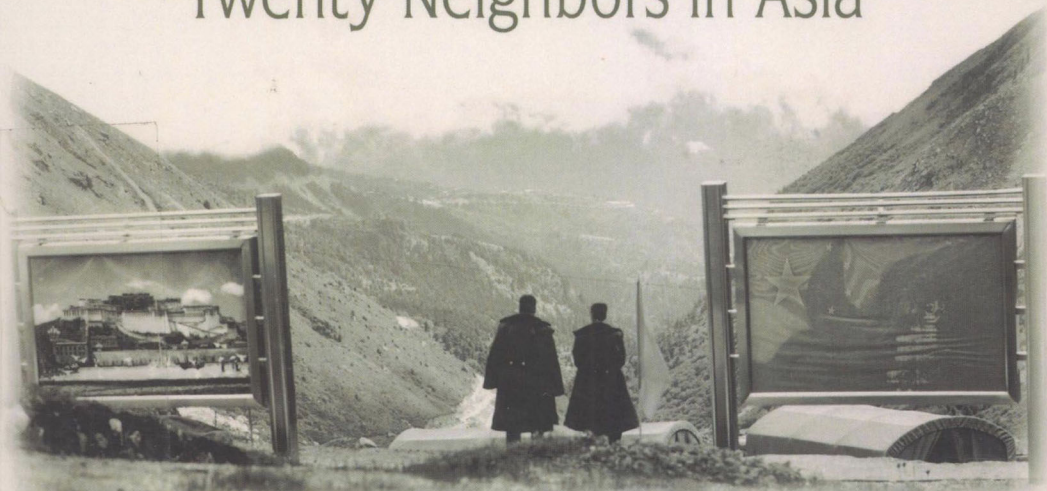


BEIJING'S POWER and CHINA'S BORDERS

Twenty Neighbors in Asia

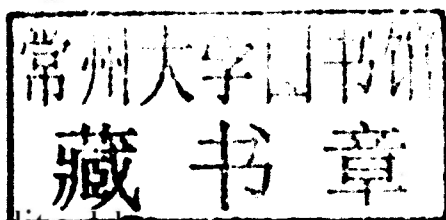


Edited by

Bruce A. Elleman, Stephen Kotkin,
and Clive Schofield

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Profound thanks to Allen Whiting, who, in addition to writing such classics as *China Crosses the Yalu*, during the 1950s “discovered” the Columbia University copy of the original Karakhan manifesto that promised the return of the Chinese Eastern Railway to China without compensation, thus helping to inspire a whole generation of students researching Sino-Soviet diplomatic and border relations.

Patricia Kolb of M.E. Sharpe has maintained a strong interest in our series over many years. Along with the able Kimberly Giambattisto and Ana Erlic at M.E. Sharpe, Pat provided invaluable editorial assistance on the current volume.

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Series Editor's Preface

Stephen Kotkin

Publications and commentaries continue to proclaim China as the world's newest superpower, though fewer analysts evince similar passion for elucidating the many limits to Beijing's great power ambitions. Fewer still take account of the unique circumstance that China borders on 20 countries—more than any other state. Unlike the United States, which abuts Canada and Mexico as well as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, China has perhaps the world's most strategically complex geography. China has twelve land and six maritime neighbors, together with two neighbors—Korea and Vietnam—with which it shares both land and sea boundaries. This circumstance provides China with a source of enormous leverage, but also equally monumental challenges.

Beijing has made significant progress in forging diplomatic and economic links with its neighbors, and in resolving many territorial disputes, but China and its neighbors disagree over a significant number of overlapping territorial and maritime claims, including disputes over what lies under the ground and under the sea. The present volume of twenty essays addresses China's neighborhood and boundaries with Afghanistan, Bhutan, Brunei, Indonesia, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Taiwan, Tajikistan, and Vietnam. In doing so, we offer a very different vantage point on China's rise as a great power—the perspective of its 20 neighbors.

