

UC Berkeley

Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review

Title

Xinjiang Studies: The Third Wave

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7cv2n88m>

Journal

Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 1(21)

Author

Perdue, Peter C.

Publication Date

2016-12-01

CROSS-CURRENTS



EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

REVIEW ESSAY

Xinjiang Studies: The Third Wave

Peter C. Perdue, Yale University

Kwangmin Kim. *Borderland Capitalism: Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. 312 pp. \$65 (cloth).

Rian Thum. *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. 336 pp. \$40 (cloth).

David J. Brophy. *Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. 368 pp. \$40 (cloth).

Judd Kinzley. *Production and Power in China's Far West: Gold, Wool, and Oil in the Transformation of Xinjiang, 1893–1965*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, forthcoming.

Justin M. Jacobs. *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016. 320 pp. \$50 (cloth).

Tom Cliff. *Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016. 280 pp. \$90 (cloth); \$30 (paper/e-book).

Abstract

During the twentieth century, Western scholars and explorers of Xinjiang have changed perspective in response to political influence, accessibility, and new historical methodologies. Six new books on Xinjiang connect the region more closely to world historical trends, follow the tracks of people who crossed borders, and give greater attention to the framework of local actors. Summarizing and comparing these new approaches, this review argues that we should consider all the peoples of China in relation to their place in the wider world.

Introduction

As the publication of these six books shows, the field of Xinjiang studies has flourished in recent years. A new generation of Western scholars has published a wealth of scholarship based on new sources and ethnographic research. Both in the news media and in academic research, Xinjiang is no longer considered a neglected, remote area. For better or worse, Xinjiang is, and always has been, connected to China and the world beyond China. The primary goal of most scholars of Han China in recent years has been to place China in the broader world, and in light of this new scholarship on Xinjiang, we see that it, too, deserves to be placed in the context of recent global developments. Despite some resistance, Chinese history—the history of *all* the peoples of China—has become world history.

We can distinguish three waves of Western interest in Xinjiang during the twentieth century. In the first wave, from the 1910s to 1949, travelers, adventurers, diplomats, and cultural prospectors crisscrossed the region in search of ancient cultural materials, exotic peoples, and the experience of thrilling and harsh landscapes. Some of them got involved in the turbulent world of warlord politics. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty, Xinjiang—under warlord and Nationalist rule—was opened to foreigners, some of whom who could converse with local leaders. They have left us a treasure trove of anecdotes, adventure stories, and, in the case of Owen Lattimore, lasting insights.

The second wave of interest, after the victory of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, was an academic enterprise conducted mostly from afar. Several pioneering scholars, most notably Joseph Fletcher, delved into multiple sources to construct a picture of Xinjiang as part of Qing expansion, one of the major Inner Asian regions that first came under the rule of a dynasty centered in Beijing. After the archives in Beijing were opened to Western scholars in the 1990s, a few historians developed research programs inspired by frontier studies in China and the West. They stressed the importance of China's frontiers for its historical development, as did Lattimore, but they relied almost exclusively on texts rather than on-the-ground experience.

The third wave has just now produced its major works, but it is a product of research done since the turn of the twenty-first century, when access to archives became more limited and fieldwork more difficult. Many of the scholars in this third wave thus rely extensively on non-Chinese materials, including those written in Russian, Manchu, Uyghur, Turkish, and Persian. Instead of placing Xinjiang squarely on the Qing frontier, they explore its other cultural

orientations—toward Russia, the Middle East, and the other empires of the twentieth century. They put Xinjiang at the center of Eurasia, rather than on the periphery of China, and they place strong emphasis on the autonomy and power of actors in Xinjiang, rather than on their subordination to the Chinese state. Because of these scholars' work, we can now see the peoples of Xinjiang as agents in their own right, doing their best to shape and respond to the world around them in all directions. China is only one part of their story, and not always the dominant influence.

In the first half of the twentieth century, although Xinjiang was open to foreigners, few people took an interest in the region, which seemed impossibly remote. The greatest obstacle for these travelers was getting there. They told stories of arduous journeys by camel train across deserts and steppes, featuring narrow escapes from bandits and soldiers, but also stories of fellowship around the campfires and in the caravansery with their Mongol and Muslim partners.

Explorers such as Sven Hedin, Aurel Stein, and Albert van le Coq, who entered the Tarim Desert and elsewhere looking for Buddhist caves and the lost cities of the Silk Road, were not really interested in contemporary Xinjiang, but they still left revealing incidental comments. Owen Lattimore was the premier explorer-scholar of the time. He and his wife, Eleanor, described their remarkable honeymoon journey in *The Desert Road to Turkestan* and Eleanor's *Turkestan Reunion*. Owen later wrote frequently about Xinjiang, with a focus on its geopolitical centrality in Asia, in writings such as *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia*, articles written while he was editor of *Pacific Affairs*, and essays in his collected papers, *Studies in Frontier History*. Lattimore's primary interest, however, was in Mongolia, and he tended to view Xinjiang as a variant of the other frontier regions bordering China (E. Lattimore 1934; O. Lattimore 1929, 1950, 1962).

