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Borders before Nations: Encounters in the Akan and Dzungar Borderlands, 1450–1750

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Abstract

This article combines the methodological approaches and insights of two scholars working in distinct regions of the early modern world, namely West Africa and Central Asia, to consider border-making outside of Europe before the nation state. Using borders to understand historical developments is not unprecedented and decades of borderland studies have shown how borders result from, and are affected by, political, emotional, economic, and social processes. The field has also shown that borders can be permeable and solid simultaneously and has offered fruitful new perspectives for historians examining the gradual consolidation of nation states. However, using the history of border-making to understand how nations were formed is a comparatively modern, and regionally limited, line of inquiry. Instead, by adopting a comparative analysis, underpinned by a common theoretical approach, this article combines the examination of two understudied early modern regions to offer an alternative approach for understanding border-making, situated in a global context. Comparisons of this nature show the potential of global history to break up categories taken for granted and open up new venues for research; in doing so, they can generate novel approaches that serve to connect diverse spaces, historiographies, and archives.

Keywords

Akan – Dzungar – Comparative – Global – Early Modern

Introduction

Global historians tend to agree that during periods of increasing globalization such as the early modern era, states, empires, cities, and individuals facing newly uncertain worlds sought to more effectively define their territory and impose their own sovereignty.¹ Growing connectivity demanded more effective means of controlling who could connect with whom.² However, despite efforts to move beyond national perspectives, state-led and imperial interpretations of territorialization and border-making remain common in global history; few discuss the implications of border-making practices before or beyond the nation.³ This is problematic, as emphasis on national or imperial borders can limit the effectiveness of how we can interpret cross-cultural exchanges in many sites where it took place, locations that also serve to blur the lines between local and global scales of analysis.⁴ Instead, a focus on border-making processes, rather than strict territorialization, highlights that borders were often meeting points where cultures, states, and economies connected, competed, and were contested, rather than strict geographical demarcations between distinct polities.⁵ We thereby align ourselves with research challenging the view of border-making as the formalization, mapping, and creation of nation states – an understanding based on European case studies.⁶ Focusing on the early modern period, and on regions outside of Europe, encourages a shift in perspective away from national border-making, and from nineteenth-century

1 James Belich, John Darwin, and Chris Wickham, "Introduction," in *The Prospect of Global History*, eds. James Belich et al. (Oxford, 2016), 14–20; Jan De Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World," *The Economic History Review* 63, no. 3 (2010): 710–733; this is also clear in non-Western global history, see Haneda Masashi, *Gurōbaru hisutorī to Higashiajia-shi* (Tokyo, 2018).

2 For a debate over this control, see Frederick Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good for? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100, no. 399 (2001): 189–213.

3 Jessica Wang, "Reckoning with the Spatial Turn: Cartography, Territoriality, and International History," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 5 (2017): 1010–1018.

4 For the difference between these approaches, see Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, 2016), 115–140; on the need for a nuanced spatial understanding, see Christian G. de Vito and Anne Gerritsen, "Micro-Spatial Histories of Labour: Towards a New Global History," in *Micro-Spatial Histories of Global Labour*, eds. Christian G. de Vito and Anne Gerritsen (Cham, 2018), 1–28.

5 Edmond Smith, "Commercial Culture in Contested Spaces," in *Merchant Cultures: A Global Approach to Spaces, Representations and Worlds of Trade, 1500–1800*, eds. Cátia A.P. Antunes and Francisco Bethencourt (Brill, 2022).

6 Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, 2014); Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2009).

imperial expansion, towards one that highlights approaches so different that they have not even been considered border-making.

This study, therefore, examines two non-European, early modern regions during periods of increased interregional and cross-cultural trade, where border-making took a different form. Specifically, it compares political and economic encounters in the Akan⁷ and Dzungar⁸ borderlands from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, contrasting examples of land and sea, Africa and Asia, and European and non-European imperial ambitions and pressures. In drawing these two case studies together for this analysis, we do not argue that there is any particular or unusual affinity between the Akan and the Dzungar borderlands *per se*. Nor do we pretend to find a perfect historical contingency: we wholly embrace that the making of a border depends on social context and ongoing and local practices. Rather, the comparison of borders is our way to ask questions to global history in a productive way.⁹ Specifically, it helps us explore border-making processes from a local, non-European perspective and during a period preceding the formation of nineteenth-century imperial states. In each case study, we see an approach to border-making defined by the challenges of encouraging trade across borders combined with local concerns of security during interactions with foreign empires. At the same time, political shifts and the entry of new economic and political players created considerable uncertainty, further adding to local efforts to better understand and control their borders.

The characteristics that make these case studies exciting also present challenges: for neither are there enough endogenous written sources for a full historical examination, partly because of the state of the archival remains, and

7 The Akan (which included the Acanes, Fante, Ashanti, Akwamu, Akyem, and Wassa) were the predominant ethnic group in this region of West Africa, connected by a common dialect (Twi) and culture. Other ethnic groups, such as the Dangme, were also present, especially along the Atlantic coast, and would have been part of the local and regional commercial and political landscape, alongside visiting African merchants that may have included Wangara or Hausa traders from further to the north and north-east. For the most detailed account of the ethnic and political makeup of the region, see Bato'ora Ballong-Wen-Mewuda, *São Jorge da Mina, 1482–1637: la vie d'un comptoir portugais en Afrique occidentale* (Lisbon, 1993).

8 The Dzungars were the collective identity for a coalition of a number of separate Oirat Mongol tribes, uniting around 1620. Over the next century, this Tibetan Buddhist polity took partial control over many small and large neighboring Mongol, Turkic, and Inner Asian groups, making the Dzungar empire ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse. For an overview of this process, see Hiroshi Wakamatsu “Jungaru ôkoku no keisei katei,” *The Journal of Oriental Research* 41, no. 4 (1983): 718–761.

9 The challenges of comparative global history have been well articulated by Prasannan Parthasarathi, “Comparison in Global History,” in *Writing the History of the Global: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Maxine Berg (Oxford, 2013), 69–82; Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge, 2007), 1–13.

partly because these were not text-based societies. For this reason, we include exogenous sources such as travel accounts and colonial records. This means that the source base for the two case studies differ; while unfortunate, that is unavoidable if we want global history to include societies with different archival traditions than those in Europe.¹⁰ This comparison relies on close scholarly collaboration: with two historians with different specialties working together, it is an example of how global history demands us to think beyond a set context, and how a broad framework such as that of borders might help us do so. In turn, our comparative, collaborative, and methodologically diverse approach shows how border-making represents a fruitful perspective for approaching questions about non-European responses to cross-cultural exchange and globalizing processes.¹¹

By presenting the analysis of the Dzungar and Akan cases together, then, we have examples of multi-ethnic and complex social compositions with their own internal tensions, and of polities that were not territorial in a conventional sense: the Dzungar empire, for example, was a composition of both nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, while the Akan were represented by numerous different polities that were connected and bounded by shared cultural, ethnic, and linguistic attributes. Furthermore, we have not assumed that borders began to be conceptualized only with the arrival of the Russian and Qing empires, in the case of the Dzungars, or with the arrival of the Europeans, in the case of Akan. Rather, we argue that the movement of people and shifting trade connections contributed to changes in how borders were understood. By engaging with theoretical frameworks of border-making and drawing on extensive textual and material archives, we trace how early modern African, Asian, and European people interacted in these borderlands; what compromises they made to facilitate cross-cultural, global exchange and, as a result, how the borderlands changed under local and outside pressure alike. In this article, borders appear simultaneously as a reaction to uncertainty, and as

10 The reliance, for the northern Akan border in particular, on archaeological and material sources is a challenge for successfully integrating many actors into global history. See Ann Stahl, "Africa in the World: (Re)centering African History through Archaeology," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 70 (2014): 5–33; Merrick Posnansky, "Begho: Life and Times," *Journal of West African History* 1, no. 2 (2015): 95–118; in the Dzungar case, the historiography relies heavily on Russian and Chinese archival material. These, just as the Tibetan and Mongol sources, each come with their own imperial and political bias.

