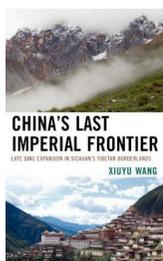
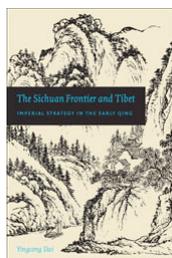


## REVIEW: *CHINA'S LAST IMPERIAL FRONTIER AND THE SICHUAN FRONTIER AND TIBET*

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Yingcong Dai. 2009. *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. xiv+368. Maps, notes, glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-2959-8951-8 (hardcover, 80USD), 978-0-2959-8952-5 (paperback, 30USD).



Xiuyu Wang. 2011. *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. xv+291. Notes, tables, glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-7391-6809-7 (hardcover, 80USD) 978-0-7391-6810-3 (ebook, 79.99USD).

Until recently, historians have not paid much attention to Qing China's Tibetan frontier, but two excellent new studies address this neglect. One is Yingcong Dai's *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*, which examines the Qing conquest of the Khams region up to the end of the eighteenth century and its effect on Sichuan. The other is *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands* by Xiuyu Wang, in which he describes Qing efforts to impose direct administration on the Khams region in the last years of the dynasty.

The Qing annexation of eastern Khams was part of the regime's attempt to secure military control of Tibet and deny it to the Zunghar Mongols. As Dai shows, Tibet's strategic importance to the Qing directly shaped Sichuan's development. Although Sichuan was long an integral part of China, its demographic collapse during the

Ming-Qing transition turned much of the province into a wasteland. Qing frontier strategy in Khams had unintended consequences in promoting the repopulation and development of Sichuan.

Dai's first five chapters, organized by reign periods, offer a chronological account of the development of the Sichuan frontier. Two thematic chapters and an epilogue follow. Chapter One deals with the Qing conquest of Sichuan and the slow recovery of the province. Chapter Two concerns the Manchu rivalry with the Zunghar Mongols, their struggle to control Tibet, and the beginnings of Qing encroachment into Khams.

In Chapter Three, Dai begins to weave the interconnections of Qing policy toward Tibet with Sichuan's development. Sichuan was the most important base of operations for the 1720 Qing invasion of Tibet. Because of the province's strategic importance, the state emphasized development over revenue collection there. The Kangxi emperor resisted pressure to carry out a land survey and regularize tax collection in Sichuan because strategic concerns were paramount. Through most of the eighteenth century the Qing relied on tax income from the lower Yangtze while Sichuan drew resources from the center.

In Chapter Four, Dai examines the Yongzheng period (1723-1735), in which the Qing brought parts of Amdo and Khams under Qing control. At the same time, Yunnan's aggressive governor-general, Ortai, implemented the Qing's *gaitu guiliu* policy of abolishing indigenous chieftainships and bringing non-Han areas under direct Qing administration.

Chapter Five covers the sixty-year Qianlong reign, which saw successive frontier wars. The two campaigns against Jinchuan (Rgyal rong) – which deserve more study – were among the costliest and most bitterly fought of the Qianlong reign's 'Ten Great Campaigns'. In fact the Qianlong emperor calculated that the two Jinchuan wars cost more than twice the conquest of Xinjiang, an area perhaps twenty times larger than the Jinchuan region (Dai and Hua 1993, Haenisch 1935, Mansier 1990, Martin 1990). Dai points out that the Sichuan frontier was the most militarized part of the Qing empire by this time. However, the consolidation of the Qing protectorate over Tibet, the elimination of the Zunghar threat (and most of the Zunghars), and

the two campaigns against the Gurkhas, marked the end of Qing expansionism in Central Asia. Sichuan then began losing its strategic significance in the early nineteenth century.

Chapter Six examines the role of the Qing military on the Sichuan frontier. Military officers controlled large landholdings and were involved in the salt monopoly and frontier trade. Nonetheless, military spending stimulated the province's economy, expanding the market for agricultural products and other commodities, and integrated Sichuan into national commercial networks. Sichuan garrisons relied on funds allocated from other parts of China, especially Jiangnan, rather than locally raised revenue. Military campaigns also helped develop transportation and communication infrastructure. The demand for military laborers, who often greatly outnumbered soldiers, also drew landless and unemployed immigrants to the province.

