

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

### Brief History of Regional Development

#### A: *The Hengduan Mountains*

The documentary history of the Hengduan Mountain Area goes back more than 2,000 years. During the *Qin* Dynasty (221-206 B.C.), the whole area was inhabited by the ancient *Qiang*, *Di*, and other nomadic people. In the early Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-9 A.D.) and *Qing* (1644-1911 A.D.) dynasties, the whole Hengduan Mountain Area became a part of the Chinese Empire. The Imperial Government had a "divide and rule" policy, and the region was divided into numerous small tribes and districts, with feudal chieftains ruling generation after generation, resulting in the stagnation of political, economic, and social development.

During the Kuomintang Period (1911-1949 A.D.) the situation did not change and the harmful "divide and rule" policy continued. What is more, numerous civil wars were waged and the common people (including the *Han*) were ruthlessly exploited. Consequently, economic and social development slowed down considerably. For example, the Tibetans lived under a feudal slavery system and the *Yi* under a brutal slavery system for a very long period of time. Agriculture was mainly characterised by shifting cultivation and very primitive tools (such as wooden ploughs) were used. Animal husbandry was even more primitive, depending entirely on natural grasslands where flocks often ran wild.

Since 1950, minority peoples have been given more political and economic power and one autonomous region (Xizang) and three autonomous prefectures (Garze, Aba, and Deqen) in Tibet; one autonomous prefecture each for the *She* (Liangshan), the *Bai* (Dali), and the *Lisu* (Nu Jiang); and one autonomous county each for the Tibetans (*Muli*), the *Qiang* (*Maowen*), the *Yi* (*Ninglang*), the *Dulong* (*Gongshan*), and the *Naxi* (*Lijiang*) have been established. The slavery system was entirely abolished in 1958.

Food production in Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture increased from 100 *catty/mu* (1 kg = 2 *catty*, 1 hectare = 15 *mu*) in 1950 to 190 *catty/mu* in 1960. The total number of flocks in Aba (Tibetan) Autonomous Prefecture increased by 70 per cent from 1950 to 1960. Until the present, apart from the 10 years (1966-1976) during which the "Cultural Revolution" took place, the area has continued to make great progress.

#### B: *The Qilian Mountains*

The Qilian Mountain Area has been a melting pot and fierce battlefield for farmers and pastoralists alike ever since the 2nd Century B.C. According to available historical documents, nomadic peoples lived in the area from 1,134-220 B.C. It became the stronghold of the powerful

*Huns* from 220-121 B.C.<sup>4</sup>, and they made good use of the lush montane grassland. Hence, when the Chinese took over the area in 121 B.C., the *Huns* bitterly complained that "by losing our *Qilian Mountains*, our flocks prosper no more".

Farming was started in the broad Huang Shui and Datong river valleys as early as the 3rd century B.C. by the ancient *Chang*. Farmlands greatly expanded after the Chinese took over both the Hexi Corridor and the *Qilian Mountain Area* in the 2nd century B.C. The great divide of the Sun Moon Mountain Line (just east of Qinghai Lake) between the cultivated and pastoral land (as well as between the oceanic and inland drainage systems) was at that time.

From the 4th to the 7th centuries, the partly farming and partly pastoral *Tayuwen* tribes established a kingdom in the *Qilian Mountain Area*. Then, from 609-681 A.D., the Chinese army took over the area and farming again expanded in the broad valleys of the Eastern *Qilian Section*. However, 80 years later, the whole area was again conquered by the *Tu Bo*, and farmlands were restricted to small patches in broad valleys.

During the *Song Dynasty* (960-1126 A.D.), irrigated agriculture greatly expanded in the broad valleys of the Eastern *Qilian Section*. During the *Yuan Dynasty*, the farming area and the pastoral area were administered separately. In the early *Ming Dynasty*, farmland greatly increased once more and many new settlers, including *Han*, *Hui*, and *Tu*, were recruited from neighbouring areas. At the end of the *Ming Dynasty*, there were about 0.8 million *mu* of farmland in the Eastern *Qilian Section*, of which, about 0.7 million *mu* were concentrated in the Huang Shui Valley.

During the late *Qing Dynasty*, farmlands started to spread into the hills and low mountains in the Eastern *Qilian Section*. During the same period, the pastoral Mongols, who invaded the area during the *Ming Dynasty* and compelled the Tibetans to retreat south of the Yellow River, were gradually replaced by returning Tibetans and other farming peoples in the Eastern *Qilian Section*. Again, during the Kuomintang Period, agricultural reclamation accelerated in the Eastern *Qilian Section*, although the Middle and Western *Qilian sections* still remained mainly pastoral.

