NOUVEAUX REGARDS SUR L'ASIE

A fresh perspective on Asia and the diversity of its issues and cultures, combining the views of experts and high-level players.

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EDITORIAL

By Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet
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The contestation of borders, as it is currently unfolding before our eyes in Western Europe with Russia's aggression against Ukraine (preceded by Moscow's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014), is unfortunately not limited to our old continent (as opposed to the Mundus Novus of navigator Amerigo Vespucci). It is also spreading to Asia—a vast region that is itself not spared from the claims and ambitions of its 24 [1] or 48 [2] constituent countries.

The resurgence of high-intensity tensions between India and Pakistan, following the (unclaimed) April 22 attack that killed 26 Indian tourists (of Hindu faith) in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, highlights—as emphasized by Jean-Luc Racine, emeritus research director at the CNRS in his analysis—"the unfinished partition" [3] between Bharat [4] and the "land (stan) of the pure (pak)" [5]. The latter was in fact created from scratch after British occupation troops withdrew from the Raj in 1947, then an empire on its way to becoming a unified nation in the form of a federation of states.

After three bloody wars (1947–1948, 1969, 1971) over sovereignty of this Muslim-majority territory (with Jammu itself being Hindu-majority) contested by Islamabad and Delhi, the Kashmir issue remains unresolved to this day. The concern is all the greater for the international community since the dispute involves two nuclear-armed rival neighbors who have never ceased to harbor deep-seated hatred toward one another, fueled by conflicting religious beliefs (Islamism vs. Vedism/Hinduism) [6].

With skirmishes continuing after the May 10 ceasefire agreement between the two "enemy brothers," observers could only conclude that it would be precarious at best and would not solve the core issue, especially as Islamabad—or at least the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence)—continues to turn a blind eye to or even encourage terrorist or separatist Islamist groups operating on its soil, ever ready to carry out attacks in Indian territory (such as the particularly deadly bombings in Mumbai in 1993, 2006, and 2008).

Calm has since returned, reportedly thanks to U.S. mediation. According to the Pakistani side, the Director General of Military Operations of Pakistan initiated a call with his Indian counterpart, and both parties agreed to "cease all firing and military actions on land, in the air, and at sea." It remains to be seen how long this cessation of hostilities will last, given the still-heated war rhetoric on both sides.

The question of Aksai Chin and the adjoining Shaksgam Valley—territories that Delhi also claims as part of Kashmir—is just as critical. Seized from India after the 1962 Sino-Indian War, this territory of approximately 38,000 km² (larger than Belgium and Luxembourg combined) remains, along with the states of Ladakh ("Little Tibet" or Xiao Xizang 小西藏 in Chinese) and Arunachal Pradesh ("Southern Tibet" or Nanzang 南藏 in Chinese), a longstanding territorial dispute between the two great powers. Beijing refuses to recognize the legitimacy of the border demarcation imposed by the British colonial empire—known as the McMahon Line—established during the 1914 Simla Convention negotiated and signed by Tibetan, Chinese, and British representatives.

As demonstrated by the deadly Sino-Indian clashes of June 2020 in Ladakh's Galwan Valley, and again in December 2022 when Chinese troops crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) into Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh, a campaign of territorial reclamation also seems to be emerging. This was reinforced by the Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources' release on August 28, 2023, of a new geographical map featuring Chinese characters labeling not only regions claimed or seized by Beijing but, more surprisingly, the entire Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island—prompting Russian authorities to emphatically reiterate that their border agreement with China had been definitively settled in 2008. Here again, these repeated and often bloody border disputes involve nuclear-armed states.

Beijing's unilateral delimitation by a "nine-dash line," later extended to a "ten-dash line" (including Taiwan), encompassing nearly the entire South China Sea (or simply "Southern Sea," as referenced in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—UNCLOS, or the Montego Bay Convention), represents another frontier dispute—this time maritime. It pits China against its neighbors (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam), whose Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) are encroached upon, depriving them of the right to exploit the fossil fuel, mineral, and fishing resources of their seabeds.

Although a signatory (since 1910) [7], Beijing rejected the July 2016 ruling of The Hague Tribunal (PCA) in the arbitration filed by the Republic of the Philippines against the People's Republic of China, declaring it "null and void" and "no more than a scrap of paper," even though the court ruled that "there is no legal basis for China to claim historic rights over resources in the maritime areas within the 'nine-dash line.'"

This dispute remains unresolved as well. Despite ASEAN's efforts—including the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC)—no binding code of conduct has yet been agreed upon. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has failed to prevent China from continuing its land reclamation and militarization activities in the region, mainly due to internal divisions between countries aligned with Beijing (such as Cambodia and Laos) and others that are allies or partners of the United States. Chinese claims over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyutai in Chinese), which are legally administered by Japan following the 1972 Okinawa Reversion Agreement with the United States, are also rejected by Beijing, which does not recognize Japan's EEZ boundaries.

As a show of force, China fired five armed missiles into Japanese waters during its 2022 military exercises. In addition, Chinese fishing vessels and coast guard ships have repeatedly intruded into Japanese territorial waters and even, in 2025, violated Japanese airspace.

The peaceful resolution of the dispute between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (in Taiwan), as urged by the international community, seems increasingly unlikely as the ideological divide deepens. Taiwan has meanwhile become a full-fledged democracy, ranked 12th globally—four spots ahead of its former colonizer, Japan (see Democracy Index 2024, The Economist).

As Beijing's calls for "unification" (tongyi 统一) continue to fall on deaf ears, the risk grows that

this could eventually lead to a devastating regional conflict—perhaps in the form of a blockade, or worse, an invasion. This would likely involve the United States in support of its former ally and now key partner, Taiwan, which remains a crucial link in the chain securing U.S. dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

The border dispute between the two Koreas, divided along the 38th parallel, is also unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. South Korea declares in Article 3 of its Constitution that "The territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean peninsula and its adjacent islands," while North Korea asserts in Article 1 of its Constitution that "The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is an independent socialist State representing the interests of all the Korean people."

As a nuclear-armed state itself, North Korea and the ruling dynasty show no sign of loosening their grip or surrendering the prize. In June 2024, Kim's Korea and Putin's Russia signed a mutual defense treaty equivalent to the one binding Pyongyang and Beijing.

Many other lower-intensity border disputes also persist, particularly in Southeast Asia, where states have continually invaded one another over the centuries, and where many borders remain ill-defined even today.

