

India China: Rethinking Borders and Security. L. H. M. Ling, Adriana Erthal Abdenur, Payal Banerjee, Nimmi Kurian, Mahendra P. Lama, and Li Bo. *Configurations: Critical Studies of World Politics*, ed. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780472130061

In his forward, editor Patrick Jackson notes that the *Configurations* series “is about using contemporary social theory to produce novel insights about specific empirical cases.” What is unique in this book is the use of history as the analytical tool to understand the ongoing conflict over the Himalayan border between India and China. In analyzing this on-going dispute, the authors deliberately rejected what L. H. M. Ling calls the “self-aggrandizing, Westphalian drama” of power politics between territorially defined states and sought to rediscover the non-state, transnational social relations that existed prior to the 20th century in order to both redefine the problem and suggest potential solutions. The result is an effort to reassess the India-China border dispute as an issue anchored in the surrounding borderlands.

In the introductory chapter, Ling contrasts the idea of fixed, administrative, state-defined and capital driven borders with that of “organic, multi-directional, and life-giving analogy” of “capillaries.” This analogy opens the way to study the Himalayan border areas as cradles of social, cultural, economic interaction. It is an attempt to fill in what is missed when looking at the India-China border situation through a principally western IR perspective. This leads Ling to the four analytical propositions examined in the book. The first concerns the re-discovery of ancient knowledge on problem solving that the “Westphalian myth” ignores or rejects and apply it to the contemporary situation. The second is that culture underpins the state and that the peoples of the India-China borderlands have hundreds of years of cultural interaction that is applicable to current interstate relations. The third proposition is that norms should guide and inform policy and that the most important norm is that which leads to and sustains the common

good versus that which benefits an elite minority. The final proposition is that development is an area where power is negotiated between local and global interests, local and national political interests and social and cultural interests.

The first of the book's six chapters is Adriana Abdeneur's short examination of the history of exchange in the trans-Himalaya borderlands. Using the 2006 re-opening of the Nathu-la Pass as a signature event, she characterizes India China cross-border exchange as not unique or an anomaly, but rather the reintroduction of movement in an area that saw the constant exchange of goods, peoples, ideas and cultural practices for almost two thousand years. The post-colonial decision to territorialize the borderlands broke the historical continuity and led to the marginalization of the borderlands as remote areas, principally of security interest, vice highways of interaction. Starting where this chapter ends, Mahendra Lama's chapter examines the borderland's current economic potential and possible revitalization. For Lama, economic development is critical to renewing the capillarie flow in the borderlands and that such flow will improve both India and Chinese security by creating interest groups, promoting interest and participation in civil society and ultimately leading to the creation of institutions that promote cooperation and development.

While the first two chapters examine the borderlands from the larger perspectives of regional history and economic development, chapters three and four focus on subregionality as an analytical method to both understand (primarily ecological) issues and suggest alternatives. In "Subregionalizing IR: Bringing the Borderlands Back In," Nimmi Kurian argues that subregional integration and policies will have to include a devolution of authority to the local level. The key to this is evidence-based policy learning through "meaningful subregional debate on questions concerning sharing, trade-offs, risks and burdens." Using the ecological issues of agriculture,

building construction and hydrological resources, Kurian argues that only through the recognition and discovery of the specialized circumstances and the application of this unique understanding to the Himalayan borderlands can problems in these areas be solved. Delving even more specifically into the subregional, Payal Banerjee and Li Bao engage in a “Dialogue Across Borders” concerning Chinese and Indian dam projects in Yunnan Province and Sikkim state. While their chapter provides background on the two dam projects, the most interesting part is the dialogue between the Indian and Chinese authors concerning their governments’ statist approach to the decision to embark on the project and the strikingly similar ecological, economic, and political problems surrounding their construction. Despite different political systems, the commonality of these subregional issues and the government responses to them suggests common ground for exchange, debate and learning.

The book’s concluding chapters are built around potential strategies for dealing with the border issues and suggestions for further study and engagement. In “Border Pathology: *Ayurveda* and *Zhongyi* as Therapeutic Strategies,” Ling relies on the ancient medical traditions of acupuncture and yoga as metaphors for understanding and treating the India-China “border problem.” But beyond that, Ling considers the border pathology within a broader and unwell world political system that privileges states and power politics. Following a distracting metaphysical discussion of *Ayurveda* and *Zhongyi*, Ling puts forth the diagnosis: the border problem resembles a personality disorder, with rapid swings between brutishness (border clashes) and anxiety (deficits of trust and security). The treatment is not just to relieve the patient’s symptoms, but to change the relationship between the patient and their wider context. The key to changing this context, as argued in the book’s short concluding chapter, is by arriving

at a greater and more appropriate understanding by abandoning the Westphalian, western model of international relations replacing it with a nonwestern-centric approach.

Ultimately this is an interesting and frustrating book. It is interesting in its treatment of the India China border problem and its emphasis on borderlands and subregional as a vehicle for analysis. It is frustrating because the book devolves into a polemic against western, Westphalian-based international relations theories. In a short monograph you might be able to do one or the other sufficiently, but not both. For an audience interested in borderland studies, or more specifically the India-China border dispute, this book could be considered at best a supplemental reading to more detailed descriptions or analysis. Similarly, for those interested in IR theory and new social science approaches, this book is again at best a supplement to more thorough and well-argued works. In either case this is a book for advanced undergraduates or graduate students as both the lexicon and arguments require familiarity with either Asian history or broader IR theory.

At the time of writing, once again Chinese and Indian forces are facing off in the Himalayas over the Bhutan border. The ongoing dispute once again has flared into a near crisis, highlighting the continued pertinence of this book's subject matter.

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