a county can appear to overwhelm the sparser population in the Tibetan highlands, even though the two zones usually remain highly segregated. This scenario applies to much of Haidong in Qinghai as well as to the essentially Han-populated lowlands of the counties in eastern Kardze TAP and Ngawa TQAP in Sichuan. For instance, the epicenter of the 12 May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan was in Wenchuan County, located in Ngawa TQAP, although the casualties were mostly Han Chinese in the urbanized lowlands of this county.²⁶

Considered in this way, Tibetans are clearly not a minority in most Tibetan areas. If anything, they are a large majority, albeit one that is predominantly rural and thus not highly visible. This leads us to the second spatial issue. It is clear from the 2000 census that the main ethnic population schisms boil down to sharp differences in urbanization levels rather than to differences in population shares. Tibetans were overwhelmingly rural in all

five of the Chinese provinces that incorporate Tibetan areas, with 87.2 percent living in rural areas in China overall (see Table 1). Tibetan urbanization rates ranged from 8.6 percent in Qinghai, 9.1 percent in Gansu, and 10.5 percent in Sichuan, to 15.2 percent in the TAR and 20 percent in Yunnan. In contrast, the urbanization rate among the recorded Han was 79.5 percent in the TAR and 44.7 percent in Qinghai, both higher than the national average of 36.9 percent. Hui Muslims were 79.7 percent urban in the TAR, where their presence is small, and 29.7 percent urban in Qinghai, where they account for about one-sixth of the population. The Qinghai Hui were less urbanized than the Qinghai Han but much more urbanized than the Qinghai Tibetans. The extremely high rates of urbanization among the Han and Hui in the TAR reflect their lack of an indigenous base in the rural areas, as is discussed further in the next section.

Furthermore, the Han and Muslim presence is more concentrated in cities than in towns, whereas urban Tibetans are more concentrated in towns than in cities, particularly outside the TAR. This is shown in Table 1,

TABLE 1 Distribution of the population by selected ethnic group in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and in Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces, 2000

	Percent of ethnic group located in			Percent of total population by ethnic group in		
	Rural areas	Towns	Cities	Rural areas	Towns	Cities
TAR						
Total population	80.6	11.1	8.3			
Tibetans	84.8	9.4	5.8	97.6	78.3	65.0
Han	20.5	35.5	44.0	1.5	19.4	32.1
Hui Muslims	20.3	25.6	54.0	0.1	0.8	2.2
Qinghai						
Total population	67.7	11.7	20.7			
Tibetans (+M & Mong) ^a	91.4	6.7	1.9	37.6	17.4	3.5
Han	55.3	13.6	31.1	44.2	62.9	81.3
Muslims (Hui & Salar)	70.3	12.8	17.0	18.1	19.1	14.3
Sichuan						
Total population	72.9	12.3	14.8			
Tibetan (+Qiang) ^b	89.5	9.5	0.9	2.3	1.5	0.1
Han	72.0	12.5	15.5	93.8	97.1	99.0
Yi	94.1	4.4	1.5	3.3	0.9	0.3
Tibetans in China	87.2	8.7	4.1			

^aRow measures urbanization rates of Tibetans only, but includes Mongours (Ch: Tu) and Mongolians in the measure of shares in order to evaluate the weight of indigenous Tibeto-Buddhists in rural, town, and city.

^bRow includes the Qiang in shares but not in urbanization rates; the urbanization rate among the Qiang is only 2 percent more than the Sichuan Tibetans, or 12.5 percent.

SOURCE: 2000 census. Calculated from Tabulation (2002: Tables 1-6, 1-6a, 1-6b, and 1-6c).

which focuses on the TAR, Qinghai, and Sichuan (accounting for 88 percent of Tibetans in China). The town–city dimension reflects the fact that most urban jurisdictions in the Tibetan areas are classified as towns, with Lhasa and Shigatse in the TAR being the notable exceptions. It is also probable that rural Tibetans tend to migrate first to local towns rather than to more distant and expensive cities, except in cases related to tertiary education, which is concentrated in the capital city of each province.

It is clear from Table 1 that Tibetans have remained predominantly rural. Rates of change are not shown: temporal comparisons of urbanization rates are difficult if not meaningless because urban definitions are quite different in each of the five censuses in China (see Zhou and Ma 2003). It is also clear, however, that rapid urban growth up to 2000 was disproportionately filled by Han, and to a lesser extent by Muslims in the case of Qinghai, relative to their overall population share. Current inter-provincial migration (or intra-provincial in the case of Tibetan areas outside the TAR) accentuates these differences, given that the destination of most Han and Muslim migrants to the Tibetan areas is urban, as discussed in the next section. Although the Han and Muslim population shares may be small in these Tibetan areas, this share is concentrated in the urban areas, precisely where it is most visible.

Moreover, minority dominance in rural areas is notable. The combined total of minority nationalities in Qinghai (predominantly Tibetan and Hui Muslims) gives them a majority in rural areas, even before isolating minority areas from the core Han areas. Given demographic momentum among both Tibetans and Muslims, this pattern is likely to continue. In the TAR, the contrast between the rurality of Tibetans and the urbanity of the Han and Hui is extreme. Therefore, the key issue is not the overall population balance between Tibetans and outsiders, but the fact that outsiders have dominated urbanization. Overall, Han population shares in Tibetan areas outside the TAR may have been decreasing since the 1980s. This is not the case in the TAR, where their share has been definitely increasing, but the increase has been from very low levels. The reasons for this apparent incongruity with claims of population invasion asserted by Tibetan exiles are explored in the following section.

Population shares reconsidered

Regardless of misinterpretations, the exile—and predominant Tibetan—view of population invasion harbors legitimate concerns and is partially valid, although only with respect to Tibetan urban areas. Only in the main Tibetan cities and towns can it be argued that Han are outnumbering Tibetans, or at least matching their numbers. Nonetheless, the Tibetan dominance in the Tibetan rural areas itself refutes the claim of overall population swamping through simple arithmetic: even if the Han become numerically dominant

in urban populations, in most cases their urban dominance would not even come close to compensating for the Tibetans' dominance in rural areas. This would hold even if the Han population count were significantly underestimated. Ironically, the perception of population swamping is essentially an urban-centric assessment, even while the Tibetan areas remain some of the most rural in China. Yet this is precisely why the issue is highly problematic given that it reflects perceptions of exclusionary dynamics experienced in urban areas.