Other travelers to Xinjiang were a mixed lot, including some who engaged actively in politics and others who went for adventure alone. Aitchen K. Wu (Wu Aitchen), author of *Turkistan Tumult* ([1940] 1984), earned a PhD in 1930, with his study of relations between China and the Soviet Union, and served for a time as a Nationalist official in Xinjiang. He tells a dramatic story of warlord intrigue, ethnic uprisings, and Russian influence. Peter Fleming's *News from Tartary* (1936) is entirely different. Fleming—an insouciant young Englishman, the elder brother of Ian Fleming of James Bond fame—went to Xinjiang on a whim, knowing no Chinese, and treated much of his experience as a joke. He did, however, meet some of the

important actors in Xinjiang politics. Owen Lattimore commented that Fleming “is in fact an inspired amateur whose quick appreciation, especially of people, and original turn of phrase, echoing P. G. Wodehouse in only a very distant and cultured way, have created a unique kind of travel book,” but that his political analysis “does not make sense” (1936, 605–606). One other source worth mentioning is the account by John Hall Paxton, American consul to Xinjiang from 1946 to 1949, who wrote an extensive unpublished account of his experiences, now held in Yale’s Manuscripts and Archives collection (Paxton 1946–1949).

These accounts provide vivid primary source material depicting Xinjiang politics and society in the early twentieth century. However, except for Lattimore’s work, they did not found a scholarly literature. Only much later, in the 1970s, did Western scholars begin to develop a substantial academic historical study of the region.

The Second Wave: Academic Research from Abroad

Joseph K. Fletcher Jr. founded the modern academic study of Xinjiang in the West with his two classic chapters published in the *Cambridge History of China* in 1978 (Fletcher 1978a; 1978b). Using an immense range of sources in many languages, Fletcher reconstructed the institutional structures of Qing rule, the economic connections of Xinjiang to the east and west, and the response of the Qing to Russian advances in the nineteenth century. He treated Xinjiang as part of the broader Inner Asian orientation of the Qing; at the time, he was one of the few scholars to do so. His stress on the importance of Manchu documents for studying the Qing led students in his seminar such as myself to many discoveries about frontier affairs, including information that was not found in Chinese-language documents. Besides Fletcher and his students, Andrew Forbes, a young Englishman who was both traveler and scholar, kept the link between exploration and historical scholarship alive in his *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia* (1986).

Fletcher’s tragic death in 1984 cut off his promising work, but students inspired by him carried on his efforts to investigate Qing rule in Xinjiang and Inner Asia. Others also conducted ethnographic research and historical research on the borderlands. They carried on the Lattimore perspective, both geopolitical and environmental, combining it with archival research in Beijing in Manchu and Chinese documents, or fieldwork in one oasis town. Much of this work culminated in separate books published in the last two decades, and in *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim*

Borderland, edited by S. Frederick Starr in 2004 (Rudelson 1997; Millward 1998; Starr 2004; Perdue 2005; Millward 2007; Dautcher 2009; Bovington 2010). Because the Chinese government interpreted the Starr volume as a political effort to split off Xinjiang from the PRC, the contributors to the volume have had difficulties getting visas to China ever since. This group, while well aware of Xinjiang's many transnational connections, still placed primary emphasis on the relationship of the region and its peoples to the Chinese state and the Chinese nation. We recognized that the Qing conquest, which was unprecedented in scale and duration of dynastic rule over Central Eurasia, drastically changed institutional structures, economic relations, and ethnic interactions both in the frontier regions and in the core of the empire. Since the Chinese nation-state in the twentieth century inherited a substantial part of the Qing frontiers (except for independent Mongolia), anyone studying Xinjiang had to address in some fashion the nature of the region's relationship to the Chinese state from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. The drawback of this approach, however, was that it portrayed Xinjiang as a dependent periphery of the center in Beijing, and it still viewed most events through the lens of central government documents, in Manchu or Chinese.

This new group of scholars gives Xinjiang and its people more autonomy from the "China" question and places greater attention on Xinjiang's place in the transnational and global processes of Eurasia. They all insist that stereotypes of victimization, unification, resistance, dependency, or harmonious cooperation cannot capture the complex responses and initiatives of peoples of the region, whether they are Han officials, local elites, sheikhs, *begs* (local elites), or peasant farmers. Each of them views the interactions among such peoples through a particular lens, which I will briefly summarize before turning to common themes.

The Uyghur Experience under Qing and Nationalist Chinese Rule

Three of these books focus primarily on the experience of the Turkic Muslims subjected to the authority of the Qing dynasty since the mid-eighteenth century, and how they began to construct a national consciousness in the twentieth century. Kwangmin Kim, Rian Thum, and David Brophy approach their subject from economic, religious, and political frameworks, respectively. They use different sources, but share certain common themes.

