

James Millward,
Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang
(New York: Columbia University Press, 2007)

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That James Millward's book managed to put Xinjiang in the *New York Review* (reviewed by Jonathan Mirsky, November 8, 2007) is sufficient evidence of the demand for such a survey. That this is the first book of its kind is testament to the fractured nature of research on Xinjiang, and the difficulties involved in producing such a work. Leaving aside the fraught question of how to refer to the region, which Millward deals with succinctly in his preface, most existing survey-style studies of the region belong to either Chinese or Uyghur nationalist schools, which have relied on artificial notions of sovereignty and/or ethnic continuity to frame their narratives. In charting a course between these two schools, but remaining in dialogue with both, Millward has succeeded in producing a work equally valuable as a reference, and as a reliable guide to the historical background of current issues.

Ecological factors in Xinjiang's history are introduced early on (pp. 4-9), and remain present throughout the book, without ever being allowed to exclusively determine the course of events. Departing from the traditional east-west focus of other studies, Millward points to the significance of the "north-south axis," contrasting the aridity of the south with the favourable pastoral conditions of the north. This has led to a long-term tendency for the

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north to dominate the south in military and political terms, with the cultural centres of the sedentary south (Kashgar, Khotan) largely responsible for the diverse literary and artistic heritage of the region.

In the first chapter (“Ancient Encounters”), unity is provided not by any local political centralisation, or short-lived moments of Chinese hegemony, but the fact that, unlike regions further west, Chinese-language sources on the Tarim Basin allow a historical, rather than a purely philological, or archaeological, window onto the subject. The themes here are thus familiar ones: Han-Xiongnu struggles, Sogdian trade networks, and the three-way contest between the Tang, Türks, and Tibet for control over the Tarim Basin. Brief references are made to the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan and the translation school of Kucha, but instead of simply retelling a classic “Silk Road” story, Millward’s interests lie just as much in contemporary implications of these issues: e.g. the Mummies and their political uses (pp. 15-17), and debates over the legacy of the Buddhist Uyghur and Qarakhanid kingdoms (pp. 53-54).

If the challenges of maintaining a Xinjiang-centred approach to Xinjiang are most evident during the period of Mongol rule, then the same can be said for most regions of Eurasia under the Chinggisid Dynasty. Here Millward concisely traces the incorporation of the Uyghurs into imperial service, the place of Xinjiang within the gradual break-up of the world empire, and the role of the Mongols in generating a new ethnic map of Central Asia. Along these lines, a stronger case could perhaps be made for a Mongol precedent for the Qing delineation of Xinjiang. After all, the territory occupied by the Moghul *ulus*, i.e. Moghulistān, fits quite well into the province’s later boundaries, especially when we consider that the Qing laid claim to regions of Semirechë and the Alatau, which now belong to the Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan respectively.

In the absence of more available literature in translation, Millward’s treatment of the Later Chaghatayid, and the so-called “khoja” period is perforce summary. In places he would have been better served by drawing on Wheeler Thackston’s 1996 translation of *Ta’rikh-i Rashīdī*, rather than Denison Ross’ 1895 version. There is a tendency in secondary literature to prematurely remove the Later Chaghatayids (Moghuls) from the historical stage; thus Millward errs when he says that the khanate ceased to function from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards (p. 72). This is at least a century too early, when we consider that ‘Abdullāh Khān, who ruled under no discernible Sufi influence, was only forced from the throne in the 1670s. For better or for worse, the lives of saints such as Ishāq Valī and Āfāq Khwāja

are known to us primarily through hagiographies. The sensational story that Āfāq Khwāja met with the Dalai Lama (p. 86), which derives from a minority of manuscripts of the relatively late *Tazkira-i ‘Azīzān*, is probably one case where greater skepticism is warranted.

Millward’s book comes into its own in its second half, beginning with his treatment of the late Qing (Chapter 4: “Between Empire and Nation”), where he carries on his analysis of Manchu policy begun in his earlier works. The author appears less interested in treating the Qing as a steppe empire, instead drawing parallels with complex systems of administration deployed by European imperialism (pp. 98, 102). This section demonstrates not only synthesis of a wide range of studies (e.g. in Japanese, the works of Kataoka for the Qing and Shinmen for the Republican period), but also new research, including a number of fascinating documents from the Xinjiang Regional Archives and previously unpublished photographs from the period. In drawing attention to the parallel development of Chinese and Turkophone reform movements in the early twentieth century, Millward manages to highlight both shared experiences of modernisation, as well as validate a distinctly Central Asian perspective on Xinjiang’s modern history, so dear to Uyghur historical memory.

Not least among the achievements of this book is its survey of Xinjiang under the People’s Republic of China—a world first as far as this reviewer is aware. Whereas other chapters place Xinjiang “between” two places or concepts, in this sixth chapter Xinjiang is definitely “in” the PRC, reflecting a closure of earlier interactions, primarily with the Soviet Union. Drawing on Chinese sources, often reading them against the grain, Millward gives valuable insight into changes in local religious life in the 1950s, Xinjiang’s “long” Cultural Revolution, and experiments with limited reform of the 1980s. The last chapter, “Between China and the World” gives equal weight to important environmental questions (primarily of water and desertification), alongside more conventional issues which surround the Uyghur-Han conflict—the power of the *bingtuan* and the effects of state-sponsored development, Han immigration, and the reality or otherwise of “separatism” and “terrorism.” While making no predictions for the future, Millward concludes with the figure of a tightrope-walker, Adil Hoshur, as a symbol for the precarious balancing of interests which, we presume, the author sees as the key to Xinjiang’s future.

This rich book rewards multiple readings, and belongs on the shelf of every scholar and enthusiast, not only of Xinjiang, but of China and Central Asia more generally.