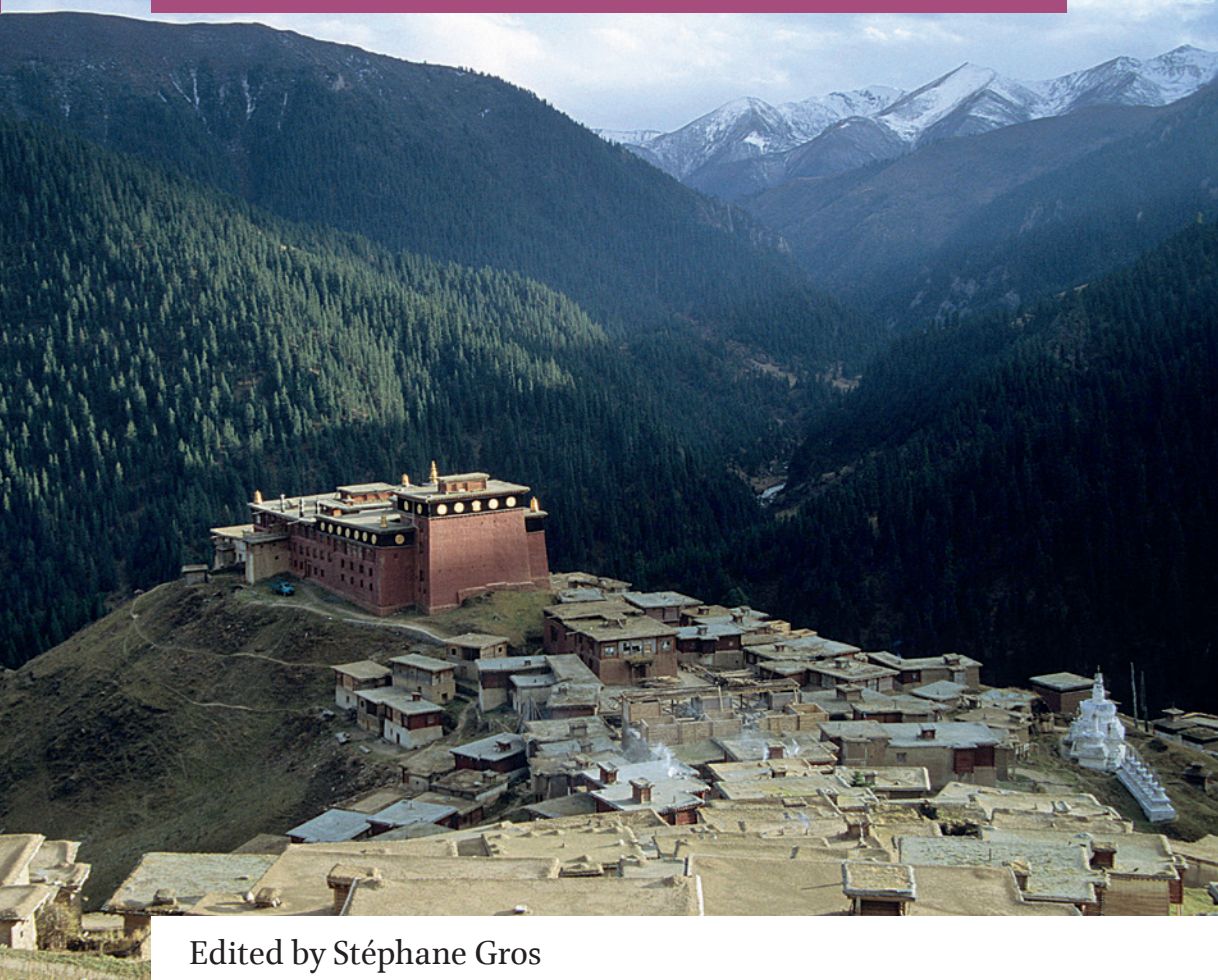


ASIAN BORDERLANDS



Edited by Stéphane Gros

Frontier Tibet

Patterns of Change
in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands

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Frontier Tibet

Asian Borderlands

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

This book stems from a research project funded by the European Research Council (Starting Grant 283870) entitled ‘Territories, Communities and Exchanges in the Kham Sino-Tibetan Borderlands’. The project called for an understanding of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands in their historical, geographical, and multi-ethnic complexities, and in a relational sense of boundaries of identity re-construction between neighbouring Tibetans and Chinese. The two worlds (Tibetan and Chinese) have mingled to some extent, while the cultural and ethnic divide have been maintained, and the process has involved at different levels many diverse local communities who may at varying degrees have recognized themselves – or not – in either of these two large categories of identity. In exploring the extent to which the region of eastern Tibet called Kham can be said to be ‘Sino-Tibetan’, we thought it worthwhile to highlight its connected features, its relational nature as a nexus of power. This volume aims to explore the intertwined questions of place-making, identity, and socio-political transformations that constitute Kham’s convoluted historical trajectory and influenced its becoming as a regional formation.