Kwangmin Kim, Borderland Capitalism: Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market

Kwangmin Kim (University of Colorado, Boulder) recounts, in unprecedented detail, the economic and social history of the oasis communities of Xinjiang during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the point of view of local actors. Starting in the sixteenth century, landed elites in the oases profited from exporting agricultural and mineral products along the well-established caravan routes. When the Qing Empire clashed with the Zunghar Mongols, Muslim leaders decided to ally with the Qing against the Zunghars' coercive policies. After the conclusion of the wars in the mid-eighteenth century, Qing administration depended on close collaboration with these *begs* in the oasis towns. The *begs* engaged in active programs of agrarian capitalist development, using their local power to expand landholdings and hire wage laborers for local and international markets. They were not older elites preserving noble privileges, but new men who aimed to take advantage of commercial opportunities under the indirect rule of the empire.

For example, Emin Khwaja, a descendant of a Sufi lineage in Turfan, surrendered to the Qing in 1731 to avoid forced labor impositions from the Zunghars and moved the population of the oasis to Guazhou, closer to the Qing interior and under its military protection. There, he opened up new lands, profiting from his development projects while supplying grain to Qing troops. He returned to Turfan in 1761 with Qing backing and continued his profitable activities based on control of land and immigrant labor. The Qing military presence stimulated the economy, especially by introducing currency into markets to buy military supplies. Chinese merchants brought tea, silk, and rhubarb to the oases in exchange for jade, grain and animal products.

Local *begs* also developed mines under Qing supervision, but they used this authority to gain even greater profits for themselves. For example, Udui, the governor of Yarkand from 1760 to 1778, dominated enterprises of tax farming, livestock ranching, mining, and farming, and relied on Chinese merchant loans to expand his operations. He was also heavily involved in the massive jade-smuggling ring led by the Manchu military governor Gao Pu in collaboration with Han and local merchants. The *begs'* authority depended on the support of Qing military administrators, who delegated local powers to and received tax payments from them. In the

competition for water, Xinjiang's scarcest resource, villagers tried to resist the encroachment of local *begs*, but Qing authorities backed the elites, suppressing uprisings and lawsuits.

The oasis towns prospered under this joint administration, but this form of capitalism, like capitalist agriculture elsewhere in the world, uprooted people from the land and generated discontent. The uprooted agricultural laborers repeatedly allied with nomadic pastoralists to raid and conquer the towns of the region.

The Jahangir uprisings of the 1830s took their support from refugees fleeing the demanding pressure of the agrarian oases for the relative freedom of the Tianshan Mountains. In the mountains, a land where migrants of many ethnicities mingled to escape state pressure, leaders like Jahangir and others gained power from raiding the oases and merchant caravans. After Qing forces restored control, a new period of prosperity based on the *beg* capitalists ensued in oases like Kashgar. Here, the Qing military expanded its garrison farms, but it needed capital investment from the *begs* to make them profitable. Qing officials allowed the *begs* to purchase official ranks and honors, and in return they yielded their authority over land development. But the *begs'* drive for commercial gain again alienated rural agricultural laborers, instigating new wars that destroyed the economy of the region in the 1840s.

Qing forces could suppress these resistance movements effectively until the mid-nineteenth century, when global economic forces and the Qing Empire's weakness in the face of internal rebellions undermined its power. Economic losses during the Opium Wars forced the Qing to discontinue silver shipments to the military in Xinjiang, cutting off the subsidy that had fueled growth. The Qing encouraged rapid expansion of copper mining to produce local coinage, but this set off inflation, further riots, and the disruption of trade. New Qing tax levies alienated the *begs*, as the agrarian structure polarized into a large number of propertyless laborers and a small number of landowners. When Yaqub Beg invaded Xinjiang in 1864, relying on his base of mountain warriors, he destroyed the bases of oasis capitalism and cut off the region from the China market. Xinjiang through the late nineteenth century began to economically reorient itself westward, toward Central Eurasia and Russia, but it suffered economic depression and decline until the end of the century.

Kim stresses the active role of local oasis elites in driving economic development by energetic pursuit of global markets and mobilization of wage and bonded labor. They gained great wealth, while the burdened laborers suffered or fled to resistant mountain communities.

Kim uses primary sources never before consulted by other scholars, especially the rich collection of memorials on frontier affairs in the Manchu language, along with Chinese, Russian, Turkic, and Japanese materials. Deftly combining the biographies of individual Turkic merchants and elites with analysis of the broader socioeconomic trends that shaped their actions, he gives us the first truly global history of Xinjiang on the local level, explaining how the processes that connected the world economy in the eighteenth century had repercussions in Central Eurasia.

Although Kim's study contains remarkable details about Xinjiang, it also effectively embraces a global scale. We learn new ways of looking at modern China, Central Eurasia, and the history of world capitalism, reminding us once again of the vital role of frontiers in the development of empires and nation-states. Central Eurasian historians will find here a strong argument that this region, far from being an isolated backwater, was an active player in global economic affairs, and the interactions between the British, Russian, and Qing empires depended in important ways on the people in this central zone where all three empires met. Historians of capitalism will find that capitalism was indeed global, and that agrarian capitalism had common features in many parts of the world: it was not a unique feature of European civilization, and its influence extended across both continental Eurasia and maritime regions.

