

Yingcong Dai. *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2009. xi, 352 pp., 2 maps. Paper, \$30.00, 9780295989525. Cloth, \$80.00, 9780295989518.

Since the end of the last century, a group of young historians trained in the US have devoted themselves to the research on southern frontiers in late imperial China such as Taiwan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. Dai's empirical study has drawn our attention to Sichuan, another inner frontier that was connected to the south, the west, and the northwest. Collecting and scrutinizing imperial archives in Taipei, Beijing, Chongqing, and even Paris, as well as in some major East Asian libraries in the US, Dai successfully presents a solid and comprehensive study on a previously ignored region of the Qing Dynasty.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of five chapters, chronologically introduces the history of Sichuan from the Ming-Qing-transition to the Qianlong era (1736-1795). Major military campaigns and their connections with Sichuan were elucidated, particularly the Zunghar campaigns, the Qing's invasions of Tibet, the two Jinchuan expeditions, and the two Gurkha campaigns. As such, this section has provided a basic review and significant discussion on the Qing military history. The second part including last two chapters, examines how Sichuan was shaped by the Qing state policy, namely, "preserving the wealth among the people" and the series of military campaigns. Chapter six examines the paramount role of the military played in local society and economy, and Chapter seven furthers the discussion by scrutinizing the formation of the Sichuan grain market that played an influential role in the cross-marcoregional interactions. Finally, Dai points out that the military achievements created and overshadowed many social problems that predated the Qing crisis before the arrival of Europeans.

It is an extraordinary rich and sound study (for instance, 1,015 footnotes). The title of the book shows that it is a history of Sichuan and Tibet in the Qing Dynasty, which alone makes an enormous project. To readers' surprise, the author simultaneously presents a history of Xinjiang, Qinghai, Mongolia, and the Kham area, if not broader, in addition to

thorough studies of many military campaigns in the west and northwest. It also sheds light on the history of Qing economy, administration, institution, and local society.

There are a lot to commend. First and foremost, the book pays attention to the military, a topic seemingly too conventional, in the long eighteenth century from the Kangxi emperor throughout Yongzheng to Qianlong that was characterized with peace, prosperity, luxury, and development. But Dai distinguishes himself by illustrating how Sichuan, a mountain-ridden internal periphery had gone through and been shaped by a series of military expeditions and a special state policy designed to meet the military need. The Qing expansion along frontiers instead of peace essentially made Sichuan populous, wealthy and strategically significant.

Dai's demonstration of the military significance can be categorized into two aspects. The first is the demarcation of regional and international boundaries. All these expedition facilitated the Qing's consciousness of its territory. Tibet and Qing eastern Turkistan, for example, had been gradually claimed and administrated with various measures and institutions, direct or not, by Son of Heaven. His study shows that various frontiers were taken into consideration by the Qing state as a whole. Connections, interactive influence and interdependence of these frontiers made a local frontier problem into a national splash and consequently reshuffled cards. Being bordered with Tibet and Yunnan, nor far from northwestern frontiers of Xinjiang and Mongolia, Sichuan, due to its strategic geographical location, essentially played a key role in the Qing's frontier expansion to the west and northwest. Military campaigns also impacted the formation of provincial boundary and administration. The case of the Kham area and the position of Governor General of Sichuan, for instance, are of the most revealing. Secondly, Dai has succeeded in discussing how the military mechanism and process shaped local and regional societies, and crossing regional connections. Because of frontier unrests, the Qing designated its light taxation policy in Sichuan, even when the province economy had already recovered from the Ming-Qing chaos. A considerable wealth especially grain was preserved among people that could be utilized for military emergence in Lhasa, for example. To sustain its control of Tibet, intensive military existence in Sichuan was self-evident, and the state was willing to make compromise with local generals, soldiers, and military institutions in terms of salary, privileges, and tolerance of some malpractices. Such state mentality,

attitude, and policy provided a wonderful platform for local economic development, from which the Sichuan grain market stemmed. The surplus rice in Sichuan was not only essential in supplying military campaigns during the emergency, but also was shipped to the highly commercialized Yangzi Delta. In words, political economy constitutes the key to understand the history of Sichuan.

Many implications can be drawn from this study, for example, the mechanism of imperial expansion, reproduction, and crisis. Vicious military campaigns brought the grand glory and legitimacy to Son of the Heaven, for once, but not forever. Enormous human resources, materials and hard cashes were spent, state agenda was re-scheduled, and national and local resources were mobilized and consumed. Such a pattern was unable to sustain continuous imperial reproduction. Eventually, the state machine was too large to shift its agenda when the tension between environment and population had yet made all kinds of social unrests into reality, and the state resources were not sufficient to deal with in the post-Qianlong situation when tensions, problems, and challenges confluent into a social crisis. Consequently, the eighteenth century prosperity foreshadowed the following demise. One may wonder whether the Qing frontier expansions succeeded only for a short term, at the cost of the empire not only economically but politically.

Logically, the capacity and limit of the state power come up to our mind. Dai is correct when he concludes that “the state in imperial China could reshape an area—either defined by administrative scope, geographic boundaries, or strategic significance—by applying specially designed policies to it”(p. 236). This statement is of great interest when we compare the Qing state with P.R. China (particularly of the last three decades). Special policy may be able to make one or two regions (Qing’s Sichuan, or P.R. China’s Pearl River Delta) economically prospering, while some fundamental challenges which are not on the top of state agenda are easy to be ignored. In addition, local and regional developments create new problems and tensions that require the state’s resilient response. Dai’s empirical analysis of Sichuan may provide a lesson for contemporary China.

A few minor issues exist that Dai may like to clarify. While Dai emphasizes that the state perverted wealth among people in Sichuan for military emergencies, grain was the

only major item that he highlights to reveal the state mechanism to extract local resources. Some explanations of the procedure and a few other cases such as tea or silk (if there had been) might help to illustrate the point. And Dai could have been more cautious when reading some imperial records, for example, those documenting well-paid laborers for the military logistics (pp.181-83). It is correct that these migrant workers were primarily attracted by the profitable payment, but it is hard to believe that all the recorded sum of money was paid to them, considering the fact of the military embezzlement of various forms of state expenditures and malpractice and manipulations of imperial regulation. In addition, the term southwest bloc is vague. Dai simply places Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi into this category, without any strict definition. Reader naturally would question its justification and its difference from Skinner's Yunnan-Guizhou marcoregion.

In general, Dai has successfully placed and conceptualized a region in the national and international context. This book makes a significant contribution to studies of the Qing dynasty, Chinese frontiers, and Chinese military history.