Nowhere else does the Roman law principle uti possidetis, ita possideatis ("you shall possess what you have possessed") apply as aptly as in this region—unless, of course, it is challenged by the resurgence of the American, Russian, and Chinese empires, a trend already visibly taking shape...

[1] As defined by the Asia-Oceania Department of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (Quai d'Orsay), i.e., East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

[2] As considered by the United Nations, which also includes the countries of Central Asia, the Near and Middle East, the Caucasus, and Northern Asia (Siberia).

[3] See Jean-Luc Racine, "India–Pakistan: The Kashmir crisis embodies the unfinished partition between the two nations," article published in the Le Monde edition of May 10, 2025.

[4] Another official name of the Republic of India, derived from Sanskrit (Bhārat Gaṇarājya भारत गणराज्य), appearing alongside "India" in the Constitution with equal status.

[5] Officially named the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Islāmī Jumhūriya-e Pākistān اسلامی جمہوریۂ پاکستان).

[6] See the daily ceremony at the Wagah border post where soldiers from both countries challenge each other: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7hyssy

[7] See Thomas E. Kelly, "The South China Sea ruling: China's international law dilemma," The Diplomat, July 14, 2018.

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

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Interview Nouveaux Regards

Bernard Thomann, Director of the French Institute for Research on East Asia.

Interviewed by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet : Regarding karoshi, the phenomenon of death caused by overwork, when was this issue—specific to Japan—officially recognized by health authorities as an occupational disease? From what I've read, even in 2023, 10% of men and 4% of women were working more than 60 hours a week, due to low wage levels pushing them to work excessive overtime?

Bernard Thomann : The first officially recognized case of karoshi dates back to 1969. Indeed, overtime work is very prevalent in Japan, but it's often difficult to measure accurately, because in the Japanese system, a lot of overtime isn't recorded or paid, and therefore doesn't show up in statistics.

About twenty years ago, another system emerged—one not based on actual hours worked, but on estimated hours. In this model, the employee is paid for a predetermined number of hours agreed upon with their superior, based on how long both parties estimate it would take to complete the assigned task. Technically, this system is prohibited by law, but Japanese labor law is not always strictly enforced.

There are two main reasons for this: the insufficient number of labor inspectors, and the fact that employees are often reluctant to report violations—especially since labor unions are usually tied to the company itself. In some karoshi cases, it's only discovered after the fact that the person had in fact worked far more than agreed upon, and was never compensated. These are extreme examples, but they do show that many such cases go unrecorded, particularly among managerial staff.

From what I've read about the evolution of work conditions in Japan in recent decades, there seem to be two main categories of workers: "regular" and "non-regular." But these don't exactly align with the French distinction between fixed-term and permanent contracts. What do these categories mean in the Japanese context?

Regular employees are those hired without a time limit. Unlike in France, a Japanese worker hired indefinitely doesn't always sign an individual contract. Instead, they often make a pledge of loyalty to the company, promising to behave properly, etc., and agree to adhere to the internal company regulations.

Their working conditions are not very individualized. They typically climb the corporate ladder through a relatively uniform promotion system, with limited differentiation early in their careers. Only after the age of 35 or 40 do promotions vary more based on individual cases—unless the person is pushed out of the system, meaning they are dismissed without it being explicitly stated.

Is promotion based on seniority or performance?

Primarily on seniority, with evaluations made over the long term. Performance is also considered, but not in an individualized or short-term way. It's generally the subjective judgment of the manager that determines who gets promoted to higher-level managerial roles. This was standard in the 1970s and 1980s. But with the aging population, companies had to introduce stricter selection systems for promotions and began cutting some salaries.

Some employees reaching the age of 35–40 saw their pay no longer determined by their rank, but by annual performance targets. They would meet yearly with their manager to set objectives. If those goals were met, their salary increased. Otherwise, it decreased. This added flexibility for companies, though age and seniority still played a role.

From the 1990s onward, companies introduced a second system to better accommodate other profiles—such as women, foreigners, or mid-career hires with specific skills.

In parallel, another category has long existed: non-regular workers, usually blue-collar, hired on a seasonal basis. In the 1960s and 70s, especially in the auto industry, many rural laborers were hired during the agricultural off-season, as well as day laborers with little education. This was common in construction but not exclusive to it.

Initially, these workers made up a small portion of the workforce, but their numbers grew due to labor law reforms. Previously banned categories, like temporary agency workers, were legalized starting in the 1990s. Such work had been banned after World War II due to abusive practices tied to the mafia, especially in construction and mining. These labor brokers would forcibly recruit workers—sometimes violently—from rural areas or slums.

The U.S. occupation authorities considered this an obstacle to modernizing Japanese labor relations and outlawed it. But in the 1980s and 90s, as companies sought more labor flexibility and lower costs, they lobbied to reintroduce temp work.

This reintroduction was gradual but significant. Today, especially in manufacturing, there are many temporary workers. The seasonal laborer category has disappeared due to rural depopulation, but temp work has become permanent. These workers aren't necessarily poorly paid but prefer not to commit to one company, especially given the ample job market. The same goes for many women, who moved from part-time replacement roles in the 1970s to full-time temp work later on.

And what about wage levels—are they really that low?

It depends on the category. The minimum wage in Japan is indeed low. It isn't based on cost-of-living needs (like a basket of goods), but on what companies can afford to pay. Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often subcontractors, are in fragile positions. The government has always prioritized full employment over higher wages. A low minimum wage, of course, depresses the overall labor market.

Are wages indexed to the cost of living?

They are, but since Japan has been in deflation for 30 years, wages haven't increased. Wages were relatively higher in the 60s–80s, but since the 1990s deflationary economy, wages have stagnated—especially for white-collar workers in management roles.
Japan doesn't really have a distinct "manager" class. Instead, there are many intermediate roles. These employees start with low salaries that are then adjusted annually—but often in a way that effectively lowers real income. To compensate, they're forced to work overtime.

I read that in 2018, a reform policy on work styles was introduced, which, for the first time, legally capped working hours—though with exceptions, particularly for white-collar workers in managerial positions.

Previously, there was already a legal limit on working hours, but it was based largely on case law derived from *karoshi* incidents. Responsible companies were careful about this. Reforms were later introduced to improve the working environment—not only to combat overwork but also to promote women's careers. As part of its efforts to combat declining birth rates, Japan recognized it couldn't prevent women from working and needed to create an environment less dependent on overtime.

A system was introduced to cap overtime at 100 hours per month. This is known in case law and legal language as the karoshi line. If someone dies due to overwork, authorities will investigate whether they worked more than 100 hours in the previous month. If so, it will be deemed a karoshi case. Working over 80 hours for two consecutive months can also qualify. In such cases, employers face fines and may be sued by the family for compensation.

