

**Sergei V. Sevastianov, Paul Richardson, and Anton A. Kireev (eds.),
Borders and Transborder Processes in Eurasia, Dalnauka:
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Stanislaw K. Domaniewski*

Borders are observable facets of our everyday lives. They provide us with order and structure. In a more symbolic sense they also provide us with a basis of who *we* are, and why *another* is not *us*. Their physical presence creates a tapestry of different contexts. However, a nation is more than just a set of lines on a map. It is more than just a theory of the possible. It is beset and beholden to history, which provides an overarching context to society.

These two features of border organics (theorization and real world historiography) come together in this new compilation *Borders and Transborder Processes in Eurasia*. The book demonstrates the disparate characteristics that govern border politics. Each chapter presents the reader with a unique set of theories or circumstances which are occurring on the Eurasian landmass but are also relative to other cases. Jussi Laine sums this up nicely in the second chapter stating:

[A]ll borders are unique, and each of them is related in different ways to local, regional, state-bound and supranational processes. Even if a border may appear as an absolute fact, perceptions of it are always relative – and, therefore, open to various interpretations (43)

The chapters which follow bear out this thought provoking statement, and various authors strive to demonstrate that all is not as it seems when contemporary Eurasian borders are thrown into the mix of national historiography.

The book contains two exceptional empirical chapters. Firstly, Jonathan Bull takes up a topic concerning the loss of territory, resettlement, and eventual exile on the Russian-Japanese borderlands. The author offers us a fascinating glimpse into what the rest of the book seems to be lacking: borders on the scale of the individual. The second standout article by Paul Richardson, “Vladivostok 2012: Border, Borderlands, and Dual-dependency in the Russian Far East,” shows us what a Pacific Russia in transition looks and feels like. Richardson nicely couples together the theories presented at the start of the book (namely Laine’s assertion that borders have a uniqueness all their own) to show the Russian perspective concerning the Vladivostok region. He questions where current governmental initiatives on the identity of the region are leading and offers a more nuanced, alternative and fragmented conception of identity. The author thus provides us with a concise dialectic between the stark reality of life on the periphery and the unifying vision that government elites are striving for in the area.

The compilation as a whole often attempts to show that what may apply to western borders often does not necessarily work in the East and hence cannot be easily categorized in a traditional

* Stanislaw Domaniewski is a researcher at the Karelian Institute, University of Eastern Finland. He can be contacted at: stanislaw.domaniewski@uef.fi

sense. Andrei Volynchuk touches upon this with his work entitled “Theoretical aspects of Transboundary Territory Formation.” In the article the author speaks of regions and cross-border cooperation in western Russia. The article is an accessible account concerning different aspects involved in the formation of transborder territories. It is an intriguing and insightful approach which tries to explain the concept of “region” and presents it from a Russian point of view.

Concerning border historiography, the book offers the reader a broad scope of information that delves into the Eurasian past. Gulmira Sultanglieva provides perhaps the most interesting historiography with her chapter entitled: “Novoileksk line as the boundary between Asia and Europe in historical context.” The article is an engaging account of the evolution of the historical boundary line between Russia and Kazakhstan, which succinctly presents the historiography from both sides of “the border.” The author gives a thorough introduction to the different forces at play in the region during the nineteenth century.

One criticism that can be made about the compilation is that at times the discussion dips into a utopian visioning. Mikhail Alexseev’s theoretical article in the first chapter lends itself to such criticism. The author speaks of an interesting idea with evolutionary game theory vis-à-vis borders. Unfortunately, such a system does not seem to be a realistic approach towards border policy. The policies that could come out of the author’s recommendation (i.e. that policies on one side of the border should be mirrored on the other) may be theoretically interesting but could lead to the exacerbation of crisis in the real world. It would, for example, be implausible to reopen the border immediately after an armed insurgency has been suppressed. Similarly, Marina Dmitrieva’s chapter on the “Formation of the Russian-Chinese Border in the Context of Evolution of Foreign Policy” presents a highly subjective account and marginalizes the role of external powers and international norms.

Several other articles are also contained within the compilation. Although their topics may be quite disparate, ranging from nineteenth century imperial China to North Korea’s special economic zone, they seem to contain a reoccurring theme: borders in a historical western sense do not necessarily correspond in the same way in the east. Even so, some theoretical commonalities can be found between the two. Sergei Ivanov tries to do this to some degree in his article when coupling Finnish border scholarship with the realities of present-day China. The article forces the reader to look upon the success and failure of cross-border cooperation in a different light.

Overall the chapters in this volume are thought provoking and challenging. It demonstrates that a shift to the East is occurring in not only economic terms but in academic terms as well. The science of border studies is moving east to discover new possibilities and new experiences. “Borders and Transborder Processes in Eurasia” displays for those of us immersed in the Euro-American centric world of border studies a new space filled with historiography that many in the field may not be aware of. It is a remarkably rare phenomenon in border studies to find scholars from the “West” meeting those in the “East” and, as this book demonstrates, there is much to be gained from such an engagement.