

and pitfalls of modern urban life, especially Shanghai, as a place of opportunity for flaneurs, hucksters, and other cheats, and the opportunity to commodify “images,” even the image of one’s self. They were part of a landscape of socio-political inversions and play that blended newly available technologies with pre-modern media and forms. Jokes and their ilk were commodities of which authors sought to claim ownership; they were produced and reproduced in the popular presses, which Rea identifies as part of a global phenomenon. At the same time, laughter and other forms of play were also beacons to socio-political reform.

The Age of Irreverence is a must-read for scholars of modern East Asian cultural studies, and it would be an excellent addition to graduate seminars or upper-level undergraduate courses on the subject. Scholars of silly walks, jocularly, and facetiousness would also find the book captivating, whereas those who do not get jokes should not get this book.

There are very few arguments in this book that I take issue with, and the scholarship is lucid, original and compelling. I wrote a whole paragraph about one minor point that I wish the author had explained more, decided I was merely being pedantic in order to prove that I was paying attention and had something critical to say (because that’s what you do at this point in a review), and I deleted it. Instead, I wrote down the title of the primary source alongside a long list of other texts Rea has piqued my interest in so I can go read them myself. Continuing with minor quibbles, I will now reveal my incomplete understanding of the economics of proofreading and typesetting: I was confused as to the logic behind when *hanzi* appeared in the text, and where it was determined that pinyin would suffice, or that characters would instead be given in the endnotes. I wish the economics of academic book publication would allow every book to include *hanzi* right there on the page in all instances where it is germane, and I wish I understood them better (the economics, not the characters. On second thought, the characters too).

A World Trimmed with Fur: Wild Things, Pristine Places, and the Natural Fringes of Qing Rule. By JONATHAN SCHLESINGER. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017. ix + 271 pp.

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In the 1980s American scholarship on Chinese history moved towards a “China-centered” approach, one that advocated a study of China’s past from the angle of the country’s own culture, institutions, and historical path. The rift at the time had come as a response to the Western-centered reading of Chinese history.¹ In the 1990s there emerged yet another wave of interpretation, which historians have called “New Qing

¹The China-centered approach continues to be relevant today: Paul Cohen’s *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press), which at the time of its appearance in 1982 was a prelude to this new interpretation, was republished twenty-eight years later in 2010.

history,” or as we might also name it, “Qing-centered history.” This time historians believed that the reading of Qing history had been too China-centered, and they argued that “Qing” was not “China”—or that at least it was more than “China.” This approach reconceptualized the history of Qing rule by raising new questions about its nature and by establishing a new chronology: the Qing dynasty had begun not in 1644 when Beijing fell to the Qing armies, but in 1636, when Hong Taiji declared its founding in Manchuria. And Qing governance, far from being a copycat of traditional Chinese governance, included institutional elements that Manchu tribal leaders had experimented with and developed during the pre-conquest period. Scholarly discussion has revolved around the Manchuness of the Qing ruling elites, their rewriting of Manchu history, their invention of traditions, and their organization of social institutions, as well as around questions of how the Manchu rulers governed the provinces, the frontiers of the empire, and the peoples under their governance.²

In the last decade, Harvard University has become the center in the United States for the research of Qing-centered history, with graduate students going through a robust training not only in Chinese-language sources, but also in those produced in Inner Asian languages, such as Manchu, Mongolian, Turkic, and Tibetan. Jonathan Schlesinger’s *A World Trimmed with Fur* is firmly embedded in this tradition, and to illustrate his scholarly affiliation with it, Schlesinger gives reference in the “Acknowledgments” to a statement once made by his PhD adviser at Harvard University that “the tapestry of Qing history (is) like woven silk: We must study the *fringes* to understand its construction” (ix; emphasis added). Qing-centered historians thus make a particular point of focusing on the frontiers of the empire, which they view not as extensions of the imperial center, but as regions with their own independent history. Schlesinger writes: “Each frontier was also a homeland, and each homeland had its own dynamic history” (7).