In Chapter Seven, Dai examines the effect of state policy on migration to Sichuan and state participation in the grain market. She argues convincingly that low taxation and cost of living in Sichuan were important factors in attracting immigrants, a point missed by earlier studies of migration to Sichuan (e.g., Entenmann 1982, Li 1987, Sun 1997). Moreover, Dai shows that the extraction of tribute grain from the Lower Yangtze region caused grain shortages there that were increasingly offset by shipping Sichuan grain down the Yangtze. The Qing state also used grain purchases to manipulate the market and control prices. Qing expansionism was spent by the end of the eighteenth century. The state's military priorities shifted to the suppression of rebellion, beginning with the White Lotus uprising (1796-1804), which was followed by weakening of Qing suzerainty in Tibet and the deterioration of control over the Khams borderland.

The last century of Qing rule is sometimes characterized as one of *waihuan neiluan* 'external peril and internal disorder', as China faced unprecedented threats from the West and the largest rebellion in its history. Nonetheless, in the first decade of the twentieth century – which was also the final decade of the dynasty – the Qing carried out an aggressive policy of military conquest and political consolidation in eastern Khams. Xiuyu Wang's study of late Qing expansionism on the Tibetan frontier raises important

questions about the nature of the Qing as a multiethnic empire. For most of the Qing period, Khams was a borderland where Qing and Tibetan governments competed for control. However, local power-holders in Khams generally succeeded in maintaining their autonomy from both Beijing and Lha sa until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Wang's first chapter presents a historical overview of Qing-Tibetan relations and their respective roles in Khams. In particular, he offers a lucid explanation of the dynamics of local authority by *tusi* 'local chieftains' and Dge lugs pa monasteries. His second chapter provides an in-depth examination of three of the four major polities in eastern Khams: the Lcag la kingdom based in Dar tshe mdo (Kangding), monastic rule in Li thang, the 'Ba' thang chieftaincy, and the kingdom of Sde dge (Nyag rong is discussed in Chapter Three). Lcag la was most closely tied to the Qing because of its strategic position on the route from Chengdu to Lha sa. By the nineteenth century, Han merchants and their families outnumbered Khams pas in Dar tshe mdo. Families of Khams pa brokers, however, also prospered. In Li thang, the Dge lugs pa monastery, with an army numbering in the thousands, shared power with local chieftains and landholders. In this context, Qing imperial power was "symbolic and distant" and "the indigenous attitude toward it was often one of indifference" (54). In 'Ba' thang, a strong chieftaincy shared power with the monastery, which was closely tied with Dge lugs pa monasteries in Tibet. Furthermore, a hereditary chieftain in Sde dge enjoyed autonomous power. Wang further suggests in this chapter that, "Lhasa carried less weight here than elsewhere and Qing power was even more peripheral" (58).

Chapter Three describes the abortive efforts of Lu Chuanlin, the governor-general of Sichuan, to establish direct control over Nyag rong in the 1890s. Lu was eager to both expand Qing authority in Tibet and challenge the thirteenth Dalai Lama. The Qing court, however, feared that an aggressive policy would push the Tibetan government toward Britain or Russia and therefore overruled Lu and dismissed him from office.

Beginning in 1904, Xiliang, Sichuan's governor-general, renewed an assertive Qing frontier policy, largely in response to the

British expedition to Lha sa. The 1905 murder of the Qing official, Fengquan, in 'Ba' thang, led to a punitive campaign that became the pretext for destroying independent military power in Khams. This fiercely fought Khams War culminated in a Qing victory. Zhao Erfeng, newly appointed *amban*, completed the campaign with the conquest of Sde dge in 1908.

In the years that followed, the Qing gradually replaced indigenous rule by monasteries and *tusi* with Qing bureaucrats and county-level administration. Qing laws and taxation were imposed in the newly created 'Inner Region Beyond the Pass' (*guanwai aoqu*). Qing officials undertook legal and economic reforms and promoted land reclamation and Chinese-style education. The collapse of the Qing in 1911 meant many of these efforts were short-lived. Nonetheless, they served as precedents for the later expansion of Chinese control of Tibetan regions, under the Republic and the People's Republic.

Dai and Wang make good use of Chinese archival materials in Beijing, Taipei, and Chengdu, and Wang also uses unpublished materials from Dar tshe mdo. Neither uses Tibetan materials, which, in any case, may be unavailable.

The greatest drawback to Wang's book is the absence of maps. Dai serves her readers somewhat better in this regard, with a map of the Border Marches Between Sichuan and Tibet (60). Both books provide a glossary of Chinese terms, but Wang's omits personal and place names.

Dai and Wang's books, complementing each other well in their chronological coverage, greatly further our understanding of the Qing effort to secure control over the Sichuan-Khams borderlands.

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