11 Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, "Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization," *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (2010): 149–170.

points of meeting and exchange, creating new cultural and political traditions in the interchange.

Theorizing Border-Making, Borders, and Borderlands

To analyze either the Akan or Dzungar experience effectively demands a consideration of the concept of “border”: borderlands are defined not as a strict “frontier,” but as a region in constant contact with two (or more) communities; they are created by and in this very contact.¹² In sites like those discussed in this article, we can see contact zones defined by highly asymmetrical relations of power where cultures met, clashed, and grappled with each other.¹³ Recognizing this dynamic in the Dzungar and Akan borderlands helps to shift the focus towards a power dynamic without one clear colonial or territorial power, whereby border-making lies in the hands of non-Europeans.

To recognize the complex and contested process of border-making in the early modern Akan and Dzungar contexts, it is necessary to dissuade ourselves of modern notions of national borders. Clearly defined territorial delineations were not the main concern for people in either of these borderlands.¹⁴ Here, instead, communities cared about the movement of people and the movement of goods.¹⁵ Thus, the expectations and terminology associated with modern, static, geographical borders become deeply problematic when applied to this period. Thongchai Winichakul, for example, has demonstrated how borders were made and lived in different ways before the emergence of the nation state and its strictures.¹⁶ The point also holds true for more recent empires, and as Lauren Benton has argued, the British empire at its high point in the nineteenth century was composed of an assemblage of interrupted, irregular, and sometimes even undefined borders.¹⁷ We should therefore consider how different borders existed for various goods, ideas, and people, and be mindful that

12 Ulrike Jureit, *Umkämpfte Räume: Raumbilder, Ordnungswille und Gewaltmobilisierung* (Göttingen, 2016), 218.

13 Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the contact zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33–40.

14 Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington, 2002), 5–8.

15 Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, and Peter C. Perdue, “Introduction: Spatial Assemblages,” in *Asia Inside Out: Connected Places*, eds. Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu, and Peter C. Perdue (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 12.

16 Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, 1994).

17 Lauren Benton, “Legal Spaces of Empire: Piracy and the Origins of Ocean Regionalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, no. 4 (October 2005): 700–724.

these did not always coincide.¹⁸ It is to highlight this diversity that we examine border-making as it was applied in practice in relation to the gold trade and spatial restrictions, as well as cultural and material exchange.

From our perspective as scholars of global history, we define border-making as a series of processes at the heart of borderland studies. This article finds that borders developed as repeat encounters became standardized. This builds on the work of James Scott, who demonstrates how border-making defined a region not once, but consistently and over time.¹⁹ By conceptualizing these spaces as borderlands, and recognizing how exchanges and conflicts shaped material and cultural processes, we are thus able to consider the experiences of specific people and communities without assuming a set spatial entity. This is especially useful for the study of regions prior to the formation of nation states and of polities outside of Europe.

In addition to recognizing the ongoing process of border-making, the concept of a borderland also enables a clearer examination of experiences on the ground. Researchers now stress questions such as who acts as a “carrier of a border” in their everyday life, maybe even involuntarily. Therefore, border-making is here understood as a set of material practices coming simultaneously from above and from below, with different motivations and changing over time. While a state could, for example, regulate borders for commercial contact as a means of combatting disruption caused by international exchange, it was local and international traders who chose to uphold or to cross them. Such spaces were, in Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron’s terms, borderlands with well-defined crossing points, and the research focus thereby lies on the process itself.²⁰

As Chiara Brambilla has argued, this shift in border-making theory – from the territorial imperative to a process-based bordering that more clearly encapsulated the ongoing adaptability of borderlands as well as the experience of living within them – has put a whole new stress on the ethnic and social making of borders. Historical actors would have been aware of who could cross and who could not, and whose transgressions would be dangerous

18 Characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, or religion all represent formal and informal boundaries, see Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Oxford, 1994). These practices are explored historically in Toyin Falola and Aribidesi Usman, eds., *Movements, Borders, and Identities in Africa* (London, 2009).

19 James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: an anarchist history of upland southeast Asia* (New Haven, 2009).

20 Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1, 1999): 814–841.

or not. Because, while borderland studies stresses the fluidity of the borders, that does not equal a lack of restrictions.²¹ Instead, studies detailing the making of rigid borders, political territorial boundaries, and their delineation in maps, are increasingly confronted with research focused on fluid, porous, lived, and imagined practices of bordering. Rigid and flexible borders are seen as parallel aspects of the same kind of border-making.²² Consequently, by examining borders before nations we can more effectively acknowledge a constant tension between openness and limits on the movement of commercial goods, technology, and peoples even as cross-cultural exchange drove the globalization of the world.

The Akan and Dzungar Case Studies

Our first case study of the Akan region of West Africa considers how local rulers and traders in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries engaged with global systems of trade via carefully regulated borderlands.²³ In the north of the region, market towns acted as entrepôts and southern termini of the trans-Saharan gold trade while, to the south, trade with Europeans was restricted to trading posts on the Atlantic coast. In both cases, trade for gold – the region’s most precious commodity – was encouraged, while outsiders’ access to the Akan gold-producing hinterland was regulated. As larger Akan polities formed in the seventeenth century, such as the Ashanti or Denkyira states, control of internal borders in the region led to the extraction of wealth from tributaries and the regular payment of customs from European traders.²⁴

Our second case study is that of the Dzungar borderlands, which spanned large parts of modern-day Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Xinjiang.

21 Chiara Brambilla, “Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept,” *Geopolitics* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 14–34.

22 For a combination of the approaches, see Dan Shao, *Remote Homeland, Recovered Borderland: Manchus, Manchoukuo, and Manchuria, 1907–1985* (Honolulu, 2011).

23 Neither the Akan nor the Dzungar polities have been the sole focus of a general overview for some time. For an overview of the region’s connection with the trans-Saharan and Atlantic trading worlds, see Ivor Wilks, “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: 1, The Matter of Bitu,” *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 3 (1982): 333–349 and Idem., “Wangara, Akan and Portuguese in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: 2, The Struggle for Trade,” *The Journal of African History* 23, no. 4 (1982): 463–472. For an overview of the Akan gold trade, see Kwame Arhin, “Gold-mining and Trading among the Ashanti of Ghana,” *Journal des Africanistes* 48, no. 1 (1978): 89–100.

24 Kwame Arhin, “The Political Economy of the Expansionist State,” *Revue Française d’Histoire d’Outre-Mer* 68 (1981): 13–36.