Migration

Returning to the historical symbols of population invasion, important features differentiate the experience of the Tibetan areas from those of Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and the northeast core of Qinghai. Han migration to Inner Mongolia was largely agrarian and took place as early as the eighteenth century, at a time when rural wealth was still coveted by migrants in China. Mongolians were already a minority in Inner Mongolia by the end of the nineteenth century, when population transfer for the purpose of land colonization became official policy under the Qing Dynasty. The agrarian focus of such policies meant that Han migrants settled in the countryside and became dominant in rural as well as urban populations. Thus, by 1947 Mongolians accounted for only about 14 percent of the population of Inner Mongolia. This share dropped further to 11 percent by 1964 during the peak of Maoist population transfer policies. The share had slowly rebounded to 13.5 percent by 1985 (Burjgin and Bilik 2003: 55–56). As noted at the outset, the share reached 17 percent in the 2000 census. Similarly, the large-scale population transfers that expanded the share of Han from 6 percent to over 40 percent of the population in Xinjiang and from around 50 percent to over 60 percent in Qinghai took place during the heydays of Maoism from the 1950s to the 1970s (QSY 2005: Tables 4-3 and 4-5).

In contrast, rural or agrarian population transfer never took hold in the Tibetan rural areas, in large part owing to the failures of agrarian colonization in the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, attempts to convert high-altitude rangelands into large-scale collective farms led to significant desertification in several Tibetan areas.²⁷ In the case of Qinghai, Goodman (2004) notes that large transfers from 1956 to 1959 were matched by an almost equally large exodus following the famine of the Great Leap Forward. Similarly, in-migration during the Cultural Revolution was balanced for the most part by out-migration over the same period (*ibid.*: 386–388). Thus, the Chinese plans in the 1950s to reach a population of 10 million people in Qinghai by 1967 were singularly unsuccessful; by 1978, the population of Qinghai had reached only 3.65 million (QSY 2005: Table 3-1). This demonstrates the importance of differentiating between rhetoric and reality in China's population transfer policies.

As a result of similar policy failures throughout Tibet, Tibetan rural areas have remained mostly Tibetan, with few exceptions aside from strategic or borderland locations.²⁸ Conversely, the Han in most Tibetan areas are concentrated chiefly in towns and cities. Similarly, the destination of most new Han migrants is urban (or peri-urban in the case of greenhouse agriculture). There is little or no incentive for this to change in view of the poverty and harshness of Tibetan rural areas (in the eyes of the lowland Chinese), and the fact that most land is already fully utilized, with little potential for commercial farming or ranching given the ecological sensitivity of the region. This is a critical difference with Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and even Xining and Haidong in Qinghai, where Han populations were well entrenched in the rural areas by the advent of the reform period in the late 1970s.

Furthermore, the concept of transfer—in the sense of organized large-scale movements of population from one region to another—would apply only in a general sense up to the end of the Maoist period in 1978, during which population movements were controlled and managed closely by the state. Since the beginning of the reform period, this control has been gradually liberalized, with the result that the principal trend in population movements has been away from rural areas and poor peripheral regions and toward towns, cities, and coastal areas of China. As in most other countries, this trend has been reinforced by the declining economic importance of agriculture, rapid population growth, and the consequent underemployment of rural labor.

Population movement since the reform period, particularly since the early 1990s, has been more or less voluntary, implying that policies must rely on incentives rather than command to instigate migration. The trend since the 1980s has been a net population outflow from the impoverished western areas of China. The Tibetan areas, some of the most impoverished, are not strangers to this outflow. Indeed, the propensity to move from such areas would tend to be stronger among Han, given that they are not indigenous to Tibet, they are more urbanized and mobile, many were forced to move there in the first place, most maintain connections with other areas of China, and many complain of the harshness of the climate and altitude. Thus, by nature Han are more apt to (re)integrate into mainstream Chinese society. Current Tibetan refugee migration to India can also be understood in this context, given that many of such Tibetans migrate with the perception that better fortune might be attainable in exile.²⁹

The only factors counteracting this overall migration trend are the heavily government-subsidized incentives and opportunities for Han, Tibetan, and Muslim workers and businesspeople to move to and settle in Tibet. Nonetheless, net outflow has been the rule for much of the reform period despite incentives. For instance, registered net migration to the TAR was negative in every year but three from 1981 to 1992 (Iredale et al. 2001: 151). The greatest outflows took place in 1981–82 owing to a change in cadre policy that

allowed many Han cadres to return home and increased the representation of local Tibetan cadres (Huang 1995). Outward flows were no doubt fueled by recession in the TAR up to the early 1990s, and net inflows only resumed sometime in the mid-1990s following the heavily subsidized recovery of the TAR economy (see Fischer 2005). In Qinghai, registered net outflows started in 1980 and remained consistently negative from 1986 until 2004 (the latest data consulted), with peaks occurring between 1988 and 1993 (QSY 2005: Table 4-3). In both periods, it can be assumed that the bulk of the outflow was Han.³⁰

These statistics refer to officially registered moves, that is, those recorded by Public Security Departments. They therefore relate to changes in the non-military³¹ population who have permanent or other forms of long-term residential status, whereas many migrants operate under a variety of temporary statuses.³² It might thus be argued that the preceding data on net migration do not fully reflect reality, inasmuch as the majority of Han in the Tibetan areas are temporary migrants, even by official measures.³³ Indeed, on top of the difficulties of measuring temporary migrants, the political sensitivity of the presence of migrants in the TAR adds further problems in light of the motivation for the government to hide or disguise the scale of Han in-migration.³⁴

Resolving this measurement problem requires a degree of creative extrapolation. This can be achieved by comparing annual population surveys with the 2000 population census. The population surveys are conducted among permanently residing households and exclude temporary migrants. This introduces a bias in the surveys depending on whether a province experiences a net inflow or outflow of population. Populations in inflow provinces are underestimated because migrants are not usually registered as permanent residents. Populations in outflow provinces are overestimated because temporary migrants usually maintain permanent status in their source provinces, a fact that exaggerates the baseline residency records used for population survey estimates. In contrast, the 2000 census went to great lengths to record temporary residents and represents the most accurate portrait of actual provincial populations to date.³⁵