A first outcome of the research project was the edited volume entitled ‘Worlds in the Making: Interethnicity and the Processes of Generating Difference in Southwest China’ (Gros, ed. 2014). It set out to compare a variety of visions and conceptualizations of people and places located at the crossroads between the conventional cultural areas of Southwest China, Southeast Asia, and Tibet and we addressed, among other topics, issues of Otherness and identity building. Contributors thereby sought to go beyond the pervasive dichotomy that often leads to a depiction of encounters in terms of acculturation, absorption by the other, or resistance to the other. While at different historical moments particular categories of identity have certainly been mobilized and the boundaries between them hardened, the volume explores various ways in which identity results from evolving relations and transactions.

A second edited volume, ‘Frontier Tibet: Trade and Boundaries of Authority’ (Gros, ed. 2016), derived from the realization that within the field of Sino-Tibetan frontier studies, there was still little in-depth scholarly discussion about commerce, trade, and the people who facilitated these activities. Examining such activities was also of primary importance for the period of transition between the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and the Republic of China (1912-1949), when eastern Tibet became an exemplary case of

frontier expansion and state building, a process during which this region underwent state-led political integration. The present volume builds on these earlier efforts and achievements, and takes as its challenge what C. Patterson Giersch (2016) called for in his Afterword: 'using local Kham history to push the boundaries of global borderlands studies'. We do so with contributions from both historians and anthropologists.

A growing literature now offers a healthy critique of traditional historiographies of China's frontier zones by approaching them as liminal or interstitial areas where economic and cultural exchanges take place along processes of ethnic formation. These are not marginal places; borderlands have their own logics and integrity – not only in relation to a centre as an expression of a spatial dichotomy but also in relation to particular histories. Scholarship has been increasingly challenging centrist views and their peripheralizing gaze to uncover the borderlands's own centrality. Such studies have prompted a reconsideration of the centre-periphery paradigm as a historical construct.

Particularly relevant to the time-frame of this volume is the substantial revision of the history of the Qing Empire in China and Inner Asia that falls under the heading 'new Qing history' (e.g. Waley-Cohen 2004) which, by reconsidering the Manchu's contribution and relationship to Chinese culture, challenges the received wisdom of the Sino-centric model of Confucian cultural unity (Crossley 1999, Dunnell and Millward 2004, Di Cosmo and Wyatt 2003, Elliot 2001, Perdue 2005, Rawski 1996). This body of literature has productively enacted the necessary dialogue between history and anthropology with greater attention to the intricacies of the local and effective use of the notion of ethnicity. Influential volumes have also combined historical and anthropological perspectives and have highlighted (dis)continuities in the political and cultural processes of articulating territorial integration and multicultural rule (e.g. Brown 1996, Faure and Ho 2013, Harrell 1995, Lary 2007, Rossabi 2004).

Comparable approaches have informed more nuanced views of Tibetan diversity across the plateau, challenging a unitary history of the Tibetan people. Several authors have shown how premodern Tibet developed its own Buddhist civilizing mission at the frontier of the state (Samuel 1993, Goldstein 1998, Huber 2011, Tuttle 2011), and that the Tibetan world is also characterized by internal diversity and the related dynamics of ethnicity (Kolås and Thowsend 2005, Shneiderman 2006, Klieger 2006). Some approach 'borders as liminal spaces' that are intrinsically ambivalent and unstable (Tenzin 2014, xiv), or focus on barely visible 'interstitial populations' (Roche 2014) in the context of porous and labile ethnic, linguistic, and territorial

boundaries (see Gros 2014). Increasingly, and across the disciplinary divide of Sinology and Tibetology, our understanding of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands in their diversity and connections with larger dynamics, is being reshaped.