Here, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a vibrant border trade through oases cities such as Yarkand and via caravan routes of Inner Asia, which connected Persian, Russian, and Chinese markets. However, increased involvement of the Russian and Chinese empires in the region threatened Dzungar control of this trade.²⁵ As foreign empires pushed for access to the Dzungar borderlands to mine for gold and gain access to its vibrant commercial networks, local rulers walked the tightrope between state security and commercial opportunity.

The Akan and the Dzungar cases both display great variation in the available source material, a diversity which is also reflected in the border-making practices themselves. Opportunities for border-making were not the same everywhere and could be defined or limited by structures of global trade. In the case studies selected here, some shared features provide a useful starting point. First, the Akan and the Dzungar borderland trade was based on caravan trade, with the particular limits and characteristics that come with that type of mobility.²⁶ Second, both regions had a reputation for having rich natural access to gold.²⁷ Third, cross-cultural trade in each region was undertaken within trading hubs and market towns on the caravan route or on the coast, not in major political centers.²⁸ Fourth, they connected different regions and world-systems, mainly the Arab and Portuguese trading networks in the case of the Akan, and the Chinese, Persian, and Russian empires in the case of the Dzungars.²⁹ The commercial contacts thereby become a lens to also consider power relations between multiple groups, as well as language and cultural

25 Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*; Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); the standard works include I.YA. Zlatkin, *Istoriya Dzhungarskogo khanstva (1635–1758)* (Moscow, 1964).

26 For the pre-modern caravan trade, see Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, 1984); Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350* (New York, 1989); Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Cross-cultural Encounters and Exchanges in pre-Modern Times* (New York, 1993).

27 For a wide-ranging study of gold, see Peter Bernstein, *The Power of Gold: The History of an Obsession* (London, 2001).

28 Trading hubs, market towns, and port cities have received attention as distinct elements within emerging global networks ever since Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation and Capitalism, 15th–18th Centuries: vol. 3, The Perspective of the World*, trans. Siân Reynolds (California, 1979).

29 For other borderlands between world-systems, see Irina Martin, eds., *Contested Frontiers in the Balkans: Hapsburg and Ottoman Rivalries in Eastern Europe* (London, 2013); Palmira Brummett, "Mapping Trans-Imperial Ottoman Space: Alterity and Attraction" in *Representing Imperial Rivalry in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, eds. Barbara Fuchs and Emily Weissbourd (Toronto, 2015): 33–57; Fariba Zarinbe, "Azerbaijan between Two Empires: A Contested Borderland in the Early Modern Period," *Iranian Studies* 52 (2019): 299–337.



FIGURE 1 Map of southern Ghana indicating gold sources, kola distribution, and aspects of trade (including markets at Begho/Bitu and Elmina)

exchanges. Thus, despite – or perhaps because of – their obvious differences, the Akan and Dzungar borderlands allow for the asking of common questions about processes of border-making in the early modern period. In the Akan and Dzungar borderlands, we trace border-making as a reaction to uncertainty in the gold trade, to spatial trade restrictions, to cultural and material exchange, and to political conflicts and world making.

On the northern fringes of the Akan goldfields lay the trading town of Bitu (Figure 1). Bitu, also known as Bighu or Begho, lay in the Banda region just south of the River Volta, and was akin to the El Dorado of the Arab world – a place that was immensely wealthy and just beyond reach – a perception then adopted by European actors. For instance, in the seventeenth-century history of the Songhai Empire, the *Ta'rikh al-Fattāsh*, the historiographer Ibn



FIGURE 2 1689 map showing the Dzungar Khanate after it conquered the Tarim Basin
CC: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

al-Mukhtar recorded that “the gold mines” of the western Niger “have no parallel in all the Takrūr, except in the land of the Bergo” at Bitu. Even though merchants (known as Wangara) from Timbuktu and other cities within the Malian and Songhai empires had regularly participated in the trading caravans southward, al-Mukhtar could only identify the trading center at Bitu as a source of gold and had no knowledge of the actual Akan mining centers further south.³⁰ The Moroccan physician and author Wazir al-Ghassani similarly wrote about “a place called Bitu where there are mines of gold and of gold dust.” He understood that the town was where “those who have the salt of Taghaza origin and those who have the gold of Bitu origin meet each other” but remained unable to describe the location of the mines, only that it was a source “without equal in the universe.” From al-Ghassani’s perspective, Timbuktu owed its wealth to

30 For the provenance of the *Tarikh al-Fatah*, see, Mauro Nobili and Mohamed Shahid Mathee, “Towards a New Study of the *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*,” *History in Africa* 42 (2015): 37–73. For the quotes here, see Christopher Wise, ed., *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh: The Timbuktu Chronicles, 1493–1599* (Trenton, NJ, 2011), 74–75.

the Bitu caravans: “it is because of this blessed town that caravans converge at Timbuktu from all points of the horizon, from east, west, south and north.”³¹

Europeans who learned of the Akan gold-trade via the northern, trans-Saharan trading routes were more limited still in their knowledge of the region. In 1447, the Genoese merchant Antonius Malfante, who served as a factor at Timbuktu, “often enquired where the gold was found and collected,” but his local patron always replied “I was fourteen years in the land of the blacks, and I have never heard nor seen anyone who could reply from definite knowledge.”³² Similarly, when the Portuguese merchant João Rodrigues wrote from Arguim in 1495 that Timbuktu was where “the merchants come who go to the gold mines” to the south, he obtained little further in the way of actionable intelligence.³³ Europeans were as likely to propagate near-mythical accounts of these African exchanges – such as Cadamosto’s famous account of silent trade – as they were to effectively pass on even the limited information available in the Arab world.³⁴ Despite the long-standing Wangara-Akan trading relationship, and the best efforts of Europeans to participate in it, the market-town border locations remained understood as the source of Akan gold, rather than the actual mines further south.

The Akan region’s Atlantic border was likewise defined in recognition of its access to the gold producing territories further inland, and it was termed the Costa da Mina (Coast of the Mine) and later the Gold Coast, with its main trading post and fortress at São Jorge da Mina nicknamed Elmina (the mine). When the fortress was built in 1482, trade with local people was forthcoming and “there was gold in abundance,” but agreements with the local ruler, Caramansa, limited the Portuguese to the construction of a “warehouse” on the coast where trade for gold could take place.³⁵ Despite numerous efforts to trade directly with gold-mining regions, the Portuguese were unable to expand their commercial activities far beyond the coastal border imposed upon them.³⁶

31 Translated in Wilks, “The Matter of Bitu,” 343.

32 Translated in G.R. Crone, trans., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1937), 85–91.

33 Translated in Wilks, “Matter of Bitu,” 340–341.

34 For a range of examples and analysis of silent trade see William A. Haviland et al., *Anthropology: The Human Challenge* (Boston, MA, 2004): 461. For Cadamosto’s account, Crone, *Voyages of Cadamosto*, 22–23.

35 Rui de Pina and Alberto Martins, eds., *Crónica de El-Rey D. João II* (Coimbra, 1950), 7–13. Translated in Malyn Newitt, ed., *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415–1670: A Documentary History* (Cambridge, 2010): 90–95.