Rian Thum, The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History

In his study, Rian Thum (Loyola University), examines the Uyghur view of their own history as seen in manuscript traditions, shrine rituals, and pilgrimages from the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries. Thum's approach takes us beyond, or outside, the official Chinese framework of integration of Xinjiang into the Qing through the PRC period. It brilliantly integrates oral history, manuscript analysis, and ritual observance, extending the cultural connections of the Uyghurs of Altishahr in southern Xinjiang to Central Eurasian, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian historical writing, while recognizing how they turned these broad cultural currents into a localized conception of their place in history.

Manuscripts called *tazkirah*, which combined history, hagiography, and religious doctrines, circulated among literate elites, and were recited at specific shrines of revered religious figures. They joined with pilgrimages to define a specific kind of cultural practice. The modern age of mass printing, nationalism, and tourism destroyed most of this tradition, but it still has left its traces in the experience of modern Uyghurs. This culture was not exclusively

nationalist, ethnic, religious, or geographical: it spanned distances ranging across the Middle East and China, and languages including Persian, Arabic, and Turkish, with influences from Mongolian and Chinese. By focusing on historiography as a cultural technology, rather than as a narrative of politics or religious doctrines, Thum brings to light a distinctive, alternative version of history and enables us to see it in its own terms. In the words of Nile Green, historian of Central Asia, “This is Uyghur history as everyman’s history” (2014).

Compiling tales of heroic saints and warriors from all over Central Eurasia who ended up being buried in Altishahr, the *tazkirah* of Altishahr were a new genre of story that responded to the situation of these people under Qing rule. They transformed these stories into versions that addressed the sites where the texts were recited. Siyavush, for example, the hero of the epic poem by the tenth-century Persian poet Firdawsi, was buried in southern Xinjiang, where many pilgrims came to worship him. In the original tale, he fought against the pagan people of “Turan,” assumed to be Turks, but in the Uyghur version, the king of Turan was a Buddhist who ruled from Beijing.

As the texts were read aloud at shrine festivals, other storytellers, schools, and copyists transmitted them to wide audiences, both literate and illiterate. They formed the core of a community history of the people of Altishahr. These histories created an “imagined community” not on the basis of print capitalism, but on the basis of oral recitation and the mobility of pilgrims, who transmitted the shared culture through the region. The shrine festivals, often held in the remote desert, attracted people of many different classes and origins, while the texts tied heroic figures of the entire Central Eurasian region to a specific place: their site of burial. In contrast to earlier ethnographers, who regarded the oases as isolated from one another and considered the status of belonging to one oasis (e.g., Turfan-liq) to be the dominant form of identification, Thum argues that a regional Altishahr identity had equal significance with that of locality, or trade guild. Although the term “Uyghur” did not appear in print until 1911, the people of Altishahr in the nineteenth century embraced a wider conception of social horizons than that of a bounded ethnic group, even though they did not express their identity in the coherent, homogenized form of a nation.

The *tazkirah*’s special form of historical practice, embedded in local Uyghur society, could not survive the storms of the twentieth century. As the Jadidists, Islamic reformers from Central Asia, penetrated Xinjiang’s schools and literate culture, they introduced the new concept

of secular history as a distinct mode of education. Uyghur nationalism in its own right originated in intellectual groups in Russia to the north and Kashgar to the south, but only slowly made an impact in Altishahr. In the 1930s, newspapers introduced the full-fledged concept of nationalism, strongly influenced by pan-Turkism. The Han governors of Xinjiang suppressed the print industry, however, and the PRC dealt the final blow by shutting down shrines and confiscating the *tazkirah* texts. The Uyghur historical tradition, however, continued to flourish in the reform period, in the form of long biographical novels. Although these were no longer connected to shrine festivals and open reading, their style still showed traces of the heroic *tazkirah* practices. In Thum's view, the *tazkirah* have given Uyghur nationalist historiography a special flavor suited to its location within a broader Central Eurasian culture. They provided the foundations for a Uyghur cultural practice independent of the Chinese state and rooted in premodern textual, social, and religious practices.

Unlike in Kim's analysis, the Chinese state is very distant during most of Thum's story. The Qing state never appears in the *tazkirah*, and the stories focus on the exploits of local heroes, not the *begs* who were delegated authority by the Qing state. Yet the leading *begs* of the oases did sponsor the compilation of *tazkirah*, and they were undoubtedly present at the same shrine festivals. And the Qing did play a role in the construction of the *tazkirah*, because its form of indirect rule shaped how the writers could tell their stories. They abandoned stories of independent dynastic leaders, warrior Khans who dominated vast spaces. Instead, they spoke of heroes who became local leaders within the Qing system of limited autonomy. Thum's account of the reshaping of history to accommodate the conditions of subjecthood resembles Johan Elverskog's description of how Mongolian historians in the nineteenth century changed their historical accounts from heroic tales of Chinggis Khan to the local affairs of Mongolian banners (Elverskog 2006).

Kim portrays relationships of alienation and exploitation between the *beg* capitalists and the local population, but Thum gives us a richer picture of cultural and social interaction, at least at times of pilgrimage. Although the *tazkirah* do not refer to daily life and were not intended to be accurate social historical accounts, they provide access in an unusually rich form to the imaginative world of the people of the oases, as they evoked models from the past to guide their present actions.

