

**Such Stuff as Qing Borderlands Are Made On**

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Kwangmin Kim. *Borderland Capitalism: Turkestan Produce, Qing Silver, and the Birth of an Eastern Market*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. 299 pp. \$65 (cloth).

Jonathan Schlesinger. *A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. 271 pp. \$65 (cloth).

The titular stuffs, silver and fur, of the two books reviewed here reveal the material basis of the books' arguments. Nevertheless, the primary resources exploited directly by authors Kwangmin Kim and Jonathan Schlesinger were the ink and paper of the archival documents in languages other than Chinese, most especially in Manchu, that they consulted in the course of their research. In these books' reliance on non-Chinese sources, *Borderland Capitalism* and *A World Trimmed with Fur* are representative of a growing body of Qing scholarship in English that delineates the empire within multilingual parameters that do not marginalize its borderlands. Instead, in these works, borderlands are integrated with central concerns of imperial commerce and imperial identity, as well as linked solidly to pervasive global trade patterns stretching well beyond the already-vast bounds of the Qing Empire. This reorientation is made possible largely because detailed documentation of local borderland dynamics exists, largely in Manchu, for periods of their formation, consolidation, and onset of decline from the mid-seventeenth into the early nineteenth centuries.

Kim's book centers on silver—perhaps the commodity that most strongly connects Qing borderlands and their surrounding imperial and global formations—and its transformative effects on the Muslim oases of the Tarim Basin (also known as eastern Turkestan or southern Xinjiang) in the hands of local administrator-entrepreneurs called *begs*. Taking advantage of the Qing need to stabilize the region and provide for its enormous

military garrisons after the 1759 Xinjiang conquest, begs channeled various forms of state support into commercial agricultural development programs that mobilized oasis land and labor for private profit. These forms of state support were comprehensive. Begg who cooperated (or, from another perspective, collaborated) with the ruling Qing military administration were provided with subsidized grants of land, tools, seed, and laborers (*yanqis*) exempt from taxation. Additionally, begs were afforded security of person and property through the direct presence of Qing troops, who also embodied an enormous and stable market for provisions of all sorts. This state-spawned market, furthermore, attracted merchants from other Inner Asian locales and from China proper, bringing more investment capital into the East Turkestanian oasis towns. The major long-term advantage the begs derived from Qing rule, however, was relatively unrestricted access to the enormous market of China proper. This market network was a conduit for New World silver flows into Xinjiang to pay for its garrisons and their provision, which, in turn, was largely delivered by beg agro-commercial enterprises.

Kim traces the rise and decline of this beg-dominated system, which he conceptualizes as “oasis capitalism,” from its inception in 1759 to its demise in 1864, when Khoqandi military entrepreneur Ya’qūb Beg established an Islamic state. His victory effectively ended the rule of Qing begs, if not of the Qing itself, which in 1878 reestablished regional control, based this time on a framework of Chinese civil administration. During the century of Qing-sponsored beg rule, Muslim civil authorities reconfigured existing and emerging institutions to abet their commercial exploitation along capitalist lines. Kim examines this process of beg agro-commercial development, and the fatal resistance it engendered, through five chronological chapters centered on representative portraits of individual begs and their *khwaja* (the dominant, yet factionalized, regional Naqshbandī Sufi lineage) adversaries, who effectively mobilized large sections of the marginalized and dispossessed masses of oasis capitalism.

The first chapter examines the establishment of the Qing–beg relationship through the career of Emin Khwāja of Turfan, who embodied the mutual interest between strategic Qing concerns and commercial Muslim ones. In 1731, Emin Khwāja sided with the dynasty against the Zunghar Mongol confederation that had dominated the Tarim since 1678. He and his subjects were forced out of Turfan and sought refuge in Gansu, where they were resettled in Guazhou under Qing protection to successfully develop its agricultural potential. Upon his

victorious return to Turfan in 1756, Emin Khwāja mobilized this experience on behalf of the nascent Qing order in Xinjiang.

