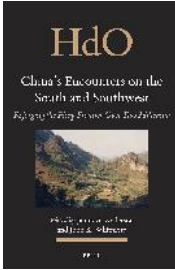


REVIEW: *CHINA'S ENCOUNTERS ON THE
SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST*

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James A Anderson and John K Whitmore (eds). 2015. *China's Encounters on the South and Southwest. Reforging the Fiery Frontier Over Two Millennia*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, xiv + 428. Five maps, 10 figures, 2 tables, preface, glossary, index. Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 3 Southeast Asia vol. 22. ISBN: 9789004218901 (hardcover, 114 EURO).

This collection of fifteen articles investigates the formation of the southern Chinese frontier and interaction between China and the various regions of Southeast Asia throughout history. The idea started with a panel presented at the meeting of the Association of Asian Studies in 2010, to which other contributions from experts in the field have been added.

The theoretical premises inspiring the volume are presented in the introduction 'The Fiery Frontier and the Dong World', by James A Anderson and John K Whitmore, as well as in the concluding section 'Asymmetric Structure and Culture in China's Relations with Its Southern Neighbors' by Brantly Womack, which should be read as complementary. As Anderson and Whitmore point out in their contribution at the beginning of the book, the papers deal with the main question, as formulated by Eric Tagliacozzo (2013): "What is a frontier? How do we delineate it historically? Ontologically?" (3).

This issue has been at the center of many studies, especially those examining China's relations with its Inner Asian neighbors.¹

¹ Works the volume editors refer to include Di Cosmo (2002), Barfield (1989), and Power and Standen (1998).

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This volume's contributors are well aware of the ongoing debate on the northern frontier and aim to take the discussion further by changing geographical scope to look at China's southern and southwestern frontiers.

The geographical space analyzed extends therefore "from the Gulf of Tonkin to the eastern edges of Tibet, from the Yangzi to Southeast Asia" (3). What distinguishes this volume from previous studies about these regions,² is the focus on the processes of frontier-building in modern China in the wider geographical area - the "Zomia" of Scott/ van Schendel's formulation (6)³ - and historical perspective, as well as the conceptual references for the understanding of this area.

By tracing the historical development and the changing relations between the powers on the two frontiers, the volume poses the question of comparativity. What are the differences between the north and northeastern frontiers of China, and the southern one? What can this comparison tell us about the nature and role of frontiers (7-11)?

In posing these questions, the contributors must deal with the more general issue of understanding frontiers from the standpoint of the actors who shape them. Therefore, the delineation of a frontier is *per se* a process of identity building: its shape and role depend on which identity lends the perspective. As the volume's title makes clear, the perspective traditionally chosen is one looking southwards from China. This leads to another important question, mentioned by the editors in the introduction, and based on the considerations of Bol (among others),⁴ of what we should understand by "China" as a geographical, political, or cultural entity (5). But why should this frontier be viewed southward, from the north? This choice, connected to the issue of a traditional reliance on Chinese sources, as well as to historical relations of diplomacy and conquest, is presented by

² Harrell (1995) is a notable example of another collection of articles examining the question of Chinese frontier building.

³ Scott (2009:14-16).

⁴ Bol (2009).

Womack through the paradigm of the "asymmetry" in the Chinese construction of power relations and diplomacy (396).

With this in mind, the contributors nevertheless delineate in their papers processes of adaptation of ideas and of political development that underlie the autochthonous and original elements in the processes of identity-formation in the regions beyond the frontier.

As for the time span, the book tracks the changing dynamics with the south through a time division in three parts (14). The first is the *dong* 峒 'mountain valleys' phase, a period of irregular interaction between China and the Southeast Asian empires in the making with highlands people. This situation was interrupted by the Mongol invasions and especially by the conquest of the kingdom of Dali 大理 (937-1253) in the thirteenth century. The second period (thirteenth to eighteenth century) is characterized by the difficulties encountered in governing these regions, and confronted through the institution of the *tusi* 土司 system of native chieftains that was maintained under the Ming 明 (1368-1644) and the Qing 清 (1644-1911) dynasties. This constitutes the second chronological focus of the volume. The third phase sees a more targeted process of border definition (in the form of the Qing-era policy of *gaitu guiliu* 改土归流 'replacing native chieftains with state officials') from the eighteenth century through a rise of nationalistic discourse that continues to the present era.

This chronological structure also determines the order of the papers, which are divided into two sections, 'Shifting the Southern Frontier' and 'Shaping the Southern Frontier'. Although the subtitle of the book promises an ambitious study of two millennia, the papers concentrate mostly on the Yuan 元 (1260-1368), Ming, and Qing periods, whereas the proper *dong* period is thoroughly analysed in the first article 'Where to Draw the Line? The Chinese Southern Frontier in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries' by Catherine Churchman and, partially, in the one by Liam Kelley.