Both authors reject the concept of oases as isolated, but they differ substantially in the kinds of wider linkages they draw. Where Kim portrays the *beg* capitalists as linked to global markets through the Qing state, the authors of the manuscript tradition act in an Islamic and Persian world of culture, unconnected to the world economy. Kim uses a rather undifferentiated concept of “global capitalism,” while Thum refers to more specific connections to places in the Central Eurasian cultural world.

We seem to have two distinctive, almost unrelated perspectives on Uyghur culture in the oases—one economic and global, one civilizational and regional. There was, however, a connection between pilgrimages to shrines and the oasis economies. In Han China as in Xinjiang, pilgrimages stimulated and followed trade routes, and shrines brought together ritualists alongside bazaar marketeers.

Even though there was no conflict between the activities of *tazkirah* readers and market traders, their motivations differed. Kim’s actors aimed for profit as pure economic actors, but they did not have social roles in the community. Relying on Chinese and Manchu sources primarily, Kim gives us a view of the officials who interacted with the *begs* as part of an administrative and economic elite, but these Qing officials knew little about the daily life of the common people, and they had little interest in Muslim culture. Regarding the *begs* as merely exploiters of agrarian laborers, based only on Qing official sources, seems to me to be too simplistic. Thum’s sources, by contrast, look at the cultural imaginary generated by writers, readers, and participants in the worship of saints, but say nothing about commercial relations. These sources, too, do not inform us directly about social life, but they indicate that a complex intersection of commerce, travel, and religious worship united both elites and commoners.

David J. Brophy, Uyghur Nation: Reform and Revolution on the Russia-China Frontier

David Brophy (University of Sydney) begins his study of Uyghur nationalism where Kwangmin Kim leaves off, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, giving us a view from the border of the contradictory sources of Uyghur national consciousness. It originated among Turkic intellectuals in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Some influences came from Russia, based on Stalinist criteria of national construction, or on revolutionary internationalism, aiming to spread the Bolshevik model among Muslims to the semi-colonized world. But more significant were strains of pan-Turkism and the modernizing version of Islam known as the Jadidist

movement. The activists were concentrated in two sites: Taranchis, in the north, in Semireche, Russia; and Kashgaris, in the south. Brophy's story runs from the 1870s to the 1930s, when the official Stalinist nationality model was finally put in place in Soviet Central Asia.

Brophy's great contribution is to show how Uyghurs themselves created a vision of a national community. Many other analysts have looked to the Soviet Union as the primary source of nationalist ideology, but Brophy argues that "the Soviets created the conditions for the emergence of the Uyghur nation, but there is no evidence that they were invested in the project themselves" (18). Russian influence was transmitted through Central Asian Muslim actors, not simply by the Russian/Soviet state.

He also shows that there was substantial continuity from the late Qing dynasty through the mid-twentieth century. The *aqsaqals*, local elite representatives who dealt with Russian and Qing officials, played the role of the *begs* in the early Qing. They made profits for themselves by mediating cross-border trade, while negotiating legal and social connections with the imperial states around them. Vali Bay, for example, a Kashgari whose commercial interests were centered in Ghulja in the Ili Valley, enriched himself by selling Russian grain to the Qing during the restoration of Qing rule in the 1880s. The *aqsaqals* also acted as consular representatives for Russian interests in Xinjiang, mimicking the pattern established in treaty ports on the coast. At the same time, Kashgari laborers migrated westward to work in Russia, creating links between southern Xinjiang and Russian Turkestan. As Xinjiang shifted its orientation westward, these Turkic actors constructed the ties that positioned the region within competing global empires. In this sense, Brophy supports Kim's concept of Xinjiang as a crossroads network, not a series of isolated oases. But he gives us a richer picture of the *aqsaqals'* roles, as they acted not just for local gain but as internationally oriented agents.

In the twentieth century, the Jadidist movement for new schools arrived in Xinjiang, at a time when Ottoman reformism stimulated efforts by Muslims in Russia and Qing China to introduce modern educational methods. It did not progress far, but Vali Bay and others reinforced their leading positions as caretakers of the Muslim community, and late Qing rulers accommodated them, following practices of indirect rule.

The fall of the Qing, collapse of the Russian Empire, and rise of Chinese nationalism and Bolshevism dramatically transformed the position of all the actors on this frontier, but strong continuities also held. The Kashgari *aqsaqals* still held leading positions, but now they tended to

identify themselves as Turks rather than Muslims. In the north, Taranchi writers in Russia built on nineteenth-century European philology to elevate the ancient Uyghurs to the position of “heartland” of the Turkic people, an inspiration for Turkic Muslims across Central Asia. But their influence in Xinjiang itself was small.