Were these overtime limits easily accepted?

Unions considered these limits far too high and ineffective at preventing overwork. Moreover, without general wage increases, people are still incentivized to work excessive hours. The unions' main criticism was that while workloads remained unchanged, the number of employees was reduced.

The unions' goal, from what I understand, is to reduce disparities in wages, status, and bonuses between regular and non-regular workers when the job content is identical.

Yes, this has been a long-standing demand. For economic reasons, companies have often replaced regular jobs with non-regular ones.

For instance, regular workers have payroll deductions for social insurance, but non-regular workers do not. The latter must pay their own health and pension contributions, which can be

beneficial short-term. Their contracts are also short-term, making it easy for employers to let them go.

In response, unions pushed for equal pay and status for equal work. Today, companies are encouraged to transition temporary or irregular workers into regular roles after a few years.

They cannot renew a non-regular contract for more than five years without offering regular employment. However, implementation has been difficult. Some companies exploit loopholes, such as making employees resign and rehiring them later, so they can claim the person is new. Workers often comply out of fear of losing their jobs.

This is indeed a union demand that the government is now trying to implement, though companies still find ways around it.

In my readings, I also noted the persistent lack of attention paid to workers' well-being during the deregulation policies of 1986 and in corporate practices. As a result, performance was prioritized over working time, and a disparity emerged between regular and irregular workers, accompanied by a worsening of workplace harassment.

At the beginning of the neoliberal wave that reached Japan around the 1980s, the country was seeking a second wind to revive growth while its demographic pyramid was showing signs of aging. Since companies' priority was then to cut costs, they implemented all the systems I previously mentioned, doing their best to get rid of employees they considered unnecessary or unproductive. It was at that point that workplace harassment surged, used as a means to push employees to resign.

Dismissal, strictly speaking, remained taboo. It was something that could not be stated outright for fear of being negatively perceived. Many workers were forced to leave their companies by being sidelined or pressured until they could no longer bear it and chose to resign on their own.

This had harmful consequences for the work environment and led to a competitive urge among workers to be seen favorably—unless they fell ill, often fatally, or were driven to suicide from overwork. Even foremen were under heavy pressure and could themselves fall victim to *karoshi* from having to push their subordinates.

For a long time, there was no awareness of this situation; it only emerged in the 2010s when the government began realizing that all of this was detrimental to fertility rates, to women, and was producing harmful effects on the economy as a whole.

At the same time, don't we see the emergence of new wage systems giving more importance to merit than to seniority?

Indeed, this salary-by-rank system no longer strictly follows seniority. For a long time, until the 1970s, the prevailing principle was: you are this age, therefore you receive this salary. Then it shifted to a system where rank determined salary. Starting in the 1990s, attempts were made to assign salaries based on goals set for the reference year for employees who had reached a certain age.

This did not render salary scales obsolete, but part of the compensation was calculated based on annual targets. This was the most significant innovation in wage policy. However, this system faces issues in Japan. The problem is that employees hired by companies follow a wage scale, are subject to the general terms of internal rules, tasks are often defined for groups rather than individuals, contracts are not individualized, and job rotation is encouraged.

As a result, job descriptions are quite vague. There is no detailed classification system—deliberately so, to ensure employees remain flexible. Thus, now that companies are trying to introduce merit-based pay systems, they face difficulties.

This leads them to try to create new employment categories based on much more precise classifications, where individual workers' contributions can be more easily assessed. But as I mentioned earlier, this new practice struggles to take root because Japanese work culture remains collective, with open spaces that facilitate both communication and surveillance. Of course, there are individuals who switch companies during their careers, but they tend to join foreign companies.

Because frequent job changes are frowned upon in Japan?

Indeed, especially in the more traditional companies. There are, however, more or less internationalized companies, foreign firms present in Japan, or companies known for operating differently. In those, job changes are more accepted. Nonetheless, long-term employment remains the general norm, despite media reports claiming otherwise.

Can we say that the 1990s marked a turning point regarding doubts about the viability of the

"Japanese-style" labor relations system, but that the process of redefining the social compromise is still in its early stages?

Indeed, during the 1980s, there was a major neoliberal wave that affected government administrations and companies, generating significant criticism of the "Japanese-style" labor relations system—known for what were long referred to as "the three sacred treasures" of the imperial crown: the mirror (wisdom and understanding), the sword (valor and the ability to share), and the jewel (benevolence and the ability to learn).

From that time on, it was believed that this type of career path did not foster creativity and had become costly for companies because they had to continue paying employees based on seniority while the aging of the population was accelerating. Hence the criticisms. But especially from the 1990s onward, a very important phenomenon must be taken into account: the financial crisis.

For a long time, Japanese companies operated under a system similar to Rhineland capitalism, primarily financed by long-term loans from banks. These loans were backed by household savings, which banks used to finance businesses. As long as companies repaid their loans over 10, 20, or 30 years, they had freedom to act as they pleased. They could adopt long-term visions, which made it viable to invest heavily in training employees with seniority-based, lifetime employment, without fear of them leaving.

This was particularly important during the 1970s and 1980s when companies were engaged in technological catch-up and needed to introduce numerous new technologies. It was essential to continue training workers. Moreover, because employees had job security, they were in turn willing to train their juniors without fearing that those younger workers would eventually replace them. That was the essence of the "Japanese-style" employment system.
But this system began to be criticized in the 1980s and 1990s because it was indeed costly, and because, at that time, with the formation of the financial bubble, banks encountered severe liquidity problems. As a result, they stopped providing loans to companies.

Additionally, the savings rate began to decline, forcing companies to seek other sources of funding: the stock market, pension funds, and so on. This profoundly changed corporate outlooks, as they became pressured to generate short-term profits. It was no longer enough to grow steadily over decades to repay debts; they had to be attractive to international financial markets immediately.

This led to a significant internationalization of companies, which had to become more profitable. Consequently, lifetime employment and the "Japanese-style" management system, which relied on long-term return on investment, forced companies to cut costs in the short term. Suddenly, it became necessary to lay off employees who were seen as unproductive or expendable.

This was seen as a breach of the social contract previously established with the unions. It's worth noting that unions did not put up much of a fight. They largely backed down, trying to salvage what they could. Nonetheless, lifetime employment continued to function in some ways, albeit with adjustments.

What is the minimum wage in Japan?