A World Trimmed with Fur explores the state’s administrative and ideological response to the depletion of natural resources in Qing Manchuria and Mongolia from 1760 to 1830. Without losing sight of Chinese-language sources, Schlesinger makes extensive use of those in the Manchu and Mongolian languages, which are held at the Mongolian National Central Archive in Ulaanbaatar, the First Historical Archive in Beijing, and the National Palace Museum in Taiwan (9). These sources have been in the fringes of Qing scholarship for a long time, and Schlesinger highlights their indispensability to research on Qing Inner Asia, noting that “most studies of Qing frontiers continue to rely on published Chinese-language accounts, such as the *Veritable Records*, local gazetteers, and the diaries of exiles” (8) and that “given the structure of the state, Qing rule is ... indecipherable without a multilingual approach” (9). As Schlesinger explains, Qing officials rarely translated frontier-related documents into Chinese, and the meaning of those they did translate was often transformed in the process (9); it is, therefore, essential to read these documents in their original language. However, to the present reviewer, the claim that “given the structure of the state, Qing rule is

²For an overview of this scholarship, see R. Kent Guy, “‘Who Were the Manchus?’ A Review Essay,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61.1 (2002), 151–64 and Joanna Waley-Cohen, “The New Qing History,” *Radical History Review* 88 (2004), 193–206. To my knowledge, the emergence of this new approach was for the first time openly articulated in Evelyn S. Rawski, “Presidential Address: Reenvisioning the Qing: The Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.4 (1996), 829–50.

indecipherable without a multilingual approach” needs to be qualified, for it assumes an ideal of comprehensiveness in our understanding of the past that is impossible to achieve. Several studies on both the frontiers and China proper, which heavily rely on Chinese-language documents, have provided invaluable insights into *different aspects* of Qing rule and have increased our knowledge of the period.

Having said that, it is undeniable that for the specific subject and questions that Schlesinger focuses on, it is necessary to delve into the Manchu- and Mongolian-language sources: why, in the second half of the eighteenth century, did the Qing state attempt to protect the mussel beds in the rivers of Manchuria? Why did it outlaw mushroom picking in Mongolia? Why did it begin to go after poachers actively? Schlesinger notes that Chinese sources are not sufficient to enable historians to answer these questions; to be sure, references to or discussions of steppe mushrooms as consumer and literary objects abounded in Chinese sources, but when it comes to their history as trade objects, one must turn to the Manchu and Mongolian archives in Beijing and Ulaanbaatar (93–4). The latter contain countless confessions, memorials, and registers, which provide the material to interpret state policies and to get a glimpse of the social context of the mushroom rush (95). Moreover, as the author puts it, “by recovering such sources, we might also humanize voices once relegated to the realm of ‘birds and beasts’” (9)—that is, the voices of the various tribal peoples of Mongolia and Manchuria who were assigned by the Qing court to send tribute of furs and pearls every year.

An equally important contribution of Schlesinger’s work is the fact that it places consumption at the center of its analysis: the increasing demand for frontier products in the eighteenth century led to serious environmental consequences and to a reconfiguration of state policies and ideologies. Historian Frank Trentmann draws attention exactly to this role of consumption as a determining force especially during the period from the eighteenth century through the twentieth. In his recently published global history, Trentmann writes: “The aim ... of this book is not only to appreciate consumption as the outcome of historical forces. Consumption, in turn, also changed states, societies and daily life.”³ In the same vein, Schlesinger’s work explores the ideological and political ramifications of consumption in the history of Qing empire-making. Moreover, by following the trail of exotic frontier commodities—furs, pearls, ginseng, and steppe mushrooms—it brings to light the “invisible” class of hunters, pearl harvesters, and ginseng and mushroom pickers in the borderlands, which stood at the starting point of the commodity chain and supplied the goods so much desired by the metropolitan elites. *A World Trimmed with Fur* comes as an invaluable addition to the scholarship on consumption within and outside the China field.⁴

³Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper, 2016), 9.