36 For example, between 1517 and 1524 gifts were sent to rulers across the region to attract Akan merchants to São Jorge da Mina after Portuguese efforts to trade elsewhere in the

Environmental conditions, whether dense forest and steep hills that made inland travel arduous, the difficult navigation of the region's rivers, or heat and disease, all contributed to the maintenance of a strong border between the Akan hinterland and visiting traders. Cultural and linguistic boundaries likewise made it difficult for outsiders to penetrate deeply into the main regions of Akan gold production. Thus, even after ninety years of settlement on the coast, Portuguese reports from the region in 1572 still struggled to identify sites of gold mining, believing that one lay somewhere "a hundred or a hundred and ten leagues" from São Jorge da Mina, and that the absence of more specific information was a consequence of Akan negligence rather than their own limited knowledge.³⁷ Whether to the north or south of the Akan goldfields, it was the meeting point, the market town or coastal trading post, that became associated as the source of Akan gold, even as knowledge of the actual sources of extraction remained in the hands of Akan producers. The Akan were effective in restraining access to gold-producing regions, largely limiting both Wangara and European traders to specified trading spaces.

The Dzungar lands were similarly described as remarkably rich with gold. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Russian empire moved steadily eastwards, resulting in violent clashes with several Central Asian polities, the strongest of which were the Dzungars, and eventually also with the Chinese empire. This expansion was in part underpinned by a belief that all of Siberia was a land of great riches – in minerals, furs, and other resources.³⁸ In 1714, Tsar Peter I received reports that this region held great reserves of gold. Tsar Peter had a motto: "Gold is the heart of the state," and at this point it was truer than ever, as Russia was embroiled in the costly Great Northern War (1700–1721). The Tsar promptly ordered numerous expeditions to establish mines in this neighboring nomad empire.³⁹ At this same time, however, the Dzungars were preparing for a large military campaign into China, and eyewitness accounts from captives tell of the ease with which the Dzungars defeated and captured the Russian expeditions.⁴⁰ Captives from these campaigns were made part of the Dzungar

region had been unsuccessful. Receipts for these gifts can be found in Arquivo Nacional da Torre de Tombo [ATT], Corpo Cronológico [CC] 2.70–113.

- 37 Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, Ms 8457, 100–10. Information about Elmina, 29th September 1572.
- 38 G. Diment and Y. Slezkine, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York, 1993).
- 39 Peter I quoted in Perdue, *China Marches West*, 211–213; Michael Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met: The Russian State and the Kalmyk Nomads, 1600–1771* (Ithaca, 2006), 157.
- 40 Brigita Scherzenfeldt, "Personalier öfwer lieutenantens herr Johan Gustaf Renats maka, fru Brigitta Schersensfeldt," (1736), 7, C.R. Berch's Collection, The Library of the Swedish Royal Academy of Letters, 12.

state building efforts of Khan Tsewang Rabtan. Rather than enrich the Russian land, the laborers and mining engineers who had been in Russian service were made to create a stronger neighbor to the Russians – a process that contributed to the eventual development of more strictly defined borders.

The border-making of this region, including that between Russia and China, was influenced by this hunt for gold and other resources that could strengthen the empire. In 1716, a Russian diplomatic mission to Beijing passed the Irtysh river. At this time, one of the emissaries specifically discussed the prevalence of lead, iron, and copper in the mountains they passed, and noted that the local inhabitants claimed not to know of any silver mines. This contrasted with information from the prisoners and their claims to have found “great quantities of gold” in the region.⁴¹

The political relationship changed in the 1720s. Facing increased pressure from the Qing Empire, and after a defeat in Tibet, the Dzungars accepted a minimal Russian presence, and allowed a contingency of engineers and mapmakers to search the land in order to establish Russian gold mines.⁴² The irony was that while the southern states of the Dzungar empire were rich in metal resources, including gold, the Russian prospectors never found it, even though the location of the mines does not seem to have been a great secret. A Swedish mapmaker held captive at the Dzungar court created, on the basis of Chinese and Dzungar maps, a map of the Dzungar empire with a clear notice next to the oasis of Kirya (Yutian): “Here there is gold.”⁴³ Yet the Russian miners left empty-handed, and the region lost its reputation as a land of riches, up until the modern era when oil was eventually found and it again became a bone of contention between neighboring powers.

The actual riches of the steppe were furs. Already by the mid-seventeenth century, the fur trade was key to the Russian economy, and a common gift in diplomatic exchanges. By the late seventeenth century, this faced increased competition in European markets from North American furs. The solution was to turn eastwards, to the Chinese market, which would also provide access to silk, the most important Chinese export to Europe. In doing so, however, the Russian empire was brought into the borderlands of the Dzungars. The Russian

41 Lorenz Lange, “Journal du voyage de Laurent Lang à la Chine,” in *Recueil de voyages au Nord, contenant Divers memoires très-utiles au commerce & la navigation Tome V, troisième édition* (Amsterdam, 1735), 385.

42 Thomas Jefferson Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 290.

43 Johan Gustaf Renat, *Carta af Songarski = Kalmuckit, Koba, Renat*, Uppsala University Library; V.S. Myasnikov, ed., *Russko-kitayskiye otnosheniya v XVIII veke. Dokumenty i materialy. T. V: Russko-kitayskiye otnosheniya. 1729–1733* (Moscow, 2016), 509.

push eastwards was driven as much by commercial needs as by dreams of territorial aggrandizement, but both endeavors were at odds with the basic logic of the Dzungar empire.⁴⁴ A long-term aim of the Russian empire – one similar to the Chinese strategy – was to change the very culture of the Dzungars, from being raiders of the open steppe to being merchants of set routes. While both trade and agriculture in the borderlands increased in scope in the early eighteenth century, the political, economic, and cultural basis of the nomadic empire was to raid and conquest across a porous borderland; in relation to that, neither peace nor cross-border trade had strong appeal for the Dzungars.⁴⁵

Practices of Border-Making

Despite lacking highly regulated, state-imposed and secured, or even clearly delineated territorial borders, Akan and Dzungar people limited access to spaces on the very edges of their shared territories. Extensive archaeological excavation around Bitu (and other markets in the Banda region) have revealed strict practices of urban planning that separated visiting merchants from the rest of the community despite shared economic interests.⁴⁶ The central market of the town was dominated by a community of traders and retailers, the east quarter by Akan landowners, the west quarter by “Kramo” *qabilas* (wards of the Wangara, who lived near the town’s mosque), and to the north lived artisans – especially blacksmiths. Near the town, in what might be called “greater” Bitu, were further industrial sites, including furnaces at Dapaa where iron slag has been unearthed in considerable quantities, and a pottery producing community at Bandakile.⁴⁷ As the source, from the perspective of visiting merchants at least, of the gold that stimulated the trans-Saharan trading networks, towns like Bitu provided an opportunity for Akan traders to access global markets. They provided security against potential threats by limiting participation in different types of economic activity and contributed to the control of commercial activity within the wider economy remaining in Akan hands. As Daaku has highlighted:

44 Mark Mancall, *Russia and China: Their Diplomatic Relations to 1728* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 11–13; Perdue, *China Marches West*, 86–88.

45 Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier*, 17, 30; Perdue, *China Marches West*, 405.

46 Wilks, “Matter of Bitu,” 343.

47 Posnansky, “Begho”; Idem, “Aspects of Early West African Trade,” *World Archaeology* 5, no. 2 (1973): 149–162; Ann Stahl, *Making History in Banda: Anthropological Visions of Africa’s Past* (Cambridge, 2009), 107–147.