Although it is difficult to measure temporary migrants in China, the discrepancy between the two sources can allow one to indirectly infer net inflows or outflows in a way that was not intended in either source. According to the above logic, the 2000 census population count should exceed the 1999 survey count (plus population growth) in net inflow provinces and fall below it in net outflow provinces. In several of the strategic and sparsely populated far western provinces, the two trends of inflow and outflow overlap and create a churning effect. Migrants from other provinces, whether state-organized or "spontaneous," usually come for short periods and do not necessarily change their registration status to the host province, even if residency rules are considerably more lax than in the coastal areas. On the other hand, this inward flow overlaps with the out-migration of previous

temporary in-migrants and, to a lesser extent, of locals. Although out-migration receives less attention, it is a considerable source of concern for local authorities, particularly with respect to the more skilled or better-educated out-migrants, as several local officials indicated to me in interviews in Qinghai. During a period of increasing government spending, inflows potentially outweigh outflows, in which case the surveys would underestimate the actual population and would be lower than the census population count. The results of this inferential analysis are presented in Table 2.

Guangdong in the southeast stands out as the quintessential inflow province, whereas Guizhou, the poorest province of China, is the most extreme case of an outflow province. Both are intuitive results. Xinjiang also stands out as an inflow province, supporting allegations of large-scale immigration. On the other hand, both the TAR and Qinghai appear relatively stable. In both cases, the proportional difference between the 2000 census and the 1999 survey is less than one percentage point above the rate of natural increase in 1999 (Columns E and G in Table 2). Measurement errors could account for much of this difference. Indeed, Qinghai recorded the largest estimated census error at 7.4 percent (Column F), indicating that the final adjusted census population, after a post-census survey was conducted, was 7.4 percent greater than the original census tabulation. If the original tabulated population is considered (Column C), Qinghai clearly appears as a net outflow province.³⁶ Despite the evident visibility of in-migration to the Tibetan areas, these observations point to the conclusion that such migration involves considerable churning, rather than sustained inflows as in Xinjiang.

As noted above, the common rebuttal to this observation is that Han migrants are underestimated in the Tibetan areas because of the sensitivity of their presence, particularly in the TAR. For instance, the 2000 census recorded only 158,570 Han in the TAR (Tabulation 2002: Table 1-6), a number that is treated with disbelief by most observers. Yet despite a similar sensitivity, an underestimation of the Han population in Xinjiang is not apparent in the census data, which unequivocally show a massive inflow from outside the province. Also, the TAR aside, an inflow of Han into western provinces such as Qinghai is not necessarily treated as a subject to be avoided by local officials. On the contrary, it is often interpreted as an indication of the success of attempts to attract skilled labor and to stem outflow, thus supporting the developmental goal of building human resources.

In the case of the TAR, the Han census count was obviously an under-shot. Arguments of statistical manipulation aside, there may be several reasons why the Han count was low. Temporary migration is not necessarily one of them. In fact, as noted above, the 2000 census attempted to record all types of migrants, including those who had not yet resolved their residency status. The only migrants who would not have been counted were either those who had hidden from the census takers (which is more of a consideration in the

TABLE 2 Selected province-level population statistics, c. 2000

	Population (in millions) according to				Discrepancies (percent)		Rate of natural increase, 1999 survey (per 1000) G
	1999 survey	2000 adjusted census	2000 census tabulation	2001 survey	(B-A)/A	(B-C)/C	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	
Inflow provinces							
Guangdong	72.70	86.42	85.23	77.83	18.9	1.4	9.92
Shanghai	14.74	16.74	16.41	16.14	13.6	2.0	-1.10
Xinjiang	17.74	19.25	18.46	18.76	8.5	4.3	11.80
Fujian	33.16	34.71	34.10	34.40	4.7	1.8	5.21
Stable provinces							
Ningxia	5.43	5.62	5.49	5.63	3.5	2.4	12.32
TAR	2.56	2.62	2.62	2.63	2.3	0.2	15.80
Yunnan	41.92	42.88	42.36	42.87	2.3	1.2	11.66
Qinghai	5.10	5.18	4.82	5.23	1.6	7.4	13.90
Inner Mongolia	23.62	23.76	23.32	23.77	0.5	1.9	7.24
Gansu	25.43	25.62	25.12	25.75	0.7	2.0	9.17
Outflow provinces							
Shaanxi	36.18	36.05	35.37	36.59	-0.3	1.9	6.13
Sichuan	85.50	83.29	82.35	86.40	-2.6	1.1	6.78
Guizhou	37.10	35.25	35.25	37.99	-5.0	0.0	14.24
National	1,259.09	1,265.83	1,242.61	1,276.27	0.5	1.9	8.77

NOTE: See text on categorization of inflow, stable, and outflow provinces. Column B, the "2000 adjusted census," represents the official estimated population after adjustments were made following the post-census survey. Column F indicates the estimated census error.

SOURCES: Calculated from CSY 2000: Table 4-3; CSY 2001: Table 4-3; and CSY 2002: Tables 4-3 and 4-8.

coastal areas given official belligerence toward migrants, but less in the west where migration is encouraged), or those who were missed because of the difficulties of tracking migrants as opposed to permanent residents.

On the other hand, timing is critical. The census was taken in November, when most of the seasonal Han migrants would already have left for the winter. The figure of 158,570 may therefore represent a reasonable count of the number of non-military Han who were actually residing year-round in the TAR in 2000. Also, military personnel would represent a significant proportion of the visual presence of Han in Lhasa and in other cities and towns. Conversely, informal evaluations by tourists and journalists are made mostly during the summer months, when the Han presence is swollen by tourism. Most Chinese tourists, whose numbers apparently reached 1.6 million in 2005 and over 4 million in 2007, visit the TAR between May and September (see Xinhua 2006; PD 2008).

