

security, transportation, public security, to financial departments) were required to mobilise in full-gear in order to reach employment assignments of student-interns for the Foxconn plants. Top leaders at the provincial level-led work teams from vocational schools required to reach hiring quotas of student-interns for the Foxconn sites in Sichuan and Henan provinces. Between August and September 2010, Zhengzhou Municipality recruited more than 20,000 student-interns in 23 cities and townships and raised some 16 million RMB (p. 84-8). We see here a longstanding pattern of central state policies and laws that, despite their aim of better protecting workers, also aim at providing enticing conditions for investment (Gallagher 2005). The role of states in facilitating labour appropriation via building or subsidising infrastructure such as roads, bus lines, housing, production sites, dormitories, etc. are not entirely new when considering the history of global capitalism around the world. But the magnitude and the responsiveness – the speed of these processes – by the Party-state (provincial, municipal, and local) in bringing about new sites of production and helping to shape new pools of labour is probably unprecedented. Somehow, a related singular feature of the narrow alliance between the state and global corporations hints at the very nature of the CCP as a mobilisational organisation (Perry 2021) to assist Foxconn in its thirst for more flexible labour in times of labour market contraction and increasing demand for electronic devices by consumers around the world.

Chapters Six to Eleven are on the whole rather brief and delve into the conditions of rural workers, their life in the cities, the various predicaments and work hazards they are facing (such as overtime, environmental degradation, intoxication through aluminium dust, fires, etc.), and how they have been struggling collectively and individually for fairer labour conditions, decent wages, and social insurance benefits.

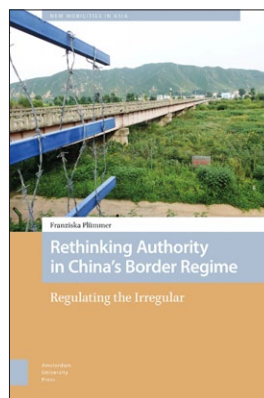
Dying for an iPhone is an important addition to a substantive body of scholarship on the politics of labour in post-socialist China, much of this literature having been produced by Hong Kong-based scholars over the last three decades. It will be of great interest both for teaching purposes and for scholars, journalists, and social activists interested in global labour and issues of sustainability of consumer-driven production systems.

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PLÜMMER, Franziska. 2022.
Rethinking Authority in China's Border Regime.

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

HASAN H. KARRAR

The last decade has witnessed growing interest in and new scholarship on Asian borderlands; much of this work has been informed by fieldwork in or just beyond China's border regions. The result is that borderland studies has quickly become a vibrant subfield within the wider Asian studies discipline. This has had two important consequences. First, borderlands, which were long considered marginal to state histories, have now become integral to understanding sovereignty, territorial claims, and governance. Second, methodologically, the rise of borderland studies is accompanied by a shift towards interdisciplinarity in the critical social sciences.

Franziska Plümmer's *Rethinking Authority in China's Border Regime: Regulating the Irregular* is an empirically grounded, welcome contribution to this body of scholarship. Drawing on her field research in China prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on a wide range of sources in English and Chinese, Plümmer asks how "authority is exerted amidst changing border regimes, and how these impact local immigration and bordering practices" (p. 13). Over seven detailed chapters, Plümmer offers both a valuable overview of China's border regimes and migratory policies, as well as a focused discussion on the southwest (Yunnan) and northeast (Jilin) regions, where at the time of Plümmer's field research, cross-border labour mobility was allowed. Both regions are part of cross-border initiatives for regional economic cooperation based on enhanced connectivity: the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), which besides China includes Cambodia, the Lao Democratic People's Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam; and the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI), which connects China to Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation.

Contemporary studies of Chinese borderlands have tended to focus on the mobility of small traders or communities with familial ties across national boundaries. Plümmer begins with a wider analytical frame by asking why the Chinese state has traditionally regulated mobility. She also asks how border regimes – which represent political actors at different levels of government – regulate mobility across borders. These questions are important for two reasons. First, as Plümmer notes, our understanding of sovereignty and the construction of borders needs to be expanded to incorporate inclusion, exclusion, and integration, which are

key to understanding “the spatial constitution of a state” (p. 27). Second, while the Chinese state has long been known to regulate mobility, notably through the *hukou* (戶口) system of domicile and registration (p. 67), cross-border mobility today is variegated, in that it sometimes varies from place to place. Put differently, while there might be a normative understanding of how borders are meant to be crossed by people and merchandise, on the ground, cross-border mobility may very well differ in different parts of the country.

Tracing how the state sought to regulate mobility, Plümmer describes how, in the 1990s, certain types of migration were deemed illegal: these were variously irregular, undocumented, or unauthorised (p. 92). Illegality was further broken down into illegal entry, illegal residence, and illegal employment. What each of these had in common was that they were seen as variations on “appropriate” and “normal” immigration procedures. Illegal migration is deemed a threat to harmonious society, and as Plümmer notes, was intertwined with the “three evils” discourse (terrorism, separatism, extremism), an important component of China’s security framework (p. 93–5). As Plümmer also observes, this discourse also had a racialised dimension in the southwestern borderland, where it was used to criticise cross-border migration and unregistered marriages (p. 95). Even though these marriages might sometimes be a result of brokerage – and often addressed a demographic or labour deficiency – foreign wives have remained the focus of surveillance (p. 96).

Plümmer also describes non-normative border crossings in Yunnan Province in which goods are shuttled across the border. People sometimes make unregulated crossings as well. Although many of these “border entrepreneurs” have official documentation, or have the ability to acquire it, they opt for cheaper and less bureaucratic ways to cross the border (p. 158–9). While China’s international borders in Jilin Province are more securitised, here too Plümmer describes informal border crossings and informal exchanges across the Tumen River (p. 160). What these examples effectively illustrate is the complexity and place-specific nature of China’s cross-border mobilities (Chapter Six). All too often, China, as well as its administrative procedures, is seen as a monolith – *Rethinking Authority* is an important corrective to this view.

I have three minor critiques. First, borderlands are fascinating places where governance and mobilities intersect; I found myself wishing for more ethnography and/or vignettes from the field, which would have allowed for a more textured account of China’s borderlands. Related, while there are extensive references to theory, I did not think these added as much as the empirical evidence. I also found each chapter having its own DOI number, abstract, and bibliography unusual. If this is a new business model for academic publishing, are we expected to reconsider how monographs are going to be read?

None of this takes away from Plümmer’s important contributions. Certainly, I will be referencing *Rethinking Authority* in my own writing. Having been immersed in borderland studies for about a decade, and China studies for considerably longer, I found *Rethinking Authority* offering frequent – and useful – insights and information on border regimes and regulations. All too often, studies on Asian borderlands tend to focus on the contemporary and what is happening at the border itself; a strength of this volume

is how it offers insights on what is happening at the border while also framing those insights within a longer history of cross-border mobility in China. *Rethinking Authority* will be a handy resource for graduate students and area specialists interested in China’s borderlands, contemporary Chinese border regimes, as well as questions of how migration and mobility intersect with citizenship and sovereignty, nationhood and belonging. Parts of the book, Chapter Two for example, which offers an overview of China’s border control, migration, and refugee policy and security, would be well-suited to advanced undergraduate courses on contemporary China.

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