With the rise of the Soviet Union, Uyghur activists, still divided into two or more groups, had to choose a stance toward revolutionary activism and the racial nationalism of the Chinese nationalist party. Both Kashgaris and Taranchis invoked ideals of revolutionary Uyghur mobilization in China, but the Soviet Union found its primary interest in extracting resources from Xinjiang in collaboration with the Nationalist state, rather than in revolution. In 1924, with the signing of the Sino-Soviet treaty of recognition, Stalin repressed revolutionary activism, but the Uyghur activists continued to develop the ideal of a nation, and by 1926 “a blueprint for such a nation had come into being” (202). In the 1930s, when provincial governor Jin Shuren aimed to homogenize the province and centralize control, the outbreak of Muslim rebellion against him drew in the Soviet activists, leading to the declaration of the East Turkestan Republic (ETR). Rather than debate the exact extent of Soviet influence on the ETR, Brophy focuses on the local Muslim actors, who followed many of the practices of the past. The term “Uyghur” still had strong associations with revolutionary Bolshevism, rather than with an independent Uyghur nation, and the Taranchis still survived as one of the fourteen ethnic groups in the new republic. Stalin’s purges in 1938 shut down the Muslims’ activities, but the idea of a Uyghur nation eventually became the basis of the PRC’s designation of Uyghurs as the dominant nationality within the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

Brophy tells a complex story of political creativity, joined with economic interests, literary revivals, and historical research, which led step by step to the creation of an “imagined community” of Uyghur people. He rejects interpretations that see the Uyghurs as a creation of the Soviet or Chinese state, as well as those that see them as having formed in resistance to the state. Instead, he gives primary agency to the intellectuals and activists on the border who engaged in diplomacy, economic interchange, and political ideology as they responded to the collapse of empires and the rise of revolutionary nation-states. Like the other new studies of Xinjiang, Brophy’s book stresses the region’s constant engagement with global forces, and he also recognizes strong legacies of the Qing Empire. Unlike Thum, he argues that community formation was a political project, where non-official or low-level functionaries could decisively

shape events. The concept of the Uyghur did not emerge all of a sudden; rather, it grew slowly, in multiple directions with multiple meanings, among people who frequently crossed the borders. He also notes surprising resemblances to the growth of Chinese nationalism: the role of overseas communities, mercantile leadership, engagement with the Soviet Union and Western powers, and crosscutting ideas of racial solidarity and class consciousness. Here again, Xinjiang is presented not as a special case, but as a region that illuminates general processes of China and Central Eurasia.

Designs of the Han on Xinjiang

The works of Judd Kinzley (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Justin M. Jacobs (American University), and Tom Cliff (Australian National University) take us to the opposite ethnic perspective, focusing on the Han population and its program for transformation of the frontier. Kinzley's book is the most environmentally oriented of these studies, putting central weight on resources as the drivers of state and mercantile interest, but Jacobs and Cliff also find that the main Han interest in Xinjiang was in extraction. For all of them, Han rule over Xinjiang looks like a colonial relationship.

Judd Kinzley, Production and Power in China's Far West

Instead of symbolic, ethnic, and political relationships, Kinzley is interested in infrastructure and the material basis for state power. The extraction of resources has had a profound effect on shaping Xinjiang as a cartographic object from the Qing through the PRC. Even in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Qing had grand plans for developing the region's agricultural production, but in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries Xinjiang became a border region supplying resources to insatiable industrializing neighbors.

Qing agricultural reclamation, a project pursued since the mid-eighteenth century to make the province self-sufficient in grain, continually failed. From the beginning it relied on military colonies, supplemented by civilian settlers; they are the ancestors of the *bingtuan* military farms in Xinjiang today. But by the end of the nineteenth century, the province still suffered from fiscal crises, little successful colonization had occurred, and many settlers fled back to China. Kinzley also looks at gold and oil prospecting in the early twentieth century, which included efforts to secure Russian loans and investment, but these too failed with the collapse of the Tsarist Empire.

In the 1930s, Xinjiang in the minds of Chinese and Soviet leaders changed from a region

largely defined by its wasteland, where officials mainly tried to discover resources to increase state revenues, into one defined by its ability to produce the specific raw materials needed to bolster large-scale industrial development. The Soviet development of rail lines shifted Xinjiang's orientation more decisively away from Nanjing and toward the Soviet Union, which explored promising markets for furs and wool, promoted by the Han provincial governors. The Soviet Union also aimed to create an "informal empire" in Xinjiang, to make it a source of industrial raw materials, especially mineral ores and petroleum. Sheng Shicai, governor of Xinjiang from 1933 to 1944, depended heavily on Soviet loans, which he promised to repay with hides, cotton, livestock, and gold, but after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union he could not satisfy Stalin's relentless demands for resources. Thinking that the Soviet Union would lose the war, Sheng reoriented his economic policies back to China, but the same type of exploitation continued. The imperial pattern of using Xinjiang for resources persisted through the Great Leap Forward, when hundreds of new, inefficient oil wells were opened. Even today, the PRC still uses the Dushanzi mechanized oil refinery to pay off debts to the Soviet Union first incurred in the 1950s. Thus, the search for resources in Xinjiang, viewed as an extraction frontier, has a long history.

The limited central state investment by China in the region meant that provincial authorities took the lead, and were forced to rely on foreign powers. Kinzley calls Xinjiang a site of "layered state formation," where regional powers acted autonomously from the center, with transnational ties, to promote development. He, like the other new writers on Xinjiang, aims to free Xinjiang from central state perspectives, examining provincial-level initiatives that connected the region to global market demands.

