Growing out of a 1996 conference held at Dartmouth college, this volume attempts to shed new light on issues of ethnicity and ethnic identity in late imperial (Ming-Qing) China by considering “the role of the Ming and Qing empires in the marking, enforcement, suppression, or invention of identities” (p. 3). Perhaps more significantly, many of the essays contained herein also examine the process of self-identification or categorization, particularly as it pertained to access to resources and legal protections more generally granted to less-marginalized members of late imperial Chinese society. Indeed, the authors are adamant against accepting standard imperial narratives of Sinicization and they reject the term and all that it presumably implies with an almost religious zeal throughout, possibly dismissing certain aspects of the process a bit too cavalierly in this reviewer’s mind. It is not that standard neat narratives of the civilizing march of Han culture across the landscape that eventually became the modern PRC are not problematic. But at times the authors’ venomous dismissals of imperial claims of “acculturation” and “civilization” (esp. pp. 6-10) serve to hamper rather than help their arguments with respect to finding the nuanced realities behind the processes of ethnic and cultural identification they seek to elaborate.

After a meandering and rather unsatisfying introduction, the book is divided into four parts, none of which really seem to tie together that well. Part I is called “Identity at the Heart of Empire” and includes chapters by Mark Elliott, Pamela Crossley, and Jonathan Lipman, although only Elliott’s essay deals with the heart of empire in that it discusses ethnicity within the Eight Banner system of the Qing. Part II, “Narrative Wars at the New Frontiers,” contains a pair of essays on the Western and Southwestern frontiers respectively, but easily could have also included the next three essays, which are instead included in a part entitled “Old Contests of the South and Southwest.” Part IV, “Uncharted Boundaries,” includes a pair of essays on Southeast China, though an essay by Ann Csete concerning ethnicity and conflict on Hainan island is puzzlingly included in the previous section. A conclusion completes the work and serves to tie various analytic threads together in much more lucid fashion than the introduction. The conclusion also does an impressive job of connecting issues raised in the essays to twentieth century developments and processes, particularly as they pertain to the multi-ethnic nation-building efforts of the People’s Republic. In the
In chapter one, “Ethnicity in the Qing Eight Banners.” Mark Elliott looks at categories and ethnic identity within the Qing Eight Banners, emphasizing the importance of the banners in maintaining Manchu power by providing the “institutional framework that sustained the distinctive Manchu lifestyle” and therefore perpetuated Manchu identity through the Qing (p. 51). Because the Manchus were a privileged conquest elite, standard narratives of ethnic subordination are insufficient for understanding their ethnic identity, argues Elliott, who calls for a “transactional, constructivist understanding of ethnicity” (p. 35) that encompasses both external and internal markers of ethnic membership. One of Elliott’s more interesting revelations is his discussion of various banner reforms throughout the Qing that progressively altered the character of the Eight Banners, transforming them from a Qing institution to a Manchu institution. In the next chapter, Pamela Crossley highlights the importance of the Mongols in creating and defining the Qing empire as universal. The defeat of Dughul Khan in 1634 and the incorporation of the Mongols into Hong Taiji’s expanding empire, along with the capture of symbolic artifacts including the alleged seal of Chinggis, allowed the nascent Jurchen/Manchu state to draw upon a powerful ancient symbol of legitimation. Thereafter Mongols would retain an important position within the Qing imperial hierarchy, with Mongol nobles being in attendance at key shamanistic rituals and Manchu princes being taught Mongolian.

Unfortunately, while Crossley mentions the Qing ability to gain legitimacy in “Mongolia,” variously defined, many of the details of this fascinating process are left out in favour of lengthy discussions of military campaigns which are readily available elsewhere, most notably in the fine recent book by Peter Perdue, *China Marches West*.

The next two chapters deal with Islam and Muslims in Qing China. In “A Fierce and Brutal People,” Jonathan Lipman examines the relationship between Muslims and Qing law, looking at shifting terms of legal description and classification of Muslims, revealing a fluid ethnic discourse grounded in the broader context of the so-called “Confucian Man’s Burden” to civilize non-Han or supposedly unorthodox elements of society (pp. 84-85). In the process Lipman notes how the modern Chinese *minzu* classification paradigm has obfuscated historical representation of Chinese Muslims. He is also careful to note how even individuals had trouble categorizing Chinese Muslims, finding them alternatively different and dangerous or reserved and unthreatening to state authority. As the wildest, most stereotyped members of Chinese society, Sinophone but dangerous, Muslims always held a nebulous legal status. In “The Qing and Islam on the Western Frontier,” James Millward and Laura Newby look at the process of identity formation amongst different groups in Xinjiang. They remind us that even though they encouraged Han settlement, it was never the Qing intention to Sinicize Xinjiang. Nevertheless, the Qing created a sort of Manchu imperialism with Chinese characteristics. For example, while local leaders would be invested with the title of beg (*boke*), the post was no longer hereditary. Sino-Muslims in Xinjiang came to embody “a rapprochement between the Qing imperial realm and the religious and commercial world of Islam and Central Asia” (p. 125). This study shows the flexibility and rationality of the Qing empire-building project while also demonstrating how it inadvertently sowed the seeds for twentieth-century Uighur nationalism.

John Herman next examines the Ming-Qing incorporation of hereditary aboriginal offices (*tusi*) in Southwest China, particularly Guizhou, into the regular administrative structure of the empire, a process referred to as *gaitu guliu* in the primary sources. Utilizing gazetteers and diaries of local officials for the most part, Herman demonstrates that this process was neither neat nor uniform, and in fact the most common strategy for political integration was in fact no more than fragmenting potentially powerful local chieftainships into smaller more easily manageable units. Herman focuses on a couple of powerful and ancient chieftain families for the bulk of his discussion, one of them being the Yangs of Bozhou. In this respect it is somewhat surprising that he neglected to use Li Hualong’s *Ping Bo quanshu*, which is