Some of the first studies about Kham were for some time dominated by an interest in the history of religious institutions and charismatic figures (Smith 1968, 1969, 1970). As many have pointed out with due reason, religious history is of primary importance for understanding Kham's history in its cultural, political, and economic dimensions. The religious diversity and the contemporary forms of religious revival are essential local dynamics in Kham (see Germano 1998). Following in the footsteps of Elliot Sperling's (1976) seminal article on Zhao Erfeng's (Chao Er-feng) role in late Qing China's colonial expansion, many historians have examined the policies aimed at taking control of this increasingly contested space, focusing on particular locales and time periods of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Along the same lines, Western language publications have focused on questions such as: imperial expansion and Sichuan leaders' shifting strategies of colonization (Coleman 2014; Dai 2009; Ho 2008; Relyea 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017; Wang 2011); Sino-Tibetan relations during the Guomindang rule and the provincialization of the frontier (Jagou 2001, 2006; Lawson 2013; Leibold 2005; Lin 2006; Rodriguez 2011; Tuttle 2005); or development of self-rule and resistance in Kham (Angdrugsang 1973; Norbu 1986; Peng 2002; McGranahan 2006, 2007). This Foreword cannot do justice to all contributions that would fall within 'Kham studies': this expanding literature is discussed in the introductory chapter and by each author according to their thematic focus.

Since the 1990s, under the leadership of Tibetan researchers in China and in exile, several series of publications on the history and cultural traditions of Kham have appeared, most notably the important set of publications from the project initiated by Tashi Tsering of the Amnyen Machen Institute. Contributions in both Tibetan and Chinese languages regarding Kham's history, culture, and contemporary economic development are now extremely numerous in China where there is a growing interest in local histories, from individual monasteries or former chieftains to specific regions. Two edited volumes of the proceedings of the International Association of Tibetan Studies have laid the ground for the development of studies of eastern Tibet and Kham in particular (Epstein 2002, van Spengen and Jabb 2009), and many have been published in China (e.g. Ze Po and Ge Lei 2004, Luobu and Zhao 2008, among others) where emphasis is often laid on the period of transition from empire to nation (see Shi 2011). In the Chinese academic context 'Kham(pa) studies' (Ch. *Kang(ba) xue*) has emerged as a

new disciplinary field. Its development can hardly be totally neutral and calls for attention to its ethico-political implications.

One key development in recent studies of Kham or other locales of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands is the emphasis on a history from below and increased attention to alternative histories that are not to be found in official records (see Hayes 2014, Holmes-Tagchungdarpa 2014, Kang and Sutton 2016, Tsomu 2015, Ptáčková and Zenz 2017). This volume contributes to this new trend, while also acknowledging the continuous relevance of an in-depth analysis and a critique of processes of expansion that progressively led to the integration of 'Tibet' into the People's Republic of China. For this reason, there is still a strong Chinese studies component in this book and its title can also be understood as a provocation. For it is clear that if this edge of the Tibetan plateau remains a frontier from a Sino-centric perspective, many of the chapters attest to the different ways some places have kept their own centrality in the eyes of their inhabitants, albeit with new parameters. These are part of the patterns of change explored in these pages.

The reader no doubt understands that this book does not attempt to sum up our knowledge of Kham and this particular part of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. Contributors were invited to reflect, through their own historical or ethnographic material, on the relevance of Kham for borderland studies and no theoretical framework was imposed. There still are, of course, many gaps to be filled. Needless to say, none of us speaks on behalf of the Khampa. In fact, Kham is used as a heuristic to explore collective and individual trajectories at crucial historical conjunctures and to demonstrate that Kham is highly relevant for the study of Asian borderlands and our understanding of 'Tibet' in its relationship to 'China', both understood as contingent entities with shifting territorial imprints. This book calls for a regional approach across the divide between history and anthropology, while not taking for granted the character of the region. Indeed, the challenge is to write a regional history that speaks to the complexity of the lived experiences of place, territory, sovereignty, and agency.

As with all projects, especially when they are collaborative in nature, many debts have been accumulated over the years. First of all, my deep gratitude goes to Yudru Tsomu for the meaningful discussions and exchanges we had during the preparation of this manuscript, and for the comments she offered on the other chapters including my introduction. Most contributions to this volume were presented during the international conference 'Territories, Communities, and Exchanges in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands' that took place on 18-20 February 2016, at the Cité Universitaire Internationale de Paris. My thanks go to Rémi Chaix, Lara Maconi, and Kunsang

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Stéphane Gros

Berkeley, 12 September 2018

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Map 1