Beijing's Power and China's Borders: Twenty Neighbors in Asia constitutes the fifth volume in a series on Northeast Asia that I launched with colleagues and the publisher M.E. Sharpe—*Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East* (1995); *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan* (1999); *Korea at the Center: Dynamics of Regionalism in Northeast Asia* (2005); and *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History* (2009). The first three of the four books were based on scholarly conferences. All pursue a form of international history that is rooted in specific places but transcends current national boundaries. Here, we confront the borders themselves.

We are hardly the first to do so. In *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (2008), the MIT-based political scientist M. Taylor Fravel underscored Beijing's practical willingness to

compromise, alongside its rhetorical inflexibility, in territorial disputes over decades. Fravel argued that China's behavior did not reflect the external balance of power—a neighbor's manifest weakness did not elicit a forward Chinese policy.

Nor in Fravel's telling did Beijing's conciliatory behavior in territorial matters reflect a supposed internalization of international norms, a favorite notion of those who see China bending to the American-centric global order. Rather, according to Fravel, China's willingness to compromise in frontier disputes derived from perceptions of its own domestic vulnerabilities: when the regime in Beijing has felt threatened internally, it has sought compromise externally.

Fravel noted that some disputes that China considers as wholly internal its neighbors view as external—notably Taiwan (the last of the three “homeland” disputes, after the absorption of Hong Kong and Macao). Still, he depicted China (before 2008, the publication date of his book) as a status quo power, concerned about domestic separatists and long-term modernization, favoring stability, and therefore measured in its foreign policy rather than prone to expansionism or provocative international behavior. If true, and enduring, this would offer a comforting vision for a lot of countries. Fravel allowed, however, that the converse of his main point held as well: when China has felt secure internally, it has not hesitated to use force in international territorial disputes.

Numerous analysts, not all of them wielding the depth of Fravel's painstaking case-study research, in effect turn Fravel on his head, putting forth what is his key explanatory factor for external moderation—internal political difficulties—as an explanation for what they perceive to be China's increasing aggressiveness. In this overall less benign view of China's external behavior, analysts also single out, among other factors, Chinese nationalism, factions in the opaque Chinese leadership (especially the military), and the allegedly inexorable conflict dynamic generated by rising powers as drivers of assertiveness. This is hardly a view limited to Americans. Masako Ikegami, a Stockholm-based Japanese scholar, has likened current Chinese policy in Northeast and Southeast Asia to imperial Japan's forcible intervention to create the puppet state of Manchukuo on Chinese territory in the 1930s (*Tamkang Journal of International Affairs*, April 2011). And yet, even many hawkish analysts of China have often felt constrained to admit that Beijing has generally tended to be more moderate than many people (i.e., themselves) predicted. Of course, past performance is no guarantee of future performance, as we hear after every market crash.

But one thing we do know for certain is that despite the far-reaching globalization of the world order, state sovereignty remains enshrined at the core of the international system and, as a result, border issues in Asia will continue to present challenges and opportunities for everyone there, America included. To be sure, the United States and China do not share a formal state border, but given mutual and

competing economic interests, as well as rival military projections, they might as well: U.S. and Chinese interests seem to converge much more outside the Asia-Pacific region than within it. The larger point, though, is that in an interconnected world, China's international behavior will not be determined by China alone.

Chinese officials, for their part, frequently claim their country is a victim and is merely in the process of overcoming indisputable legacies of unequal treaties. By contrast, China's neighbors, even powerful ones such as Japan, see contemporary China throwing its weight around, on such issues as the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. Both these views are true. China's external behavior, such as the efforts to extend its naval power far beyond its territorial waters (described in China as a move from "coastal defense" to "far sea defense"), can fairly be interpreted as either aggressive or as a natural (and expensive) outgrowth of its export-led growth and insatiable demand for commodities, crops, and other resources, and a desire to ensure open sea lanes. Both explanations are inseparable. But what really stands out—independent of Beijing's motives, or of regime type—is the inherent difficulty that *any* Chinese state would face in managing borders with 20 different neighbors.