[...] by the end of the sixteenth century the Akan economic production had become highly specialised, both regionally and locally. The salt and dry fish of the coastal dwellers were exchanged for food stuff and other forest produce and the gold mining areas of Awowin and Wassa depended on their food-producing neighbours for their sustenance. At the same time, Akan traders scoured the inland markets of the Wenchi-Bono-Takyiman area and beyond for manufactured [goods].⁴⁸

Thus, from an Akan perspective, these divisions of economic activity among the quarters of Bitu reflected common practices across the wider Akan economy, with specialization of manufacturing practice fueling the dense commercial webs that crisscrossed the region. A similar mentality was maintained by the various Akan rulers and traders who participated in trade with Europeans along the Atlantic coast. The twenty or so European forts that had been established by around 1600 provided further opportunities for access to growing Atlantic markets, and Akan polities, such as Komenda or *Cara* (Accra), used these markets to grow into powerful regional centers.⁴⁹ This was facilitated in part by Portuguese practices whereby they “inserted themselves as a militarized commercial elite” alongside communities “with an established commercial and political life but with every intention of encouraging the existing commercial order to continue.”⁵⁰ By overseeing the practices by which Akan gold reached global markets, different Akan polities could maintain significant control of the movement of people and goods through their territories while simultaneously encouraging commercial engagement.

The Dzungar example similarly exemplifies the vibrancy of early modern cross-cultural trade focused on a few urban centers. The caravan trade passed primarily through the oasis cities in the valleys, notably Kashgar and Yarkand. The Dzungar had extended their control of these age-old trading hubs in the seventeenth century, but rather than taking over their administration, they instead exacted a hefty tax from local rulers while encouraging commerce.⁵¹ So-called Bukharans, a term not only applied to those from Bukhara specifically

48 Kwame Yeboa Daaku, “Aspects of Precolonial Akan Economy,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5, no. 2 (1972): 237.

49 Later, this would make them targets for European military conquest. Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600–1720: A Study of the African Response to European Trade* (Oxford, 1970), 78–95.

50 A similar dynamic is seen in Portuguese activity in East Africa. Malyn Newitt, “Mozambique Island: The Rise and Decline of a Colonial Port City” in *Portuguese Colonial Cities in the Early Modern World*, ed. Liam M. Brockey (Farnham, 2008), 105–129.

51 James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York, 2007), 92.

but as a generic name used for urban caravan traders, particularly Muslims from the Tarim basin, dominated this trade. They oversaw trade flows between China, Persia, Russia, Tibet, and the Ottoman empire, as well as the multiple polities of Central Asia, including the Kazaks and the Kalmyks.⁵² Rather than a decline of the silk route after the discovery of maritime trade routes, the inner Asian caravan trade shifted to a different trajectory, right through the Dzungar realm.⁵³ From a Dzungar perspective, the control of these major commercial hubs was vital and they kept a close watch over the movement and activities of people in the region, levying a five and ten percent tax on foreign and Muslim traders respectively – Uighur merchants played a crucial role as middlemen between foreigners and Dzungar nobility but they had low status in Dzungar society.⁵⁴ Chinese observers, later attempting to present Qing rule as saving the region, labelled the taxes as “plunder” and the status of the Uighurs as “slaves.”⁵⁵

Trade in the Dzungar borderlands thus took place amidst a strongly stratified social structure, and a Russian emissary noted the use of coerced labor, with workers coming from neighboring nomadic groups, Russia, and the Central Asian slave trade.⁵⁶ As a result of captures and human trafficking, the Dzungar society was ethnically diverse, but the diversity was of its own making.⁵⁷ The treatment of such prisoners, called “foreign specialists,” was regulated in the Oirat law.⁵⁸ However, while some groups were welcomed, the balance between trade, increased cultivation of the land, and military security were cemented through ethnic division, in which (at least theoretically) the Dzungar ruling group was supposed to exact the profit from the urban centers and embrace a

52 For the trade at large, see Takahiro Onuma, *Shin to Chūōajia sōgen: Yūbokumin no sekai kara teikoku no henkyō e* (Tokyo, 2014); Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 27.

53 Scott C. Levi, “Early Modern Central Asia in World History,” *History Compass* 10, no. 11 (2012): 866–878; for more extensive research on this, see Scott C. Levi, *The Bukharan Crisis: A Connected History of 18th Century Central Asia* (Pittsburgh, 2020).

54 Ma Dazheng, “The Tarim Basin,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Development in Contrast: From the Sixteenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, eds. Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, vol. 5 (Paris, 2003), 196–200.

55 This is an ongoing theme in Fu Heng et. al., (*Qinding*) *Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi*, 1755–1782; see L.J. Newby, “The Chinese Literary Conquest of Xinjiang,” *Modern China* 25, no. 4 (1999): 451–474.

56 See descriptions of the slave markets in H. Veselovskii, ed., *Posol'stvo k ziungarskomu khun-taichzhi Tsevan Rabtanu kapitana ot artillepü Ivana Unkovskogo i putevoi zhurnal ego za 1722–1724 gody* (St. Petersburg, 1887).

57 Pamela Kyle Crossley, “Slavery in Early Modern China,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, eds. David Eltis and Stanley Engerman (Cambridge, 2011), 199–200.

58 Roman Yulianovich Pochekayev, “Rossiyskiye Puteshestvenniki o Pravovykh Otnosheniyakh v Dzhungarskom Khanstve XVIII v.,” *Oriental Studies* 12, no. 1 (2019): 28–40.

nomadic and military culture, while the Bukharans focused on the urban and caravan trade, and the Uighurs and other sedentary groups were made to work the land.⁵⁹

A defining feature of engagement in the region, like the Akan-European experience on the Atlantic coast, was the steady building of Russian fortresses along the Dzungar-Russian border region. Several of these were razed to the ground by the Dzungars and then rebuilt, but they were indicative of Russian efforts to formalize and control the border. These fortresses were meant to secure commerce, but they also gradually moved the Russian borders – constituting a growing threat to Dzungar authority.⁶⁰ In a similar process from the other direction, the Chinese were also constructing forts.⁶¹ Being trading hubs, however, such forts also offered access to the Russian and Chinese markets, forcing the Dzungar to balance commercial and security interests.

The main resources of these borderlands were their people and herds. Rather than creating borders to shut people out, the Dzungar state depended on forced migration and amassing as large as possible groups of warriors and farmers.⁶² Thus, the resource most carefully guarded in the borderlands was people, not territory, but border-making of the lands was nonetheless a result. For example, groups such as the Uriankhais Hyrgys of the Yenisei river and the Altai Teleuts paid taxes to Russia, the Dzungars, and the Altan Khan simultaneously. These taxes were not equally large: for instance, some subjects paid five sables of fur to their local rulers and one to the regional lord. This practice was well known: in 1716, a Russian emissary described what he called the “tartar” groups of this border region, and said that while they paid tribute, mostly consisting of furs, to the tsar, they also paid tribute to Khan Tsewang Rabtan.⁶³ Similarly, both the Bashkirs and the Kazaks – two other groups with ongoing relations with Dzungaria – paid *yasak* (a Turkish-Mongol word and concept) to Russia in the early eighteenth century, normally in the form of furs. There was, however, a conceptual disconnect. While Russian representatives saw *yasak* as a tax, proving the right to a territory and its people, the local understanding was closer to a form of trade.⁶⁴ Neither collecting tributes nor imposing taxes were self-evident border-making practices.