In her analysis of the foundation of Yuezhou 越州,⁵ Churchman brilliantly combines textual sources, maps, and archaeological evidence to delineate important conceptual and historical premises for the understanding of political structures in the *dong* phase. Particularly important is her review of terms for the description of populations in the South, tracing the origin of some back to Tai terms (64). She also traces the development of power structures in these areas and conceptually, she poses the important question of treating the frontier as a region instead of a line.

The second paper, entitled 'Constructing Local Narratives: Spirits, Dreams, and Prophecies in the Medieval Red River Delta' by Liam Kelley, offers a fascinating survey of spirit stories in Vietnam for the medieval period (eighth to fifteenth centuries). Expanding on the theories by Taylor (1986) and Dror (2007), and through a strong philological analysis, the author presents original materials and a variety of stories that overlap periods, genres, and motives. A leading question of his research is the relation between territoriality and identity, and the resultant clash between issues of identity and political legitimacy. He traces the movement, adoption, and adaptation of literary themes and local religious forms in the Red River Delta by Chinese agents, who began to endorse local spirits for political reasons, as well as the Vietnamese reappropriation of these religious forms. He also touches on the period of Mongol rule, which is, however, treated in more detail in certain other papers in this collection.

The expansion of the Mongols in the south had indeed no precedent, and the legacy of their campaigns profoundly shaped both the Chinese frontier and the interactions with southern neighbors for centuries after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty. Consequently, the Mongol campaigns in the south have stimulated ongoing scholarly interest.

⁵ An area corresponding to the southeastern part of present-day Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu 广西壮族自治区) and the southwestern part of present-day Guangdong 广东 Province, north of the Leizhou 雷州 Peninsula (59).

Three contributions in this volume - the papers by Anderson, Brose, and Sun - deal with this period, focusing on the Mongol interactions with Yunnan, the kingdom of Pagan (849-1287), and Đại Việt under the Trần Dynasty (1225-1400). Therefore, they should be seen as a thematic unit for providing a comprehensive, interconnected review of several effects of the Mongol campaigns in these areas. The only downside is a certain lack of uniformity in the rendering of Mongolian and other non-Chinese personal names that might confuse a non-specialist reader.

James Anderson, in 'Man and Mongols: the Dali and Đại Việt Kingdoms in the Face of the Northern Invasions', provides a detailed description of the military campaigns against Dali and Đại Việt, completing the information of the problematic *Yuanshi* 元史 '*History of the Yuan Dynasty*'⁶ with a variety of other sources, including those of Vietnamese compilation. The problem of the reliability of the *Yuanshi* as a source is in fact, a well-known issue for scholars of Mongol and Yuan history, for whom Anderson's analysis is a refreshing addition.

The author convincingly argues that the different results in resisting the Mongols depended on the diverging political organization of Dali (a "mandala state") and the more centralized Đại Việt kingdom (a "classical state"). The success of the latter depended on having shaped a stronger political identity, also through the borrowing of Chinese dynastic structures, and having strengthened the linkage between center and peripheral regions through marriage, commerce, and militia recruitment. This comparison between Dali and Đại Việt has the merit of looking at the political background and interactions of different regions at the Southern border, and the impact of the "Mongol factor" on local realities. Most importantly, Anderson turns the conventional interpretation of the frontier, examining the interaction with the Chinese territory northwards. This

⁶ Song Lian 宋濂 (1310-1381), 1370 [1976]. The *Yuanshi* is one of the official Chinese dynastic histories known as the *Twenty-Four Histories of China*. Commissioned by the Ming emperor Hongwu 洪武 (r. 1368-1398), the text was completed in 1370.

is a very interesting change from the aforementioned "asymmetry," and one shared by a few other papers in the volume.

On the other hand, Sun Laichen, in 'Imperial Ideal Compromised: Northern and Southern Courts Across the New Frontier in the Early Yuan Era', examines Mongol diplomatic interactions towards the South, taking first the example of Burmo-Chinese relations, and then a stronger focus on Đại Việt. This paper also offers a very competent review of various sources (Chinese and non-Chinese), some of which remain understudied, from official historiography to envoy poetry, and so on. The author thoroughly traces the many difficulties of these diplomatic encounters (e.g., the role of the envoys, misunderstandings in the performance of ceremonial diplomatic duties), which were at the center of Qubilai's (r. 1260-1294) politics for more than thirty years.

