China Perspectives

2008/3 | 2008

China and its Continental Borders

Editorial

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/3993>

DOI: 10.4000/chinaperspectives.3993

ISSN: 1996-4617

Publisher

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 July 2008

Number of pages: 1-1

ISSN: 2070-3449

Electronic reference

Sébastien Billioud, « Editorial », *China Perspectives* [Online], 2008/3 | 2008, Online since 01 July 2008, connection on 22 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/3993> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.3993>

Editorial

China's "peaceful rise" on the world scene, be it on the economic or political front, has a strong and direct impact on countries with which it shares its continental borders. Such an impact can be felt in very concrete ways, including availability of Chinese goods on local markets, contracts from Chinese companies to tap energy resources, increasing flows of Chinese migrants, and Chinese involvement in regional organisations. But the impact also has a psychological dimension, especially on populations that, in spite of their geographical proximity, hardly know each other. History and the scarcity of contact over relatively long periods of time easily explain this paradoxical situation: the freeze in relations with India after the 1962 war between the two countries, the general absence of China in the economic and cultural reality of Central Asia until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the suspension of Chinese migration to the Russian Far-East between the 1917 Revolution and that same 1991 watershed... Even though the situation is now changing with an increased flow of exchanges between neighbouring states and a range of related benefits, Chinese expansion beyond its immediate continental borders remains, more often than not, associated with an ill-defined sense of threat.

The special feature on China and its continental borders that you will explore in the following pages attempts to cast some light on the situation from a variety of angles. In an introductory article, C. Patterson Giersch provides an historical retrospective of late Qing (1877-1911) state building in Inner Asia, which reveals, among other things, how Han elites at that time conceived of Inner Asian territories and peoples in new ways and with enduring consequences. Olga Alexeeva's contribution on Chinese migrations in the Russian Far East also delves into history to provide an overview of these migrations over the course of 150 years, and a better understanding of the current situation, in which pragmatic economic integration balances fears of a "Yellow Peril." In Kazakhstan, China's economic rise is often perceived as a potential bonanza, especially given the severe consequences Kazakhstan has suffered following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, Sebastien Peyrouse analyses a number of concerns about Chinese domination accompanying the development of exchanges between the two countries. Tensions are also at the heart of Indian-Chinese relations, even though

considerable headway has been made in recent years in normalising the situation. Jean-François Huchet's contribution highlights the geostrategic and economic rivalries that prevent the development of a genuine strategic partnership. The last two articles of the dossier provide insights into China's role as a regional power in Southeast Asia. Claudia Astarita explores China's role in four regional organizations, while Tim Summers, building on the example of the Mekong area, attempts to analyse Chinese perceptions of regional integration.

Apart from this special feature, the current issue of China Perspectives also offers articles on the recent revival of Confucianism, a discussion between Gao Xingjian, the 2000 Nobel Prize laureate for literature, and Liu Zaifu, a prominent Chinese scholar, as well as a selection of research notes, review essays, and book reviews. •

Good reading,

Sébastien Billioud