Encompassing China :
Understanding Complexity, Avoiding Containment

David Wolff (Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido U.)

As World War II drew to an end, great armies with the potential to capture whole countries in just a few days using Hitler's great invention, the Blitzkrieg, roved the face of the earth. Russian and American armored divisions in both Europe and Asia, combined long tank columns and thousands of artillery units for crushing bombardments of the enemy and his cities. In all the waters of the globe the American Navy ruled supreme, grouped around floating airbases, ready to take control of any given volume of air, over sea and coastal areas, while sending protected bombers to destroy coastal cities. In China, too, millions of men were under arms, finishing off the Japanese Empire and lining up to continue the civil war that had been interrupted by the World War. The potential for border change was never greater, except, perhaps, at the end of World War One, but the Republic of China, weakened by civil war, was in no position to take advantage of the opportunities, even though it was on the winning side.

It was into this situation at the dawn of the Cold War that the People's Republic of China was born. Long years of American support for his arch-enemy Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) more or less predicated that Mao would turn to the other side of the Cold War, where Stalin ruled supreme. Ideological affinities also brought Stalin and Mao together. On July 1, Mao's "Lean to One Side" speech was published, broadcasting to the USSR and the US, where Mao stood. In response, Stalin encouraged and helped Mao to set up his new government in the fall of 1949, and then invited him to Moscow to cement their alliance with the whole world looking on.

It is this December 1949 moment of border-crossing, as Mao stepped into the USSR and onto the world's stage that appears in Soren Urbansky's study of the twin border cities on the Trans-Siberian, Trans-Manchurian railroad. The rest of the articles go a little earlier, back to the World War II roots of PRC borders, and forward to March 1969, when Mao "crossed back" from his friendship with the Soviet Union, signaling to the Americans that he was now ready to "lean to the other side," a signal that was transmitted through the medium of Soviet soldiers' blood sprinkled liberally on the ice of the frozen Ussuri River.

The shock waves radiated across the Pacific and Atlantic. When the Soviet's made their angry announcement of the March 2 incident several days later, Mao's signal to the Americans was complete. Even the doubters were silenced into believing that Sino-Soviet relations were no longer good. But many basic facts remain unknown, including the Chinese casualty count and the background to the Soviet Union's decision to use anti-personnel artillery on the Chinese reserves. Fresh documentation on both of these issues is provided in Dmitrii Ryabushkin's Research Note.[1] In

[1] This documentation is exclusively Russian in origin, detailing and clarifying the dominant Russian narrative of

this sense, what we have before us is a collection of articles building toward a multilateral history of China's border politics in the era of the Sino-Soviet alliance.

Since, as Iwashita Akihiro has pointed out in the Foreword, China's borders are immensely long, there is no way to cover the full extent, including all neighboring countries and crossings, but this special issue does have cases to all the points of the compass, as well as border politics with both capitalist and socialist countries, allowing for a range of comparisons, as well as compilation. In some articles, such as Pierre Grosser's, the comparison is made explicit with parallels between the Indochina and Korean Wars. Both military engagements and diplomatic negotiations are covered, although not equally in all cases. Linkages to domestic politics come to the fore in different ways, with James Hershberg pointing out that Krishna Menon's departure from Nehru's inner circle became the price of American aid to India in 1962, while Sergey Radchenko evokes the Inner Asian ethnic complexities of the Russo-Chinese borderlands, where new nationalisms sprouted from earlier identities in the sheltering inaccessibility of mountains and deserts.

Chinese border issues have drawn some attention of late, with Taylor Fravel's book sparking discussion, while supplementing earlier historical descriptions.[2] Now newly-declassified materials on all sides of the Cold War make it possible to test theories further, while adding details and corrections to earlier histories. For example, Lorenz Luthi's trenchant use of the Indian side materials on the Zhou Enlai visit to Delhi in 1960 makes clear China's strong effort to reach a compromise territorial trade during the Zhou visit and Nehru's unwillingness to give up on any of the disputed territory. We hope that the Chinese materials can also become fully available soon in order to clarify the motives behind Zhou's diplomacy and the downward spiral to violence in high places that followed in 1962.

