

## Book Review

**Community Still Matters: Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context** by  
(Ed.) Aysima Mirsultan, Eric Schluessel and Eset Sulaiman, 2022, NIASS Press

This recently published collection is a Festschrift in honor of Dr. Ildikó Bellér-Hann, Lecturer Emerita at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. While Dr. Bellér-Hann describes herself as a Turkologist, her research and publications from 1987 onwards provide a window into her impressive breadth of interests and expertise. Dr. Bellér-Hann has used a multitude of methods and approaches including historical anthropology, oral history, literary studies, and area studies. Her research draws upon both textual sources and primary data gathered from extensive fieldwork conducted in NE Turkey, NW China (Xinjiang) and Kazakhstan.

The volume reflects the many facets and strengths of Dr. Bellér-Hann's approach that continue to be cultivated among scholars active in the field, several of them being nurtured by her. These contributions are showcased through twenty short chapters, each around 5000 words. They range from historical accounts of Europeans and community figures active in Uyghur lands, to love letters, memoirs of migration, ethnographic work, and literary studies.

Chapters in the volume lay down the spectrum of themes and focal areas including the connections between the Uyghur region with British Colonial power and the Ottomans; the role of community leaders and intellectuals such as Safdar Ali Khan, and Abdulaziz Kolcali; the memoirs of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Swedish missionary Lovisa Engvall; historical events such as the Qoray rebellion of 1958; and intersectional issues engaging gender, oral history, Maoism, and identity politics.

Chapters also span units of analysis ranging from Abdushukur Muhammet's contribution on a historic marital alliance in Kucha, to Rune Steenberg's work on the changes in Uyghur marriage practices over the last century. The chapter by Rachel Harris and Zulfiyam Karimova uses symbolic Interactionism to study tea ceremonies and gender socialization among Diasporic Uyghur communities in Kazakhstan, while another by Ildiko Gyongyver Sarkozi studies the tense interactions between the Chinese state's ethnic reconstruction projects with family histories written and preserved by individuals. Jun Sugawara presents the analysis of a love letter between two individuals as a window into the life of women in

Sufi families at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and also makes the case for studying personal correspondence for understanding complex community issues. The volume does not shy away from the Chinese government's forced assimilation policies, and the chapter by Joanne Smith Finley delves into the state's internment camps, harassment of Uyghur female hostesses in Han dominated cities, and conservative social norms through which Young Uyghur women use their agency towards autonomy.

This is a valuable contribution to anyone interested in a first orientation to Uyghur studies. Contributions provide approaches and discourse diverse from the earlier scholarship of Central Asia presented by Soviet scholars, and showcase European and Uyghur perspectives on themes under study. The range of themes and disciplinary approaches undergirding the volume have meant a tradeoff with depth, but that seems to be the design. While this book will not be very productive for scholars already engaged in Uyghur studies, it will be a boon for new scholars entering Uyghur studies, or those who are generally interested in ethnic or area studies who come from a variety of disciplines and use diverse sources and methods.

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