



DOI: 10.54631/VS.2022.64-117633

COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH ON CHINA'S LAND BORDER RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

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Quan hệ biên giới trên đất liền giữa Trung Quốc với các quốc gia láng giềng (Land Border Relations Between China and Neighboring Countries). Edited by Dinh Quang Hai. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishers, Mai Ha Books, 2022. 370 p. ISBN 978-604-308-860-1

Abstract: China is one of the rare countries with a rich history and culture, a large area and extremely diverse natural conditions and resources. Played as a superpower, China's policies in fact have regional, interregional and global scope and influence. Among historical and contemporary issues, the border relations between China and neighboring countries is one of the most

complex issues which are the top concern in the foreign affairs of the concerned sides including Vietnam. The author of the review, at the request of the journal, focuses on the section of the book that characterizes the border aspects of relations between China and Vietnam, moreover, from the standpoint of Vietnamese interests and perception. On the base of various sources of material and given a dimensional and interdisciplinary approach, with the contributors as Vietnamese experts in historical studies, international studies, regional studies, country studies, the book is a valuable work, providing background knowledge on China's policy and border relations with neighboring countries in history, especially since 1949.

Keywords: China, border relations, international relations, Vietnam, Russia, Southeast Asian countries.

For citation: Nguyen Manh Dung (2022). Comprehensive Research on China's Land Border Relations with Neighboring Countries. *Russian Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 6 (4): 86–89.

Received: October 21, 2022

Accepted: December 9, 2022

On the study on world history and international relations in Vietnam, China is one of the research subjects and themes that greatly attract Vietnamese scholarship. Chinese culture and civilisation influenced and impacted widely throughout East Asia, forming civilisations that

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A.J Toynbee from his *sous-classe* classification has considered as civilisations satellites. Obviously, China is a power in the world with a rich historical and cultural tradition. It is the fourth largest country by land area in the world after Russia, Canada and the United States. In international and regional relations, there are so far problems that have been, are and will have a persistent and long-term influence on China's foreign policy with regional countries, including relations of the mainland border between China and neighboring countries, especially those that share land borders with China.

The book under the title “Land border relations between China and neighboring countries” is one of the important scientific monographs with profound theoretical and practical significance, providing useful insights on China's policies and actions in border-territorial relations with neighboring countries.

Historians, political scientists, ethnologists, international researchers in such their areas of specialisation as Chinese studies, the Soviet Union/Russian Federation studies, Indian studies, Vietnamese studies, Southeast Asian studies, Area studies contribute to the work which is edited by Prof. Dr. Dinh Quang Hai, Editor-in-Chief of Vietnam's leading scientific journal Journal of Historical Studies, former Director of the Vietnam Institute of History.

The overarching content of the work is the border policies and the land border relations between China and neighboring countries with a time focus (scope) since October 1949 (and including comparative analysis in the historical past). On the other hand, due to time constraints, this book only seeks to focus on major issues of policy and land border relations between China and neighboring countries as case studies.

In addition to the Preface and Conclusion, the book consists of five chapters:

Chapter One provides an overview of the process of forming the Chinese frontier and the border policy of the People's Republic of China. From the Chinese concepts of the border definition and the ideological basis for the border formation, this chapter clarifies the process of forming the Chinese frontier, China's border policy, especially since the People's Republic of China. By September 2019, China had diplomatic relations with 180 countries. Basically, China's foreign policy is the “five principles of peaceful coexistence” (from the time of Premier Minister Chou En-lai). However, the book comes to comment that over the past 70 years (1949-2020), China's foreign policy and guideline did not fully comply with that principle, especially in border-territorial relations with neighboring countries.

Chapter Two. Border relations between China and Tsar Russia and the Soviet Union/Russian Federation address two main focuses on the process of forming the China-Russia/Soviet border (from the seventeenth century to the early 1920s), the border policy of the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China. The work also highlights why China did not question the border between China and the Soviet Union until 1959?