The articles in this collection make use of archival documents from China, both Beijing and Taipei, as well as Canadian, French, German, Indian, Mongolian, Russian and US archives. This points the way toward a full international treatment of a fully international topic, in which the Cold War imperative to "encircle" China, gives way to a global desire to understand and "encompass" China, along all its borders and into all its borderlands. Below I detail some of the contributions from each article in this Special Issue of *Eurasia Border Review*, as we move chronologically through the historical cases, rather than clockwise around the points of the compass, making time and the great Eurasian space the two main axes of our journey in a journal. I would like to thank the editors of EBR for making this the first Special Issue and a special note of thanks to Kaol Ito who produced the excellent maps that accompany each essay.

---

what happened at Damanskii in March 1969. It in no way refutes the very different Chinese version of what happened on the ice of Zhenbaodao. For the two versions in broad outline in English, see Neville Maxwell, "How the Sino-Russian Boundary Conflict was Finally Settled" and Dmitri Ryabushkin, "Origins and Consequences of the Soviet-Chinese Border Conflict of 1969" in Akihiro Iwashita, ed., *Eager Eyes Fixed on Eurasia* (Sapporo, 2007), 63-68, 82-83.

[2] M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008; Ting Tsz Kao, *The Chinese Frontiers,* (Palatine, Ill.: Chinese Scholarly Publishing Company, 1980); V. S. Miasnikov, ed., *Granitsy Kitaia: Istoriiia formirovaniia*, 2001).

The first article takes us deep into Inner Asia, where the fate of Mongolia was determined in negotiations between Stalin and two Chinese regimes in quick succession, although the Mongolians played their part as well, Between January 1944 and August 1945, Stalin allowed the Mongols to propagandize pan-Mongolian unity in order to scare Chiang Kai-shek into acknowledging Outer Mongolian "independence" and the Soviet military presence in Manchuria, along the railway and in the ports of Dalian and Port Arthur.

Once these goals were accomplished, Stalin reined in the Mongolian leader Choibalsan, asking him rhetorically in February 1946, if "we" really needed a new war with China? But three years later when Mao tried to get Mongolia back for China, Stalin was unencouraging. Sensing an opportunity in the Chinese interregnum of 1949, Choibalsan did not give up, telling Stalin, that for Outer and Inner Mongolia "the border is the only thing that separates us." This time Stalin dissuaded Choibalsan, pointing out that Mao Zedong's "difficult side" could not be easily overcome. In this difficult series of negotiations, the PRC's friendliest border was pacified, if not fully settled.

Almost the same friendly conditions prevailed nearby where the now fifty-year old Chinese Eastern Railway crossed into China from Russia, linking the border towns of Manzhouli and Zabaikalsk, the latter previously known as Otpor until 1958. Soren Urbansky's article probes both the acts and images of the "friendship border" finding that this was a chilly friendship, without much human content. Trade increased, but it traveled long-distance, providing no lasting benefit for the border towns and their hinterlands, the borderlands. Here, cultures and cuisines should mix, but Urbansky finds neither mixing, nor merging, With statistics and narrative sources from both sides of the border, Urbansky captures the truths and lies of the great, but brief friendship of the USSR and PRC.

With the collapse of border negotiations in 1964, the coming of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated further on the way to 2 March 1969, when Chinese and Soviet troops clashed on and around a disputed, desolate island near the Ussuri's frozen midstream. This only armored conflict between nuclear-tipped powers is arguably one of the great danger points of the Cold War and surprisingly understudied. In his Research Note, Ryabushkin makes use of participant interviews and rare documents to shed new light on this incident.

