

In sum, this book provides valuable insights into current flows of Chinese students studying abroad in terms of issues related to gender, family and social change. Through employing theories of cosmopolitanism, emotion and power, Kajanus uncovers the big picture that describes the process and the impact of this flow of people. In this sense, this book deserves to be read by all scholars and students interested in gender studies, international student migration and contemporary social change in China.

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Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang

TOM CLIFF

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Xinjiang Studies, nested at the crossroads of China and Central Asian studies, have traditionally been dominated by the focus on the ethnic majority population in the region, the Uyghur. In a recently occurring shift, however, the field seems to be opening up to studies of the primary “other” of the Uyghur in contemporary Xinjiang – the Han. The Han population in the region has massively increased since 1949 due to, first, government-sponsored settlement and later, especially since the 1990s, as a consequence of individual economically driven in-migration. *Oil and Water* by Tom Cliff, an Australian anthropologist, is the first book-length publication which focuses exclusively on the Han living in Xinjiang. The material presented and analysed in the book is a result of a two-year period of fieldwork in Korla, an oil city in southern Xinjiang, between 2007 and 2010. This ethnographic material is further critically and creatively developed with the help of well-chosen primary and secondary literature.

The declared aim of the book is to ponder the question “what it is like to be a Han person living in Xinjiang” (p. 4). The author focuses on subjective experiences of his Han informants, gives them space to speak in the book and helpfully embeds their biographic narratives in “large-scale stories” and structures imposed by “era-defining institutions.” These have conditioned the lives of individuals but have also afforded a context-specific agency. The main cohort that Tom Cliff focuses on are the Han employees of the Tarim Oilfield Company in Korla and the 2nd Agricultural Division of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). Han constitute an overwhelming majority of the employees in both of these *danwei*. Based on his ethnographic material, the author demonstrates that, similarly to other provinces in inner China, Xinjiang Han are a highly stratified and divided society. Cliff does a very good job in teasing out the hierarchies and exclusionary discourses from the narratives and experiences of his informants. The book is beautifully written and the author skilfully renders the complex life-worlds and uneasy life choices of his informants; his own photographs will be particularly helpful to readers who have not travelled in the region.

The larger analytical frame in which Tom Cliff locates the stories of his Han research participants and his discussion of meta-discourses, is the colonial centre–

periphery framework. This framework, as Cliff argues, determines the relationship that the Xinjiang Han maintain with the region and with “the metropole.” The author demonstrates that Xinjiang Han have internalized the role of agents of stability and construction on the *quasi*-imperial frontier and, in return, expect trust, protection and central investment. The author provocatively argues that, given the central role of Xinjiang Han in the “colonial endeavor” (p. 9), the central government is actually more concerned with stability among them, rather than among the Uyghur. This claim could and likely will be debated, similarly to the almost total absence of the Uyghur voices in the study. Cliff contends that “Han energies are focused intra-ethnically” because it is other Han who “present the greatest threat ... and provide the greatest opportunities” for them (p. 216). One wonders here whether this absence of the Uyghur in “what it is like to be a Han person” in Xinjiang may be specific to the Han-dominated XPCC and the oil industry. Research elsewhere suggests namely that the othering along this line tends to be important in the making of subjectivities on both sides of the ethnic boundary. Moreover, in the absence of Uyghur voices, the centre–periphery framework, which Cliff evokes throughout the book, remains unchallenged and appears universal, like the narratives which frame Xinjiang as peripheral, as “not yet there”, and as “behind.” However, though these definitions definitely dominate the political discourse in China, other notions of what Xinjiang is – besides being a periphery in the Beijing-centred spatiality of power – do exist. Uyghur stories would help to identify these other spatialities which contend Beijing’s perspective and continue to affect the situation in the region.

This is an intelligently written book, rich in ethnographic detail supported by in-depth knowledge of regional history, economy and politics. Though Xinjiang is where Tom Cliff’s story takes place, the concepts with which he structures his analysis are not context-specific but link to broader debates on social and spatial mobility, the systems of organized dependence, the life of *guanxi*, forms of social organization, marriage economy, urbanization and more. Scholars and students interested in these questions, and those interested in the region of Xinjiang, will find Cliff’s book insightful and important.

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Frontier Livelihoods: Hmong in the Sino-Vietnamese Borderlands
 SARAH TURNER, CHRISTINE BONNIN and JEAN MICHAUD
 Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015
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Frontier Livelihoods is an informative and readable account of the economic behaviour of the Hmong population of the Sino-Viet borderlands. Discussing five forms of economic activity (maize or rice farming, water buffalo breeding and trading, alcohol brewing, cardamom cultivation, and weaving) it argues that the Hmong creatively adapt practices promoted by the state to suit their needs. The authors take an “actor-oriented” approach that foregrounds the decisions and strategies of individuals and families. They emphasize the complexity of Hmong livelihood strategies, which combine strategic adoption, creative adaptation and covert resistance.