

Review: Gainsborough, Martin (Ed.): On the Borders of State Power: Frontiers in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region

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||| **Gainsborough, Martin** (Ed.) (2009).
||| ***On The Borders of State Power. Frontiers in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region.***
||| London & New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-41465-4. 114 + ix pages.

This volume edited by Martin Gainsborough deals with a relevant geographical area and with interesting research issues. The research problems addressed are both interesting and relevant. Thus, the starting point of the volume is promising. The ambition as expressed in the first chapter by the editor is commendable. In this review the way in which the research issues and problems are addressed in the volume will be assessed. The review will also evaluate if the editor's ambition as outlined in the introduction chapter has been achieved.

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter 1 by the editor Martin Gainsborough is the introduction to the volume (pp. 1-11). Chapter 2 by Emmanuel Poisson deals with the interplay between Kinh and ethnic minority rule on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier from the fifteenth to twentieth century (pp. 12-24). Chapter 3 by Bradley C. Davis discusses the collaboration between China and Vietnam in pursuing bandits in the border area in the aftermath of Taiping rebellion in China (pp. 25-34). Chapter 4 by Stan B-H Tan tackles government policies aiming at controlling land grabbing in the Central Highlands of Vietnam during the First Republic of Vietnam (1954-63) (pp. 35-50). Chapter 5 by Miwa Hirono deals with 'community development' in a village on the Chinese side of the border between China and Myanmar and the interplay between villagers, Oxfam and the Chinese authorities (pp. 51-59). Chapter 6 by Kyoko Kusakabe examines impacts of the politics of 'opening up' on female traders in the borderlands of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand (pp. 60-74). Chapter 7 by Holly High investigates the mobility of the marginal in the borderlands between Laos and Thailand (pp. 75-100). Chapter 8 by Andrew Walker is a conclusion centred on the question "are the Mekong frontiers sites of exception?" (pp. 101-111).

The first impression of the volume is that it is very short for an edited book. This is not due to the number of contributions, but due to the fact that the vast majority of them are very short. It appears that the editor faced problems even getting this short version out and hence to argue for more contributions would not have been an option. Instead, the question is why such short contributions? With the exception of chapter 7, the other contributions range between eight and fifteen pages in length.

The shortness is not motivated by the issues that are studied, all of which could have been studied in more depth. In fact they should have been studied in more detail in order to adequately deal with the issues that each of the chapters are devoted to.

The introduction provides a good overview of the process leading up to the book and delivers insights into the various contributions. It also sets out that borders, globalisation and the state are the three key issues that are studied in the book and that they are studied in historical context. The problem is that Gainsborough does not address the changing nature and definition of borders through history. The same applies to the concept of the state and relations between states in historical context. Nor does he clarify how the concept of globalisation applies to historical processes and developments. Furthermore, Gainsborough's attempt to relate chapters 2 and 3, which deal with developments along the border between China and Vietnam in history, to studies dealing with other borders in the region in the present day is not convincing.

Chapters 2 and 3 both address highly relevant issues relating to the situation in the border areas between China and Vietnam. Both would potentially have generated a considerable amount of new knowledge had the chapters been developed to their full potential. Empirically the information is relevant but leaves a number of unanswered questions. In chapter 2, Poisson manages to cover developments during more than five centuries in a few pages and this is far from satisfactory. The fact that he does not define the changing nature of the concept of border between China and Vietnam during these five centuries diminishes the relevance of his study. The reader is left wondering what the status of the Sino-Vietnamese border within the context of the tributary relationship between China and Vietnam actually was. Chapter 3 is more detailed than chapter 2 given that it deals with a shorter period of time and hence provides more data and information about the collaboration between China and Vietnam in combating bandits in the border area after the Taiping rebellion in China. A shortcoming is that the chapter ends without any information on whether the broader problem of bandit activity was resolved in the area. As in the earlier chapter, Davis does not address the nature of the relationship between China and Vietnam and in particular not such key questions as status of the border from the perspectives of both sides. Furthermore, he uses the term "sovereignty" in the Vietnamese case without defining its meaning in the particular context of the historical period that

he studies.

In Chapter 4, Tan has a declared ambition to prove that the Diem administration in the Republic of Vietnam (ROV) (South) 1954-1963 made major efforts to curb land grabbing in the Central Highlands of the ROV (pp. 35-36). In his attempt to do so, he selects the province of Lam Dong and studies the situation in this province and the government policies to curb land grabbing. The problem relates to land rights of ethnic minorities and state formation as well as relations between ethnic minorities and the majority ethnic group, i.e. Kinh. The study is well documented and shows that the government in the ROV did try to combat land grabbing through various pieces of legislation. The author takes this as proof that the government supported the land rights of the ethnic minorities (pp. 36-38). However, this is not evident from the facts presented in the study. These facts rather indicate that the goal was to enhance state control over land transfer in the Central Highlands, which is not the same as ethnic minorities' rights. The chapter leaves the reader with one important unanswered question, namely was the government successful in its attempts or not? Given the stated aim of the chapter to leave that question pending implies that the chapter falls short of its aim.

