

Explorers and Scientists in China's Borderlands, 1880-1950

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European exploration of south-western China during the early 20th century produced a considerable body of knowledge concerning that area. In recent years the opening up to tourism of the remoter parts of China has enabled the academic gaze to return to those realms once labelled the 'Sino-Tibetan marches', for they lie between the centres of Han Chinese and Lhasa Tibetan civilisation. The region is home to a patchwork of tribal groupings who are today increasingly drawn into modernity, particularly in the forms represented by the Chinese communist state.

This timely volume of papers, which derives from a University of Washington symposium, examines the contributions of a number of individuals who worked in these regions prior to the communist take-over. These travellers have in common the fact that they were all linked to institutions of collection and classification. Consciously or unconsciously, they shared in the idea of a 'high' (that is, Western), culture vis-à-vis a world of nature, which included tribal societies which were (in that paradigm), properly represented in Natural History museums.

None of this eclectic selection of travellers was particularly interested in Asian high culture, and while participants in, or at least beneficiaries of, the contemporary process of European imperialism in China, they were also witnesses to the process of Han Chinese imperialism against the non-Han cultures of the south-west. It was with those colonised peoples that they tended to identify. That identification produced a body of work that is today situated in on-going processes of identity formation, for many of the individuals discussed here are now honoured for their role in cultural preservation by the descendants of those among whom they worked. Some, notably Joseph Rock, are even locally commodified for domestic and international tourist consumption.

There is a total of 14 contributors, including film-makers, and a

number of chapters focus on issues of visual representation, the creation of a 'culture of display' in which the field of vision was structured to 'emphasize the subjective, empirical gaze of an imperial viewer and to deflect the power of the return gaze' (p. 30). These classifying and categorising projects implicitly supported contemporary theories of race, yet also contested their presumed hierarchies. Not only did many of those discussed here comment favourably on their tribal subjects vis-à-vis the Han, but other intellectual currents might also be involved, such as the identification of a tribal group as descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Only a nuanced examination of individual approaches such as is provided here can properly reflect the complexity of these patterns of encounter, and reading those examined here by no means encourages a simplistic model of power relationships in this process of knowledge construction.

While a number of European and Chinese explorers are discussed here, seven are the subjects of separate chapters, and as expected several are identified as escaping the boundaries of their own class background. In the case of the botanist George Forrest (1873-1932), who made seven expeditions to China in search of alpine flowers, and Ernest Henry Wilson (1876-1930) who made two plant-collecting expeditions there, their lower class origins were reshaped by their successful careers. The Swiss Fritz Weiss (1877-1955) and his writer wife Hedwig (discussed in a chapter written by their grandchild and film-maker Tamara Wyss), were of Jewish ancestry, and their peregrinations among the Nuosu, a sub-tribe of the Lolos, reflected both the imperial context of Fritz's employment by the German consular office and a more personal search for a reflection of their own ancient imagined society.

The social rise of botanist Joseph Rock (1884-1962) also came as a consequence of his work. In a collaborative chapter with no less than five authors, the extent to which Rock's published work is actually dominated by his studies of Hawai'i rather than Asia is brought out, but the less attractive aspects of his life and work are largely ignored, giving a somewhat unbalanced picture of the man.

Like Rock, Paul Vial has recently been re-evaluated as his writings are utilised by local church and tourist board interests and within the development of Yi studies as a specific field. Vial, who worked among the Sani Yi in eastern Yunnan during 1887-1917 as a 'religious leader, ethnographer, linguist and agent of empire' (p. 150), was a man whose memory

'has been suppressed, manipulated, and exploited to legitimize changing values and worldviews' (p. 151). A strongly anti-Han moderniser, he established his own model community among the Sani, thus offering an alternative path to modernity.

David Crockett Graham (1884-1961), a Baptist 'missionary, educator, natural historian, museum curator and anthropologist' in western Sichuan from 1911 to 1948, is the subject of two chapters. Graham was the long-time editor of the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, a treasure trove of writings that would surely repay a modern reprint. The increasingly academic Graham eventually returned to the USA to undertake formal studies in anthropology, having won renown for the more than 400,000 specimens he sent to the USNM/Smithsonian. Graham's work has also been reassessed in modern China, and he is beginning to be seen as an exemplar of Sino-Western cultural exchange.

The final chapter discusses Sweden's Johan Gunnar Anderson (1874-1960) and his Chinese contemporary Ding Wenjiang (1887-1936). Anderson, the Director of Sweden's Geological Survey, was invited to China in 1914 to advise on mineral prospecting. Ding, the British-educated Director of China's National Geological Survey, was originally his host, and was a strong believer in positivist science as a universal value. Ultimately, the linguistic and ethnological studies of these two friends served the Republican Chinese model of modernisation.

While the subjects of individual chapters occasionally overlap, this well-illustrated publication is to be welcomed. It is a cohesive collection that celebrates its subjects' achievements while remaining critical of many of their assumptions. It is of considerable relevance to those interested in similar historical processes in the Himalaya and provides a valuable stepping-stone to further scholarship in this area.