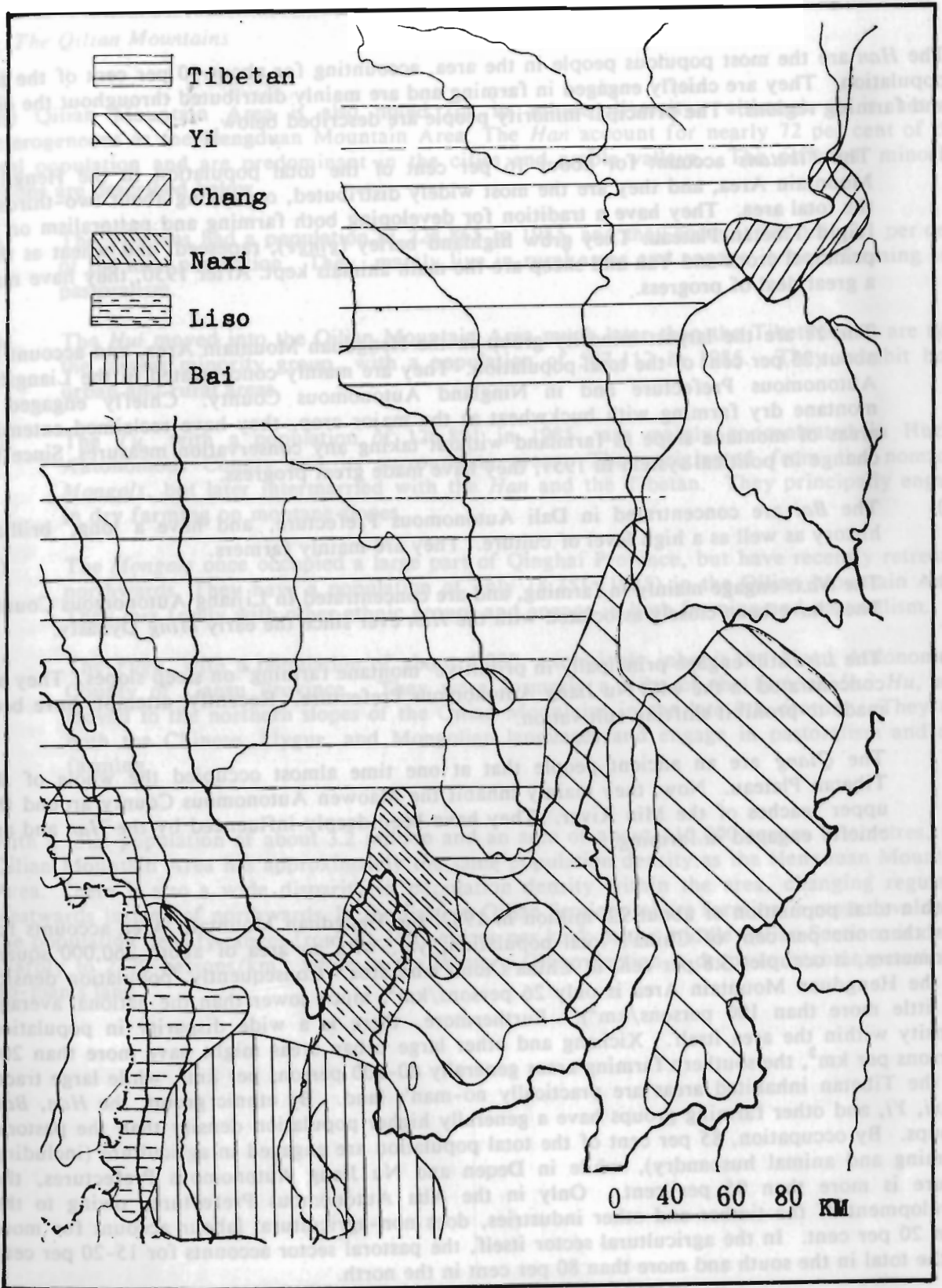
Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, both farming and herding have made appreciable progress. Up to 1980, farmland increased more than 30 per cent and the effective irrigated area (2.4 million *mu*) nearly five times. Consequently, total production of food (more than 1.8 billion *catty*) more than doubled.

## Ethnicity and Population

### A: The Hengduan Mountains

The current distribution of ethnic groups in the Hengduan Mountain Area is a result of a complicated historical evolution that has lasted over 2,000 years. It is characterised by wide diversity (Fig. 9) and very conspicuous vertical zonation (with Tibetan and *Liso* located at the highest altitudes, followed by the *Shi*, the *Han*, the *Bai*, the *Naxi*, and the *Tai* in that order). The physical environment has had a great deal of influence on the various ethnic groups, and, in turn, their different cultural mores have had a great impact on agricultural development.

4. The *Huns* moved later (about the 5th century A.D.) to central Europe and founded modern Hungary.



**Fig. 9: Distribution of Principal Minority Groups in the Hengduan Mountain Area**  
 Source: Zhao Songqiao et al.

The *Han* are the most populous people in the area, accounting for about 50 per cent of the total population. They are chiefly engaged in farming and are mainly distributed throughout the cities and farming regions. The principal minority people are described below.

