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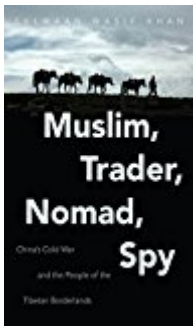
Sulmaan Wasif Khan. *Muslim, Trader, Nomad, Spy: China's Cold War and the People of the Tibetan Borderlands.* The New Cold War History Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 216 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-2110-4.



Reviewed by Marissa Smith

Published on H-War (October, 2017)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

At several points in his introduction, Sulmann Wasif Khan describes his book as a contribution to anthropology. Accordingly, I will take this opportunity to review the book as an anthropologist as well as an area specialist.

Unfortunately, Khan uses several works by anthropologists working with Tibetans, particularly those by Carole McGranahan and Melvyn Goldstein, as historiographic sources, while discounting their theoretical positions on empire and state. The anthropological theory that Khan draws most heavily on, James Scott's notion of Zomia, is widely criticized by cultural and social anthropologists, including me, who take issue with the stark line drawn between people with states and empires on the one hand and those without, resisting "weak" "fourth world" people, on the other.

While much of Khan's argument is in line with Uradyn Bulag's concept of "sub-nationalism," in other words, that the People's Republic of China and India adopted the "hard" imperial forms of their political predecessors in the course of their work to undo them, Khan explicitly rejects Bulag's work as a theoretical framing. Though he does not give much explanation for this, it makes sense when one considers that Bulag has argued that the political structures of the Mongols (long after the empires of Chinggis Khaan and Khublai Khaan) be treated with equal weight as those of the Chinese, the Manchus, the Russians, and so on. Similarly, work such as Rebecca French's on Tibetan law, which shows Tibetan sociality to include political structures with the kinds of characteristics that Khan ascribes to states and empires, for example, the unification of multiple nationalities in a single political system, are notably absent. Khan refers repeatedly to studies of the British Empire—but not to help elucidate Indian political forms developed in that context, but as a source of universal laws to apply in explicating Chinese as well as Indian imperial actions.

However, despite these theoretical framings that might hinder such intepretations, Khan shows how social systems, particularly of trade,

crossing the Himalayas have not been taken into account by dominating political, economic, and military powers (as well as historians) to their own major detriment. The final chapter argues that the famines of the late 1950s and early 1960s were caused by the cutting off of Tibetans from Indian wheat, which they had long traded Tibetan salt for. These famines have largely been attributed to poor political and economic policy, and the creation of communes and the state communist economic system by the PRC. While being careful to not contradict dominant narratives that emphasize the religious oppression of Tibetans, Khan suggests that much of the flight of Tibetans to India was due to the disruption of these trade relations and the famines themselves.

This interpretation is apparently due to Khan's careful reading of his documents, mostly reports and other correspondence between Chinese, Indian, and Nepalese diplomats, many from archives that Khan reports were unclassified only for a short time and now closed. The Tibetan documents and sources are of a very different character; they include writings by the Dalai Lama for Western audiences sympathetic to a positioning of Tibetans as "fourth worlders," and interviews with members of the Tibetan refugee community who often articulate the same political positioning (see Carole McGranahan's ***Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War*** [2010]) as globe-trotting lamas (see Donald S. Lopez Jr.'s ***Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*** [1999]). It is unfortunate that analogous "foreign diplomacy" documents from the Tibetan side are not included in the study. This is of course attributable to issues of access and language skills (and related to the disciplinary formations constraining graduate study and scholarship), but Khan's theoretical framing also positions Tibet as categorically without such institutions and documents.

Throughout the book, in chapters that detail participation in the UN and Afro-Asian Council, the categorization of border crossers by citizenship and type of threat, and the subsequent actions contributing to Sino-Indian conflict and the disruption of Himalayan trade discussed above, Khan reads memoranda with attention to the diversity of the interests of the authors not just as representatives of the PRC, the RoC (Republic of China), India, and Nepal but also as individuals. However, as with the positioning of Tibetans as "fourth worlders," consideration of these actors' perspectives could take much more seriously the particularities of the various systems of political institutions involved, which bring interests that are particular rather than universal ("great games," etc.) into the picture.

As I prepared this review, Chinese and Indian military were again taking part in a standoff over their disputed border, widely compared to the one of 1962 discussed in this book. While Khan is right to emphasize the role of traders and nomads (the 2017 event involved the construction of a highway), ultimately the reasons for these standoffs and why they take the forms that they do can only be understood with a greater attention to forms of statecraft and empire formation that do not assume that these are grounded in universal laws, especially from universal laws formulated in the context of a single imperial project.

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Citation: Marissa Smith. Review of Khan, Sulmaan Wasif. *Muslim, Trader, Nomad, Spy: China's Cold War and the People of the Tibetan Borderlands.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. October, 2017.

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