59 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 92–93.

60 Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 25–29.

61 Perdue, *China Marches West*, 328.

62 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 92–93; Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 205.

63 Lorenz Lange, “Journal Du Voyage de Laurent Lang à La Chine,” in *Recueil de Voyages Au Nord, Contnant Divers Memoires Très-Utiles Au Commerce & La Navigation Tome V, Troisième Edition* (Amsterdam, 1735), 384.

64 Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier*, 61–62.

To ensure the right to tax-collection, there was a forced division of the local population and consequently a growing spatial division between the Russian, Dzungar, and Chinese regions. After the regional definition of the Uriankhai frontier in the treaty of Kiakhta in 1727, the inhabitants could only avoid paying taxes to both Russia and China by defining themselves as part of one specific regional group.⁶⁵ Such strict definitions were wholly new to groups that had had their own traditions of shifting territoriality without a given loyalty to one or the other ruler; the taxation in the borderlands undermined the fluidity of the border groups, and the borders.

The spatial development went further still. In 1689, the Qing empire and Russia signed a formal treaty in Nerchinsk. This has been seen as a decisive shift, both diplomatic and political, in the history of this borderland and as a sign of the start of a new kind of border-making.⁶⁶ Recent research, however, underlines the rifts in the geographic understanding of this borderland region, the many cartographic misunderstandings and confusions that followed from the treaty, and the underrated impact of borderland groups, including nomad groups, on Russian and Chinese territorial understandings.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the treaty of Nerchinsk and the treaty of Kiakhta put pressure on the Dzungars. As an effect of the formalization of Russian-Chinese relations, stone markers were raised along the border between them, creating a physical dividing line.⁶⁸ Equally, if not more, important to the Chinese understanding of borders were the practices of imperial officials of raising steles (inscribed stone slabs), and of travel writers to carving character into the land they passed, thus taming the very landscape.⁶⁹ The pressure from both Russia and China forced the Dzungars to reassess their nomadic perception of borders, from a non-territorial based view to one in which certain regions and lands, rather than people, were defined as within their realm or not.

The attempts to focus cross-cultural commercial practices within the hands of one group in these trading zones show border-making as a practice from above and below simultaneously, but with different motivations. Across these sites of contact, parallel to the opening of borders to some foreigners,

65 Dorj Shurkhuu, "Similarities and Differences between Mongolia and Tuva in the Evolution of Bilateral Ties," *Senri Ethnological Studies*, (February 24, 2014): 129.

66 See Peter C. Perdue, "Boundaries and Trade in the Early Modern World: Negotiations at Nerchinsk and Beijing," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no. 3 (July 23, 2010): 341–356.

67 Helena Jaskov, "The Negotiated Geography of the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) and the Role of the Jesuits," *Late Imperial China* 40, no. 2 (2019): 45–88.

68 Evelyn S. Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives* (Cambridge, 2015), 92–93.

69 Perdue, *China Marches West*, 411–412.

there were efforts to maintain distinct local communities – but, for global encounters to be profitable, they required at least some degree of letting the outsider in.

Beyond Material Boundaries

In border-making, geographic markers served an important role: gates, walls, forts, pillars, and other means of separating communities were common in sites of global encounter across the world. However, in the Akan and Dzungar examples, these material boundaries were not the only means of restricting movement or access. For example, the Portuguese not only failed to access Akan territories further inland, but Akan merchants were also quite willing to shut them out of the trade if the Portuguese did not cater to their needs.⁷⁰ Securing local priorities against external pressures depended as much on a willingness to engage (or not) with outsiders as it did on physically limiting them.⁷¹

However, while processes of border-making involved exclusionary tactics, foreign merchants and cross-cultural exchange still influenced communities beyond the marketplace. Even in cases when only commodities were supposed to pass a certain territory, recognizing the concurrent exchange of cultural practices reveals a more porous interchange. For traders in West Africa, cross cultural, trans-regional trade was nothing new, and commercial practices were already shaped by the contestation and accommodation of various local traditions as well as those imported through engagement with Wangara and Hausa traders.⁷² As Toby Green has highlighted, “a combination of distinctiveness and hybridity” stemmed from long-standing “interpenetrating multiculturalities” that reflected the necessities of regional, trans-Saharan, and later Atlantic trade.⁷³ The movement of new commodities could alter a society’s

70 Wilks, “Struggle for Trade,” 465–468. On the Atlantic coast, the Portuguese at São Jorge da Mina were avoided in favor of so-called *Lançados* or other European traders when they antagonized nearby Akan polities, see Maria da Graça Silva, *Subsídios para o Estudo dos “Lançados” na Guiné* (Lisbon, 1967); A. Teixeira da Mota and P.E.H. Hair, *East of Mina: Afro-European relations on the Gold Coast in the 1550s and 1560s: An Essay with Supporting Documents* (Madison, WI, 1988).

71 For comparative practices of securitization in the early modern world, see Lisa Hellman and Edmond Smith, “Global Border Making and Securitization in the Early Modern World: introduction,” *Journal of the British Academy*, 9, no. 3 (2021): 1–12.

72 See Toby Green’s *Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the rise of the slave trade to the Age of Revolution* (London, 2019).

73 Toby Green, *Rise of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge, 2012), 16.

cultural and social landscape, and in the case of the Akan, the vast expansion of their access to goods such as metalware, ceramics, shells, and beads had a significant impact, as did new access to luxury commodities, including certain textiles.⁷⁴ Changing consumption habits would, in turn, come to affect practices of sociability, political authority, and the accumulation of wealth. Together with other factors, these shifting practices would contribute to the formation of Akan states like Ashanti in the seventeenth century.⁷⁵

Changing consumer demands, conversely, could also lead to the stricter imposition of borders, and failure to meet with Akan demands quickly led to European traders finding themselves cut out of the market entirely. For instance, in 1518, Captain Fernão Lopez Correia complained that Akan traders were not interested in Portuguese products at the low quality and high prices demanded. Therefore, when the trader Gonçalo Vaz sought to sell *algeravias tenezes* (burnouses) he was rebuffed by Akan merchants “because the *tenezes* are made with another pattern” that they did not want and were not “soft and warm, [which was] what they really enjoy.”⁷⁶ However, when goods were offered that did cater to Akan requirements, demand at the fortress was so high that a fully laden ship carrying “three thousand *manilhas* (bronze rings) and two hundred and fifty *algeravias* and two hundred *bacyas de myjar* (bronze or copper bowls)” only provided enough goods as could be “taken in one day.”⁷⁷ As this suggests, the Akan were active shoppers but would only buy goods that met their demands, and there was little the Portuguese could do to obtain gold without catering to these.

In the Dzungar case, their control of the oases towns of modern-day Xinjiang guaranteed access to gold, silver, and minerals for gunpowder. Copper from the southern mines was used to mint new coins that provide evidence of the cross-cultural characteristic of this empire: they bore the mint name in Arabic, and the Khan’s name in the Oirat script.⁷⁸ Another way in which both consumption and production of the Dzungars changed as a result of cultural influence from abroad was through the construction of two large Buddhist temples

74 The impact of new consumer products is clear from the archaeological record across the Akan and wider *Costa da Mina* region, see Daaku, “Precolonial Akan Economy”; Christopher De Corse, *Archaeology of Elmina: Africans and Europeans on the Gold Coast, 1400–1900* (Washington, DC, 2001); Merrick Posnansky, “Early West African Trade,” *World Archaeology* 5, no. 2 (1973): 149–162.