⁴Outside the China field, consumption is a well-established subfield, especially of Anthropology and European history. Given the amount of scholarship that has been produced, it is impossible to list everything here. For an introduction, see Daniel Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London: Routledge, 1995) and Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). In the Qing field, Antonia Finnane, Lai Hui-min, Joanna Waley-Cohen, and Wu Jen-shu have been actively publishing on consumption and material culture. For an overview of the field, see the Qing chapters in Elif Akçetin and Suraiya Faroqhi, eds., *Living the Good Life: Consumption in the Qing and Ottoman Empires of the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Two recent studies on material

Chapter One discusses the shifts in Beijing's culture of consumption during the High Qing period and thus provides the background information for the ideological, political, and commercial developments that the author elaborates in the following chapters. Consumption was inextricably linked with the fashioning of identities; at court the Manchu rulers created a cosmopolitan and opulent consumption culture, while at the same time they highlighted elements from what they perceived to belong to their old rustic Manchu culture: they went hunting, wore furs, and ate venison and deer (21–9). These “invented traditions,” to use Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's expression, recreated the so-called pure and natural lifestyles of the Manchu rulers' ancestors and took on a renewed importance during the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Qianlong emperor realized, to his dismay, that the Manchu bannermen were being assimilated into Chinese culture (20). In the context of this ideological framing, court demand for frontier products, such as furs and pearls, increased.

As Schlesinger tells us, however, these products did not remain a privilege of the Manchu rulers; they also became an inseparable part of elite Chinese fashions (18). A contributing factor was the shift in the court's gifting practices during the Kangxi reign, when the emperor began to distribute gifts of fur pelts, robes, and jackets to Chinese officials, especially those who had been successful in military campaigns (37).⁵ The Yongzheng emperor took this practice a step further, by presenting such gifts to his civilian subjects—for example, to the living descendants of Confucius—and to a broader group of officials (37–8). In time, sumptuary laws became obsolete (42), and furs and other frontier products became accessible to a wider social group, a process that resulted in what Schlesinger calls “the Qing integration” (33). As the craze for frontier products took hold of the capital, the Qing imperial integration was manifested in, but also accelerated by, the production of a large number of writings on frontier products by scholars, poets, connoisseurs, gourmards, and pawnbrokers. Scholars on their part went back to the historical sources in order to trace and establish a genealogical link between the frontier products of their time and those of an imperial and Inner Asian past (46–9).⁶ To be sure, these goods did not lose their significance as symbols of the “true” and “pure” Manchu lifestyle, but, as Schlesinger argues, they also “became part of a larger, shared, and peculiarly Qing material culture” (35).

In Chapter Two, Schlesinger weaves the case studies of ginseng and pearls into the history of Manchuria as an imagined homeland. Manchuria or the “Three Eastern

culture are Dorothy Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones: Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017) and Yulian Wu, *Luxurious Networks: Salt Merchants, Status, and Statecraft in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

⁵The Kangxi emperor's favoritism toward the military has been shown by Yingcong Dai in several of her works, including her article “To Nourish a Strong Military: Kangxi's Preferential Treatment of His Military Officials,” *War and Society* 18.2 (2000), 71–91. In a recent article Michael G. Chang shows how in the wake of the Three Feudatories War, the Kangxi emperor used commensality to strengthen his alliance not only with the Manchu and Mongolian nobles, but also with those officials with military responsibilities, including provincial governors. See Michael G. Chang, “Of Feasts and Feudatories: The Politics of Commensal Consumption at the Early Kangxi Court,” in Akçetin and Faroqi, eds., *Living the Good Life*, 307–29.

⁶Some of this literature that Jonathan Schlesinger discusses in Chapter One appears to have been in the tradition of the evidential research scholarship (*kaozheng*) that Benjamin A. Elman has treated in several of his works.

Territories” (Mukden, Jilin, and Sahaliyan Ula) as it was known in the Qing dynasty, was an ethnically and administratively diverse region and a commercial center in its own right, with connections to Siberia, China, Hokkaido, and Korea (61, 63–5). It was home to peoples of different tribal associations, some of whom had been enrolled in the Eight Banners, while others were incorporated into the tribute system, providing the court with furs, ginseng, and pearls. The tribute system itself was divided into different categories, each defining the special relationship between a given tribal group and the Qing court.

