

Book review: Aysima Mirsultan, Eric Schluessel, Eset Sulaiman (eds.): Community Still Matters - Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context

Olivieri, Chiara

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shows the actual vitality, plurality and emancipatory momentum that emanates from the very words that make up this space. Let there be more work, research and academic commitment in this direction.

Fabricio Rodríguez

AYSIMA MIRSULTAN / ERIC SCHLUESSEL / ESET SULAIMAN, *Community Still Matters. Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context*. (Studies in Asian Topics 77). Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2022. 356 pages, £70.00. ISBN 978-87-7694-315-8

The volume *Community Still Matters. Uyghur Culture and Society in Central Asian Context*, edited by Aysima Mirsultan, Eric Schluessel and Eset Sulaiman, is presented as a tribute to the exceptional work of the self-described “Turkologist” Ildikó Béller-Hann. In her work, Béller-Hann has helped to shape the field of Uyghur Studies, influencing the research of almost any scholar who engages with the Uyghurs, both in Central Asia and in the diaspora.

Her aim to give voice to the Uyghurs throughout her career and scholarship inspired most of the authors who contributed to this book – the title of which also recalls one of the most influential works by Ildikó Béller-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang 1880–1949: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur* (China Studies 17, Brill 2008). Béller-Hann’s book discussed ongoing research among Uyghurs and highlighted the importance of what the editors of *Community Still Matters* call “circles of kindness”, which “rely on members who proceed from a positive social orientation towards mutual support in pursuit of a common scholarly goal” (p. xi).

The current volume is composed of twenty short chapters that analyse a broad range of issues among Uyghurs, from diverse perspectives: historical (the chapters authored by Hermann Kreutzmann, Eset Sulaiman, Ildikó Gyöngyvér Sárközi, Rune Steenberg, Jeanine Dağyeli, Patrick Hällzon, László Károly and Ingvar Svanberg); biographical (David Brophy, Fredrik Fällman, Abdushukur Muhammet and Ablet Kamalov); literary (Eric Schluessel, Jun Sugawara, Claus V. Pedersen and Joshua L. Freeman); women’s studies (Zulhayat Öktür, Aysima Mirsultan, Joanne Smith Finley, Rachel Harris and Zulfiyam Karimova); political (Martin Lavička); and anthropological (Ingeborg Baldauf). The limited length of chapters seems a wise choice in many ways: on the one hand, it enables a greater range of topics to be covered within the volume, providing a highly varied scenario of fields of study related to the Uyghurs; moreover, it also gives voice to a larger number of scholars engaged with Uyghur studies, bringing those “circles of kindness” to the fore. Some readers may be

left with the desire to know more about the issues examined, but an extensive bibliography is provided at the end of each chapter to encourage further reading.

This edited volume represents a brilliant contribution to Uyghur studies, for a number of reasons: first, it is deeply rooted in Ildikó BÉller-Hann's heritage, which undoubtedly shaped the very tradition of committed works on Uyghurs. Moreover, the structure of the book provides a very broad vision about a great diversity of topics, enlightening fields otherwise obscured in classic research. The transdisciplinarity of the texts, which range from the fields of historiography, biography, literary studies, anthropology and sociology to medical sciences, political sciences and others, provides one of the richest collective works in sources, content and themes that has been published to date in Uyghur studies. The commitment of the authors to the Uyghurs is clearly reflected in the tone and objectives of each chapter, as well as the authors' deep knowledge of diverse, direct sources, both archival and ethnographical.

The guiding thread of the volume is its aim to restore importance and academic relevance to the Uyghur people's community affairs, which are fundamental for the formation and preservation of an identity that, for geopolitical reasons, is being forced into "tight categories" imposed by the state. Such categories apply indifferently to practically all areas of the private and community life of the Uyghurs, from civil and religious ceremonies to "rites of passage", historical memory and historiographical narratives, artistic and literary production. The studies and analyses of these circumstances and the changes that have occurred in recent decades point to the chief factor behind them: the unequal and hegemonic relations established between China – in its different historical stages, from the Qing Dynasty to the Guomindang regime and the civil war, to the establishment of the People's Republic – and its colonial territories.

In the academic field, which is increasingly divided on the Uyghur question between those who deny the oppression and those who work to report it, this book is outstandingly committed to rigorous, diverse research that spans epistemologies and disciplines, providing voices from different geographical, linguistic and subject areas.

In the last seven years, due in part to the relevance that the issue has acquired in the international media landscape, in addition to the greater presence of highly trained and specialised researchers, academic publications on Uyghur studies have appeared with steady frequency. This collective work, in addition to paying tribute to an academic who expressed the greatest effort, expertise and commitment to Uyghur studies, lays the foundations to continue investigating Uyghur "community matters", in an attempt to preserve the integrity of the Uyghur people, and especially their history, from politicised historiographical narratives.