Consider that even though China's international water disputes have been numerous, as the essays that follow show, no less consequentially China is the source of cross-border river flows into Russia, Kazakhstan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, North Korea, Indochina—overall, into the largest number of countries in the world. (Tibetan sources alone supply water to 11 countries.) China's construction of dams within its borders ipso facto affects hundreds of millions of people—outside China. (China also builds more dams overseas than any other country.) Sharing so many critically important rivers with so many neighbors is a source of power for China, but it is also a burden, arousing suspicion and anger, especially when China makes decisions it regards as vital for its own internal development and national interests that can fundamentally alter daily life and development patterns in other countries.

Innumerable examples in the essays below will be seen of China's decisions being fraught. This should not be taken in the least to vindicate (or impugn) China's positions in territorial disputes, but rather highlights how no other state is challenged by the balancing act China faces.

Ultimately, any book on China's borders must acknowledge that China is not just a regional, but also a global power, whose state and private companies pursue foreign direct investment and trade far beyond its borders, with Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South and North America. Beijing's treasury and sovereign wealth fund enable it to purchase large amounts of foreign debt, while accumulating huge foreign currency reserves, and China's own currency, the *renminbi*, appears on a trajectory to become a global reserve currency in its own right. China's expanding

numbers of submarines and the acquisition of a retrofitted Ukrainian aircraft carrier (the U.S. Navy has eleven carrier groups) has underscored a desire to deploy a blue-water navy. Chinese construction firms have become ubiquitous as China's huge infrastructure build-out extends far beyond East Asia. For all these global matters, however, China's neighborhood and border disputes remain absolutely fundamental.

Consider the strategic trade routes from China to Europe. Currently, these run predominantly through the South China Sea and Indian Ocean via the Malacca and Singapore Straits and Suez Canal. A largely ice-free route through the Arctic could prove revolutionary, though that proposition remains to be seen. Alternative routes on land currently proceed by means of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, from Harbin, or across Central Asia, the Caspian, and the Black Sea. East Asian goods going through Suez into the Mediterranean reach European ports in approximately 45 days; rail across Russia could, in theory, deliver those same goods to Finland in a third of that time. But Russia's ability to rebuild infrastructure across vast distances and inhospitable terrain including natural swamps, as well as across its domestic bureaucratic bog, have so far brought that proposition no nearer. Moscow and Vladivostok lie 5,753 miles (9,259 km) apart; Moscow and Pyongyang, 6,380 miles (10,267 km). Russia's dream of extending the Trans-Siberian through the Korean peninsula has gotten nowhere, undermined by severe underinvestment in upgrading Russian railroads as well as geopolitics.

In the meantime, eight different countries—China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—have been cooperating on a multi-billion dollar effort to upgrade the patchwork transit system in Central Asia. Drawing on multicountry expertise, labor, and financing, the group has envisioned up to eight rail and road corridors across the trails of the Silk Road, the 19th century name for the ancient route. The west-east land corridors would lead to Turkey, and possibly to southwestern Russia, from China's far west. (In addition, the Central Asians have been eager to reinforce their north-south routes, down to South Asia and the Middle East.) But even though China has completed an internal rail link to Lhasa, China's far west continues to suffer social and political unrest (in Xinjiang as well as Tibet), while China lacks an integrated domestic trucking system inland; visions of building dozens of airports in western regions—a “Silk Road in the sky”—have met skepticism about overcapacity. With so many states in Central Asia, maintaining such cooperation is not a given. The upshot has been that China has been investing far more in infrastructure along the sea route to Europe. In doing so, the border story is inescapable.