Chapter Three is to shed useful insights on China's land border relations with Southeast Asian countries, Laos and Myanmar. This is a chapter with rich and diverse focuses on typical cases of China's border relations with India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Laos, and Myanmar. The work notes that the unresolved border disputes with India so far make the smaller South Asian and Southeast Asian countries becoming a very important buffer zone between India and China.

Chapter Four considering as the essential chapter of the book, is to deal with the land border relations between China and Vietnam. Among the borderline between Vietnam and neighboring countries, the Vietnam and China border is the most important and the most complicated border. The

land border between the two countries covers 1,065.652 km long in a total length of 1,449.466 km (about 384 km at sea). Its starting point is the intersection of the border lines of three countries China-Vietnam-Laos at the Apachai border gate (Lai Chau province, Vietnam) and the end of the border line is the first point of the territorial water delimitation in the Gulf of Tonkin (p. 233).

During the French colonial period of Vietnam, and the Qing dynasty of China, the land border was one of crucial problems in French pacification of Vietnam, for instance the Franco-Qing Treaty was signed in Tianjin (China) in 1885 with many provisions related to surveying and border marking process; in 1887, France - Qing China basically planned the land border between Tonkin and Qing China (p.242). In 1895, the Franco-Chinese Convention was signed, resulting in a definitive demarcation of the Tonkinese and Chinese border and the border between Laos and China as well (p. 244).

As for the period from 1966 to 1979, China stepped up activities that violated the borders and expanded the territorial encroachment with a large number of shape. In February 1979, China attacked six northern border provinces of Vietnam. The Vietnam-China border war broke out, and the relationship between the two countries was interrupted until the late 1980s (p. 255–256). And during 10 years from 1980 to 1991, the two sides did not conduct any round of border negotiations (p. 258).

From 1994 to 1999, Vietnam and China conducted 6 rounds of government level negotiations, 16 rounds of joint working group negotiations, and 3 rounds of group negotiations on a draft of a treaty of land border. At the end of 1999, the two countries signed the Land border Treaty, a treaty of great significance for the two countries. The demarcation activities continued from 2000 to 2009 (p.263-273).

Thus, this is a comprehensive and in-depth chapter on China's border relations with Vietnam before and after 1945, during the period 1980 and 1999, and from 1999 to 2009; as well as addressing a number of major issues in the relationship such as the land demarcation, the Border Treaty dated 30 December 1999, the status of land and population management in the border area between the two countries since 1945.

Indeed, regarding the Vietnamese-Chinese land border, the book also mentions the situation of land management and population in the border areas, in which the issues of ethnic structure characteristics, ethnic policies with the adjusted process in both countries; then the impact of border policy on ethnic minorities in border areas and so on are the major contents relatively concretely presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five provides remarked comments on land border relations between China and neighboring countries. It comes to China's policy on border and territorial issues, emphasizing the policy of “maintaining the status quo”, flexible changing to protect national interests; China's border and territorial policy, the process of resolving the land border issue. The impact of Chinese border relations to Asia-Pacific countries with a positive effect is to maintain a peaceful international environment for economic development. In addition to the claim to Taiwan, the book comes to remark that China constantly causes border and territorial issues with almost its neighbours, and disputes have developed into armed conflicts. On the other hand, the negative effects cause instability in all aspects. The work also assesses the impact on Vietnam in both positive and negative effects. The book states that the Vietnam-China relationship is always the most important and awkward foreign policy issue for Vietnam (p. 342).

In summary, given an interdisciplinary approach, along with diverse, reliable, official and up-to-date documents, the work contributes to provide a general picture on the frontier relations between China and neighboring countries. As for Vietnam, the authors consider that China's competition for regional influence with the United States has created more favorable conditions for Vietnam to strengthen her relations with both the United States and China and to implement the Vietnamese policy of independence and self-reliance, relationship diversification and multilateralization. The two powers (the U.S, China) in increasing their cooperation seem to contribute positively to regional activities.

Developing friendly and neighborly relations with China is one of the top priorities in Vietnam's foreign policy. Vietnam needs and is able to take advantage of trends and cooperation programs in line with her economic and strategic interests, “to enhance national general force and at the same time take all advantage of opportunity to settle border and territorial disputes with China for the respect of international law” (p. 360).