Justin M. Jacobs, Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State

Justin M. Jacobs likewise focuses almost exclusively on the regional political level. He carefully traces the careers of the governors of Xinjiang during the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on the alliances they made with non-Han elites and their efforts to develop narratives to legitimize their rule. Six governors ruled Xinjiang from 1911 to 1949, of whom five were Han Chinese, in a province where at most 10 percent of the population was Han Chinese. These governors had little military power and few resources, and they ruled nearly autonomously from the Nationalist government in Nanjing, and later Chongqing. Jacobs shows expertly how

these governors, building on the Qing dynasty legacy of indirect rule, compromised the principles of Chinese Nationalism in order to grant significant autonomy to the Kazak, Uyghur, Tajik, Mongol, and other Muslim peoples under their control. More than any other scholar, he connects political rule in Xinjiang closely to the surrounding international politics of Eurasia: the rise of the Soviet Union, the presence of Japan, and the Chinese war against Japan, along with the end of colonial rule in India under the British. The People's Republic of China emerged in 1949 with its own distinctive nationality policy, derived only in part from the Soviet Union's approach to nationalities. Jacobs provides the essential background for understanding the initial successes and ultimate failure of the PRC's approach: formally, it endorsed autonomous regions for nationalities, but in practice it subordinated them to the needs of rapid industrialization led by Han managers and workers. This blindness to local needs has produced the cycle of continual resistance and repression that characterizes Xinjiang today. Jacobs explains better than any previous scholar how the "empire of nations" that is the modern PRC emerged from the colonial rule of the Qing dynasty and the politics of accommodation of Republican China on the frontiers.

Tom Cliff, Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang

Tom Cliff worked as an English teacher in the Tazhi oil refinery complex in Korla in southern Xinjiang in 2007–2010. He was able to establish contacts with Han settlers in the oil refinery district, who lived very separate lives from the native Uyghur population. The oil refinery, which stimulated an economic boom in the 1990s, was the latest of the state-owned enterprises that have dominated Han settlement in Xinjiang ever since the Qing. The *bingtuan*, an institutional descendant of the Qing military colonies, attracted the first wave of migrants in the 1950s, but it has now been surpassed by the industrial refinery, which has more prestige and exhibits a form of suburban modernity.

Although Cliff focuses only on the Han settlers, he gives us a nuanced, diversified account of how they compete for advancement, view one another, and see Xinjiang's relationship to the rest of China. The PRC state in the borderland has created an intricate structure of status hierarchies centered around concepts of being advanced and backward (*luohou*). Cliff's biographies show how the Han residents try to move up in status while accepting their position within the state-owned oil refinery.

The new Han settlers see themselves as more advanced than the primitive Uyghurs, but Cliff notes subtler status distinctions among the Han settlers themselves, just as in all colonial situations. The idea of being a “constructor” (*jianshizhe*) is central to the identity of these Han settlers. They see themselves as pushing forward a project of development and serving the state beyond their own personal interest. It is both a colonial endeavor and a civilizing mission. For example, Zhang Yonglei, a doctor from Gansu who came to Xinjiang in 2003, berated three young men, recent arrivals from Jiangsu, who said that they had come to Xinjiang just to get jobs, earn money, and go home. Dr. Zhang saw himself as an advanced “constructor” and told the young men that they too were in Xinjiang not just for money, but to serve the nation (44). On the other hand, the earlier *bingtuan* settlers, who promoted land reclamation, see themselves as the true pioneers, but they have by now been bypassed by employees of the oil company, who are urbanized, technically skilled, and live in a clean suburban enclave. The oil company employees regard the *bingtuan* employees who remain on farms as a backward class—of higher status than the Uyghurs, but no longer part of the advancing front of economic development. Cliff finds that the settlers endorse conceptions of multiple hierarchies in which they position themselves, all based on the polarity of advanced and backward. China is backward compared to the West, interior China is more backward than the coast, Xinjiang is more backward than the Han interior, southern Xinjiang is more backward than northern Xinjiang, and *bingtuan* farmers are more backward than the oil company workers. Even within the oil company, employees distinguish between those with permanent employment and those, like the wives of the male workers, who have a variety of temporary jobs. Cliff provides many vivid stories of individuals who shape their own lives within the SOE (state-owned enterprise) structure while they create it with their own actions.

Six Xinjiangs, or One?

Because of these new studies, we have a great deal more detailed local information about Xinjiang, and a refreshingly wide range of perspectives. But do we now have six Xinjiangs instead of one? Earlier studies, which mainly looked at Xinjiang from the Chinese center, could assume some unity to the region, but the new studies use different sources, focus on different localities, and stress different kinds of social, cultural, and economic processes. Still, they do cohere around several common themes, related to empire, ethnicity, and environment.

