

On the Edge: Life Along the Russia-China Border. By Franck Billé and Caroline Humphrey. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021. xii, 376 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Maps. \$29.95, hard bound. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.188

Franck Billé and Caroline Humphrey's poignant, nuanced, and remarkably detailed account of the complex interplay of politics, commerce, and society on the 2,600-mile Russian-Chinese border is a tour de force. It will undoubtedly come to serve as welcome addition to scholars' bookshelves across multiple disciplines, including anthropology, geography, and politics. Describing themselves as "anthropologists and border specialists" (270), the duo brings their scholarly sights to bear on the shared space between Blagoveshchensk, Russia (pop. 225,000) and Heihe, China (pop. 1.3 million), employing the twinned cities as a synecdoche for the larger border zone—one that has a storied history as a frontier between "east" and "west," but which is now a dynamic assemblage that defies binary or simplistic divisions.

While exploring the "real" geographies of the two cities, these researchers are equally concerned with the "situated myths" (154) that each population holds about themselves and their respective "other" across the Amur River. On the northern bank, the Soviet-designed city blends with the remnants of an imperial settlement designed to secure the tsarist empire's designs on the Russian Far East and access to the Pacific. To the south sits a much younger city: one defined by its proximity to Russia, but which remains quite distant from its septentrional counterpart in so many other ways, not least of which is its undeniable connections to a globalized world that often eludes its neighbor. As the authors are at pains to point out, the "imaginary dimension" (248) permeates nearly every interaction between the residents of these two Asian cities, both of which serve as beachheads, even laboratories for various geopolitical and commercial maneuverings of their respective capitals, Moscow and Beijing. The most profound finding of Billé and Humphrey, one grounded in careful and meaningful on-the-ground analysis, is that despite the so-called "no limits" partnership that supposedly exists between these two "gigantic, nationalistically orientated countries" (19), Russia and China (and correspondingly Russians and Chinese) remain worlds apart even when butting up against one another in places like Amur Oblast and the krajs of Zabaikalsky and Primorsky.

After briefly introducing the Sino-Russian relationship by highlighting similarities and differences in these respective superpowers' approaches to (neo-authoritarian) governance, (political) capitalism, and (imperial) multiculturalism—as well as Russian fears about becoming a natural resource "appendage" of China (12)—*On the Edge* quickly proceeds to a discussion of the "phantom bridges" that (do not) exist between the two countries. Such "bridges" serve as a metonym for the aspirational, but mostly unrealized bonds that could, would, and even should bind China and Russia, but which—like any haunting—are ghostly, incorporeal, and remind us of that which has failed to be realized. Rather than engaging the macro, Billé and Humphrey choose to investigate the micro "lived realities" of those people living in the shadow of these phantasmal funiculi, evoking how their quotidian experiences give lie to "official accounts" (5) of the robust, multivalent relationship hawked by Beijing and Moscow in nearly equal measure. In doing so, the authors show us that, in fact, "Russians and Chinese know surprisingly little about each other" (9), yet quite engage in a "complex cross-cultural process[es] of borrowing, inspiration, and mimesis" (21).

As the reader moves through the text, the geographic scale steadily narrows from the (inter)national level to the regional to the local, eventually engaging the realm

of individual—albeit collectively-informed—*Weltbilder* (world-pictures) of the denizens of Blagoveshchensk and Heihe. In the ensuing chapters, the authors delve into this curious paradox, first by discussing “Border Spaces,” “Standoff on the Border River,” and “Making a Living in the Cross-Border Economy” (Chs. 1–3). This troika of chapters serves to ground the more sophisticated and complex narrative threads that will be present in the final three full chapters of the text: “Friends, Foes, and Kin across the Border,” “Resources and Environment,” and “Bright Lights across the Amur” (Chs. 5–7). Knitting these two sections together is the very welcome fourth chapter, “Indigenous Peoples of the Borderlands,” a thoughtful and evocative series of vignettes focusing on the ethnic minorities (Nanai-Hezhe, Oroch-Oroqen, and Buryat-Barga) whose lives and livelihoods are split and pained by the Russo-Chinese border. With its sound anthropological analysis, this chapter exemplifies the overall quality of the book’s contribution to the field of Eurasian studies.

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In the Shadow of the Great War: Physical Violence in East Central Europe, 1917–1923. Ed. Jochen Böhler, Ota Konrád, and Rudolf Kučera. Berghahn Books: Oxford, 2021. vi, 199 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$135.00, hard bound.
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This is an excellent collection of research essays. The three editors, Jochen Böhler, Ota Konrád, and Rudolf Kučera did an impressive job of assembling nine high-quality essays. The volume analyzes the uses and perceptions of physical violence in east central Europe between 1917 and 1923. The focus is on the successor states of Austria-Hungary and the violence that accompanied the dissolution of its empire. The chapters are thematically quite diverse, and all are based on original research. Each chapter is followed by a short but instructive bibliography. The articles are framed by an introduction penned by the three editors and an afterword by Boris Barth. The book is completed by an index.

In the first chapter, Matthias Voigtmann uses the concept of *Gewaltgemeinschaften* or “communities of violence” to analyze the activities of the paramilitary German Free Corps in the Baltics. He shows that the reasons that motivated “Baltikumer,” the name they gave themselves, to join the Free Corps varied greatly, ranging from the hope of receiving land for later settlement to adherence to a strongly nationalist ideology to a love of adventure. Voigtmann argues convincingly that many “Baltikumer” saw an “opportunity to live out a fantasy of a romanticized military life” (21). Even after the Free Corps was dissolved, the collective violence bound the group together. In the following chapter, Christopher Gilley scrutinizes the war lords of the Ukrainian civil war. These military commanders constructed their identities from a combination of different ideologies. Gilley views the violent acts committed by war lords and their soldiers as a “means of forming new identities” (41). He uses the concept of *Gewaltraum* (space of violence) to describe the place where these identities were forged.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Béla Bodó and Emily R. Gioielli look at specific aspects of the “white terror” after the fall of the Soviet Hungarian Republic. Both authors discuss the widely publicized case of Mrs. Hamburger but from different perspectives. Mrs. Hamburger was captured by members of the notorious Prónaj battalion, was tortured and forced to witness the torture of friends. Bodó presents the case of Mrs. Hamburger as one of two examples of sexual and gendered violence during the Hungarian civil