Kim shows that the relationship between dynastic authorities and their beg administrators was a Qing version of a long-standing practice of state engagement of Sufi elite developers to manage local agricultural clearance of tax-free land on behalf of ruling khans. Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this form of oasis development afforded direct access, via the “tribute trade,” to New World silver flowing into Ming-dynasty China. Emin Khwāja astutely transferred traditional relations of khan-Sufi to those of Qing-beg, while adapting them to take advantage of expanded opportunities that emerged from the Qing victory over the Zunghars, to connect East Turkestan more directly to the China section of the maritime global market.

Kim applies these fundamental arguments throughout the remaining chronologically ordered chapters to present a new perspective on the Qing borderland order in southern Xinjiang. Chapters 2 and 4 cover the agricultural expansion across the main oasis locales of the territory. This expansion, however, was interspersed with endemic opposition from Muslim villagers who bore much of its burden as they were displaced, lost their commons, and fell under heavier levies to compensate for state revenue lost to beg tax shelters. In chapters 3 and 5, Kim argues that this economic opposition, rather than purely religious sectarianism, was the main impetus for the five “*khwaja* wars” intermittently launched against Qing rule between 1826 and 1864.

Senior begs who ruled their jurisdictions on Qing behalf took advantage of various state-funded opportunities offered by the throne, which planned to buy oasis elites’ loyalty in the process of defraying the expense of imperial incorporation of Xinjiang. Yarkand’s first ruling beg, Ūdui, for example, brokered large-scale provisioning of garrisons amounting to thousands of bronze coins (*pul*) to buy herds of livestock and tens of thousands of bolts of cloth. Ūdui was also able to exploit his position to pioneer the supervision of Yarkand’s jade mines, which he discovered on his own initiative. A 1778 court case later dug up evidence that Ūdui had presented a mere twenty tons of jade in formal compliance with the royal house’s monopoly tribute while smuggling out fifty-six tons to his own account. These lucrative machinations augmented his regular state compensation in the form of dozens of assigned cultivators freed from their tax obligations to work thousands of equally tax-free acres, subsidized by tens of thousands of *pul*. Investment capital, public and private, to fund beg schemes was also shepherded in from China. The court alone annually shipped in 60,000

taels of silver to defray administrative expenses in southern Xinjiang, and about ten times this amount in northern Xinjiang, during the late eighteenth century (53).

The capitalism that Kim defines through these various actions is one of expansionist commercial enterprises that reorganized local socioeconomic relations to maximize profit from emerging global trades. These enterprises were run by a commercial class—begs—formed through accumulation of profit, which was achieved by the indifferent and wholesale reorganization of these relations for that private end. The actor that does not fit smoothly into Kim's generally plausible concept is the state in its dominant role in the market, a role that plays out on nearly every page of *Oasis Capitalism*.

There may be no more concise demonstration of how critical the Qing state's role was for the development of southern Xinjiang's oasis capitalism than chapter 5, which covers the system's "global crisis." Specifically, this crisis was the termination, brought on by the costly disasters of the first Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion, of the huge flows of silver with which the Qing state annually inundated Xinjiang to pay for the territory's security and development. Begs had proven so entrepreneurial that they, along with other wealthy nonstate landowners, successfully avoided generally half-hearted Qing attempts to tax their wealth as an alternative source of local administrative funding.

Beg exemptions further destabilized the Qing order as other revenue sources evaporated. As shown in chapter 3, beg market exploitations created large groups of dispossessed oasis inhabitants impoverished by encroachments on a range of public resources, including water, the lifeblood of an oasis. These people, almost literally marginalized by beg commercial agrarian development and excluded from its tax shelters, fell under the leadership of *khwajas* whose families had been opponents of the initial Qing conquest and were, therefore, dispossessed as well. Five outbreaks of *khwaja* wars, as "holy wars of the uprooted," ensued. These wars alerted Qing authorities to mortal inequalities generated by a deficiency of official restraint on the predations of oasis capitalism. A proposal to tax the main source of oasis wealth—namely, oasis beg capitalists along with their landed and merchant allies—was futilely pursued after Jahāngir Khwāja's incursion, the inaugurating conflict of the *khwaja* wars. Another somewhat more serious, but ultimately vain, attempt was belatedly made in the aftermath of the penultimate flare-up of these wars in 1857.