- 1) The *Tibetans* account for about 16 per cent of the total population in the Hengduan Mountain Area, and they are the most widely distributed, occupying about two-thirds of the total area. They have a tradition for developing both farming and pastoralism on the frigid Tibetan Plateau. They grow highland barley (*ginge*), rapeseed, and wheat as their principal crops and Yak and sheep are the main animals kept. After 1950, they have made a great deal of progress.
- 2) The *Yi* are the largest minority group in the Hengduan Mountain Area, and account for about 23 per cent of the total population. They are mainly concentrated in the Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture and in Ningland Autonomous County. Chiefly engaged in montane dry farming with buckwheat as the major crop, they have reclaimed extensive areas of montane slope as farmland without taking any conservation measures. Since the change in political system in 1957, they have made great progress.
- 3) The *Bai* are concentrated in Dali Autonomous Prefecture, and have a long, brilliant history as well as a high level of culture. They are mainly farmers.
- 4) The *Naxi* engage mainly in farming, and are concentrated in Lijiang Autonomous County. They have been closely associated with the *Han* ever since the early *Ming* Dynasty.
- 5) The *Lisu* still engage principally in primitive "montane farming" on steep slopes. They are concentrated in the wild Nu Jiang Autonomous Prefecture. Recently, attempts have been made to prohibit shifting cultivation.
- 6) The *Qiang* are an ancient people that at one time almost occupied the whole of the Tibetan Plateau. Now, they mainly inhabit the Maowen Autonomous County around the upper reaches of the Min River. They have been deeply influenced by the *Han* and are chiefly engaged in farming.

With a total population of about 9.5 million in 1982, the Hengduan Mountain Area accounts for less than one per cent of China's total population; yet, with an area of about 360,000 square kilometres, it occupies 3.8 per cent of China's total land area. Consequently, population density in the Hengduan Mountain Area is only 26 persons/km<sup>2</sup>, much lower than the national average (a little more than 100 persons/km<sup>2</sup>). Furthermore, there is a wide disparity in population density within the area itself. Xichang and other large urban areas might have more than 200 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, the southern farming areas generally 60-200 persons per km<sup>2</sup>, while large tracts of the Tibetan inhabited areas are practically no-man's land. By ethnic group, the *Han*, *Bai*, *Naxi*, *Yi*, and other farming groups have a generally higher population density than the pastoral groups. By occupation, 85 per cent of the total population are engaged in agriculture (including farming and animal husbandry), while in Deqen and Nu Jiang Autonomous Prefectures, the figure is more than 95 per cent. Only in the Aba Autonomous Prefecture, owing to the development of the timber and other industries, does non-agricultural labour account for more than 20 per cent. In the agricultural sector itself, the pastoral sector accounts for 15-20 per cent of the total in the south and more than 80 per cent in the north.

## B: The Qilian Mountains

The Qilian Mountain Area is also noted for its ethnic diversity, although it is not as heterogeneous as the Hengduan Mountain Area. The *Han* account for nearly 72 per cent of the total population and are predominant in the cities and arable valleys. The principal minority groups are described below.

- 1) The Tibetans had a population of 228,865 in 1985, and they account for only 7.1 per cent of the total population. They mainly live in rural areas and engage in both farming and pastoralism.
- 2) The *Hui* moved into the Qilian Mountain Area much later than the Tibetans but are now the largest minority group, with a population of 507,112 in 1985. They inhabit both urban and rural areas.
- 3) The *Tu*, with a population of 126,881 in 1985, are mainly concentrated in Huzhu Autonomous County and its surrounding areas. They originated from the nomadic *Mongols*, but later intermarried with the *Han* and the Tibetan. They principally engage in dry farming on montane slopes.
- 4) The *Mongols* once occupied a large part of Qinghai Province, but have recently retreated northwards. They have a population of only 18,351 (1985) in the Qilian Mountain Area. They mix freely with other ethnic groups and engage in both farming and pastoralism.
- 5) The *Yugu*, with a population of about 4,000, exclusively inhabit the Yugu Autonomous County of Gansu Province. They were formerly a tribe of the famous *Hui Hu*, and moved to the northern slopes of the Qilian Mountains in the late 9th century. They use both the Chinese, Uygur, and Mongolian languages and engage in pastoralism and dry farming.

With a total population of about 3.2 million and an area of about 110,000 square kilometres, the Qilian Mountain Area has approximately the same population density as the Hengduan Mountain Area. There is also a wide disparity in population density within the area, changing regularly westwards instead of northwards. In the Eastern Qilian Section, where farming is most developed, the population density ranges from 80-180 persons per km<sup>2</sup>; in the middle Qilian Section, it drops sharply to 2-20 persons/km<sup>2</sup>; while in the Western Qilian Section it drops to become practically no-man's land.