75 See Daaku, *Trade and Politics*, 148–181; Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Athens, OH, 1993).

76 ATT, CM, Maço 3, n. 179. Letter from Fernão Lopes Correia to the King, 8th October 1518.

77 ATT, CM, Maço 3, n. 180. Letter from Fernão Lopes Correia to the King, 23rd June 151[8].

78 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 90.

in Ghulja (Yili), ordered by Khan Galdan Tseren. Later Chinese accounts claim that “They were so tall that they caressed the skies, gold streamers dazzled the sun, the beams and rafters were immense and the Buddhas were solemn and imposing.”⁷⁹ These temples were built after a Tibetan model, but that required a sedentary organization of territory, quite at odds with the nomadic setup of the empire; eventually, the temple territory housed more than six thousand llamas and a ten thousand servant household.⁸⁰

Alongside changing consumer practices, the Akan and Dzungar borderlands allow us to trace another classic effect of intercultural exchanges: linguistic developments. Through loan words and language changes, cultural influence went in several directions through the borderlands. The Fergana valley had, like many trading hubs, long been multilingual, which included use of the now-extinct Fergana Kipchak Turkish. The more direct linguistic influence of the Dzungars seems to have been on nomad groups subsumed into their empire: for example, the Tuvan Turkish language group still has Kazakh and Mongol elements. Similarly, Kirghiz, while a Turkish language, has an Altai influence from the time of the Dzungar invasion.⁸¹ An analysis of the linguistic influence on the borderlands shows how the Dzungar invasion of the Kazakhs in 1723 led to the adoption of several Mongol words into the Turkish Kazakh word-stock, including *aymaq* (region), *dönejin* (three-year-old calf) and *atan* (gelded camel) – a reminder of the caravan trade. As an example of the interrelation between political and linguistic developments, the invasion of the Dzungars in 1723 pushed the Kazakhs into the arms of the Russian empire, which annexed them in 1731. This, in turn, led to loan words such as *beket* (stopping place for travelers), *oblis* (province) and *türme* (prison, jail).⁸² Note how both Dzungar and Russian dominance led to new words for geographic entities: *aymaq* and *oblis* respectively. The creation of new borders had a linguistic dimension. Of course, the influence went the other way too, with Turkish

79 Quote in Bai Cuiqin, “The Dzungars and the Torguts (Kalmuks) in China,” in *History of Civilizations of Central Asia: Development in Contrast: From the Sixteenth to the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, ed. Chahryar Adle and Irfan Habib, vol. 5 (Paris, 2003), 174; further such descriptions in Fu Heng et. al., (*Qinding*) *Huangyu Xiyu Tuzhi*, 1755–1782.

80 Cuiqin, “The Dzungars and the Torguts (Kalmuks) in China,” 168.

81 Marina Vasil'yevna Mongush, “U tuvintsev Sin'tszyana: dvadtsat' let spustya,” *Novyye issledovaniya Tuvy*, no. 4 (November 28, 2012): 130–147; Christopher P. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York, 2004), 556–557; Talat Tekin, “A New Classification of the Turkic Languages,” *Türk Dilleri Araştırmaları* (1990): 5–18.

82 Kalmyrzayeva G. and Abramova G., “Borrowing Process in The Kazakh Language,” *The Scientific World of Kazakhstan* 1, no. 35 (2011): 44.

words – and through them Persian and Arab words – being adopted in Russian during the Russian empire’s expansion eastwards.⁸³

Like many Mongol federations, the Dzungars were primarily an oral culture. However, in this time and place they also created and institutionalized a script for Oirat Mongol. This created a written culture separate from the Russian, Turkish, and Chinese written traditions surrounding it, exemplified in the Dzungar legal code of 1640, which relied heavily on competence from scholars of Tibetan Buddhism but was based on Dzungar legal traditions.⁸⁴ This script bridged the gap between Tibetan and Mongolian cultures and was used to translate hundreds of manuscripts, primarily Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, but also works of Chinese medicine, astronomy, history, and literature.⁸⁵ Border-making included the creation of separate state, cultural, and legal systems but these, just as the words, were effects of cross-border exchanges.

Similarly, the adoption of Malian terms for trade and transportation into Akan dialects reveals the commercial foundations of this relationship. Words such as *yoma* for camel, *okor* for canoe, or *boto* for purse all related to the transport of goods, while *damma* was adopted to delineate the smallest unit in the Akan weight system.⁸⁶ While the movement of individuals and the penetration of religious or imperial structures was strictly opposed, new ways of doing business lent themselves to the development of cross-cultural exchange. In part, this willingness to embrace new consumer goods or linguistic hybridity reflected relative political security. In other border areas, linguistic limitations were strictly enforced in light of perceived asymmetric power relations, and hybrid language forms mocked.⁸⁷

Like language, religious practices in the borderland regions could be contested. In the Akan region, as discussed above, Islam was carefully controlled and regulated within urban sites on the northern border, while the Portuguese empire’s intermittent efforts to proselytize, combined with the establishment of mulatto familial networks, led to the development of new communities that existed within a unique Luso-African space.⁸⁸ In the Dzungar borderlands,

83 Nicolas J. Poppe, “A Survey of Studies of Turkic Loan-Words in the Russian Language,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 11, no. 4 (1966): 300.

84 Khodarkovsky, *Where Two Worlds Met*, 37–42.

85 Cuiqin, “The Dzungars and the Torguts (Kalmuks) in China,” 171.

86 Wilks, “Matter of Bitu,” 338.

87 Lydia He Liu, “The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign,” in *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia He Liu (Durham, NC, 1999), 13–41.

88 Silva, *Subsídios para o Estudo dos “Lançados”*; David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570–1640* (Williamsburg, VA, 2016).

similarly, religion contributed to the ways that the region and communities within it were defined and represented.⁸⁹ For instance, Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the Yellow Hat sect and their ties to the Dalai Lama, was perceived as crucial for the legitimization of Dzungar rule. Thus, after the Qing conquest in 1757, they demolished the large temples of Ghulja. This spatial shift reinforced their rule, a symbolism that was reinforced when such a temple was rebuilt a few years later – now without its religious elements and in the grounds of the Qing emperor's summer palace.⁹⁰

New technologies also proved critical in shaping the porosity of Akan and Dzungar borders. As seen in the neighborhood division at Bitu, a strictly divided economic system meant that ideas and tools from the Malian states could be integrated into strongly defined artisanal communities with limited risk – especially when competing craftsmen were based around eight hundred miles to the north. Surviving examples of clay spindle whorls adopted from Sudanic cloth-making practices reveal an adaptive cloth-making industry in the Bitu region that catered to local markets' demand for foreign wares.⁹¹ Similarly, bracelets, other metal items, and pottery were increasingly produced in the area using designs that had been introduced via the northern trading route.⁹²

In a similar vein, Dzungar rulers combined traditional craftsmanship with skills obtained from their foreign captives and tributary peoples. Doing so allowed them to open up new techniques of production such as of cotton and woolen goods, leather processing, paper-making, printing – and particularly smelting and the manufacture of guns.⁹³ They were well known for their use of gunpowder, and accounts from foreign captives from Europe detail how the Dzungars and captives together further developed cannon casting for use against both the Russians and the Chinese.⁹⁴ In this way, the Dzungars

89 Valerie Kivelson, “Exalted and Glorified to the Ends of the Earth’: Imperial Maps and Christian Spaces in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Russian Siberia,” in *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago, 2009).

