

Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China's Borderlands. By DAVID A. BELLO. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 350 pp. £64.99 / \$99.99 (cloth).

This book defies conventional categorization and is an essential work for understanding transdisciplinary subjects that are relevant to studying China, Asia, and the world past and present. All readers will value its content for the author's most fundamental aim, to examine the ties between animals and people (p. 2) to understand the lives of borderlands. While he thoroughly analyzes government policies and other political elements that determine how borderlands are formed and developed, Bello also demonstrates his keen preference for examining how borderlands shape the economic and social identities of their human inhabitants through people's relationships with the animals that both provide their sustenance and threaten their survival.

Colleagues in Bello's primary field of Chinese history will welcome his compelling critiques of scholarly approaches that marginalize people who were not agriculturalists, or in more direct terms, non-Han people who are perceived to have been transformed through sedentarization and other forms of Han-centered economic modernization. Bello counteracts how these people, who disproportionately lived in Qing borderlands, have been treated in scholarship and popular imagination by expressly not committing the opposite error of focusing solely or inordinately on them. Rather, he examines the processes and consequences of their economic activities in their interrelationship with those of Han people.

The book consists of a core of three empirical chapters (2, 3, and 4) framed on either end by theoretical chapters (Introduction, 1, 5, and 6). Throughout, Bello's thinking is enlivened by wordplay as in chapter 1, entitled "Qing Fields in Theory and Practice," wherein he tills both the field of Qing studies and the literal fields, forests, and disease zones that he studies. The empirical chapters show that Qing frontiers should be studied together and not just compared across books, but within them. The framework of multiple frontiers rather than a single frontier, in concept or reality, is well established, but Bello brings it to life by leading readers from what he calls the Sahaliyan-Amur-Heilongjiang (SAH) basin – a useful shorthand for other scholars to emulate – in Chapter 2, to Inner Mongolia in Chapter 3, and then to Yunnan in Chapter 4. All three of these chapters are evenly comprehensive and advance new views that are specific to their featured region. Chapter 2 defines foraging as a dimension of collective identity in the Qing northeast, bringing together hunting and gathering, which have often regarded separately. Chapter 3 explains the environmental and economic transformation of southern Inner Mongolia as frustrating Qing imperial expectations and intentions. Chapter 4 proves that the Qing government's incoherent knowledge of physiology and etiology distorted cultural identities and led to the establishment of administrative institutions that undermined the adaptations that Yunnan's indigenes made to maintain their health and survival. Chapters 5 and 6 are thick interpretations of the process by which the overwhelming compulsion to create "Hanspace" in these borderlands resulted in indelible ecological change and, by extension, the incomplete perceptions of these regions, which Bello himself does so much to remedy.

One of the notable strengths of this book is that all the chapters stand alone, which does great service to colleagues both as researchers and as teachers. Each chapter contains enough content to give a robust representation of Bello's main arguments. And yet, close attention to more than one of the interlinked empirical chapters rewards the reader with more evidence that in turn gives greater weight to the exercise of comparison. Another principal strength, which might superficially seem like a shortcoming, is that Bello is absolutely forthcoming with his limitations, such as not including as much content from Russian and Mongolian sources as he would have preferred (p. 15). Drawing such parameters serves this book well. The reader can appreciate how Bello's case studies are indeed representative and at the same time recognize that they provide conceptual seeds that can be planted in other grounds, which is what I hope Bello himself does in his future research.

Conversely, some of the book's most important contributions may be perceived as its shortcomings. This book will not satisfy the increasingly prevalent expectation that an academic monograph be easily digestible. Readers seeking a crystal-clear paradigm that can be easily cited and applied to other research will not find one. This study is rich in defining and interpreting several concepts that will not be familiar even to most specialists, most importantly "imperial pastoralism," "imperial arablism" and "Hanspace." Another characteristic of this book that could be considered either beneficial or detrimental to comprehension is that the fluidity of the prose may not mitigate the sheer density of the text. Fortunately, one aspect of its multi-

purpose nature is that this book can be read mainly or solely for the quantitative details, as accessible in nearly exhaustive tables, or the qualitative reflections about how animals and people cope with political forces that seek to transform them.

Loretta E. Kim

University of Hong Kong

School of Modern Languages, Run Run Shaw Tower 5/F, Centennial Campus,

University of Hong Kong, Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong (no zip code)

lekim@hku.hk