In the same years that the Chinese-Soviet-Mongolian borders were a model of demonstrative, if wary, neighborliness, to the South, conflicts raged both East and West. Matsumoto makes pioneering use of materials from Jiang Jieshi's archive to shed new light on the clashes over border islands, this time rocks in the Taiwan Strait, rather than icy islets in the Ussuri. And this time it was PRC artillery that claimed casualties among both soldiers and civilians. To the southwest, the Indochinese wars would continue for three decades with short reprieves. Making use of a wide range of French sources, both public and private, Grosser details the decision mechanism from Paris to the Vietnamese north, where the face of battle would become the boundary with China, behind which the Communist forces regrouped and rearmed before continuing the battle with the French, then the Americans. After 1950, especially after 1953, fears that Vietnam would become a "second Korea"

dominated French discourse, leading to the failed Korea negotiations and successful Indochina negotiations at Geneva in 1954. The French feared that Chinese "volunteers" liberated from their moral duty to fight Americans in Korea by the ceasefire would show up in Tonkin. At Geneva, a new border, the 17th parallel, was born. But just as clearly, Grosser shows that the French had always seen two Vietnams, Cochin-China and Tonkin, each with a different meaning and value for Empire. Grosser's paper is methodologically important as well, introducing elements of both gendered and postcolonial analysis.

The last section of this Special Issue's articles focuses on Sino-Indian relations in years of friction leading to the high-altitude war of 1962 in which the Chinese demonstrated their military superiority and logistical ability to deploy to the high plateau at the heart of Central Asia. The Indians learned that their ideological commitment to non-alignment had to be sacrificed to the harsh Realpolitik realities. Lorenz Luthi's article points out the centrality of the Tibetan issue to the conflict's evolution, starting from the crisis of 1959 resulting in the Dalai Lama's taking refuge in India as the Chinese established ever-tighter degrees of control over Tibet. Having earlier refused to support the Dalai Lama against the Chinese, considering his Holiness a feudal remnant, now Nehru found himself constrained both by humanitarian principle and public expectation to drive to the border to meet and greet the unwanted guest. Although Nehru told the Dalai Lama that India's best support for Tibet would be to maintain good relations with the PRC, when Zhou came to New Delhi a year later to negotiation, Nehru was unwilling to accept the proffered deal, setting himself up for the beating he would take in the fall of 1962 . Having condemned the greed and injustice of the capitalist world, largely through his international mouthpiece, Krishna Menon, active first in London and then at the United Nations in the 1950s before becoming Defense Minister.

Clearly, in this position, he needed to bear the brunt of responsibility for Indian soldiers being unable to defend the Northern and Eastern borders. But pressure for Nehru to sack him came not only from domestic sources, but also from the Americans who had been repeatedly insulted in international fora by the sharp-tongued Menon, since the founding of independent India. Hershberg's detailed and powerfully documented study of American animus toward Menon draws on a range of materials, but most notably the personal files of the American Ambassador to India, Harvard Professor John Kenneth Galbraith. And under Hershberg's studious eye and fluid pen these two titans' mutual animosity comes alive! In addition, there is a wonderful cameo performance by John F. Kennedy, fully preoccupied with the Cuban Missile Crisis, one step from the abyss, but still able to find time to meet briefly with the Indian Ambassador to Washington and advise him that, he, the President, "speaking personally rather than officially," recommended sacking the "grand mogul."

All of this came to pass with Nehru firing Menon in the following days and American aid promises following, even as the Chinese conducted a victorious unilateral retreat, making American aid unnecessary. Hershberg's juxtaposition of the Galbraith diary publication with the original manuscripts shows an intentional distortion, meant to make Menon out less evil and the US less responsible for his political demise. References to Menon as Rasputin and the Devil were removed from Galbraith's memoirs, but an apologetic footnote made clear that much worse could be said about the Defense Minister than had been pronounced by Galbraith's poisoned, but careful, tongue. A

public claim that the Indian had been brought down under American pressure might give the artful politician a second lease on life, always in an anti-American vein. But without opening himself to a lawsuit or Menon's chance at a comeback, Galbraith managed to make clear to his readers that Menon was even worse than the version published in the memoirs.[3] The ability of border issues to make and to be made by politicians, points to the necessity of thoroughly analyzing the web of domestic and international politics in which borderland discourse and practice are embedded. Chen Jian has pointed out the importance of border conflicts in mobilizing nationalistic support for the Communist Party and Mao's continuous revolution.[4] Border conflicts in 1954, 1958, 1962 and 1969 fit well into this pattern, but we still need to reconcile the tension between theories that posit that China will be more flexible and willing to settle when weak, divided and/or isolated, in contrast to arguments that it is exactly insecurities that lead China to provoke border conflicts and the attendant nationalistic outburst.

