

Water, Sovereignty and Borders in Asia and Oceania

Edited by

**Devleena Ghosh, Heather Goodall
and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald**

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Water, Sovereignty and Borders in Asia and Oceania

In the twenty-first century, water is an increasingly contested and scarce resource in an era of climate change and rising water demands related to global urbanisation and industrial agriculture. There are conflicts over rivers in the Middle East and in South Asia, fishermen are imprisoned for crossing the invisible borders of national oceanic economic zones, and in China and Australia, regional populations, city dwellers and colonised indigenous peoples are engaged in battles over internal rivers.

This book restores water, both fresh and salt, to its central position in human endeavour, in ecology and in the environment. It explores the roles that water, in both rivers and oceans, has played in shaping and challenging national and international demands for precise borders and clear-cut sovereignties. This book draws on water's many formations and representations, exploring human relationships with an essential component of life and a major factor in contemporary politics. The topics range from oceans and rivers to lagoons, billabongs and estuaries in Asia, Oceania and the West Pacific. In interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary analyses of the many facets of water and its crucial role in everyday life and in geopolitics, the contributors address the physical descriptors of water and interrogate its politicised administrations.

Water, Sovereignty and Borders in Asia and Oceania identifies new discursive possibilities for thinking about water in theory and in practice. It presents discourses that address the multiple crises of water access and availability in an economically booming region and thus should be of interest to scholars of Asian Studies, Geography, Environmental and Cultural Studies.

Devleena Ghosh is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Inquiry at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. Her research interests are in Indian Ocean studies, postcolonial studies and the cultural history of migration. She is currently involved in a joint project researching Intercolonial Networks in the Indian Ocean. **Heather Goodall** is a Professor of History in the School of Social Inquiry at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. Her research interests include place and contested histories, indigenous histories, environmental history, cross-cultural research, international activism and new media. She is currently engaged in a research project focussing on Australia's relations with the Indian Ocean Region. **Stephanie Hemelryk Donald** was formerly Director of the Institute for International Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia and is now a Professor of Chinese media studies at the University of Sydney.

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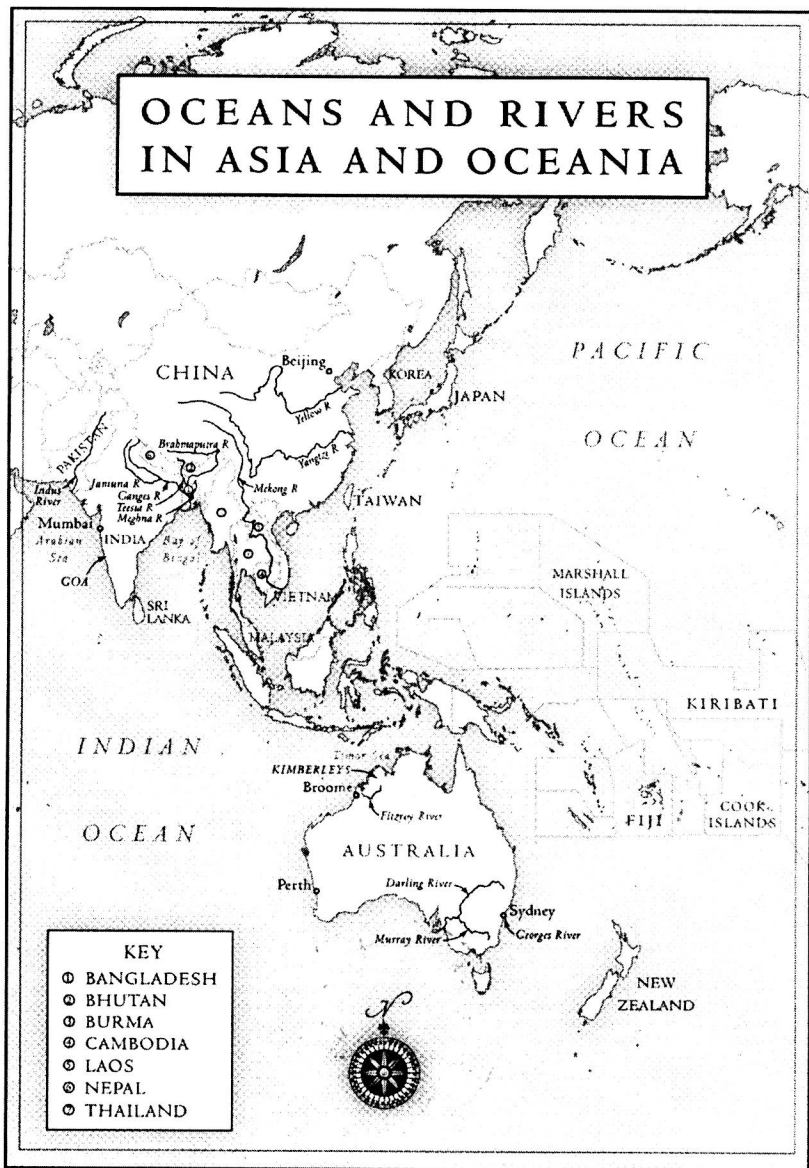
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OCEANS AND RIVERS IN ASIA AND OCEANIA



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This book brings together some of the articles presented at that symposium along with other invited pieces relevant to the theme of water, borders and sovereignty. The editors gratefully acknowledge the cartographer, Ian Faulkner, for creating a marvelous map to tight deadlines and Lola Sharon Davidson whose assistance, editing and indexing skills were invaluable.

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Introduction

Fresh and salt

Devleena Ghosh, Heather Goodall and Stephen Muecke

Nothing in the world is more flexible and yielding than water. Yet when it attacks the firm and the strong, none can withstand it, because they have no way to change it. So the flexible overcome the adamant, the yielding overcome the forceful. Everyone knows this, but no one can do it.

Lao Tzu

Amphibious stories

Water, whether fresh or salt, has been an essential part of human culture and history. Each story of livelihood extracted from water tells of the ebbs and flows of the creation of the national and global economy, made by people with cultures, not just capital. For example, the Indian Ocean is not just the Indian Ocean rim, a regionalization based on capital flows, with an empty centre. An historical and cultural perspective such as Gilroy's pinpoints how traditional economic ideas are inadequate to explain historical developments (Gilroy 1993). The neoclassical and Marxist 'labour theory of value' doesn't apply well to forests, rivers or the sea, and current notions of economic development conflict with ecological stability. This book attempts to restore water, both fresh and salt, to its central position in human endeavour, ecology and environment.

Water, like all other elements essential to and intertwined with human lives, is made meaningful by people in various ways. For example, many people saw (and still see) water as a 'force of nature', governed only by deities like Neptune or Varuna, moving according to its own chaotic, complex and rhythmic logic. When we read water, we focus on aspects we can observe and understand; the currents and tides, things which will move us if we sail it in our specially designed ships. Over generations we build up knowledge of the relations of wind and water; and we store this knowledge in texts. We can calibrate the tides and the monsoonal seasons. Free of the manipulative agency of humans, bodies of water, rivers and oceans, still remain, of necessity, readable. Yet we can take another step in this fluid philosophizing and assert that we *have* made modifications to oceanic and riverine architecture: yes, *maybe* we have made them physically different and hence more humanly meaningful than we thought. For