Chapter 5 deals with a very important issue, namely the relations between centre and periphery in China and the activities of international NGOs, in this case Oxfam. Although some interesting observations are made, they are not elaborated on in detail. Also the interviews referred to are vague since there are no notes to indicate when they were conducted. The overall impression is that the chapter is more a short report than a substantive academic study. In other words the potential has not been fully realised by the author. The eight pages including two notes and half a page of references are not in any way sufficient for a chapter in an academic book in the social sciences and humanities.

Chapter 6 provides an insight into the fate of female traders in the three border areas Cambodia-Thailand, Laos-Thailand and Myanmar-Thailand, and into the impact of economic liberalisation in the opening up of these border areas. Thus, the chapter deals with an interesting interplay between formal state structure and policies and more informal structures through which the female traders operate. The chapter offers interesting information about the situation in each of the three border areas, but it does not compare them with each other. Furthermore, the issues addressed in

each of the border areas are different from one area to another. Thus, the section on “strategies of resistance” deals only with the Cambodia-Thai situation (pp. 68-70) and this is not satisfactory since the existence or non-existence of such strategies in the Lao-Thai and Myanmar-Thai areas ought to have been analysed in the chapter.

Chapter 7 is the most detailed of all contributions to the volume. It is the chapter that makes the most comprehensive attempt to address the issues that are researched. It seeks to both identify the aspirations of the inhabitants of Don Khiaw Island located in the Mekong in the south of Laos and the impact of relations between Laos and Thailand – with special emphasis on the border area – on the inhabitants of the island. The chapter provides some very interesting insights into the perceptions and aspirations of the inhabitants of the island, many of whom have been or want to go to Thailand to work. The author outlines how increased government control makes movement across the border between Laos and Thailand more difficult. The chapter also contains an essay on the history of the region as well as on Lao-Thai relations (pp. 79-88). This overview is unfortunately both biased and overlooks key periods of internal development in Laos. The bias lies in the broadly positive presentation of Thai policies towards Laos in historical times (pp. 79-83). This can be contrasted with the criticism of Thailand for collaborating with Laos in the current period (pp. 88-91). The author should be given due credit for her efforts in addressing the studied issues in a comprehensive way, in particular compared to other contributions to the book. However, to deal with an academic discipline different from a researcher’s own area of expertise – in this case an anthropologist dealing with history – is a challenging task, as can be seen in this chapter.

Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, makes a serious attempt at identifying some of the major findings and arguments from the other chapters in the book and also at framing the analysis around the both relevant and interesting question: “are the Mekong frontiers sites of exception?” Based on the evidence provided in the volume this question cannot really be answered but the discussion in the chapter is interesting. The drawback with the chapter is that the author refers to his own book repeatedly. In fact the starting point of the chapter is derived from his earlier book and not from the edited volume that he is contributing to.

To summarise this review, the volume deals with an interesting problem and a number of relevant issues but it is too limited both in terms of content and in

terms of length to properly address the problem and its issues. Given the major weaknesses outlined in this review and the shortcomings in addressing the stated objectives of the volume, the conclusion of this review can only be that the book is not recommended reading.

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▬▬▬ **Grabowski, Maïke, Herold, Heike, & Jordan, Rolf** (Hrsg.). (2009).
Sicherheit kontra Menschenrechte: Antiterrorpolitik in Asien.
▬▬▬ Köln, Deutschland: Horlemann Verlag. ISBN: 978-3-89502-284-5. 206 Seiten

Die Tatsache, dass die Sicherheit der Allgemeinheit und die (scheinbare) Stabilität des Systems oft im Konflikt mit den individuellen Rechten der betroffenen BürgerInnen stehen, wird seit langer Zeit beobachtet und erörtert. Die Terrorismusdebatten nach 9/11 rückten dieses altbekannte Dilemma wieder in den Fokus öffentlicher Diskussionen. Dabei ging es im politischen „Westen“, also Regionen, die sich – durchaus zu Recht – immer noch als Vorreiter und -kämpfer der Menschenrechte sehen, allerdings primär um die bedenkliche Aushöhlung der eigenen Rechtsstaatlichkeit. Wie aber sieht es in Teilen der Welt aus, in denen rechtsstaatliche Prinzipien nie so recht Fuß fassten? Welchen Einfluss hatten die Terroranschläge in New York und Washington auf noch andauernde Demokratisierungsprozesse?

Der auf Beiträgen einer Tagung des (Essener) *Asienhauses* im Mai 2008 basierende Sammelband „Sicherheit kontra Menschenrechte: Antiterrorpolitik in Asien“ beleuchtet dieses Thema von zentralasiatischen Ex-Sowjetrepubliken wie Usbekistan über Indien, Bangladesch und Ostasien bis Südostasien, das mit den Philippinen, Malaysia, Singapur, Indonesien und einer Betrachtung der ASEAN-Politik klar den Schwerpunkt des Buches darstellt.

In insgesamt zehn Beiträgen gehen die AutorInnen der Frage nach, wie es um Bürger- und Menschenrechte in ausgewählten Ländern Asiens steht und präsentieren diese Entwicklungen zumeist in Relation zu den Anschlägen des 11. Septembers 2001. Dabei wird klar, dass die westliche und insbesondere amerikanische Terrorismusdebatte, welche seit diesem Datum massiv zugenommen hat, nicht ohne Weiteres auf Asien