That depends on the sector. The minimum wage is set regionally and varies by prefecture, averaging around 1,000 yen per hour, or about 6.5 euros. It is established by tripartite commissions on a prefectural basis. Currently, unions and center-left and left-wing parties are campaigning to raise it to 1,500 yen per hour, or about 10 euros at the current exchange rate.

And with regard to seniority, is there a legal retirement age?

Today, the retirement age is set at 65 for both men and women. That's the age at which one can receive a full pension. Previously, it was set at 60. The challenge for the government has been to persuade companies to retain employees until that age. While this is a legal obligation for companies, they can choose to do so under conditions that may be less favorable to employees, such as renegotiating salaries downward.

In general, do both husbands and wives work in Japanese households?

This has varied throughout history. Traditionally, in rural areas, women worked. The majority of the labor force in the textile industry, for example, was female until the early 20th century. From the 1920s onward, the standard of living gradually increased—first for white-collar workers and later for skilled blue-collar workers. At the same time, fewer and fewer women worked. The housewife model became widespread among white-collar workers and dominant among blue-collar workers with stable monthly salaries.

However, among irregular workers—day laborers or employees of small companies—women have always worked because wages alone weren't sufficient. Moreover, job security was never strong enough for women to afford not to work. Having a working wife acted as a safety net in case of layoffs, especially since unemployment benefits in Japan are much less generous than in France, for instance. The period with the highest number of housewives was the 1970s. Later, women—even with irregular status—returned to the workforce through part-time work, usually once their children had grown, around their forties, to supplement household income.

At that point, companies began needing more part-time employees, and to support this, the government implemented a system in which women earning less than 1 million yen per year would not be taxed. Today, female workforce participation continues to rise because more women want to work, wages are stagnating, and fewer women are getting married.

There is also a growing number of women who want careers. Indeed, there's an emancipatory desire, but also increasing difficulty—shared with men—in getting married, due to declining living standards among young people. Many continue to live with their parents to save money, which discourages marriage.

Is there also household debt related to housing?

Absolutely. After the COVID pandemic, there were truly dramatic situations where people were forced to take out loans to secure housing, with debt levels for home ownership remaining very high. It's also important to note that starting in the 1980s, a growing gap appeared between real estate prices and wages.

While wages stagnated, real estate prices continued to rise. Then, in the 1990s, the housing bubble burst, stock prices collapsed, as did land values. Prices fell, but not to the level of wages, and then they started rising again while wages remained flat.

The market was indeed very speculative in the 1980s. After the bubble burst, things calmed somewhat. Many mafia members, the Yakuza, had been investing recklessly with bank loans. Banks were making easy money without checking clients' financial stability. Then everything collapsed. While the situation has calmed somewhat since, the market remains speculative.

This is what's happening in China today!

Not quite at the same level. Today's China is like Japan in the 1980s. Japan's real estate market is no longer as speculative as China's is now.

There is talk of a weak representation of labor at the national level, worsened by the collapse of the Socialist Party. Trade unions are said to be turning toward the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Moreover, there's reportedly an unprecedented weakness in union representation because fewer and fewer workers are unionized. Only about 20% of workers are union members.

Unionization rates have been falling since the postwar period. They peaked at 50%, which was already significant. Then came stagnation and a decline in union membership, especially among SMEs, primarily because the proportion of regular workers decreased.

In Japan, regular employees are unionized. Other types of unions began forming in the 1990s, but this remained a marginal phenomenon. This is mainly due to the decline in the proportion of regular workers in large companies.

Personally, I would explain it the other way around. I'd say that the weakening of the Socialist Party is more due to the decrease in enterprise-based unions and their dues-paying members. This continued until the Socialist Party became so weak that unions began diversifying their political affiliations to maintain influence. It is true that today, the powerful Rengō union, which includes many regular employees, is turning toward the LDP. We are witnessing a normalization of the LDP at the expense of social-democratic parties.

As for the number of unionized workers, it continues to fall, reportedly even below 20%. This is linked to the fact that there are fewer and fewer lifetime employees in large companies—those who were traditionally unionized. Union federations are trying to include new types of workers but haven't significantly increased the unionization rate.

It seems Japanese unions do not accept some categories of workers, such as managers who are under the most pressure from employers. Furthermore, they are poorly equipped to challenge employers' decisions regarding economic dismissals, often disguised as voluntary resignations?

This indeed concerns management positions—the kanrishoku, employees who have reached a certain level in the promotion hierarchy and who, as a result, cannot unionize and therefore have no protection within the company.

In Japan, there is a distinction between those who actually have the role and those who only have the title. When the employee pyramid was vertical, seniority-based promotions allowed nearly everyone to reach a management position. When the age pyramid shifted to a mushroom shape, those who had climbed the salary ladder to reach section manager level had no available positions.

Companies then distinguished between those who were truly section chiefs (line) and those who were nominally section chiefs (staff) to maintain appearances. The companies attempted to get rid of the "staff" employees.

Case law has always shown that courts tend to overturn dismissals not justified by the risk of company bankruptcy. If the company could prove its survival was at stake, the courts ruled in its favor. Otherwise, if dismissals were motivated by profit-seeking, courts would reject them.

That's why companies avoided outright layoffs for fear of legal action. They preferred, especially to maintain good relations with unions and help them save face, to ask employees to resign voluntarily. Many accepted because they received compensation.

This type of amicable settlement has always been preferred by companies. There have even been cases where unions collaborated with management to designate candidates for departure.

Some observe a lack or weakness of collective agreements regarding workforce adjustments.

Indeed, collective agreements are often weak and lacking in detail. Working conditions are usually specified in internal regulations, which are not legally binding documents. This varies by sector. But the collective agreements I've seen were largely symbolic.

As a result, unions cannot rely on collective agreements to combat certain practices. However, courts generally consider that if working conditions deteriorate beyond a reasonable limit compared to internal norms, they cannot be allowed. So, workers are still protected by the judiciary. But many companies don't have collective agreements, which is somewhat unique to the Japanese system.

Do unions in Japan play a protective role? I sometimes hear about ideological conformism among unions, even complacency and collaboration with employers?

That wasn't the case right after WWII, when unions could be affiliated with the Communist Party or the left wing of the Socialist Party. Strikes were organized. But from the early 1950s, with help from the American occupation authorities, a strongly anti-communist policy was introduced, along with purges of « Reds."

This coincided with McCarthyism in the U.S. At that time, the most leftist unionists were fired by companies with full government cooperation. As a result, the proportion of militant unions decreased; their members were no longer promoted and were often harassed.

