



BOOK REVIEW

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## Review of *Re-Imagining Border Studies in South Asia*

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### *Re-Imagining Border Studies in South Asia,*

Edited by Dhananjay Tripathi

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South Asian academic engagement with border studies as a discipline is set against the backdrop of its contemporary trysts with the idea of the nation and the postcolonial markers of territoriality and state-formation, which has been intensely contested over time. There are multiple worldviews of the nation-state and its diverse constituents, which form the crux of analyzing borders from a South Asian context. The machinations of nation-state control over its sovereign territory are securitized in the form of 'lines of controls', for instance the Line of Control (LoC) and the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the context of the India-Pakistan and the India-China borders respectively. In contrast to the state-led notion of definite 'geography of lines', the perception of borderland communities and borderlines in South Asia can be viewed from the lens of the 'anthropology of frayed edges' (van Schendel 2013, 269).

Dhananjay Tripathi's edited volume embarks on the re-imagination of the border studies discourse in South Asia, both in a theoretical and an empirical context,



### RE-IMAGINING BORDER STUDIES IN SOUTH ASIA

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and it offers fresh insights into the multi-layered understanding of borderlines and borderlands in the region. The contributors of the volume are young scholars mostly trained in International Relations and Political Science, however, the overall treatment of the chapters comes from a range of interdisciplinary approaches to border studies. This structure allows for a unique and meaningful conversation among the diverse scholars

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to develop, brought together by Tripathi through a well-laid out structure. It also avoids falling into the business-as-usual approach to border studies analysis that starts from a security entry-point. Instead, it begins from a theoretical base, moves to a regional economy and connectivity path, engages with borderland communities, and then closes with a security lens.

Tripathi lays out the current debates in border studies in his introductory chapter, setting in motion conversations about border studies' engagement with International Relations theories, the processes of globalization, and the re-imagination of Asian perspectives. He underlines the need for a critical engagement with 'Third World' and 'Global South' dialogues on border studies while moving away from a Euro-centric and North American-centric traditional dominance in scholarship. Building on these themes in chapter two, Sriparna Pathak discusses the concept of sovereignty with Chinese characteristics vis-à-vis the Western notions. She brings out an overview of the Sino-Indian boundary dispute, which has been simmering away, with now frequent border skirmishes between the two largest armies in the world, analyzing Chinese tactics along the border with India.

The theoretical section continues as Vaishali Raghvanshi sketches out the dialectics of mental borders in South Asia from a literary perspective, which is a unique approach especially as she focuses on the perceptions of borders with memories from the Partition of the India in 1947. In the final chapter of the theoretical section on borders, Syed Murtaza Mushtaq offers a philosophical treatment of borders, territoriality, state, nation, citizenship, migration, and asylum, and their relationship with religion, focusing on Islam. The overall discussion of psychological borders, mental borders, philosophical borders, and religious borders of the first section makes for an interesting reading and demonstrates the critical theorization emerging from Asia, particularly in South Asian. These discussions enrich the field of border studies and lay the groundwork for much more scholarship on South Asian borders to emerge.

The second section focuses on regional economic trade and connectivity, and begins with an overview of India's economic connectivity infrastructure plans with Central and Southeast Asia. Written by Dhananjay Tripathi and R Madhav Krishnan, this chapter focuses specifically on India's Look/Act East Policy. The section continues with Mohit Nayal looking at the maritime borders between India and Sri Lanka, focusing on the geopolitical and legal engagements around the Palk Strait. Sankalp Gurjar assesses the problems and prospects of South Asian

Trans-Border Energy Connectivity and Cooperation, outlines multilateral donor engagement in the region, and discusses the growing role of China. The section concludes with Monica Verma's analysis of cross-border trade and investment where she discusses its opportunities and threats in South Asia and marks bilateralism as an effective approach.

The section on borderlands begins with Sourina Bej and Nasima Khatoon attempting to map the emerging changes and contestations among the Monpas in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh. Here they analyze how large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the construction of big dams and major roads, have affected the social and ecological lives of those in the region as well as the sacred landscapes. Bharat Hun sketches the history of the Thar Desert and the varying perceptions of the borderland by the postcolonial state and local communities. Jigme Wangdi goes out in search of the nation-state, its mentalities, and the subjectivities along the India-Bangladesh border haats, and brings forward cross-border perspectives on the haats. The focus on borderlands and its communities reflects the multiple shades of a border, which keeps transforming across time and space across the geography of South Asia.

The final section addresses the security perspective and opens with Sachin N. Pardhe exploring the connections between conflicts, cooperation, and territoriality as he marks it out to a regional understanding of security linkages with borders. Using the framework of the heterogeneous security complex, Anjan Kumar Sahu discusses the China-India water conflict both within the specific bilateral context and within the more general South Asia context. He then connects it to major infrastructure projects in the region involving India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China. The book rounds up well with Subham Dwivedi exploring the intricacies of globalization, the internet, and nation-state borders, through a case study on China's role in determining geography and territoriality through the internet and its possibilities. Overall, the book has a lot to offer in terms of serving as a primer of the evolving shades of understanding borders in South Asia, all the while contributing to an important conversation in the process.

## Work Cited

Willem van Schendel. 2013. "Afterword: Making the Most of Sensitive Borders", in Gellner, D. N. (ed.). *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia: Non-State Perspectives*. Duke University Press.