The *khwaja* wars not only disrupted beg development schemes, especially in front-line areas like Kashgaria, but increased the numbers of dispossessed opposed to Qing-beg rule. Their ranks were also swelled by refugees from similar state-building projects pursued

by other neighboring Central Asian states, such as the khanate of Khoqand. Although Kim accepts that these masses were ostensibly mobilized through religious appeals, he shows that religious and ethnic resistance were substantially driven by economic interests, rendering the conventional understanding of these conflicts as religiously motivated “largely misleading” (92). Even Khoqand’s motives for support of *khwaja* incursions are shown to be limited by fundamental concerns for the maintenance of Xinjiang’s economic stability, on which the khanate’s own prosperity depended.

The 1830 revision of a key Qing policy in response to the defeated Jahāngir Khwāja’s initial foray did restore prosperity for fifteen years, during which no further major *khwaja* conflict occurred. The expansion of Qing garrisons in southern Xinjiang not only enhanced military security but also expanded the market for local products to revive the regional economy. More troops, however, required more state outlay for pay and provisioning, which would not be defrayed by taxation of exempt local elites. Once again, beg oasis capitalists found themselves gifted with state-supplied and state-subsidized consumers and markets. Qing authorities also obligingly provided further incentives for agricultural development through the establishment of state agricultural colonies (*tuntian*) intended to augment military logistics. These colonies, ideally, were to be cleared by more politically reliable Han settlers, allowed into southern Xinjiang for the first time. With the approval of senior dynastic officials in the territory, begs, exemplified in chapter 4 by the tenure of the Muslim beg of Kashgar, Zuhūr Al-Dīn, soon took over the management, and exploitation, of these agricultural colonies. Begg formed consortiums with sojourner merchants to provide capital and recruit labor. Such activities, in turn, helped to consolidate an expanded Qing military presence after 1830 in much the same way as they had in the wake of the initial conquest in 1759. One major difference between the two periods, however, is that nineteenth-century beg development occurred on state, not private, lands so that begs came to have a direct stake in the Qing imperial incorporation of Xinjiang. Dynastic authorities found begs indispensable in part because Han migrants often lacked both the experience and the desire to set up *tuntian*. In this way, the Qing order in southern Xinjiang was directly contracted out to oasis begs to the extent that, as Kim puts it, “the Qing empire itself became privatized and the target of beg capitalist investment” (127).

This is certainly an overstatement, despite the undeniable economic influence of begs that Kim demonstrates in such detail through a range of Inner Asian sources, including some written in Turki. The extensive exploitation of imperial opportunity by Zuhūr and his

colleagues did not even directly extend into the Zunghar Basin of northern Xinjiang. More significantly, oasis capitalism could not generate sufficient finance capital to enable begs to become state creditors (begs instead became indebted to Chinese private merchants), nor could it expand the territory's main market in military provisioning. Finally, oasis capitalism as practiced by begs did not outlast the decline of the dynastic order in the final 1864 *khwaja* war. By then, critical flows of silver from state coffers, the lifeblood of Qing garrisons, had ended, inept private and state attempts to substitute locally mined fiat bronze *pul* currency notwithstanding.

Although Kim argues that capitalism redeveloped in some areas after 1864 as a cotton export trade to new Russian markets, beg oasis capitalism was existentially dependent on the Qing military order. In this respect, it resembles a similar pattern of regional development in another borderland, western Sichuan's Tibetan frontier. As Yingcong Dai shows in *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet* (2009), the region was economically transformed by eighteenth-century Qing military operations, especially the Jinchuan campaigns (1747–1749 and 1771–1776). Like the Xinjiang conquest, the imperial incorporation of this area of greater Tibet “provided vital stimuli to [its] economic development” (237). In western Sichuan's case, however, the main profiteers of military provisioning were Han, suggesting a pattern of borderland economic development transcending ethnicity. In qualified respects, Qing borderland development reflects some dynamics examined by scholars of European history. The “military revolution” or the “predatory theory of state-building,” articulated in Geoffrey Parker's *The Military Revolution* (1996) and Charles Tilly's *Coercion, Capital, and European States* (1992), respectively, likewise stress an unprecedented and transformative degree of state-induced revenue extraction and economic reconfiguration for military purposes.