Nevertheless, there were major strikes like the one at the Miike mine (1959–1960), which lasted a year. It was a showdown between employers and government on one side, and unionists on the other, which the latter lost. The striking union was replaced with one that cooperated with management.

This trend was encouraged by the Japanese Productivity Center, a Schumpeterian concept introduced by the Americans, promoting "productivity agreements" with unions. These contracts aimed to make unions collaborate on productivity and wage increases, resolving class struggle.

Unions that signed the agreement after 1950 were favored. Those that refused were gradually eliminated. In time, enterprise unions became productivity-focused, viewing their role not as organizing strikes for better wages, but working with management to boost profits.

Japanese companies experienced strong growth until the 1980s, making unions appear legitimate since workers' wages and living standards improved. Eventually, union leadership became a stepping stone to HR management roles. Studies have shown that most HR directors had prior union experience.

This eroded unions' image. In the 1980s and '90s, as working conditions declined, unions were blamed for their weakness and even for complicit behavior. However, new unions emerged to combat this, including ones defending women's unionization or even that of managers.

In Japan, you could only join a union if you were not a manager. From age 40, even without major responsibilities, you couldn't join a union. This made it easy for companies to dismiss or pressure such workers. Those affected formed niche unions that were never recognized by companies for negotiations, such as on wages.

Still, these unions played a role similar to NGOs, supporting workers in cases like wrongful dismissal. There are also communist unions grouped under the Zenrōren Federation, mainly active in public and healthcare sectors. In private companies, Rengō predominates, and is now considering defending irregular workers due to falling membership.

Company leaderships reportedly tolerate only minimal union participation. Likewise, union delegates' profiles don't lend themselves to acting as counterweights?

Union leaders often pursue careers in HR. Therefore, they don't really serve as counterweights. Studies confirm this.

Some unions did manage, post-war, to impose a strong co-management model, similar to Germany's, where unions had real influence. But from the 1950s–60s onward, companies rolled back these gains. They allowed management councils where unions had a say—but not on financial policy, industrial strategy, layoffs, or wages. These councils could only opine on operational matters and productivity improvements, like quality circles. Unlike in Germany, unions had no say in key decisions.

Are unions now more excluded from communication between workers and management than in the past?

Yes, compared to the 1940s–50s, but this has been the case for a long time now.

Income inequality has risen since the 1990s due to a surge in non-regular workers, who then made up about 38% of the labor force.

To understand this, note that the number of regular workers is relatively stable. The number and proportion of irregular workers have risen, at the expense of both regular workers and, even more, the self-employed.

Postwar Japan had a large self-employed population—small shopkeepers, restaurant owners, farmers. Many of these went bankrupt over the past 30 years. People from these groups often became irregular workers. They now fill roles like temp workers, day laborers, or franchise employees. Japan has fewer independent shops, replaced by franchises like 7-Eleven. These are independent workers, not owners; they pay rent and franchise fees.

They earn less, especially since the minimum wage is very low. This doesn't only affect such employees, but also managers, whose pay has dropped due to new compensation systems and wage moderation.

Is it fair to say Japan's external labor market flexibility relies on the growing precariousness of part of the workforce?

This is especially visible in the automotive industry, where many seasonal and non-permanent workers were hired until the 1950s–60s. Later, they were often regularized.

But from the 1980s–90s, companies began hiring temp workers for assembly line jobs, driving wages down and increasing precariousness. White-collar workers (salarymen) were less affected, but among them, especially women, temporary jobs have become more common. These are usually lower paid.

In 2015, 68% of women were regular workers, while 56% of active women were non-permanent employees. Japanese women are generally better educated than men but hold low-skilled jobs and receive no in-house training.

Japan has signed UN conventions committing to gender equality at work. This led to legislation banning workplace sex discrimination. Companies could no longer deny women management positions. To get around this, they created two tracks: clerical (de facto for women) and general (career path, for men).

When hiring, women were asked their preference. Under pressure, 98% chose the clerical track, preventing career advancement. Only recently have some companies begun merging the two tracks.

Indeed, female workforce participation has evolved. Recently, companies have taken steps to retain women—maternity and parental leave, workplace daycares, flexible hours.

These efforts are real but need statistical confirmation to see if they'll have a large-scale impact. Since 1995, companies have aimed to tap into educated female labor. Keidanren aimed for one-third of senior positions to go to women, but this hasn't materialized.

There are more accommodations now, but time will tell if they lead to mass inclusion. So far, many women have been hurt by job quality declines. One can say women have been disadvantaged by reforms over the past 20–30 years.

Will they eventually be better integrated into regular, skilled, well-paid work? That remains to

be seen. Some companies are realizing they're underutilizing female talent.

I also wanted to discuss Japan's aging population, declining birthrate, and the fact that Japan, for the first time, is recruiting foreign workers despite past reluctance.

Yes, there are agreements in place for manual laborers, for instance with Vietnam. But these are tightly regulated, and treatment of such workers isn't always good. Many Chinese and Indians are also joining Japanese firms, especially in IT. This is a new phenomenon, also seen in retail in Tokyo, where almost all workers are now foreigners. It also applies to fields like architecture, which need skilled labor.

At the same time, to cope with labor shortages due to aging and low birthrates, companies are hiring more elderly Japanese. Many programs aim to retain workers past age 65. Many wish to stay employed because pensions are lower than in countries like France. So it's crucial for them to combine pension and part-time work.

Do these workers have social security?

It depends. Regular workers receive pensions proportional to their salaries and can live off them. Irregular workers pay into a public system, but pensions are too low to live on, so they must keep working.

I meant health insurance.

Yes, both categories are covered thanks to elderly support systems.

Some say private entrepreneurship has a poor image in Japan, where long-term employment in big firms is still idealized.

I wouldn't say that. The best proof is the celebration of Eiichi Shibusawa, the "father of Japanese capitalism," who founded many firms in the Meiji era. His portrait is now on the 10,000 yen bill, and his biography was a hit TV series. His book Rongo to Soroban (The Analects and the Abacus), advocating Confucian business ethics, is a bestseller. Bookstores are filled with books on entrepreneurial success.

The salaryman ideal and entrepreneurial appeal coexist. Though the salaryman model has weakened over the past two decades, both ideals persist.

Can we speak of weakened solidarity based on private groups, companies, and families, which once offset the weak welfare state?

Yes, the concept of "Japanese-style welfare society," promoted in the 1980s by sociologists and the LDP, no longer holds. It emphasized family and corporate solidarity over the welfare state.

