

## BOOK REVIEWS

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James A. Millward. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. Revised and Updated Edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. 494 pp. (ISBN: 9780231204552). doi:10.22679/avs.2022.7.2.008

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History informs public debates. This is particularly true for the literature on Xinjiang. In this new edition of *Eurasian Crossroads*, James A. Millward presents a comprehensive coverage of Xinjiang's continuity and change since antiquity and links that history to the controversy over the Uyghur ethnocide. By organizing the eight chapters chronologically and thematically, Millward balances a macrohistory of empire rivalries with a micro-level analysis of the lived experiences of ethnic communities in different temporal and spatial settings. Chapters one to four document the rise and fall of tribal confederations and empires across Eurasia and chapters five to eight discuss wars and revolutions in modern Xinjiang. A detailed timeline in the appendix highlights the impactful events in Xinjiang's history.

Chapter one draws from archaeological and literary findings to conceptualize Xinjiang “as a Eurasian crossroads with a diverse population already in the second millennium BCE” (p. 17). Because of its strategic location, Xinjiang witnessed typical “circuits of interstate power relations and economic interchange” (p. 37) and its fate was vulnerable to empire competitions. Chapter two investigates the Turkicization of the Central Asian territories of Xinjiang before Islam.. The Islamization of Central Asia and the integration of Xinjiang into the Qing Empire are discussed in chapter three. Underlying the story of empire encounters was a dynamic process of cross-cultural interactions. Millward builds on Susan Whitfield's scholarship to throw light on the trajectories of sojourners and settlers in Xinjiang over centuries.<sup>1</sup> As such, chapter four challenges the discourse of Sinicization in Chinese historiography and shows that the Qing expansion into Xinjiang signified a new attempt by the Manchus to “expand China into Central Asia” (p. 123). Yet, the creation of Xinjiang province and its Chinese-run bureaucratic apparatus in 1884 displayed a Sinicizing agenda aimed at controlling Han Chinese migrants. The fall of the Qing prompted the Turkic Muslim reformists in Xinjiang to express their localist sentiment in vernacular language rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Whitfield, *Life Along the Silk Road* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

pursuing an imagined Uyghur nationhood.

Chapter five looks at the political turbulence that destabilized Xinjiang in the early twentieth century. Millward refers to some Chinese Muslim leaders who resisted Soviet influences and utilized the Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) state's recognition against the emerging Uyghur elites. Against this backdrop of power contest, Millward identifies the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Republic in Kashgar (1933–1934) as vital to the rise of Uyghur nationalism. This short-lived Islamic Republic embodied the reformist goals of Turkic intellectuals, calling for modern education and engagement with the West. Meanwhile, the spread of Stalinism and the Soviet purges of Turkic elites in Central Asia had a spillover effect on Xinjiang, where, in 1937, military strongman Sheng Shicai allied with the Soviet forces to suppress local Turkic resisters and Huis. In World War II (WWII), Sheng changed his allegiance from the Soviet backers to the KMT government in Chongqing. After WWII, disunity and competition among the rival Turkic nationalists undermined the hope for an autonomous Xinjiang.

The Maoist rule of Xinjiang is examined in chapter six. The initial promise of regional autonomy for the official nationality groups was in name only. The key decision-makers in the autonomous areas were, and still are, Han Chinese party officials. The People Liberation Army-run system of farming militias (*bingtuan*) monopolized access to the region's resources. The Maoist state intensified "chauvinistic attacks on non-Hans as traitors and on non-Chinese culture as backward, feudal, bourgeois and local-nationalist" (p. 266). The Sino-Soviet border conflict in 1969 led to the wrongful punishment of Turkic peoples and non-Han party cadres as "Soviet fifth columnists" (p. 267). Mutual distrust persisted and the Communist authorities were "less accommodating to direct Uyghur expressions of grievance after the Cultural Revolution" (p. 275).

Chapter seven explores the centrality of Xinjiang in contemporary China's outreach efforts to Eurasia. Since the US war on terror began in Afghanistan in late 2001, China has perceived Xinjiang as a strategic frontier to oppose Islamic extremism and to diversify its energy supplies. The last chapter reflects on anti-Uyghur violence since 2000 and critiques the Chinese policy of ethnocide. Millward consults the investigative findings of Ilham Tohti, a Uyghur intellectual and a Communist, to examine the devastating effects of many waves of state-orchestrated Han migration to Xinjiang since 1949. He shows how the institutionalization of the Communist governance structure reinforced discrimination against Uyghurs. With the lynchings of Uyghur factory workers in Shaoguan, Guangdong province on June 26, 2009, which led to demonstrations in Urumqi on July 5, the Xinjiang authorities responded with lethal force and demonized the Uyghurs as "outsiders and an existential threat to Chinese security" (p. 374). The 2009 Urumqi unrest prompted Beijing to implement draconian policies aimed at Sinicizing Uyghurs. Subsequently, the Xinjiang authorities built internment camps for Uyghurs and other Turkic groups and imposed birth control measures in non-Han populated areas. The release of the Xinjiang Police Files confirms the scale of

ethnic cleansing.<sup>2</sup>

The most valuable lesson from Millward's account is the exploration of multiple sources. Even though the Chinese state restricts access to archives and information on the ground, Millward combines overseas archives and literary evidence with social media technologies to circumvent official censorship and constructs a coherent historical perspective crucial for our understanding of political crises in post-1949 Xinjiang and the dilemmas of enforcing a Han-centered modernity in this multi-ethnic region. In short, *Eurasian Crossroads* contains new information and critical insights. Its clear prose and argumentation make it the perfect textbook for classes on Silk Road studies and instructors can supplement it with other publications.<sup>3</sup> This exciting work shows us an academic path to transcend the Sinicizing narratives of Xinjiang in the global public arena and to pursue longitudinal research into the lived experiences of Uyghurs at home and abroad.

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Adeeb Khalid. *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021. 576 pp. (ISBN: 9780691161396). doi:10.22679/avs.2022.7.2.009  
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Adeeb Khalid's latest book is a welcome contribution to the field of Central Asian studies and, more generally, global history. Yet, it is quite difficult to pin down the disciplinary house for this book and this should be taken as a positive quality of this monumental work. In fact, Khalid's study eludes simplistic name-tagging and categorisation, instead making the most of interdisciplinarity with references to political theory, sociology, political economy, and the broader arts and humanities.

The book is divided into four macro-sections, plus an introduction and a conclusion. The "Introduction" helps the reader situate Central Asia in global history, illustrating and analysing the various polities, both nomadic and sedentary, that have crossed and swept the area from initially recorded times to the advent of Russian colonisation. The first section, "Empire", narrates the modern history of the region through its dialogue with, and then incorporation into, the Qing and Romanov empires. The second section, named "Revolution" and the longest of the book (eight chapters), focuses on the crumbling of the two abovementioned empires, the impact of World War I and World War II on the

<sup>2</sup> "The Xinjiang Police Files. Accessed on June 20, 2022 from <https://www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ilham Tohti, *We Uyghurs Have No Say: An Imprisoned Writer Speaks* (New York: Verso, 2022), Morris Rossabi, *China and Uyghurs* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), and Sayragul Sauytbay and Alexandra Caveliu, *The Chief Witness: Escape from China's Modern-day Concentration Camps* (London: Scribs, 2021).