State mobilization of borderland resources also plays a critical role in Jonathan Schlesinger's *A World Trimmed with Fur*, although this change in Manchuria and Khalkha Mongolia was not overtly driven by imperial military expansionism. Instead, Schlesinger focuses on the ecological, as well as economic, transformation that occurred in the wake of initial incorporation of these vast Inner Asian territories. The agents of change here are Han pioneers and markets in China proper that create the demand for various products of Inner Asian forest and steppe. The “ideology” of this mainly urban commercial demand is surveyed in chapter 1. Elite consumption of wild products worked to keep Manchu Inner Asian identity afloat in the more populous Han waters of urban China proper. Fur clothing is the main

example of how imperial consumption of a range of borderland products “institutionalized... social and political hierarchies” (28). Sinocentric obstacles to “barbaric” frontier products were steadily overcome as furs became gifts of imperial favor that expressed Manchu court approval of such core Confucian values as filial piety in recognition of long-lived parents. Furs, along with other wild wares, eventually circulated into Beijing markets beyond the court, an indication that Qing social institutions were unifying the very different worlds of Han and Inner Asians into one empire.

Much of the surge in demand for exotic products in China proper appears to have been driven by eighteenth-century borderland expansionism. As in Kim’s southern Xinjiang oases, Manchurian commerce was stimulated by conquest and by its connections with vast demand in China proper. Schlesinger echoes Kim when he emphasizes that Manchurian states, including those prior to the Qing, depended on a large commerce in forest products that brought large flows of Chinese silver into their domains. Thus, Schlesinger imagines Jurchen leaders like Nurhaci more like “commercial capitalists” than “simple hunters” and “silver [as] central to the life of Nurhaci’s state” (61). New World silver transferred to Inner Asian borderlands via China proper’s global market connections is the economic foundation of the analyses of both Kim and Schlesinger.

In contrast with Kim’s southern Xinjiang, in Schlesinger’s Manchuria and Mongolia, systemic instability arising from multiethnic economic discontent did not disrupt production regimes. Resource depletion, arising from greater consumption of wild products in China proper, becomes the main disturbance in these territories. By the mid-nineteenth century, collapse of supply from overexploitation became widespread for many commodities from Inner Asia and elsewhere. Here Schlesinger’s stress on consumption complements Kim’s on production; read together, the two books present a more comprehensive and globalized analysis of borderland socio-economy.

In further contrast, Schlesinger’s contribution is more environmentally focused. Using Mongol and Manchu sources, his three core chapters trace trajectories from burgeoning consumption to practical exhaustion—but not, however, as he often implies, the total extinction—of Manchurian pearls, Mongolian mushrooms, and Manchurian sable. This focus renders *A World Trimmed with Firm* a firmly “declensionist” environmental history, an orientation it shares with the vast majority of work on China. This certainly places the book within the mainstream of the latest monographs, most notably Ling Zhang’s *The River, the Plain, and the State* (2016). There is, however, a growing tendency in the wider field of

environmental history to question what, until recently, has been its signature narrative of unqualified anthropogenic catastrophe wreaked on an existing natural harmony. Authorities such as J. R. McNeill have recognized the need for more “complex” analyses “in recognition of the likelihood that environmental change is good for some people and species and bad for others” (2010, 360). Some other work on China better accounts for this complexity, most recently Micah Muscolino’s *The Ecology of War in China* (2015) and Jiayan Zhang’s *Coping with Calamity* (2014). Nevertheless, as J. Donald Hughes has observed in *What Is Environmental History*, “deterioration of the global environment as a result of human activities is a fact revealed by careful research in many cases” (2006, 101). Schlesinger’s account of Manchurian and Mongolian borderland resource depletion certainly covers more than one such case.