When pearl and ginseng production in the region began to show signs of decline, the Qing ruling elites responded by increasing the policing of poaching: they declared moratoriums on pearl harvesting; ordered the “purge” of poachers and the punishment of corrupt officials whose actions, they believed, caused the region’s natural products to dwindle in the first place. In order to facilitate policing, the state gave operational authority to the local Qing officials; for example, in the case of the Hunter Ula banner in the region of the Upper Sunggari river—a group that harvested Manchurian freshwater pearls for the court—in 1748 the Ula commandant came under the direct authority of the Jilin governor who was now put in charge of the administration of pearling operations (75). As a result, Schlesinger argues, “the complexity of Qing rule diminished ..., as groups like the Ula were brought under the unified command of the territories” (88). There was also an ideological dimension to this territorial centralization: as state power diffused in the locality, emperors and provincial officials justified it by claiming that the Three Eastern Territories was the dynastic homeland of the Manchu rulers, and that the “pure and simple” customs and the natural products of this homeland were under attack from external corrupting forces (89–90). They thus fashioned a new Manchu territorial identity entwined with a discourse of “purity,” one that obscured the ethnically diverse and complex history of Manchuria.

Chapter Three turns to the case study of the mushroom rush in Mongolia and reveals a similar story. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Qing state devised a system of passports and permits in order to control the movement of merchants and confine their activities to designated areas. As demand for exotic Mongolian goods such as steppe mushrooms and deer horn increased in Beijing, Mongolia became the El Dorado of Chinese merchants and poor immigrants from Shanxi, Shandong, southern Zhili, and Henan (107). As long as the numbers of undocumented merchants and immigrants were manageable, the issue was resolved with the creation of new rules and regulations; but when in the late 1810s complaints about large numbers of undocumented mushroom pickers trespassing into Mongol pasture land began to swarm in, the state turned its full attention to the problem. The local banner authorities actively went after poachers, even sending troops to raid their camps (112). Mushroom picking eventually was defined as a crime, and a precedent was established by the Board of Punishments in 1829 (115). As was the case in Manchuria, the state justified these policies through a discourse of “purity.” The concept of “purity” had an important place in Mongolian culture; holy mountains, game parks, and the interior of Khüree were to remain “pure,” because they were sacred places which had “an association with heaven (Mo: *mgri*), state power, men, and spiritual ‘rulers’ or ‘masters’ (Mo: *ejen*)” (125). Moreover, in imperial imagination the Mongols, like the Manchus, were viewed as people with temperance who led a frugal and simple life; but, as the emperors warned, Mongols’ nature was also prone

to corruption (118). The Qing rulers, therefore, saw themselves as the protectors of the true nature of their Mongol subjects, who needed to be shielded from external corrupting influences.

In Chapter Four, Schlesinger lays out the state's response to the decrease of fur-bearing animals in Mongolia and Manchuria, with a focus on the territories of the Uriankhai people in northwestern Mongolia. The Uriankhai's relationship with the Qing state was defined according to the specific role they occupied in the empire; their sole responsibility was to provide fur tribute to the court, and even though many of them were pastoralists, they were defined in the imperial classification as hunters. The state did not interfere in their internal affairs, but was determined to keep their territories and way of life unspoiled by what it perceived to be the corrupting force of trade (143–5). Hence the Qing state created a special administrative zone in the Uriankhai territory along the Russian border and fortified it with guard stations (*karun*). The Uriankhai's movements were largely restricted, as they were allowed to hunt only in designated areas, and only when the state allowed them to (153–6). The Qing state also created a separate chain of command: when drafted to serve in the *karun*, guardsmen became directly attached to the imperial representatives in Khüree or the military governor in Uliasutai (147). With yet another territorial adjustment, the Qing state aimed to “purify the land,” maintain the Uriankhai's natural environment, and, above all, continue uninterrupted the tribute relationship.