But for decades we've seen fewer multigenerational households, more single people, the disappearance of small family businesses, and corporate social programs being cut. Public insurance hasn't filled the gap, and even those programs are being reduced—like pensions and health insurance.
This has led to rising inequality, shown by the Gini index, and to new forms of poverty such as the "working poor."

Bernard Thomann

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Interview Nouveaux Regards

Alice Ekman, Director of Research at the European Union Institute for Security Studies.

Interviewed by Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet : In continuity with your first book "Bright Red", you pursue in "Last Flight to Beijing" the idea of ideology's primacy in Xi Jinping's China, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy.

At the same time, you acknowledge the difficulty—quoting you—"of definitively qualifying the current Chinese political system." Isn't there a contradiction here? Some, both within China and abroad—for example, President Joe Biden or German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock—do not hesitate to label the regime and its leader as dictatorial. What is your view?

Alice Ekman : No, I don't see any contradiction: just because China's ideological influences are multiple doesn't mean they don't exist. They add up, they don't cancel each other out. And there are different types of dictatorship. The ideological revival clearly observable since Xi Jinping came to power has consequences not only for domestic policy, but also motivates China's foreign policy ambitions and orientations—hence the importance of analyzing it.

For Cai Xia (蔡霞), a former professor at the Central Party School who was expelled from the CCP, stripped of her pension, and forced into exile in the United States in 2019 for daring to criticize Xi Jinping's policies, there is no doubt that the CCP is a mafia-like organization, with Xi Jinping as "the don" and, under him, his lieutenants or "underbosses"—the seven members of the Politburo Standing Committee and the eighteen others of the CCP Central Committee's Politburo [1].

Do you agree with this characterization, arguably a bit simplistic, which tends to support the idea that the ideology claimed by the Chinese Communist Party is ultimately just a façade serving the dark goals of an organization primarily interested in exercising absolute power for its own benefit and that of its members?

I wouldn't presume to challenge Cai Xia's analysis—she knows the Party far better than I do, from the inside. From what we can observe externally, certain aspects of the Party's functioning do indeed resemble those of mafia organizations, to some extent: the culture of secrecy, opacity, internal order maintained through fear, a form of paranoia... But that's not the whole picture, and the Party is not devoid of ideals that go beyond the mere material interests of its members.

Xi Jinping's actions cannot be reduced solely to the protection of the interests of the so-called "Red Princes" [2] and their heirs. Another question—concerning the ties between the Party and mafia-like groups—is also worth exploring, especially in a country where Party connections remain central to the development of nearly all economic activities, "clean" or not, and where maintaining internal order is equally vital to the Party.

Further in your latest book, you respond categorically ("the answer is yes, unequivocally") to the question about China's ambition to see the emergence of a post-American world, where it would hold the dominant position.

Does China really have the means for this? And in your view, is this highly ambitious goal actually attainable—especially now, when we are witnessing not merely risk reduction but a full-blown economic and technological decoupling between the world's two leading powers?

I think we should not underestimate China's ambitions or the means it currently possesses. That's been done too often over the past twenty years, during which many claimed China would be "unable" to modernize its military, develop a proper navy, gain influence in multilateral organizations, innovate, or become a

technological power… Yet it has become all those things.

Of course, China now faces major vulnerabilities—economic, demographic, and social in particular. But its overarching foreign policy ambitions remain unchanged for the time being. The Chinese Communist Party views the current period as difficult—especially under a second Trump administration continuing commercial and technological pressure—but also as one offering diplomatic and geostrategic opportunities to seize. Chinese diplomacy is currently very active, strengthening partnerships with Russia, South Asian countries, Latin America, and more broadly, with countries of the so-called "Global South" [3].

Meanwhile, decoupling is accelerating, and it is driven as much by China as by the United States. China is now doing everything it can to reduce its dependence on the American market and boost its technological self-sufficiency, as much as possible.

Among the multitude of executive orders signed by President Trump upon returning to the White House—especially those restricting investment and high technology—China (including the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau) is labeled a "foreign adversary" of the United States.

Along with the trade war and tariff increases primarily targeting China, can we now say we are fully entering a new Cold War—one pitting a bloc of authoritarian states (China, Russia, North Korea, Iran—all nuclear-armed or nearly so, in Iran's case) against another made up of liberal democracies?

The Cold War comparison is not far-fetched. It has often been dismissed on two grounds:

1. That polarization is not as ideological as it was during the Cold War. But it increasingly is. This is certainly the approach of Chinese diplomacy, whose anti-Western stance fits within an openly assumed rivalry between political systems.

2. That such strong polarization would be impossible in today's globalized and interdependent world. But this is exactly what's happening. Trade no longer softens political conflict, and we're witnessing a growing geopoliticization of the global economy. Over the past three years, China has increased its trade with Russia and other countries it deems "friendly"—those that do not criticize its political system, do not raise human rights issues, Xinjiang, or Hong Kong, and support its positions on Taiwan and the South China Sea. Simultaneously, and even more so in recent months, China is working to limit its dependence on countries it deems "hostile," first and foremost the United States, but also Europe.

The title of your book "Last Flight to Beijing" can be interpreted in various ways—among them, that of a final opportunity. In your epilogue, you yourself observe that the closing-off process China has undergone over the past three years is likely to continue for at least three reasons, one being that sanctions against Russia will indirectly reinforce China's policy of self-sufficiency.

In your view, is China ready to cut itself off from the world, as it has tried to do before—only to later regret it at various points in its history? And if so, what could be the consequences, both for China and for the rest of the world?

It is ready to cut itself off from part of the world, yes. China does not seek to isolate itself entirely, but rather to strengthen cooperation with countries that are unlikely to impose sanctions on it.

What is particularly important to take into account is China's normative ambition: it seeks to become a reference point for part of the world—encouraging countries in the "Global South" to increasingly adopt its technologies and accompanying standards, get their news from its media and social networks, train in or with China, and also form coalitions at the United Nations and within other multilateral arenas (like the BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization).

Indeed, this is not the first time in its history that China has been willing to cut itself off from parts of the world. But today, it is the world's second-largest economic power, with a capacity for influence and coalition-building far beyond what Mao-era China ever had.