Although there has been a clear increase in temporary Han migration to the TAR since the mid-1990s, particularly during the summer months in parallel with tourism, such migration is not stable. It is to be differentiated from the case of Xinjiang in that Han migrants by and large do not settle over the long term. For instance, surveys taken in the TAR in the mid-1990s indicated that most Han migrants concentrated on economic activities in the TAR for a temporary period, perhaps five to six years on average (Iredale et al. 2001: 156–158). These insights were reconfirmed in a 2005 survey by Ma and Lhundrup (2006). My own field observations from Lhasa suggest that many Chinese migrants in the TAR are seasonal, particularly since the massive boom in tourism that began in the early 2000s. Given these characteristics, Han migration would tend to be very susceptible to changes in social and economic conditions, such as the March 2008 protests and one-day riot in Lhasa, which subsequently caused a sharp fall in tourism (PD 2008). This probably had the knock-on effect of reducing the tourism-related seasonal migration flows as well. Conversely, rapidly increasing subsidies, which have been in effect since the mid-1990s, obviously encourage net inflows. Indeed, despite contentions that the Qinghai–Tibet railway, completed in 2006, will accelerate in-migration, increased inflows are more likely related to ongoing policies of subsidization rather than to the easing of transport per se. The question remains, however, whether net inflows could be sustained in the long run if and when subsidies stabilize or social stability declines. The underlying trend would suggest that inflows face an uphill battle against the counter-current of outflows.

Structural transformations in the regional economy could also increase out-migration of both Tibetans and Han from certain counties, even while increasing in-migration to others. For instance, local governments in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan are much more fiscally austere than in the TAR. They are often left with few fiscal means to stem an outflow of labor in the event of a collapse in a key industry; for instance, the 1998 moratorium on forestry activities declared by the national government in response to flooding on the Yangtze had a debilitating impact on many Tibetan counties in Sichuan and Yunnan. Therefore, one cannot assume that the migration pattern of the TAR represents the norm in the Tibetan areas outside the TAR, given that the former is primarily a response to massive subsidies.

Han migration versus Tibetan natural increase

As noted above, most rural areas of Tibet remain overwhelmingly Tibetan, along with pockets of several other closely related ethnicities. For instance, 97.6 percent of the TAR's rural population in the 2000 census was Tibetan (Table 1). Even if the Han population of the province were underestimated,

the underestimation would relate mostly to the urban areas and would scarcely affect this rural share. Even in eastern Tibetan areas that are relatively close to such large cities as Xining, Lanzhou, and Chengdu, rural populations in the decisively Tibetan areas also remain predominantly Tibetan. This was consistently confirmed to me in my fieldwork. It can also be shown through a county-by-county examination of the 2000 census, beyond the scope of this article.

Because fertility and birth rates are considerably higher in the rural areas, the Tibetan population holds the upper hand in the demographic contest. This demographic advantage is amplified by Tibetans' low levels of urbanization, given that rural dwellers have more lenient birth limits, and by their younger age structure, with 31.2 percent of the TAR population under age 15 in the 2000 census, versus 22.9 percent in China (CPSY 2002: Table 2-6). As these youth cohorts enter their reproductive years with the two-child limit presumably still in place, they will sustain higher rates of natural increase relative to the Han for at least the next 20 to 30 years. In contrast, the few Han who settle permanently in the Tibetan areas mostly follow the urban Chinese demographic profile of one child per family. Han who migrate on a temporary or seasonal basis are disproportionately male (with the exception of sex workers), of working age, and tend not to bring their families with them during their working sojourns (see Ma and Lhundup 2006). While these attributes amplify male migrant demand for sex workers, they considerably lower Han rates of natural increase in Tibet.

In other words, sustained net inflows of Han would be required merely to maintain their population share. For instance, taking the rate of natural increase for the TAR in 2003 and assuming that the Han contribution to this rate was zero (it was probably negative), a net inflow of at least 30,000 Han migrants per year would be required merely to maintain the Han population share (calculated from CSY 2004: Table 4-3). Such a net inflow might be sustained as long as the economy was booming and would definitely be surpassed in the summer months, but if the province were to follow a boom-bust cycle, the balloon of Han in-migration equally could deflate.

Thus, despite the visibility of in-migration to urban areas, Tibetan population shares in certain cases may be increasing rather than decreasing, particularly outside the TAR. For example, the share of Tibetans in the population of Qinghai has been slowly edging upward during the reform period, from 18.5 percent in 1978 to 21.9 percent in 2004, and growing at about the same rate overall as that of the Hui Muslims (QSY 2005: Table 4-5).³⁷ The Tibetan population share in the TAR fell between the 1990 and 2000 censuses, for reasons discussed above and because the Han have been increasing from a very small base. Some analysts argue that the increases in minority populations in China have been related in part to the switching of ethnic status by Han in order to take advantage of various preferential policies for minorities,

TABLE 3 Changes in Han and minority populations between 1990 and 2000, selected regions

	TAR	Qinghai	Sichuan	Gansu	Yunnan	China	All Tibetans in China
Average annual population increase (percent)							
Total	1.7	1.5	0.6	1.3	1.4	1.1	—
Minority	1.5	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.5	1.5	1.8
Han	6.5	0.9	0.5	1.3	1.4	1.0	—
Share of minorities in total population (percent)							
1990 census	95.9	42.2	4.4	8.3	33.4	8.0	0.41
2000 census	93.9	45.6	5.0	8.7	33.4	8.4	0.43
Change	-2.0	+3.4	+0.6	+0.4	0.0	+0.4	+0.02

SOURCES: Census data. Calculated from CPSY 2001: Tables 2-13, 2-14, and 2-21.

particularly between the 1982 and 1990 censuses, although this was probably less pronounced in the Tibetan areas than elsewhere in China.³⁸

Table 3 focuses on changes in Han and minority populations between the 1990 and 2000 censuses. Note that Tibetans are not differentiated from other minorities. The category of minorities in the TAR is almost entirely Tibetan. It is about two-thirds Tibetan in Qinghai in combination with Mongours (Ch: Tu) and Mongolians (the other third being Hui and Salar); about one-third Tibetan in Sichuan; one-fifth Tibetan in Gansu; and a small fraction in Yunnan.

Outside the TAR, minorities have either increased or maintained their shares throughout the decade. This picture may reflect some ethnic status switching, although more generally the results are not surprising. As discussed above, outflows and demographic trends would tend to dominate inflows in these more fiscally austere provinces, particularly among the more mobile urbanites, who tend to be Han rather than Tibetan or Muslim.³⁹ Overall these results are consistent with previous analyses that show the TAR as the only province where the Tibetan population share is decreasing, albeit from a very high level.

