

***Asymmetrical Neighbors: Borderland State Building between China and Southeast Asia.* By Enze Han. New York City, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. Hardcover: 240pp.**

Asymmetrical Neighbors examines the interrelated nation-state building processes in the borderland areas between China, Myanmar and Thailand. Enze Han uses extensive historical resources and fieldwork to provide a detailed account of the transnational links between the three countries and how the nation-building processes in each country are mutually implicated in one another. In doing so, the book makes a significant contribution to the study of political developments in Southeast Asia.

Chapter One introduces the book's structure and methodology. Chapter Two establishes a novel theoretical framework that portrays nation-state building not only as an internal domestic process of a given country, but one that is informed by interactions with neighbouring states. Chapter Three traces the historical narratives of the borderland territories by delineating the nature of the relationship between the populations of the lowlands and the highlands before the mid-twentieth century. Chapter Four discusses two factors that greatly impacted the nation-building process in the three countries: the presence of Kuomintang (KMT) forces in Myanmar and the communist insurgency in Thailand during the early stages of the Cold War. Surprisingly, Han finds that the KMT acted as a catalyst for the fragmentation of Myanmar's peripheries, triggering military conflict between the Burmese army and ethnic minorities. However, in Thailand and China, the KMT incursion offered an opportunity for the two countries to strengthen their control over their respective borderland areas. In Chapter Five, Han discusses the different consequences of Beijing's support for the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT), which was, respectively, the militarization of ethnic minorities along the Burma-China border and the counteractive campaign of nation-state building by the government in Thailand.

In Chapter Six, Han examines the dynamics of the cross-border economy, the dominance of China and Thailand in the borderland areas of Myanmar, as well as the flow of resources and labour. Chapter Seven discusses nation-state building in the three countries, focusing on the impact of ethnic minorities on national identity. Chapter Eight analyses the existing ethnic politics in the restive frontiers of Myanmar, including the ongoing conflicts and the peace

process. In Chapter Nine, the book concludes with some theoretical reflections about the neighbourhood effects of state- and nation-building, including recent developments in China that facilitate the integration of regional economies and their significance for both Myanmar and Thailand.

The book reveals how the processes of borderland integration and national unification are inter-related and how challenging nation-state building can be in the borderland areas. All the chapters are supported by rich historical and contemporary accounts revealing the deep cultural and political interconnections between the three countries in their common borderland areas. Han's fieldwork yielded fascinating insights into these connections, which, as he points out, has resulted in important differences in the three countries' nation-state building processes.

In terms of methodology, Han presents a theoretical approach that transcends national boundaries. Accordingly, nation-state building is not seen as a process predetermined by domestic factors, such as preparations for war, political institutions or geographical and demographic variations. Instead, nation-state building is conceptualized as a process that is greatly affected by the "neighborhood effect" (p. 10). Han argues that nation-state building is a highly interactive process influenced by power relationships and asymmetries between neighbouring countries, in which concurrent regional events can affect each country's domestic development trajectories.

Interestingly, the book argues that Myanmar failed to consolidate control over the borderland areas partly because of the political and military interventions from China and Thailand during the Cold War. Economically, China and Thailand are also more developed than Myanmar, and therefore have substantial economic influences over the borderland at the expense of Myanmar's economic sovereignty. These two factors accordingly explain the gap between the nation-state building processes of the three countries.

The book also offers an interesting argument about Zomia, the huge mass of mainland Southeast Asia that was historically beyond the control of governments based in the lowlands. Han argues that Zomia was a target for penetration by the modern state since the first half of the twentieth century, a process which was accelerated by a combination of technological power, sovereign ambitions, modernization and nation-state building. As a result, Zomia has been fragmented across several countries, with the modern states imposing their presence in these mountainous areas. China and Thailand have apparently strengthened their sovereign control over the borderland

areas, while simultaneously projecting their economic and cultural influences across the border into Myanmar. Both China and Thailand have also largely completed their nation-state building processes, with their respective ethnic minorities now identifying themselves as Chinese or Thais. Meanwhile, the Myanmar government continues to face resistance from the borderland ethnic minorities who oppose its national unification efforts.

For those studying Southeast Asia, Han's central message—that nation-state building in borderland areas is more than just a domestic matter for any one country—may be groundbreaking. In closely documenting the historical and contemporary state-building efforts in the tri-state borderlands, the book delineates how relations between asymmetric neighbours can shape their borderland politics, nation-state building and national identity. The book makes a valuable contribution to the study of Southeast Asian borderland areas.

ZHU XIANGHUI is Associate Professor with the Institute of Myanmar Studies and the School of International Relations, Yunnan University, China. Postal address: No. 2 Cuihubei Road, the School of International Relations, Yunnan University, Kunming, China; email: aprilxianghui@gmail.com.