He is also on strong ground when arguing that, as nature became increasingly cultured through its higher consumption in China proper, dynastic concerns to preserve Inner Asian identity merged with concerns to preserve Inner Asian resources, although this was a pre-Qing Jurchen concern as well. The Qing state sought to manage this emerging nature-culture dynamic through more elaborate institutions intended to limit resource extraction to sustainable levels, which, in turn, would ensure that borderlands remained viable spaces of Inner Asian diversity. In the case of freshwater pearls, an elaborate system of collection and evaluation, which existed prior to the Qing, was augmented by an extensive regulatory network intended to stop both smuggling and overharvesting. A similar development occurred with what was Manchuria’s single most valuable resource, ginseng, which the author also explores through underexploited Manchu sources. Dynastic measures to arrest the decline of both failed for ecological and cultural reasons. The main import, however, is that the court’s conservation measures were not purely economic, but were substantially “ideological,” a notion that I would prefer to understand as “environmental” for reasons I will discuss in my concluding remarks. An expanded notion of the Manchu homeland as the “Three Eastern Territories,” extending far beyond their original core of Mukden and Changbaishan, represented a new, eighteenth-century “convergence of territorial, ethnic and natural space” that moved dynastic authorities to protect their now-wider culture through a protection of their equally broadened nature (91).

This convergence occurs in somewhat different terms in chapter 3, which covers the previously unexplored “mushroom crisis” during the 1820s in Khalkha Mongolia. In this much more isolated territory, the main institutional controls are not directed at resources, but

at territorial access, especially by Han. Qing restrictions on mobility beyond the Great Wall experienced an exemplary breakdown during the mushroom crisis as hordes of Han prospectors conducted large-scale seasonal raids on various banner areas: an ironic reversal of the traditional Han–Inner Asia relations’ narrative. In attempts to first repel, then regulate, and finally criminalize Han incursions, central and local officials articulated justifications of preserving the “purity” (Mong. *bolgo*) of Khalkha banner zones. Although difficult to define precisely, purity was clearly a reaction to unauthorized and disruptive incursion into one of the state’s many restricted borderland spaces. While lacking the ethnogenic dimension inherent in the Three Eastern Territories, Khalkha space was constitutive of an Inner Asian, if not a Manchu, identity critical to the Qing enterprise under pressure from intrusive Han resource exploitation.

In chapter 4, the imposition of dynastic identity on borderland peoples, the Tannu Uriankhai of northwestern Khalkha Mongolia, is explicit. Organized into banners obligated to hunt up tribute furs, the Tannu Uriankhai were primarily pastoralists rather than foragers, largely because their grassland territory had comparatively little forest habitat preferred by sable. These facts of nature and culture, however, did not alter dynastic expectations that the annual Tannu Uriankhai pelt quota be fulfilled. As elsewhere in Khalkha Mongolia, access to Tannu Uriankhai territory was restricted, especially because of the region’s proximity to the Russian border. Thus, dynastic territorial management was effected, as elsewhere in Khalkha Mongolia, primarily through the institutionalization of border controls from both points south into China proper and points north into Russia. This institutionalization, manifested mainly as outpost lines (Mong. *karun*) that kept even Tannu Uriankhai out of the Russian border zone, further constrained hunting conditions and trade. The Tannu Uriankhai, unsurprisingly, found it increasingly difficult to maintain their dynastic obligations and their livelihoods under this local version of borderland purity maintenance. In the process, there was considerable renegotiation of spatial and tribute terms as sable were exhausted, hunting territory re-delineated, and squirrel pelts substituted.

Schlesinger concludes that Manchuria and Mongolia converged into restricted, idealized Qing borderlands in response to pressures on Inner Asian resources and identities. State enhancement of its borderland authority became in this way an environmental project embodied in pristine Manchu foragers, Khalkha pastoralists, and Tannu Uriankhai hunters. All three borderland embodiments needed to be kept isolated from contaminating contact with much larger Han populations of commercial agriculturalists, whose polluting influence

was eroding Inner Asian purity by the nineteenth century, as measured by contractions in sable and mussel populations and in fields of wild ginseng and mushrooms.