China has no California—that is, its western frontier does not border on an ocean. But Chinese-funded infrastructure projects across neighboring Myanmar and on that country's coast could afford Beijing strategic access to the Bay of Bengal and to the

Indian Ocean. The largest and most important projects, as of 2012, have been an oil pipeline and a hydroelectric dam. The dam on the Irrawaddy River had been intended to deliver 90 percent of the power it generates to China, while leaving Myanmar with many of the side effects, such as forcibly resettled villagers. Here, the Chinese squeeze appears to have induced the Myanmar junta to seek the balancing power of the United States. In January 2012, the junta released a slate of political prisoners, signed a tentative cease-fire with Karen ethnic rebels, and promised to permit elections—and the United States reopened its embassy and planned to send an ambassador for the first time in two decades. The U.S. Secretary of State followed with the first such visit to Myanmar in 50 years. The elections took place, delivering impressive success for the opposition. The Myanmar authorities also promptly sent a high-level delegation to Beijing to soothe the impact. The U.S. attention span in Southeast Asia remains to be seen. China is in for the long haul, and its currency, mobile phone networks, and companies and laborers continue to spread over Myanmar. The oil pipeline, from a deep sea port on the Bay of Bengal, is going forward with more generous attention (schools, hospitals) to those affected.

On China's eastern frontiers, a similarly strategic area for Beijing, China eyes ports on the northern Pacific. Beijing's North Korean policy perplexes American policy makers, particularly when the North Korean regime appears to surprise and buck its Chinese patron. But the prospect of a collapse-unification enabling American military bases to move into North Korea may be making Beijing more indulgent. Meanwhile, Chinese-funded development projects in North Korea could potentially compensate for Russia's seizure of the Amur Basin in the 19th century, and afford China better positioning on the Pacific than does the Liaodong peninsula alone. To be sure, China already enjoys freedom of navigation on the river system leading to the Pacific, as well as on the ocean itself. Nonetheless, for China's northern regions a Chinese infrastructure build-out in North Korea could someday deliver improved access from the Pacific coastline, including northward to the Arctic Ocean. South Korea, for its part, looks warily upon the prospect of Chinese investment and infrastructure in North Korea. China's border with the Korean peninsula remains highly unpredictable.

In the end, relations with neighbors support not only China's regional position in East Asia but its global position. Knowing more about the territorial issues between China and its 20 neighbors is tantamount to a deeper understanding of the possibilities and limits of Chinese power.

Abbreviations

ADB Asian Development Bank	MFTC Malaysian Friendship and Trade Centre
AMM ASEAN Ministerial Meeting	MMAF Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries
ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations	MNDAA Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
ASEAN+3 The ASEAN nations plus Japan, Korea, and China	MOU Memoranda of Understanding
CBM Confidence Building Measures	MPR Mongolian People's Republic
CCP Chinese Communist Party	MPRP Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
CENTO Central Treaty Organization	NSG Nuclear Suppliers Group
CER Chinese Eastern Railway	PLA People's Liberation Army
CIA Central Intelligence Agency	PLAN People's Liberation Army Navy
COMECON Council for Mutual Economic Assistance	PMZ Provisional Measures Zone
CPV Chinese People's Volunteer troops	PoK Pakistani-occupied Kashmir
CSTO Collective Security Treaty Organization	PRC People's Republic of China
CU Customs Union	QDII Qualified Domestic Institutional Investor
DoC ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea	RATS Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure
DPRK Democratic People's Republic of Korea	RFE Russian Far East
DVFO Far Eastern Federal District	ROC Republic of China
EEZ Exclusive Economic Zone	ROK Republic of Korea
EoL Exchange of Letters	ROV Republic of Vietnam
GNH Gross National Happiness	SAARC South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
GTI Greater Tumen Initiative	SAR Special Administrative Region
GWOT Global War on Terror	SCO Shanghai Cooperation Organization
IAEA International Atomic Energy Agency	SEATO Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross	SEZ Special Economic Zone
IMF International Monetary Fund	SRBM Short Range Ballistic Missile
IRPT Islamic Revival Party	TAR Tibet Autonomous Region
ISAF International Security Assistance Force	TRADP Tumen River Area Development Project
JMSU Joint Marine Seismic Undertaking Tripartite Agreement	TZ Transitional Zones
KIG Kalayaan Island Group	UNCLCS United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
KKH Karakoram Highway	UNCLOS United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982
KMT Kuomintang	UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
KPA Korean People's Army	UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
KVA Korean Volunteer Army	WTO World Trade Organization
LAO PDR Lao People's Democratic Republic	XUAR Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
LDP Liberal Democratic Party	

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