



Chinese Migrations: The Movement of People, Goods, and Ideas over Four Millennia (Critical Issues in World and International History)

Diana Lary

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The current waves of migration sweeping the Chinese world may seem like new phenomena, the outcome of modernization and industrialization. However, this concise and readable book convincingly shows that contemporary movements are just the most recent stage in a long history of migration, both within China and beyond its borders. Distinguished historian Diana Lary traces the continuous expansion and contraction of the Chinese state over more than four millennia. Periods of expansion, which involved huge movements of people, have been interspersed with periods of inward-turning stasis. Following a chronological framework, the author discusses the migrations themselves and the recurrent themes within them. We see migration as a broad spectrum of movement, from short-term and short-range to permanent and long-range, and as a powerful vehicle for the transfer of commodities, culture, religion, and political influence.

The Confucian tradition treated migration as undesirable. It praised the delights of staying at home: “A thousand days at home are good, half a day away is hard.” Lary argues that, despite this view, migration has been a key element in the evolution of Chinese society, one that the state disparages and encourages at the same time. Her book will be compelling for all readers who want to understand the context for the present internal and international migrations that have changed the face of China itself and its international relations.

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