

the tragedy suffered by the Uyghurs and Kazakhs of Xinjiang. A dialogue with French researchers would have enabled the author to enrich his work with fresh elements on aspects as diverse as early history (the seminal work of James Russell Hamilton), sociolinguistics (with Giulia Cabras's remarkable thesis, published in 2018), music (Trebinjac 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2008), and geopolitics (Rémi Castets).

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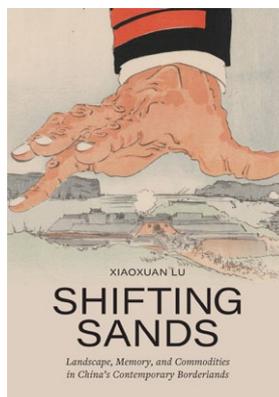
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LU, Xiaoxuan. 2023. *Shifting Sands: Landscape, Memory, and Commodities in China's Contemporary Borderlands*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

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Shifting Sands: Landscape, Memory, and Commodities in China's Contemporary Borderlands is a fascinating dive into China's historical and contemporary contestations of its 64 "category 1" Inner Asian borders, analysed through the lens of the materiality of transport infrastructure. The author, Xiaoxuan Lu, was educated as an architect and landscape architect, and is currently a professor at the University of Hong Kong. In her book, Lu conceptually frames the plethora of projects, plans, and policies of China's expansive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in relation to broader landscape concepts, history, and continuous nation-building. She underscores the deliberate and unintended consequences of the territorial transformation of China's Inner Asian borders in relation to the *longue durée* and immediate history. The insightful case-based texts and collection of materials – from archives to fieldwork on through carefully constructed cartographies – offer a novel perspective to understanding the coupling of new modes of statecraft and resource extraction. Lu's writing is sharp and well-referenced, and it thoughtfully probes past and present policies on Chinese borderlands.

The book is simultaneously descriptive and interpretative. Notably, the research emerges in contemporary times, as a number of phenomena are unfolding. First is the forceful reactivation of China's borderlands and extraterritorial development from the 2000s onward, particularly under Xi Jinping's leadership. The text frames the logics behind Xi's BRI, and the use of infrastructure and projects for dominance of international trade networks. Second is the increased globalisation of the transfer of capital and knowledge in and from China as related to the interdependency of trade and diplomacy, economy and security, as well as the evolving role of the state. Third is the precarity and explosive nature of borderlands, as witnessed, for example, in the South China Sea.

The book's overall structure is clear and effective. The introduction – "Stratigraphy of China's Borderlands" – draws the reader in with its concise and focused description of the transition from imperial frontiers to national borderlands (including Sun Yat-sen's fascinating 1917 project, a precursor to the 2013 BRI), as well as of numerous

nineteenth-century infrastructure projects by Russia, Japan, and several European colonial powers. The subsequent three sections traverse various scales (global, regional, and local) and develop insights that address borderland transformations as nonlinear, transnational, and contingent processes driven by historical, multilateral forces.

Section One, “Exchanges and Flows,” focuses on Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that shape the quantities and types of exchanges and flows between China and the rest of the world. Lu focuses on four aspects (infrastructure, logistics, expertise, and resources) to unravel the international development of China and the interrelationships between trade, diplomacy, economy, and security. Each aspect is explored through a contemporary case study. Infrastructure is analysed through the China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO), which is transforming global transportation routes through the acquisition of global seaports. Logistics are examined through the ways in which the China Railway Container Transport Corporation (CRCT) is optimising Eurasian land-based routes. The projects of the China National Machinery Industry Corporation (Sinomach), the nation’s largest engineering contractor, reveal how expertise is being reshaped by Chinese-led joint venture projects. Finally, resources are investigated through the China Oil and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO), which is part-and-parcel of the country’s transition from fossil fuels to biofuels and its ever-expanding global bioenergy resource networks. The text of Section One is complemented with various scaled, author-created maps.

Section Two, “Corridors and Concessions,” investigates the social and spatial implications of China’s evolving borderlands integration into global knowledge and economic systems. It articulates the transnational nature of borderlands, with a focus on three cases: (1) “Silk Road Urbanism,” where the analysis of new town development in the China-Laos borderlands pinpoints the juxtaposition of ecologies and modernity through the lens of a real estate exhibition venue; (2) “The Xinjiang Model,” where road construction in the Tianshan mountain range area of Kyrgyzstan and China reveals new infrastructure development as a counterforce to Muslim-dominated East-West connections; and (3) “Shan-shui Memory,” where mineral water extraction in the China-Korea borderlands underlines the copresence of contested pilgrimage and intense commodification of water.

Section Three, “Settlements and Memories,” is composed of a cartographic atlas organised by three regions, which underscores geodynamics and civil unrest. It focuses on 36 of the 64 inland border gate settlement areas (13 in the southwest, 10 in the northwest, and 13 in the northeast), each treated in two pages composed of one map and a textual synthesis. Lu examines China’s contemporary border settlements – redefined in the mid-twentieth century from traditional, vaguely demarcated frontiers into more stabilised territorial limits – and reveals the ways in which history (through local perceptions and practices) nuances development projects. She identifies three characteristics of the border settlements as: (1) dual-directionality of flows of capital, materials, ideas, and people; (2) multimodality port-settlement configurations in relation to natural resources, economic development, and settlement morphologies; and (3) vulnerability of predictable and unpredictable disturbances from natural disasters to social unrest on through military incursions.

Xiaoxuan Lu’s scholarship builds on Owen Lattimore’s seminal *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (1940) as well as on more recent works, including Nianshen Song’s *Making Borders in Modern East Asia: The Tumen River Demarcation, 1881-1919* (2018), and Judd C. Kinzley’s *Natural Resources and the New Frontier: Constructing Modern China’s Borderlands* (2018). It stands apart from them in the way it conceptually frames projects, plans, and policies within broader concepts and history and in their specific relation to the spatial and symbolic transformation of the sociocultural and physical territory. Her writing blends traditional scholarly discourse with that of a first-person travelogue. Her approaches to the built environment underscore the disciplines’ capacity to critically identify and analyse multifaceted relationships of landscape, society, and individuals through spatial, sociocultural, and political realms. There is also an importance given to the visual component and the knowledge it both reveals and generates, through inclusion of ample historical documentation, fieldwork photography, and interpretative cartography. Moreover, the book includes an accompanying website¹ that provides additional maps, timelines, and resources. *Shifting Sands* is part of the University of Texas Press series “Lateral Exchanges: Architecture, Urban Development, and Transnational Practices,” edited by Felipe Correa, Bruno Carvalho, and Alison Isenberg. The series includes books that investigate the ways concepts and techniques have instigated cultural and intellectual exchanges beyond disciplinary boundaries and locales, asking how such exchanges, particularly in the context of persistent global asymmetries, can be historicised and theorised. Xiaoxuan Lu’s book is therefore a meaningful addition to a growing collection of timely and significant importance. It will be of interest to China scholars, particularly those concerned with geography, geopolitics, development studies, and history, as well as to architects, landscape architects, and urbanists, who will appreciate Lu’s specific insights concerning the agency of various scaled projects, including their intended and unintended impacts.

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