[1] « The weakness of Xi Jinping – How hubris and paranoia threaten China future » : « Outsiders may find it helpful to think of the CCP as more of a mafia organization than a political party. The head of the party is the don, and below him sit the underbosses, or the Standing Committee. These men traditionally parcel out power, with each responsible for certain areas—foreign policy, the economy, personnel, anticorruption, and so on. They are also supposed to serve as the big boss's consiglieres, advising him on their areas of responsibility. Outside the Standing Committee are the other 18 members of the Politburo, who are next in the line of succession for the Standing Committee. They can be thought of as the mafia's capos, carrying out Xi's orders to eliminate perceived threats in the hope of staying in the good graces of the don. As a perk of their position, they are allowed to enrich themselves as they see fit, seizing property and businesses without penalty. And like the mafia, the party uses blunt tools to get what it wants: bribery, extortion, even violence. », Foreign Affairs, September/October 2022.

[2] Editor's note: Taizidang (太子党) refers to the descendants of senior officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), who gain access—through nepotism—to political, economic, and military power in the People's Republic of China. Xi Jinping is one of them.
[3] Editor's note: Refers to developing countries.

Alice Ekman

Young Leader from the France-China program in 2018, Alice EKMAN is Director of Research at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and a China specialist. She is notably the author of Dernier vol pour Pékin (Last Flight to Beijing, Champs/Flammarion, 2024).

Analysis

China and its peripheries: imperial dreams.

By Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

In an imperial reflex, Xi Jinping pursues the dream of territorial and maritime conquests—or reconquests—expressed by Mao in the wake of his rise to power. This dream merely reflects and perpetuates a hegemonic aspiration once held by the ancient empires defeated by Western powers in the 19th century [1]. As a result, regional balances are now threatened, and with them, global stability.

« After having inflicted military defeats on China, the imperialist countries forcibly took from her a large number of states tributary to China, as well as a part of her own territory. Japan appropriated Korea, Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands, the Pescadores, and Port Arthur ; England took Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, and Hong Kong ; France seized Annam ; even a miserable little country like Portugal took Macao from us. At the same time that they took away part of her territory, the imperialists obliged China to pay enormous indemnities. Those heavy blows were struck against the vast feudal empire of China. » (Mao Zedong) [2].

Au cours des siècles, les frontières de la Chine n'ont cessé d'être modifiées au gré des invasions étrangères ou des guerres de conquêtes menées par les dynastes d'ethnie Han ou autres qui se sont succédé à la tête du plus ou moins vaste empire, selon les périodes. Paradoxalement, cet empire qui ne se désigne pas encore alors comme « chinois » (zhongguo 中國) [3] connait son extension territoriale maximale sous la domination de deux peuples envahisseurs non han, les Mongols (dynastie Yuan 元朝 - 1271-1368) puis les Mandchous (Da Qing 大清 - 1644-1911).

Over the centuries, China's borders have constantly shifted with foreign invasions or conquest wars led by successive dynasties—Han or otherwise—who ruled over an empire of varying size depending on the era. Paradoxically, this empire—still not yet self-designated as "China" (zhongguo 中国) at the time [3]—reached its maximum territorial extent under the rule of two non-Han invading peoples: the Mongols (Yuan dynasty 元朝 – 1271–1368) and the Manchus (Da Qing 大清 – 1644–1911).

It was under these two dynasties that the empire corresponding to today's China reached its largest size: about 13 million km², resulting from peripheral conquests.

It was amputated of several parts of its territory in the 19th century by the great powers of the time, reducing it to around 9.6 million km²—the current area of the People's Republic of China (PRC) [4].

A large part of the PRC's 22,722 km of land borders with its 14 neighbors has been partially settled, mostly to its advantage [5].

However, border disputes remain unresolved with the Himalayan countries (India, Bhutan, Nepal) as well as on its maritime front (15,274 km) with the Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei—due to Beijing's claims in the East China Sea (Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands under Japanese sovereignty) and the South China Sea (the ten-dash line unilaterally drawn by Beijing).

These disputes have been the source of tensions, sometimes escalating into armed clashes, as seen recently in Kashmir. During the 1962 Sino-Indian war, Beijing seized the Aksai Chin region. After the end of hostilities and the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Indian territory, Beijing signed a series of treaties with Burma, Nepal, and Pakistan, India's main rival. Similarly, although the territorial disputes between China and Russia were apparently resolved in 2005 [6], Chinese voices abroad have protested against Beijing, notably arguing that the agreements made in 1991 legitimized the cession of territory under "unequal treaties" [7].

It is not uncommon to find on Chinese social media claims over formerly conquered

territories or about the dozen tributary countries or regions (fuyong guo 附庸國) of the former empire [8].

An Openly Expansionist Policy
Since 1949, Chinese leaders (the term "Chinese" here refers to the entire population of the PRC and conveys a normative identity—that of the Han 汉) have had a single goal in mind: to recover the territories lost by the last ruling dynasty (the Manchu), beginning with the Eastern Turkestan Republic (Xinjiang) in 1949 and then the Tibetan state, reconquered in 1951.

As early as 1930, Mao already asserted in his work The Chinese Revolution and the Communist Party that China's borders should include Burma, Bhutan, and Nepal [9].

In 1960, Chinese authorities again claimed that Bhutan, Sikkim, and Ladakh had always belonged to the "Great Ancestral Land" (伟大的祖国) [10],[11]. Beijing would go on to assert that Bhutanese territory "had always been under Chinese jurisdiction and that Chinese herders had grazed their animals there for generations" [12].

Four years later, in 1964, the "Great Helmsman" (da tuoshou 大舵手) declared to Japanese communist sympathizers:
"A hundred years ago, the region east of Lake Baikal became Russian territory, and since then, Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka, and other areas have belonged to the USSR. We have not submitted a note on this matter" [13].

The defense of the "territory bequeathed to us by our ancestors"—specifically, the ten-dash line demarcating China's maritime claims in the South China Sea—was reaffirmed by Xi Jinping during his 2018 meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis [14].

China's sovereignty claims over territories lost in the 19th century are tightly linked to Xi Jinping's concept of the "Chinese Dream" (zhongguo meng 中国梦), that of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing 中华民族伟大复兴) [15].

Sovereignty with Chinese Characteristics
In his book Guojia zhuquan 国家主权 (National Sovereignty), Wang Huning 王沪宁—nicknamed "China's Kissinger" and current chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—offers a definition of sovereignty which, he claims, originates from ancient China, long before it was developed in the West.

The Chinese term zhuquan 主权 literally means the authority (quan 权) of the ruler, who is simultaneously a suzerain (zhu 主), implying a relationship of vassalage. According to Wang Huning, sovereignty has a dual nature: it means both the supremacy of the Party-State and its independence from foreign influence [16].