Sun connects the patterns of Qubilai's diplomacy to a longstanding Chinese tradition from which the Mongol ruler shaped, especially, relations with Đại Việt (227). However, the Mongolian matrix of Qubilai's foreign policy, which Sun correctly mentions on the base of Allsen's analysis⁷ (208), could have been given greater consideration. Yuan diplomacy - and not only towards the south - should in fact be seen as the product of a circulation of ideas witnessed between Han and Non-Han empires across history, and which has shaped what can be defined, following Skaff (2012), as a system of Eurasian diplomacy.

In the last of the three papers with a focus on the Mongol period, entitled 'Yunnan's Muslim Heritage', Michael C Brose analyses the development of Muslim elites in Yunnan through the Yuan and Ming dynasties. The creation of new elites and the movements of people have often been underlined as a major effect of Mongol rule in Eurasia. Brose provides an overview of some famous cases, e.g., the one of Sayyid 'Ajall (1211-1279) and his descendants. The author offers insight into the shaping of a new ethnic landscape in Yunnan under Mongol rule, taking the example of the Muslims and Uighurs employed in the army that the Mongols sent to Yunnan and

⁷ Allsen (1983).

Pagan, as well as in the administration. He further suggests the idea that Muslims - as other *semuren* 色目人 'people of various categories' under Mongol rule - were able to succeed in this region because of their liminality between Chinese and Mongol identities, and their simultaneous role as subjects and masters (152).

The papers focusing on the Ming Dynasty mostly interrogate the influence of Chinese culture on the frontier regions. On one hand, cultural forms were used by the Ming Dynasty to control the various local *tusi*. On the other hand, these influences were subject to adaptations, as native elites embraced Chinese culture to enhance their own legitimacy. This is the case, for example, of the writing of local gazetteers, as illustrated in the brilliant article by Joseph Dennis entitled 'Projecting Legitimacy in Ming Native Domains'. Taking the example of the *Mahu fu zhi* 馬胡府志, a sixteenth century gazetteer of Mahu 馬胡 (Sichuan 四川 Province), he shows the multiple purposes of local gazetteers. From a Ming perspective, these included territories in the Ming realm, shaping the cultural and geographical border between China (Zhongguo 中国) and the barbarians (*waiyi* 外夷) (260). Not less important was their documentary value, as they collected information from writings left by Chinese officials, as well as elements of native oral culture. For local elites, the sponsoring of local gazetteers was a way to enhance their legitimacy and reach out to Chinese elite.

This process of sponsorship shows that the administration of these frontier areas provided many occasions for the initiative and development of local elites and for the private initiative of individual personalities, who served as bridges between political and cultural systems. A similar aspect is at the center of the paper 'Northern Relations for Đại Việt: China Policy in the Age of Le Thanh Tong (r. 1460-1497)' by John Whitmore. He also looks at the frontier northwards and shows the different ways the scholars of Đại Việt convinced their rulers to enter the Sinitic cultural sphere (232), adapting Chinese strategies of governance and legitimacy to their own political purposes.

A further example is provided by Kathlene Baldanza in 'A State Agent at Odds with the State: Lin Xiyuan and the Ming

Recovery of the Four *Dong*'. She analyzes the role of Lin Xiyuan 林希元 (1480-1560) as an agent of cultural influence in the Ming frontier with Vietnam. She also highlights his role in shaping the international borders between the Đại Việt and Ming territories, especially in relation to the reappropriation of the region of the four *dong*.

Kenneth M Swope's 'Gunsmoke: The Ming Invasion of Đại Việt and the Role of Firearms in Forging the Southern Frontier' concentrates on a different kind of cultural influence: the technological exchange and movement of experts between Vietnam and China during the Ming Dynasty, focusing on the example of firearms and gunpowder. Following Sun's (2000) thesis in reading this technological exchange as a major contribution of the Ming Dynasty, the author portrays this process of technological exchange through reference to textual and archaeological sources. As the author shows, the impact of this technology was widespread, even reaching Burma and northeast India via traders.

The span between individual destinies and the shaping of frontier comes again to the fore in Alexander Ong's 'Royal Refuge and Heterodoxy: The Vietnamese Mạc Clan in Great Qing's Southern Frontier, 1677-1730', a study of the changing fate of the Mạc Clan under the Ming and Qing, as well as in the paper by Bradley C Davis 'Volatile Allies: Two Cases of Powerbrokers in the Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese-Chinese Borderlands'. The papers dealing with this later period are more directly concerned with the aforementioned vision of "asymmetry" postulated by Womack. This is evident, for example, in the interesting contribution by Kim Jaymin entitled 'The Rule of Ritual: Crimes and Justice in Qing-Vietnamese Relations During the Qianlong Period (1736-1796)'. It provides a broad variety of examples of legal cases to review the controversy between territoriality and judiciary power in the case of Qing China and Vietnam. Kim convincingly shows how Qing attitudes towards tributary states were oriented towards the idea of a universalistic mission of government that deeply influenced the understanding of frontiers, and territorial and political identities.

