

Back to the Future: A world of “fortresses”?

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Asia's maritime border areas have recently attracted a great deal of attention in the light of a series of conflicts occurring in the East China Sea, Sea of Japan, and Sea of Okhotsk. On the basis of numerous case studies conducted primarily in Europe and North America, the author considers the concept of timeline to be a valuable tool for the comparative studies of borders. This concept has been developed from the four-stage border transformation model proposed by Oscar Martinez, in which borders develop from a “fortress,” via “coexistence” and “interdependence”, to “integration”.

In Martinez's stage theory, contemporary Asian maritime disputes would move towards a peaceful resolution. The author wishes to consider whether this is a realistic proposition, and how it might come about.

By contrast, Eurasia's continental borderlands appear to be de-coupling, moving from “coexistence” or “interdependence” back to a “fortress” situation, as seen in the fences being built by Hungary and others to shut out refugees in the EU or current situation in eastern Ukraine. In fact, political space across Eurasia evidences a mix of these four-stage phenomena in a variety of timelines. The author argues that developing a framework within which to compare these timelines would provide us with a powerful tool for developing new perspectives on the transformation of borders.