The Inclusive Concept of Tianxia
Sinologist John King Fairbank, in his work Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West [17], explains that the emperor receives the Mandate of Heaven (Tianming 天命), which gives him the right to govern all of humanity. The Tianxia 天下 ("All Under Heaven") is by nature universal and does not acknowledge formal borders.

"Under Heaven" includes, on the one hand, the civilized world (hua 华)—ethnic Han (汉)—which accepts the emperor's wise rule, and on the other, the barbarian world (yi 夷), which may achieve civilization by embracing the order and culture of Confucianism.

Behind the concept of Tianxia lies the idea of a Sino-centric world order, reflected in Xi Jinping's "community of shared future for mankind" (renlei mingyun gongtongti 人类命运共同体).
Only by incorporating the world into itself can China construct a universal order that it can then universalize [18].

A Distinct Conception of Borders
As Bill Hayton reminds us, when the Qing Empire collapsed in 1911, most of its borders were more imaginary than real [19].

Indeed, the Chinese have inherited a plural and unique conception of their borders, unlike those of European nation-states or the United States. They use at least three different terms:
- bianjie 边界 refers to imperial boundaries,
- bianjing 边境 to territorial limits under acquisition,
- bianjiang 边疆 to frontier zones in sparsely populated areas dominated by non-Han peoples (Uyghurs, Tibetans, Mongols, etc.) [20].

This plurality, as Sébastien Colin explains, reveals the diverse and fluid nature of Chinese borders [21]. The construction of the Chinese nation-state depends on completing the Qing (Manchu) imperial project—closely tied to a process of colonizing the periphery, or even extending beyond (into Africa, South America, the Belt and Road Initiative, the 17+1 format,

which became 14+1 after Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia withdrew) [22].

For the Party-State (“党政军民学，东西南北中，党是领导一切的” — Party, State, military, civil, education—east, west, south, north, center—the Party leads everything, Xi Jinping’s report to the 19th CPC Congress, 2017), territorial integrity is an existential issue, and “stability outweighs everything” (wending yadao yiqie 稳定压倒一切).

Yet this presents a paradox: in seeking to conquer or reconquer what it considers its rightful possessions and to project itself as a hegemonic power, China—like Russia—produces instability, both for itself and for the rest of the world, as in ancient times.
At the same time, Xi Jinping’s insistence on “Sinicizing” (zhongguohua 中国化), or more precisely “Hanizing” (hanhua 汉化) borderland ethnic groups, and integrating them into the “path to socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi 中国特色社会主义道路)—that is, aligning them with the Party-State—reveals a real anxiety at the “Center” (zhongyang 中央) regarding the periphery, with the potential risks of fragmentation as seen with the former Soviet empire.

[1] See interview of historian Sabine Dullin, « Les dirigeants russes, des tsars à l’actuel maître du Kremlin, ont une obsession des frontières », parue dans l’édition du 16 mars 2022 du journal Le Monde.

[2] Schram, Stuart R., « China and the underdeveloped countries », in The political thought of Mao Tse-tung, Praeger publishers, pp. 257-258.

[3] Bill Hayton, « The invention of China », chapitre 7, « The invention of a national territory », Yale University Press, 2020, pp. 184-212.

[4] Ibid. Bill Hayton aptly notes that when the last Qing (Manchu) Empire collapsed in 1911, most of its borders were more imaginary than real. Except in a few areas where the Russians, French, and British had forced the Manchu imperial power into making demarcations, its borders had never been formally defined.

[5] Thierry Kellner, « Le règlement des questions frontalières… entre la République populaire de Chine et ses voisins centrasiatiques », Relations internationales, 2011/1 (N°145), pp. 27-51.

[6] The Sinicization of the southern territories of Russia—particularly Khabarovsk Krai and Primorsky Krai, long neglected by Moscow—is the subject of deep-rooted fears in the Russian political imagination, Cf. Emmanuel Lincot, « Défis stratégiques dans les rapports centre/périphérie en Chine », mis en ligne le 12 June 2018.

[7] Yike Zhang, Les relations sino-russes du point de vue chinois, Outre-Terre 2007/2 (n° 19), pages 317-328.

[8] René Servoise, « La conception de l’ordre mondial dans la Chine impériale », Revue française de science politique, année 1973, 23-3, pp. 550-569.

[9] « The correct boundaries of China would include Burma, Bhutan, Nepal » in Schram, Stuart R., « China and the Underdeveloped Countries », The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung. Praeger Publishers, 1969, pp. 257–258.

[10] «Bhutanese, Sikkimese and Ladakhis form a united family in Tibet. They have always been subject to Tibet and to the great motherland of China. They must once again be united and taught the communist doctrine. », in Brian Benedictus, « Bhutan and the great power tussle », The Diplomat, August 02, 2014.

[11] Dorji PENJORE, « Security of Bhutan: Walking Between the Giants », Journal of Bhutan Studies Volume 10, Summer 2004, Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH, 2004, pp 114-115.

[12] «Bhutan has always been under Chinese jurisdiction and Chinese herdsmen have grazed there for generations » in Jerome Alan Cohen, Hungdah Chiu, People’s China and international law – a documentary study, volume 1, Princeton University Press, edition 2017, p. 422.

[13] François Joyaux, « La tentation impériale, politique extérieure de la Chine depuis 1949, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1994, p.40.

[14] « China cannot lose even one inch of the territory left by our ancestors », in « China’s sovereignty obsession », June 26, 2020 I Foreign Affairs.

[15] Zhang Baohui, « Xi Jinping, « pragmatic » offensive realism and China's rise », Global Asia, June 2014.

[16] Yi Wang, « Opinion : Meet the mastermind behind Xi Jinpng’s power », Washington Post, November 6, 2017.

[17] Far Eastern Quaterly, ½, February 1942, p. 135

[18] Zhao Tingyang, « Tianxia – tout sous un même ciel », Les éditions du Cerf, 2018, p. 261.

[19] Bill Hayton, « The invention of China », Chapitre 7, « The Invention of a national territory », Yale University Press, p. 186.

[20] Cf. Michel Nazet, « La Chine et ses frontières : Risk ou Monopoly ? », La revue géopolitique, 28 mars 2015.

[21] Sébastien Colin, « La frontière en Chine : une notion et des pratiques ancienne », éditions Armand Colin, 2011, pp. 45-62.

[22] See Marie Krpata, « Relation Chine-Balkans : L'Union européenne a pris conscience d'une vulnérabilité à sa périphérie », Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI), 08/06/2023.

Jean-Raphaël Peytregnet

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