Urban exclusions and intra-urban inequality

By all indications, the impression of an increasing Han or Muslim presence in eastern Tibet is not accurate at the aggregate level. It derives from an increased presence of migrants in urban areas, even while Tibetans are maintaining or even increasing their population dominance overall. This is still problematic, however, precisely because urban areas represent the centers of economic and political power. Hence, the real issue is economic and political dominance rather than population dominance.

More precisely, regardless of whether or not out-of-province migrants are flooding the local population, they are definitely flooding urban employment opportunities. This can be succinctly illustrated through an extrapolation from the 2000 census data for the TAR. While permanent and temporary Han residents accounted for about 6 percent of the 2000 census population in the TAR, they accounted for nearly 20 percent of the town population and around 33 percent of the city population. Because they are concentrated in the economically active age groups (Ma and Lhundup 2006: 14), we can safely assume that some 80 percent of Han residents were economically active. Indeed, most temporary migrants would eventually return home if they did not find employment. It is also safe to assume that they were working mostly outside agriculture, and we know that at least 80 percent of them resided in urban areas. Accordingly, their 6 percent population share in 2000 was in effect equivalent to more than 38 percent of total employment outside the primary sector (both urban and rural) and more than 55 percent of total urban employment (employment data from CSY 2001: Table 5-4). In other words, the Han population share is magnified many times over in urban employment. Because the census probably underestimated the actual Han migrant population, particularly during the summer months, the magnification itself would be underestimated. Moreover, it is clear from field observations that out-of-province migration to the TAR has increased rapidly since the 2000 census, particularly with the construction of the railway in the early 2000s and the subsequent explosion in tourism from 2006 onward. Under these circumstances, even a small change in the overall Han population share (say from 6 percent to 8 percent) could have a very large impact on urban employment.

If local residents in these Tibetan urban areas were able to use administrative means to protect themselves against migrant competition, as is increasingly the case in other provinces in China, then perhaps this situation would be less contentious. However, local Tibetans do not have any of these means at their disposal, because their regions are effectively ruled by non-Tibetan outsiders, appointed either by Beijing in the case of the TAR or by provincial capitals in the case of Tibetan areas outside the TAR (see Fischer 2005: 73–84). Notably, no ethnic Tibetan has ever held the post of Party Secretary of the TAR, the TAR's top leadership position.

In this context, Tibetan locals have to play on a field that is far from level. The primary structural factor is education: Tibetans both inside and outside the TAR have by far the lowest education levels of all the main ethnic minorities in China. In the 2000 census, only 54.5 percent of the Tibetan population in China aged six and older had some form of primary education, compared with 92.7 percent for Han Chinese and 92.3 percent for China as a whole. Only 13.3 percent of Tibetans had some form of secondary education, versus 53.4 percent for Han Chinese and 52.3 percent for China as a whole

(calculated from CPSY 2003: Table 2-2; see Fischer 2005 for further detail). Simply on the basis of these quantitative comparisons, it is clear that the average local Tibetan is easily out-competed in the labor market by the average Han Chinese migrant. An additional qualitative dimension further complicates matters. Tibetans who perform relatively well in an urban economy dominated by Central government spending and Chinese corporations are those who possess some degree of proficiency in Chinese. Given that Chinese-medium education only starts at the secondary level in most Tibetan areas, the vast majority of Tibetans cannot attain this linguistic qualification.

This educational divide does not necessarily mirror the urban–rural divide. Some 41 percent of the permanently resident adult city population aged 15 and older in the TAR was illiterate in 2004 (CPSY 2005: Table 1-24). This is an exceptionally high level of urban illiteracy in China, with no parallel in any other province. Given the lack of parallel, most of these illiterate adults were probably Tibetan. Indeed, this educational divide helps to explain why intra-urban inequality, not just urban–rural inequality, has reached much higher levels in the TAR than in other provinces in China (Fischer 2005: 122).

Conclusion: Urban fault lines of migration and exclusion

Tibetans have been in demographic transition, as have most other ethnic groups in China and, indeed, elsewhere in Asia. While they lag behind the Han in this transition, the lag is partially due to differences in family planning policies since the 1980s and other proximate factors since the 1950s. However, Tibetans' demographic trends show enough similarities with those of the Han to clearly dismiss simplistic theories that Tibetans are either poor because they are demographically backward or demographically backward because they are poor. They are poor but they are relatively well advanced along the demographic transition, in the sense that fertility rates are now below replacement levels.

Nonetheless, their position in the demographic transition does clarify some of the key social and economic aspects of modernity facing Tibetans. Relatively rapid population growth is not solely the result of Chinese rule, although the extension of primary public health care in the 1950s and 1960s obviously contributed to falling death rates, thus accelerating population growth. Nor is falling fertility solely the result of repressive birth control policies; more fundamentally, it is linked to the remote cause of falling mortality, along with a variety of proximate social and economic factors.

Urbanization in turn sets the stage for understanding the crux of modern ethnic tensions within Tibetan areas. The contemporary meeting points between ethnic groups are towns and cities, as they were in the past, although with the important difference that modern demographic and economic transi-

tions place far greater pressures on urban areas than historically was the case. In the process, rising population density and rapid urban expansion can give the visual impression that the more urbanized or economically successful groups (Han and Muslims) are becoming more dominant even while they are only maintaining or even losing their share in the overall population.

Perceptions may thus be deceptive even while they fuel resentment and signal other underlying problems of considerable gravity. In the Tibetan areas, these problems relate to the interaction between demographic and economic transitions, particularly within the context of rapid economic growth that is heavily skewed toward urban areas. Yet this observation of urban bias tends to lead to the conclusion that effective ethnic discrimination in development is not due to intentional discrimination, but rather due to this spatial bias in development, as argued by Sautman and Eng (2001). Indeed, in line with the Chinese government, Sautman and Eng argue that out-of-province migration brings a net economic benefit to Tibet. As support, they refer to research on immigration that shows such benefits in the case of Canada. However, they ignore research on the migration of non-Aboriginals into Aboriginal regions in Canada, which would have been a much more appropriate comparison for the case of Tibet.