With these considerations in mind, we can draw some first tentative conclusions, the sinews of a next-step research agenda. First of all, there is a temporal aspect to be fleshed out. Weak in its early days, preoccupied with the burdens of war-fighting in Korea, the PRC avoided the resolution of border contestations, expecting to be in a stronger position later. Only in 1958 were general instructions issued to solve the border issues.[5] Border agreements were reached with Mongolia, in November 1962 and with Korea the next month. This drive to clarify the borders came even as the worst effects of the Great Leap Forward led to tens of millions of "excess deaths," as the demographers like to say. And the conflict with India in the Himalayas began even as these negotiations reached their final phase. This rational search for reasonable solutions in the period 1958-1962 meshes well with Zhou's visit to New Delhi in 1960, willing to give up land east of Nepal in exchange for clear title to the parts of Aksai Chin containing the new road that provided the main logistical support for the military occupation of Tibet. It was this at all costs that China would not let out of its hands, as Luthi has emphasized the centrality of the Tibet issue. When Nehru refused the deal, Zhou left empty-handed and the situation began to deteriorate toward the border clash two years later, which helped to bolster Mao's return to autocratic power.

Secondly, there is a sociogeographic aspect. In the 20th century, the old caravan routes across Asia, linking Russia, Mongolia and China, were revived on rails of iron and wings of aluminum. As

[3] Krishna Menon is often confused with his coeval, K. P. S. Menon, who served as Ambassador to Moscow even as Krishna created non-alignment at the UN. Although K. P. S. entry in Wikipedia states clearly his ambassadorship from 1952 to 1961, it is Krishna who is incorrectly credited in his Wikipedia entry with being the last foreigner to meet with Stalin. (Wikipedia entries consulted on 7 May 2012)

[4] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), 169, 180.

[5] Shen Zhihua, "A Historical Investigation of the Sino-Korean Border Issue, 1950-1964" presented in Sapporo in July 2011. The issue editor thanks Professor Shen for making this paper available. Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi set this process in motion through the State Council, which in turn called on border provinces to conduct local studies, completed the following year. The original plan was to resolve the Sino-Mongolian border in 1958, the Sino-Soviet border in 1959, and the Vietnamese and Korean borders soon thereafter. These, after all, were all still friendly socialist countries in 1958.

Urbansky points out, comradely friendship was kept strictly on these steely tracks, without much room for local initiative. His study looks at the Trans-Manchurian rail corridor, but the years we are examining also saw the opening of a Trans-Mongolian railway linking Moscow and Beijing. It should be examined asking the same penetrating questions posed by Urbansky, separating the discourse of friendship from its more concrete manifestations. Borderland most be proved, not assumed.

The death and life of the borderland as a social habitat is an important topic that needs to be studied along other Chinese borders as well. Clearly, one would expect peaceful borders to produce bountiful borderlands, but maybe conflictual situations produced their own distinctive borderlands of violence? Even the same geographic space could serve both functions. Tonkin, once a "balcony over China" for the French Empire, was converted by long years of irregular warfare to China's "balcony over Cochinchina", at least in the fearful imaginings and discourse of fierce anti-Communists. The nature of the Vietnamese Communists' relations with China and the USSR, as well as South Vietnam's ties to France and the US, loom large in this reshaping of borders and boundaries. Clearly, alliance is the key related concept in border studies, uniting in the same way that borders divide, but a full study of this interaction on either the theoretical or empirical plane goes beyond the scope of the research results presented in this Special Issue.