In more ecological terms explored by neither Kim nor Schlesinger, Qing borderland institutions throughout Inner Asia may be seen as an attempt to maintain a “steady state” between people and nature as defined by imperial perceptions and requirements. In contrast to an ecological consensus that once emphasized that a primordial balance of nature be maintained against all “external” disruption, the current consensus is grounded in what increasingly appears to be an inherently nonequilibrium, dynamic condition that structures all environmental relations.

One such condition may be seen in the operations of the global and China proper markets that were almost designed to push resources, especially those immune to anthropogenic expansion like sable or silver, beyond their marked natural limits. Even those products that could be farmed, ginseng most prominently in *A World Trimmed with Fur* and cash crops in *Borderland Capitalism*, were disruptive. Dynastic authorities actively prohibited ginseng cultivation as a criminal artifice of the most natural Manchu resource. Marginalized oasis Muslim populations revolted against beg commercial agriculture’s encroachment on village commons’ resources.

Taken together, the works of Kim and Schlesinger certainly can be read as substantial chapters in the current, ongoing rearticulation of Qing borderlands in a more globalized and less Sinocentric context, although neither work engages very directly or systematically with existing narratives to work toward a new synthesis deliberately. At the same time, both works mine a number of prerequisite sources for just such a synthesis. One motherlode is the underexploited trove of Inner Asian–language primary documents that vein the structures of both books, although this is intermixed with references to similarly sourced secondary work primarily in Japanese (such as Hamada Masami’s *Higashi Torukisutan Chagataigo seijaden no kenkyū* [2006] and Matsuura Shigeru’s *Shinchō no Amūru seisaku to shōsū minzoku* [2006]).

Another prerequisite resource is New World silver, whose own significance for the latest version of global history has been influentially articulated in numerous articles by Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, especially in “Cycles of Silver” (2002). In Qing terms, silver, as the main medium of exchange between China proper and Inner Asia, was the mainstay of the dynasty’s borderland order that also firmly connected it to the imperial center. Silver may enter through private civilian commercial exchanges with China proper, but

definitely enters in transformative quantities through the establishment of state military infrastructure. The effects of silver transfusions, however, are not a unidirectional Sinification of Inner Asia, but of what one can easily term, in the conventions of Sinophone borderland scholarship that is now so often apparently at odds with that of the Anglophone West, a *duoyuan wenhua* (loosely translatable as a “multiethnic cultural consensus”). This consensus is manifest in the high value Han consumers placed on Manchurian ginseng; in the Beijing passion for Mongolian mushrooms that enriched Han prospectors from Zhili, Shandong, Shanxi, and Henan; and in Manchurian furs’ multicultural attraction in the Qing capital and globally. It is even visible in the cooperative efforts between beg entrepreneurs and state territorial officials to develop Xinjiang oasis agriculture and the jade trade, which benefitted many, if far from all, Muslim and Han traders and consumers.

The inevitably contentious consensus between borderland and core, however, rests on something more than just culture. Nonhuman ecology—in the form of finite mineral deposits in only very particular places in Xinjiang and the New World, in the form of wildlife and plant life with ranges restricted to mixed conifer-deciduous forests or open steppe, and in the form of patchy oases scattered through highly arid climate—fundamentally set the range of possible, albeit considerable, human institutional adaptation. This inescapable interdependency is nowhere better demonstrated in the works under review here than in their observations of supply and demand collapses caused by excessive resource extraction and of failures in silver flows. None of this is to suggest that ecology determined culture, but rather that culture cannot evade ecology. Instead, the emerging consensus may be an environmental one, a “*duoyuan shengtai*,” in which human diversity is consciously acknowledged to be always interdependent with ecological diversity, and analyzed as such. A “multienvironmental consensus” in this interdependent sense is, hopefully, such stuff as all borderland histories will naturally be made on.

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