There are a variety of problems with this argument. First, it ignores the fact that the urban–rural divide has been much higher in the TAR than elsewhere in China since the mid-1990s, which itself can be seen as a result of discrimination in development policy (see Fischer 2005). Moreover, intra-urban inequality is also very high, and around 40 percent of permanent (i.e., non-migrant) urban residents in the TAR were illiterate in 2005, which suggests that the fundamental divide is not spatial but educational. In this respect, even though spatial polarization might distance rural dwellers from the portals of prosperity, the critical arenas where ethnic exclusion occurs in Tibet, for both rural and urban dwellers, are primarily urban. This is precisely where the political and economic levers of power are controlled, along with access to strategic and lucrative economic opportunities. In this light, it is mistaken to say that urban bias is the cause of ethnic discrimination in Tibet, although it clearly structures the way that discrimination occurs. This is in marked contrast to the situation in other ethnic minority regions in China, such as Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, where rural populations are more ethnically mixed and minority populations are better educated.

Thus, while probably misconceived, the perception of “population invasion” can be seen as a reactive lens through which locals interpret their concerns with modernity within a context of stark political disempowerment. In particular, the perception voices a legitimate concern that Han Chinese in-migration might exacerbate economic exclusion among Tibetan locals in their towns and cities, particularly at a critical stage of their demographic and economic transitions when such exclusions will no doubt heavily influ-

ence the long-term course of ethnic stratification. Nevertheless, the logic of peripheral development in western areas of China would tend to counter the thesis of population invasion. If anything, population outflow, particularly among the better-educated, is an important developmental constraint in these areas. Nevertheless, this conflation of Han in-migration and Tibetan exclusion seems to provide the discursive lens through which Tibetans perceive their disempowerment.

Methodological appendix

This study is derived from a larger interdisciplinary research project examining Chinese development strategies in Tibet. The project involved quantitative and qualitative research to examine politically sensitive issues within a tightly controlled field setting characterized by effective occupation and repressed political dissent.

Quantitative data were mostly obtained from publicly available official statistical sources, such as the 2000 census tabulations, the *China Population Statistical Yearbook* from various years, and the *China* (and various provincial) *Statistical Yearbook* from various years. While the accuracy of these official sources is often questioned, the alternative of conducting independent household surveys was impossible given the political situation. However, in defense of these data sources, I have generally found that they are corroborated by my fieldwork in terms of representing broad structural trends over time. The issue of data quality was therefore not an overwhelming obstacle for the inductive nature of quantitative analysis required for this study.

The data are nonetheless limited by what has and has not been divulged in official sources. Outside of population censuses, official Chinese sources do not disaggregate data by ethnicity. Thus some creative extrapolation is often required to circumvent the data limitations and to tease out insights from the available data. This includes using the rural data for the TAR, which represents an almost entirely Tibetan population, as a proxy for the general experience of Tibetans outside the TAR. The rural data for the other Chinese provinces containing Tibetan autonomous areas are overwhelmed by the population weight of non-Tibetans in the non-Tibetan areas of the provinces. Using the TAR data to approximate broad trends outside the TAR is arguably a valid approach, at least with respect to rural areas, given strong similarities across Tibetan areas and stark differences between these areas and the rest of China in terms of topography, population density, patterns of land use and livelihood, levels and composition of average rural household incomes, education levels, and health indexes. Nonetheless, an effort has been made throughout this study to find suitable sub-provincial data for Tibetan areas outside the TAR in order to render this proxy method more rigorous.

Similarly, the qualitative methods were eclectic given the political sensitivity of the issues researched. Formal surveys were not possible; thus the field methods were basically ethnographic. However, a wide variety of field sites was sampled, each with much less depth than would be normally accorded by purely ethnographic methods. This approach was taken partly to avoid spending too much time in each community for political reasons, and also partly as a means to trace broader processes operating across the regional Tibetan system.

My fieldwork included 12 months spent in Tibet and China between June 2003 and January 2005, and two subsequent one-month visits in December 2005 and September 2007. This was more generally informed by seven years of predoctoral field experience living in Tibetan refugee communities in India and Nepal from 1995 to 2001. The fieldwork in Tibet was conducted in all three of the major Tibetan regions (Utsang, Kham, and Amdo) and in four of the five Chinese provinces containing Tibetan areas (the TAR, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu). The largest portion of time was concentrated in Amdo/Qinghai for multiple reasons, from logistics and freedom of movement to research interest. Extensive visits were made to both farming and pastoral areas in Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu, including repeated and extended contact within eight rural communities. Limited rural travel was also undertaken in the TAR, although this was restricted owing to the control over the movement of foreign researchers outside Lhasa. Urban areas visited included (Tibetan names used for Tibetan towns): Lhasa and Shigatse in the TAR; Xining, Xunhua, Chentsa, Rebgong, Sogwo, Chabcha, Mangra, Jyeku, Dawu, and Darlak in Qinghai; Lanzhou, Linxia, and Labrang (Ch: Xiahe) in Gansu; Chengdu, Shichu, Derge, Manikango, Kardze, Drango, Dawu, Tagong, Dartsedo (Ch: Kangding), and Ngawa in Sichuan; and several short visits to research centers and universities in Beijing. The urban areas were chosen for their importance as regional centers for local government administration, education, business, off-farm employment, and migration.

Fieldwork entailed informal and unstructured interviews, conversations, focus groups, participant observation, and general living experience within households in several of these settings, in both rural and urban areas. Interviewee selection was determined through snowball sampling; the political sensitivity of the research precluded representative sampling as well as extended ethnographic contacts. Some interviews were conducted by myself in Tibetan (mostly in Central Tibet), some were conducted by myself in English with Tibetans or Chinese who spoke English, and about half were conducted with the assistance of either a Tibetan translator (in the case of interviews with Tibetans, particularly those from Eastern Tibet) or a Chinese translator (in the case of interviews with Chinese or Muslims and some educated Tibetans). The exact number of informants is difficult to quantify because in many cases contact was made in very fluid social settings. However, it is possible to enumerate roughly 228 key informants, in terms of contacts that resulted in significant and substantive field insights. This sampling was disproportionately weighted toward more elite informants, particularly local Tibetan, Chinese, and Muslim scholars who possess a wealth of knowledge but are considerably more constrained than foreign researchers in the dissemination of their findings.