An interesting aspect of Kim's paper is the comparison

between Qing relations with Đại Việt and Korea (Chosŏn, 1392-1910). This is, in fact, the clearest comparison in the volume between northern (more specifically northeastern) and southern frontiers, a pattern deserving more attention in further studies. Another notable point of Kim's analysis is the issue of political refugees and their border crossing, a topic similar to the royal refugees analyzed by Amy Holmes-Tagchundarpa in 'Depicting Life in the Twentieth-Century Sino-Tibetan Borderlands: Local Histories and Modernities in the Career and Photography of Zhuang Xueben (1909-1984)', which turns the discourse to the Republican period, and geographically to the Sino-Tibetan Frontier. She brings visual history to the fore, concentrating on the Han Chinese photographer, Zhuang Xueben 庄学本, and his portrayal of Tibetan borderlands and their minorities. The author's lively analysis of Zhuang Xueben's life and career shows how his work responded to different political and intellectual biases, from work produced for documentary purposes, as artistic expression, and to contributing to the construction of a national identity.

The theme of national identity is also present in the last paper entitled 'From Land to Water: Fixing Fluid Frontiers and the Politics of Lines in the South China/Eastern Sea' by Kenneth MacLean, who examines the maritime side of the southern frontier in the contemporary interaction between China and Vietnam. His analysis of the various attempts to manage a maritime frontier, of the related interests and difficulties, and of the usage of these issues for nationalistic purposes shows how the idea of a "fiery" Southern frontier has been perpetuated across history to the present day.

This collection is the product of the expertise of the authors, who offer an up-to-date overview of the theories and sources in their respective fields of research. In this regard, the volume provides a valuable new contribution to scholarly debate. An important merit is presenting a great variety of primary sources, Chinese and non-Chinese, many of which offer original material for the study of these issues. The combined usage of primary documents together with non-textual materials adds value to certain papers in the book, and is a direction that should be pursued in future studies on the

topic.

The papers are very well interconnected, theories and ideas flow and recur across sections of the book, and the contributors often refer to each other's work. This gives the positive impression of a lively and ongoing discussion among the authors. The scope of the book is, however, very broad in both geographical area and chronology, leaving much room for completion and supplementation of the discussions initiated here. This is probably also due to the format of the book - a collection of essays - that nonetheless has the indubitable advantage of presenting a wide range of topics that constitute an inspiration for further, deeper analyses. For this same reason, and due to the specialized character of the papers, this volume is more suited to an audience who has existing knowledge of the history of China and Southeast Asia rather than as a teaching text.

More generally, this volume not only portrays how the frontier was shaped, but also gives some hints on how it was deconstructed and transcended, offering a stimulating challenge for other scholars to answer the above mentioned questions.

In this respect, two key elements should be considered. The first is the distinction between Han and non-Han actors in the shaping of the southern frontier. As shown in the papers in this volume, periods of non-Han rule brought different inputs and contributions to interaction with the southern regions, as did their Han counterparts, most notably the Ming. It is thus insufficient to include these two different aspects under the general label of "China" or "Chinese influence." During periods of non-Han rule, Chinese territory was part of a broader Eurasian context, and the Inner Asian ideological influences brought about in this process deserve more attention. Most notably, a distinction was indeed made by the southern kingdoms that interacted with China. One famous example is the Trần Dynasty, which tried to maintain ties with both the Mongols and with the Southern Song 南宋 (1127-1279) in a triangular dynamic.⁸ The different areas of the southern frontier should thus be analyzed as the ground for the interaction of multiple

⁸ This issue is treated by Warder (2009).

actors, and as the place where legitimacies were challenged and multiple loyalties concurred with local interest.

The second point is that the focus of the volume lies mostly on elite discourses. Some notable exceptions are to be mentioned, such as the fishermen of MacLean's paper, the portrayals in Holmes-Tagchungdarpa's contribution, and the refugees of Kim's analysis. However, it would be of value to analyze the role of the frontier beyond the processes of empire-formation and identity-construction of the political elites. Most importantly, the frontiers are not only a means of separation between geopolitical identities, but are also the place of contact, interaction, and often of crossing between them. How did this crossing occur? What was its influence in everyday culture? Certain papers in this volume touch this issue, but there are still many paths to be explored in this direction.

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