90 Cuiqin, “The Dzungars and the Torguts (Kalmuks) in China,” 174.

91 L.B. Crossland, “Traditional Textile Industry in North-West Brong Ahafo, Ghana: The Archaeological and Contemporary Evidence,” *Sankofa* 1 (1975): 69–73; Ann Stahl, “Innovation, Diffusion, and Culture Contact: The Holocene Archaeology of Ghana,” *Journal of World Prehistory* 8, no. 1 (1994): 51–112.

92 Ann Stahl, “The Archaeology of Global Encounters Viewed from Banda, Ghana,” *The African Archaeological Review* 16, no. 1 (1999): 5–81; Posnansky, “Begho,” 105–110.

93 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 90; Cuiqin, “The Dzungars and the Torguts (Kalmuks) in China,” 165.

94 “Skrivelse Från Johan Renat” (23 August 1739), Gunnar Jarrings Arkiv vol. 411, Renat, Johan Gustaf: 1, Lund University Library.

creatively used foreign technology, and adapted their productive process to reflect the changing world around them.

The Dzungar were not only willing to use new technologies that crossed their borders, but also to use them to proactively redefine their own borders spatially *vis-à-vis* their imperial neighbors. After both Qing emperors and Russian tsars sent out state-sponsored surveyors, such as the gold prospectors, and promoted mapping to simultaneously create and communicate their image of empire, the Dzungar responded by engaging in their own practices of mapping and naming.⁹⁵ Examination of a surviving Dzungar map shows that while Dzungar map-making was dependent on Chinese and Russian maps and information – for example, it followed Chinese convention and put south on the top – it did not blindly follow either Russian or Chinese cartographic norms. The legends take different shapes and are distributed differently than in corresponding Manchu maps, and the map uses other Dzungar names for places and cities.⁹⁶ While Russia and the Qing Empire were clarifying regional borderlines, the Dzungars tried to combine a fluid border view with the mapping practices of the day.⁹⁷ Even as they used new forms of mapping technology and spatial organization, the Dzungars did not simply adopt wider processes of border-making. Rather, the communities in the Dzungar and the Akan borderlands, who did not strictly follow the patterns of border-making typical of polities with a centralized nation state, illuminate the enduring influence of local agency even as they increasingly butted against pressure to conform to the standards of imperial polities with whom they were exchanging commodities, technology, language, and ideas.⁹⁸

The effectiveness of the Akan and Dzungar border regimes did not lay only in their relative success in controlling foreign actors. The maintenance of strong cultural boundaries created a dynamic whereby despite the strict enforcement of borders (for example, by refusing to engage in trade that failed

95 Laura Hostetler, "Contending Cartographic Claims? The Qing Empire in Manchu, Chinese and European Maps," in *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, ed. James R. Akerman (Chicago, 2009), 94–95; David Ludden, "The Process of Empire: Frontiers and Borderlands," in *Tributary Empires in Global History*, eds. Christopher Bayly and Peter Fibiger Bang (London, 2011), 132–150; Steven Seegel, *Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire* (Chicago, 2012), 65, 133.

96 *Kalmuckisk karta över Dzungariet – Renat 1/Renat A*, Koba, Renat, Uppsala University Library; John F. Baddeley, *Russia, Mongolia, China: Being Some Record of the Relations between Them from the Beginning of the XVIIth Century to the Death of the Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich A.D. 1602–1676 Rendered Mainly in the Form of Narratives ... by Envoys Sent by the Russian Tsars ...* (London, 1919), 166–196.

97 Tagliacozzo, Siu, and Perdue, "Introduction: Spatial Assemblages," 12–13.

98 Perdue, *China Marches West*, 443–457.

to follow their rules) new cultural and economic practices could nevertheless be adopted within the wider borderland area. In this way, sought-after material and ideas could be socially and politically viable even as perceived threats could be resisted. By tracing the material cultures of encounter, we see constant and close connections taking place across borders, but without the discord that might have occurred if the interactions among people, state institutions, legal systems, and religions had been unmoderated. In the Akan and Dzungar borderlands, border-making and cross-border integration were intrinsically interconnected as dual responses to the same conflicts, exchanges, and exogenous pressure.

Border-Making and Global History

In this article, we have presented a comparative examination of border-making in two distinct borderlands during periods of increased interregional and cross-cultural contact. In neither the Dzungar or the Akan cases was border-making a straightforward effect of commercial and cultural changes, nor did it involve adopting wholly exogenous practices. Rather, our comparison suggests that borders could function as a response to the uncertainties in the globalizing processes and could simultaneously respond to external pressures while reflecting internal practices.

First, both cases show the multiplicity of actors and aims in the process of border-making. In both cases, the expectations of states or empires on the one hand, and those of local traders or farmers on the other, were not perfectly aligned. The process of border-making involved multiple actors observing different borders within the same space: the ways in which borders were interpreted depended as much on the actors engaging with them as the will of rulers or the lines drawn on a map.

Second, cross-cultural exchange in both regions was both controlled and encouraged by border-making practices. These practices were key to successful commercial, cultural, and linguistic exchange, and the impact of these practices bears reminding: the Akan case shows the weak position of the Europeans in West Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth century; the Dzungar case illustrates the importance of including nomadic and semi-nomadic polities when considering globalization.⁹⁹ From this comparative analysis, then, we can see how there were similar reactions and strategies to combat uncertainty stemming

99 Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 191; see also Ada Ingrid Engebrihtsen, "Key figure of mobility: the nomad," *Social Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2017): 42–54.

from rapid economic change in both West Africa and Central Asia, albeit with different effects on the border-making process. These difference resulted from the nature of the pressures faced and the cultural norms of the two societies.

Third, border-making in both regions evolved in step with external pressures. While both the Akan and Dzungar examples reveal conceptions of borders that made use of restrictions to encourage exchanges, such as the urban delineation at Bitu or the trade through the Bukharan merchants, they also reflected endemic tensions in each region. The Dzungar and Akan interacted with multiple borders at the same time, and communities and rulers alike upheld and transgressed these borders. The Dzungar case especially underscores diversity within the polity and demonstrates that a mobile culture did not preclude border-making processes. For the Dzungars, porous, flexible, and people-centered borders were the cultural norm, but pressure from their Chinese and Russian neighbors forced them to also adapt more sedentary border-making practices. For the Akan, the stricter regulation of people's movements facilitated a permeable border for the movement of commodities even when they carried cultural collateral with them. This draws attention to the possibilities, and indeed the effectiveness, of cultural border-making (despite the fact that the Akan world included a multiplicity of polities) – even in the face of European imperialism. Together, the two case studies show that not only did the process of border-making differ, so did the degree to which it worked.

In pursuing this collaborative consideration of two early modern borderlands, it is our hope to encourage further attention to borderlands studies by scholars of the global early modern world. Such an approach would encourage work on understudied areas by scholars working from distinct perspectives and, in doing so, illuminate the nature of cross-cultural interactions in a way that neither presupposes the nation state nor a fixed spatiality.

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