Notes

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1 In this article, "China" refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and "Tibet" refers to all of the Tibetan areas in China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Tibetan areas incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. Often known as "Greater Tibet" or "cultural Tibet," this region is about the size of Western Europe or about 25 percent of China. This larger understanding of Tibet is actually not controversial in that it conforms to administrative definitions in China, which identify Tibetan autonomous areas at various levels of jurisdiction. The TAR is equivalent to a province, whereas Tibetan areas incorporated into the other provinces are designated as either autonomous prefectures (TAPs) or autonomous counties (TACs). With the exception of some disagreements in the borderlands of Eastern Tibet, the Chinese administrative definitions are almost identical to the definition of Tibet used by the Tibetan Exile Government, and they conform to the areas that Tibetans consider to be Tibet. Most of these highland areas, at average altitudes of well over 3,000 meters, are also clearly differentiated from non-Tibetan lowlands by topography and population density. While the TAR is the administrative area that the PRC government and most of the Western media usually mean when they refer to Tibet, it accounts for just over half of the Tibetan autonomous areas in China and less than half of the total Tibetan population in China. The boundaries of this region were determined by the territory controlled by Lhasa at the time the PRC invaded the eastern part of this territory in 1950 (see the chapter entitled "The People's Liberation Army Invades" in Goldstein 1989: 638–696).

2 Following conventions in the literature on minorities in China, the term "Chinese Muslim" refers to an amalgamation of Muslim groups across China. An important concentration is located in northeast Qinghai and Gansu Provinces, bordering Northeast Tibet. Unlike Uyghurs from Xinjiang, who are Turkic Muslims, the majority of these Muslims are Chinese-speaking.

3 For instance, following the widespread Tibetan protests across China in March 2008, the Dalai Lama reasserted his view that China's policy of resettling Chinese migrants within Tibet amounts to "demographic aggression" and even "cultural genocide" (see VOA 2008). Similar views were echoed by Tibet advocacy organizations in exile and in the West.

4 See the interview with Samdhong Rimpoche, Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile, in Mahalanobis (2003).

5 The Dalai Lama's position on cultural genocide shows little change from previous official exile statements on population transfer and control, as in TGIE (1993, 1996).

6 See Kwok (2008) for a report on a government-organized foreign press conference in Beijing following the Tibetan protests in March 2008, when Tibetan researchers from the China Tibetology Research Centre insisted that claims of population invasion were exaggerated.

7 For instance, in PRC (2001: Question 20), the government argues that after 1951, "helping the Tibetan people to develop their economy and improve their living conditions became the common concern of the central government and the Chinese people, and it is an important facet of China's modernization drive." Later in Question 56, it argues that "with the constant improvement in health care and living standards of Tibetan people, the long stagnant population growth of Tibet has seen a sharp increase." Moreover, in Question 55, it contends that "[t]hese days Han residents in Tibet are mostly technicians, workers, teachers, medical professionals and officials from other provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions of China."

8 PRC (2001: Question 17); "With the support of the central government and people of other areas, Tibet has developed its pillar industries through utilization of its rich resources."

9 For more examples of these official arguments, see PRC (2001: Questions 17, 18, 20, 54, 55, 56, and 58).

10 This irony and its political rationale are discussed in depth by Childs (2008: 214–231).

11 See Ma and Pan (1992); Xi et al. (1992); Anderson et al. (1995); Guo (1996); Ma (1996); Sun and Li (1996); Marshall and Cooke (1997); Iredale et al. (2001); Goldstein et al. (2002); Childs (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008); and Childs et al. (2005).

12 See Fischer 2005: xx–xxii and the methodological appendix for further elaboration.

13 See PD (2002) for an example of these assertions in the official Chinese press.

14 See Childs (2008: 216–221) and Fischer (2008: 133–136 and 142–143) for further discussion.

15 This is not to suggest that Beijing sees population growth as a positive factor for development in Tibet. Rather, from another perspective, it argues that poverty in Tibet is exacerbated by population growth and environmental degradation (e.g., see PRC 2001: Question 22).

16 For instance, an Asian Development Bank report on western China implicitly refers to Tibetans as a “pretransitional” minority (ADB 2003: 268).

17 See Childs (2008: 214–221) for an excellent discussion of historical demographic estimates for the TAR. He adeptly debunks the common hypothesis in the Chinese literature that the Tibetan population was shrinking, or at best stagnant, up to the 1950s because of exceptionally high death rates and low levels of fertility.

18 While the number of Tibetans who died during this period is a subject of contentious debate, there is little doubt that Tibetans suffered disproportionately relative to most other groups in China. There was widespread armed uprising and intense counterinsurgency in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan from 1956 onward, in Qinghai and Gansu from 1958 onward, and in the TAR in 1959–60. For background, mostly focused on the TAR, see Goldstein (1998) and Shakya (1999; 2002: 43). Mortality rates in Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan were also among the highest in the country during the famine of the Great Leap Forward (Yang 1996: 33). Official population records for Qinghai show that the Tibetan population of that province fell by over

100,000 people, or more than 20 percent, between 1957 and 1963 (QSY 1991: 163), although caution must be used with these statistics given their doubtful accuracy.

19 The sustained improvement can be roughly represented by the fact that crude death rates fell below 10 per thousand in the TAR and other western provinces by the mid to late 1960s (see Figure 3 for data on the TAR, and QSY 2005: Table 4-1 for data on Qinghai). On lags with China, life expectancy for all of China (both sexes combined) was 68.6 years in the 1990 census and 71.4 years in the 2000 census, whereas it was 59.6 years and 64.4 years respectively for the TAR (CSY 2007: Table 4-6). UNICEF reported that (official) infant mortality stood at 53 per 1,000 live births in the TAR in 2000, and maternal mortality at over 400 per 100,000 live births, versus 35 per 1,000 and 56 per 100,000 in China overall in 2000 (UN 2004). Unofficially, health workers from several international nongovernmental organizations in the TAR whom I interviewed estimated that rates of infant and maternal mortality were much higher, perhaps double the official figures.