As the three case studies reveal, then, the rhetoric of “purity” prevailed prominently in the Qing state's approach to the environment. But to what extent was this ideology the driving force of the Qing state's policies to nurture the environment and the natural products within? Schlesinger argues that for the Qing rulers it was, first and foremost, about controlling people and borders, and imposing social order; in fact, he notes, “there is no evidence that the state cared about plants, animals, and fungi in and of themselves” (117). Moreover, consumer goals, which were driven by identity-making, were also determining; the Qing rulers wanted the real stuff, because, as they saw it, they could not possibly project the image of the rustic and natural Manchu with fake and low-quality products. The frontiers, therefore, had to remain “pure.”

It was thus not environmentalism in the modern sense, but rather an environmentalism that was guided by the concerns to consolidate territorial rule and to fashion identities. The Qing state had established a certain order and understanding of the world, where people were endowed with certain natural qualities, belonged to a certain activity, needed certain goods for survival, and were tethered to the state through a certain administrative arrangement. The collapse of these classifications threatened the Qing control of the frontiers, and as a response the state heightened the level of surveillance. The irony in all of this was that this world as the Qing rulers knew it was bound to be dislocated, one way or another, by the rapid growth of consumption at the imperial court and beyond. Qing rulers failed to understand that rising consumerism was the force that tipped the balance.

What Schlesinger does here is historicize environmentalism, that is, he shows how the approach to nature and the environment is firmly embedded in the political and cultural context of an era. *A World Trimmed with Fur* thus opens a window on the imperial mentalities of the High Qing period. At the same time, it incorporates into the historical narrative the “history-less peoples”—to use Eric R. Wolf's expression—of the Qing

empire's borderlands, which were often reduced, in Chinese (and even Manchu) sources, to the realm of "birds and beasts" (see the quotes from Cenggunjab's 1758 memorial on page 143).

For example, through a quantitative analysis, Schlesinger reveals major changes in the Uriankhai tribute system, a conclusion that gestures at the serious ramifications that animal scarcity and ecological crisis had on these people's lives (159–65). This analysis establishes a strong foundation for future research on the question of how increasing consumption in China proper, together with state policies, affected the modes of life and environments of the native peoples of Mongolia and Manchuria.⁷

Moreover, Schlesinger's study prompts us to think about why there were differences (and sometimes similarities) in the way the Qing state administered the different frontiers of the empire and legitimized its policies in each case. Research in the field has hitherto shown that the Qing state did not perceive and govern all of the frontiers (and the regions of China proper, for that matter) in the same manner; a striking contrast emerges, for instance, when we compare Qing governance in the southern frontiers with that in Manchuria and Mongolia. The case presented in *A World Trimmed with Fur* helps us to explain some of the reasons for this divergence.

Chinese History and Culture, by YÜ YINGSHI. 2 volumes. With the editorial assistance of Josephine Chiu-Duke and Michael S. Duke. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016. 432, 448 pp. Each volume: \$65.00, £54.95 (cloth), \$64.99, £54.95 (ebook).

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When I began graduate school, a friend sent me a list of books I ought to read if I wanted to make informed choices about my graduate work. I tried to work my way through the list, but soon the demands of graduate course work took over, and the items from my friend's list remained on the shelf. If I had to write such a list today, the first item on it would be the two-volume collection *Chinese History and Culture*, a collection of the English-language writings of Yü Yingshi 余英時 (b. 1930). There would be a certain ironic justice in this. Many of the items on my friend's list were works by Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), a very broad-ranging historian who founded New Asia College in Hong Kong. Yü Yingshi was a graduate of New Asia College and student of Qian Mu, who returned to the college as its president in the 1970s.

Chronologically organized but not a narrative, the work explores central issues of several thousand years of Chinese history with sparkling creativity and force. Although the essays are complete in themselves, they provide an entree into the much wider world of Professor Yü's Chinese scholarship, where details and the Chinese language texts of

⁷For a comparison see Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), Chapter Six "The Fur Trade," 158–94.