These studies take for granted that Qing and Chinese rule over Xinjiang was a colonial relationship. Scholars in the PRC will not accept the term, but “colonialism” and “imperial formations” are plainly evident in all of their work (Stoler, McGranahan and Perdue 2007; Perdue 2009). The Qing Empire had at least three features in common with other early modern empires: it recognized that its constituents were peoples of diverse ethnicities and religions; it constructed different forms of administration in its peripheries; and it aimed to extract resources from its frontiers to benefit the core. The Republic of China (ROC), as these studies show, carried on Qing policies of respect for difference and resource extraction. From the Qing through the PRC, a developmentalist project, a clear *mission civilisatrice*, has driven efforts to raise agrarian productivity and extract mineral resources. Leaders of the self-strengthening movement in the northwest like Zuo Zongtang openly espoused these ideals, and Qing and Chinese activities in Xinjiang closely resemble Japanese “colonial modernity” in Korea. Xinjiang became a settlement frontier as well as an extraction frontier, slowly absorbing Han migrants with state and mercantile backing who held privileges over the native population. To some extent, Qing and ROC programs tried, as other colonial empires did, to encourage modernist education of local elites. The ROC tolerated Jadidist movements as it also introduced new forms of Han education. But the concept of “backwardness” privileging the Han state and its settlers maintained a wide distance between them and the other ethnic groups. Imperial formations survived into the era of the nation-state, and both imperial and modern states maintained an ethnic hierarchy.

All studies of Xinjiang must recognize the fantastic diversity of ethnic groups in the region, but not every analysis makes this the central focus. Thum emphasizes single-mindedly the distinctive Uyghur historical identity expressed in his sources, while Brophy demonstrates how tortuously and slowly a Uyghur collective consciousness emerged into a full-blown nationalist ideology in the 1930s. The other non-Han ethnic groups in Xinjiang—Kazakhs, Mongols, Tajiks, etc.—receive little attention here. The studies focused entirely on Han settlers and officials also demonstrate the wide gap between the colonizing Han and their native subjects. But at the risk of making the story even more complex, we need more studies of ethnic groups besides the Han and the Uyghurs (Benson and Svanberg 1998).

Although not all the authors discuss the distinctive environment of Xinjiang in detail, environmental influences shaped all the peoples and processes in these books. The vast, sparsely

populated territory, with its scattered oases, deserts, pasturelands, and small river valleys, structured the social consciousness and migration patterns of everyone. Even Thum's book, centered on historical and religious texts, recognizes that pilgrimage routes through the desert formed the conditions under which the stories were disseminated. Brophy's nationalists could only generate their communal consciousness because they had refuges in Russian Semireche, and because they could move back and forth across the permeable borders. Cliff's Han settlers live in an almost totally artificial environment, constructed as a suburban housing project in the middle of a desert, cut off entirely from the Uighur population. Yet they cannot help realizing that their geographical position determines their status in a modernizing ideology. Each writer looks at a different part of the Xinjiang region—Thum discusses Altishahr in the South, Brophy focuses on the Kashgar and Ili Russian borderlands, and Kinzley emphasizes northern oil fields—so each gives us a different combination of geography, economy, and society. Yet they are all linked together by routes, climatic conditions, geopolitical positions, and cultural connections.

In these works, we still find a recognizable “Xinjiang,” but it is different from the frontier region seen by the earlier travelers and scholars. In this new Xinjiang, people cross borders constantly, global trends penetrate to local villages, and local actors of many ethnicities actively shape the history of the region. Xinjiang—like China, in these historians' imagination—has become part of the world.

Peter C. Perdue is professor of History at Yale University.

References

- Benson, Linda, and Ingvar Svanberg. 1998. *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Bovingdon, Gardner. 2010. *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dautcher, Jay. 2009. *Down a Narrow Road: Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community in Xinjiang China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Elverskog, Johan. 2006. *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Fleming, Peter. 1936. *News from Tartary*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

- Fletcher, Joseph. 1978a. "Ch'ing Inner Asia c. 1800." In *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, part 1: *Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911*, edited by John K. Fairbank, 35–106. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1978b. "The Heyday of the Ch'ing Order in Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet." In *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 10, part 1: *Late Ch'ing, 1800–1911*, edited by John K. Fairbank, 351–408. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Forbes, Andrew. 1986. *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Green, Nile. 2014. "Xinjiang Stories." Review of *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, by Rian Thum. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 3. Available at <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/xinjiang-stories-nile-green-rian-thum-sacred-routes-uyghur-history>, accessed January 3, 2017.
- Lattimore, Eleanor H. 1934. *Turkestan Reunion*. New York: The John Day Company.
- Lattimore, Owen 1929. *The Desert Road to Turkestan*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- . 1936. Review of *News from Tartary*, by Peter Fleming. *Pacific Affairs* 9 (4): 605–606.
- . 1950. *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- . 1962. *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers, 1928–1958*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Millward, James A. 1998. *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- . 2007. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Paxton, John H. 1946–1949. "Consul to Sinkiang." New Haven, CT: Yale Manuscripts and Archives, John Hall Paxton Papers.
- Perdue, Peter C. 2005. *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2009. "China and Other Colonial Empires." *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 16 (1/2): 85–103.
- Rudelson, Justin J. 1997. *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China's Silk Road*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Starr, S. Frederick, ed. 2004. *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Stoler, Ann Laura, Carol McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue, eds. 2007. *Imperial Formations*. Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press.
- Wu, Aitchen K. (1940) 1984. *Turkistan Tumult*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.