20 These data include urban areas and non-Tibetan populations. Alternatively, Childs (2008) analyzed village-level survey data collected by Goldstein et al. (2002) from an entirely rural Tibetan sample. These data reveal similar patterns, showing a peaking of the TFR at 6.3 in 1986, after which it fell rapidly from 1989 onward. Childs emphasizes the speed of the fertility transition that occurred simultaneously in both the rural areas of the TAR and the exile community; TFRs fell in an almost identical manner, from around 6 in the late 1980s to below replacement by 2000 (*ibid.*: 237–239).

21 It is not clear why the crude birth and death rates for the TAR were so low in 1965. The CBR does not correspond to the official TFRs discussed above, suggesting that these data for the TAR in 1965 are inaccurate and can be disregarded.

22 For an analysis of the latter discourse, see Childs (2008: 221–231).

23 See this argument in PRC (2001: Question 57). For general background on minority family planning policy, see Zhang

(1990); Anon. (1991); Yang and Liu (1992); Yang and Zhu (1993); and Greenhalgh (2003).

24 For examples of these allegations, see TIN (1994) and TSGUK (no date).

25 For instance, official statistics for Qinghai report a sharp drop in the CBR between 1980 and 1985, from 21.1 per thousand to 14.2, but it then increased to 24.9 in 1986 and remained at that level until the late 1990s (QSY 2004: Table 4-1; data not available for 1981–84). The sharp drop in 1985 might reflect an aggressive application of family planning measures in the early 1980s, thus explaining the reports of abuse from the exile community in the 1980s and early 1990s. Alternatively, the data might simply reflect problems of under-reporting.

26 Communications from various contacts working in the area.

27 There has been considerable debate on the conventional allegation that flooding in the lowlands of China or other forms of environmental degradation have been caused by overgrazing in the highland pastoral areas of western China (e.g., see Williams 1997). However, it is generally accepted that agrarian land colonization schemes implemented by the government in Tibetan pastoral areas in the 1960s and 1970s were a failure, causing considerable land degradation, particularly in Qinghai.

28 For instance, agrarian colonization policies were practiced with some success in Kangding (Tib: Dartsedo) in Sichuan as early as the late Qing Dynasty, similar to the situation in Inner Mongolia (Coleman 2002; van Spengen 2002; and Tuttle 2005). As a result, the county now contains a strong rural Han presence. Nonetheless, the population becomes indisputably Tibetan after the first pass west of Kangding Town, with almost no Han in the rural areas (confirmed with local residents during fieldwork in the area in 2004).

29 This observation comes from my field experience with Tibetan refugees in India and Nepal from 1995 to 2001 and from interviews with returnees during fieldwork in Tibet in 2003 and 2004.

30 Iredale et al. (2003) argue that minority populations in China are significantly less

mobile than the Han. Their mobility started to increase in the 1990s, although much later than among the Han.

31 Provincial population statistics do not include resident military populations, which are considerable in both the TAR and Qinghai. For instance, estimates for the military in the TAR in the 1990s ranged anywhere between 40,000 and 200,000 or more (UNPO 1997: 70). Taking an estimate of 130,000 would yield about one soldier for every 20 residents in 2000, versus one for every 4,500 residents in China overall. This large military presence is obviously related to the vast border area of the TAR.

32 China stipulates a *de jure* approach to residency status, meaning that residency is recorded by officially registered status regardless of the amount of time spent in a location, in contrast to standard international definitions, which consider *de facto* residency. The Chinese approach is equivalent to a concept of citizenship, such that a person can reside in a place for years without being considered permanent in the census as long as he or she has not made an official change in status.

33 Although data on ethnicity and residency status are tabulated separately in Tabulation (2002), the residency status of the Han in the TAR can be extrapolated by comparing the total Han count in the 2000 census (158,570) with the population records of nationalities reported in the *Tibet Statistical Yearbook* (i.e., TSY 2005: Table 3-4). While the latter do not indicate any source, they presumably are drawn from the Public Security Department (PSD), which is responsible for residency registration, given that the numbers match those reported in CSY (2002: Table 2-9), which cites the PSD as its data source. If the PSD data for 2000 are compared to the 2000 census tabulation on residency status (Tabulation 2002: Table 2-2), the PSD count for the TAR (2.51 million) falls in between the permanently residing population (2.39 million) and the population either permanently residing or residing for more than six months but registered elsewhere (2.587 million). In other words, the PSD data probably use a cutoff criterion that lies somewhere between long-term temporary residency and permanent residency. These (apparently) PSD data

in TSY (2005) are broken down by ethnicity, showing a more or less unchanging population of Han from 1985 to 2000, at 72,122 in 2000. Accordingly, we can presume that this is the population of permanently or long-term resident Han in the TAR, and that the remaining 86,488 Han counted by the 2000 census were temporary residents.

34 The PSD data discussed in the previous endnote show an increase in the Han population count after 2000, up to 93,306 in 2004. This is still far below the Han count in the 2000 census. Correspondingly, with the logic of the previous note, we can presume that most of the large increase in Han migration since 2000, as noted by most observers, is composed of temporary migrants. Notably, when government officials claim that the Han population in the TAR has barely increased in recent years, as they often do in foreign press conferences, they seem to be referring to these PSD data. See some mention of this in Ma and Lhundup (2006: 7).

35 See Zhou and Ma (2003). For an alternative perspective, see Goodkind (2004).

36 There are some arguments for using the original census tabulation data for

this purpose; several scholars and officials in Qinghai suggested to me that the census adjustments in Qinghai in part resulted from negotiated political considerations.

37 All ethnic shares remained constant from 2000 to 2004, suggesting that data had been adjusted simply on the basis of the 2000 census.

38 See Zhang (1990); Anon. (1991); Yang and Liu (1992); Yang and Zhu (1993); and Attané and Courbage (2000). Most of these studies focus on minorities located in central or eastern China, such as the Manchu or Mongolians, that have been much more assimilated into Han mainstream culture, thereby facilitating switching of ethnic status.

39 The annualized population change of Tibetans in the TAR measured by the two censuses is quite low in comparison to change among minorities in the other provinces, particularly Qinghai, and it contrasts with the high rates of natural increase in the TAR, which were the highest of all Chinese provinces. These results might reflect out-migration or simply measurement errors across the two censuses.

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