

REVIEW

Translating Critical Border Studies in East Asia

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European-East Asian Borders in Translation is an edited volume that advances Critical Border Studies (CBS) on East Asia through a collection of essays that take an inter-disciplinary approach to question, explore and offer new insight into border theory. The critical approach moves the focus away from traditional knowledge of what and where borders are to give sociological treatment to a set of 'bordering practices.' This approach uncovers the 'array of technologies of governance designed to control the mobility of people, services and goods' (p. 2) and illustrates new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, us and them and power and authority in East Asia.

The volume is organized in nine chapters by different authors with a short introduction by editors Joyce C. H. Liu and Nick Vaughan-Williams. The volume is primarily concerned with extending an understanding of bordering practice in East Asia far beyond what has traditionally been the focus of border studies and to offer new insight into border studies from East Asian cases.

Seeking to move beyond the impasse reached in debates in the 1990s and 2000s about whether borders between states are either withering under globalizing conditions or more virulent than ever against the backdrop of the so-called global 'war on terror,' CBS has urged a sociological treatment of borders as a set of practices (Liu and Vaughan-Williams, p. 1).

The volume makes a conscious effort to ‘decenter and deterritorialize the production of knowledge associated with CBS beyond its familiar “European”/“Western” geocultural context’ (p. 4). It employs a ‘bidirectional approach to consider both the “translate-ability” of critical border theory associated with CBS in diverse “East Asian” contexts’ and to ‘explore the ways in which “East Asian” conceptualizations of borders and bordering practices may be challenged in view of “European” thought and experience’ (p. 5).

To achieve this, the volume employs translation as a guiding problematic to raise questions of power and authority, to question borders between inclusion/exclusion, here/there and us/them and to offer new ways to theorize border studies. This opens border studies to inclusion of externalized physical borders and internalized bordered consciousness and allows contributors to focus on a range of geographical, linguistic, ideological and virtual borders in East Asia and to examine ‘historical processes and complex discursive contexts so that borders are questioned, problematized and pluralized’ (p. 9).

Acts of translation, understood broadly here in terms of attempts to make the incomprehensible comprehensible, always already both disrupt and reaffirm divisions. In this regard, translation must itself be understood as a border economy involving inclusions and exclusions, and it is central to the production of territory, identity, subjectivity and political community (Liu and Vaughan-Williams, p. 5).

Approaching border studies as bordering practices and thinking in terms of translation opens up new ways of theorizing border studies in East Asia. This is illustrated in the first chapter, ‘The figure of translation: Translation as a filter?’ by Naoki Sakai. Sakai’s contribution explores the philosophical underpinnings of translation practices and provides a critical platform for the remaining chapters in the book. It problematizes the figure of the filter in translation, arguing it presumes a dichotomist relationship of inside and out and arguing much ‘representation of translation serves to reproduce the schema of the international world’ (p. 34). Sakai’s theory of the relationship between border and translation gives critical treatment to the ‘impoverishment’ of the forms that translation can take ‘as a result of the formation of the nation-state.’ He argues it is the representation of translation that creates the unity of national language and forms the inner kernel of techniques for the production of national subjectivity. Sakai therefore suggests it is ‘through the reconstitution of the very ways to represent translation that we can continue to seek a mode of collective being, one that is neither nation nor

ethnicity' (p. 34).

The call to employ new forms of representation of translation to critique socially constructed borders is followed by three chapters of empirical contributions. These are organized around the theme of translating borders across history, culture and identity in Taiwan. The inclusion of historical knowledge, identity and political discourse presents a viable means of understanding bordering practices around Taiwan and demonstrates the drawbacks of a world of physical and national identity borders created and enforced through juridical international law and by various dominant groups at the exclusion of others. Contributors argue a shift in how borders are represented can provide new ways of democratizing borders, of collectively redefining identity for the future and of finding new approaches to deal with territorial disputes in the region.

...the question of Taiwan enables us to face an alternative mode of thinking: the possibility of a topological vision of a political society not conceived of as a nation-state-based entity defined by inter-“nation”-al law, but as a political community in a topological mode that is constantly undergoing re-composition (Liu p. 59).

The fifth and sixth chapters focus on Japan's maritime power through analysis of intellectual history and contemporary security discourse. Nishiyama's chapter translates land borders and sovereignty into the context of the sea with reference to the Amami Oshima incident in 2001. It problematizes the very notion of borders, boundaries and demarcation on the open sea. Hung Yueh Lan explores the intellectual discourse and translation of sea power theory into Japanese discourse and imagination as a maritime nation in the 19th century. This chapter provides valuable insight into how Japan developed a discourse and imagination as a maritime nation before comparing this to discourse in contemporary China. Lan argues the maritime nation imagination and translation of Mahan's sea power theory led Japan to expansionist Asianism (to become the West) and to expand the borders of Imperial Japan. Moreover, Lan contends that China no longer imagines itself as only a continental nation but increasingly as a sea power thus leading to the de-Asianization of China and increased border conflict in Asia. Taken together, these chapters present insights into how language has been used as a bordering practice in the maritime realm.

The final three chapters explore ethnicity in the Chinese diaspora and illustrate bordering practices in the Internet in China. These chapters stand out as significantly different from the previous as they shift the border studies focus away from analysis of traditional border issues. Previous chapters are valuable

for their application of critical approaches to well-known border issues in Asia. These chapters seem a little out of place with their focus on ethnicity discourse and Internet control and resistance. By framing these issues as bordering practices that 'control the mobility of people, services and goods' (p. 2) they sit comfortably under the critical border studies rubric and by doing so represent the greatest departure from mainstream border studies.

For those readers searching for new insights into well-known border issues in East Asia, the sociological treatment of bordering practices highlighted in chapters on Taiwan and Japan provide excellent material. They are well worth reading for insights and implications for border studies as well as their analysis of bordering practices in the region. The final three chapters extend border studies in East Asia well beyond the traditional field of study and are therefore of more interest to those readers seeking a new understanding of critical border studies. Readers with an interest in identity, transnational migration, Internet governance and resistance in China will also find these chapters fruitful.

Overall, the volume provides the reader with a critical view of bordering practices in East Asia. Many of the chapters present excellent empirics on well-known border disputes and border-related issues in the region and the sociological treatment brought forth by the lens of translation illuminates what is often obscured in these cases. However, shifting border studies away from the traditional focus on nation-states and *inter*-national relations redefines the very subject of research in border studies to a soft focus on a broad array of issues of inclusion and exclusion. This raises the hard question of what the boundaries of border studies should be. The unifying theme of the volume, the use of the lens of translation to understand bordering practices, provides a critical framework for the volume but the application of this framework differed considerably for each contribution. Future studies would do well to develop boundaries for the focus of research and to develop guiding principles for the application of translation as a critical approach to border studies.