Introduction

On the New Politics of Margins in Asia
Mapping Frontier Assemblages

Jason Cons and Michael Eilenberg

How shall the inhabitants of a 'remote area' evaluate the arbitrary love-hate of its visitors? Are alternative periods of 'unspoiledness' and violence their inevitable fate? – Edwin Ardener

This volume responds to the emergence, and we argue convergence, of two phenomena across Asia over the past handful of decades. The first is the rapid transformation of forest and agrarian spaces into sites of export-oriented resource extraction. Whether in the conversion of vast swaths of rainforest to oil palm and rubber plantations across Southeast Asia or the explosion of large-scale and wildcat mining operations around the Pacific rim, millions of acres of land have been rapidly converted into sites for often ecologically and socially destructive extraction.[1] The causes of this expansion are various, but broadly they have been stimulated by the search for new investment opportunities by transnational companies, both beyond but especially within Asia, and a boom in transnational investments and development collaborations anchored in global supply chains (Hall, 2011; Borras and Franco, 2011; Buchanan et al., 2013; Baird, 2014; Li, 2014b; Kelly and Peluso, 2015; Li, 2015). Alongside this unprecedented expansion have been a myriad of other transformations of remote space into new kinds of productive sites – sites slated for massive infrastructural projects, export processing zones, new urban developments, spaces of privatized health care, habitats of ecological reclamation and sustainability, speculative locations for carbon storage and more. The proposition of this volume is that these two

processes of extraction and production should be understood together as linked projects of incorporating margins and remote areas into new territorial formations. In other words, these out-of-the way places (Tsing, 1993) are key sites in the making of, and thus key vantage points for understanding, new articulations of territorial rule, regional and global networks of accumulation, and security.[2] We argue that both these productive and extractive transformations should be understood as the making of new Asian resource frontiers.

Studies of resource frontiers have primarily explored extractive spaces – areas where monocultural crop booms or the discovery of new mineral or petrochemical resources have rapidly reconfigured land tenure and sociality alongside of political economy and ecology (Sturgeon, 2005; McCarthy, 2006; De Koninck et al., 2011; Hall et al., 2011). In this volume, we move away from an exclusive focus on extraction, and understand resource frontiers also as sites of creative, if often ruinous, production. In doing so, we offer two rejoinders to the more well-trodden literature on the political economy of extraction. First, we suggest that what matters in the incorporation (or re-incorporation) of margins are the various forces and processes that are assembled to reinvent these spaces as zones of opportunity. And second, we suggest that not only are these forces of spatial transformation resonant across sites, resources, and interventions, but that a broader view of territorial intervention gives us tools to understand a moment in which the relationship of millions of people to land and rule is being radically reconfigured. Moreover, we suggest that at once plumbing the unique histories of individual frontiers and understanding similarities across different frontiers might open new possibilities for responding to exploitation.

How might we understand the forces that precipitate these sweeping transformations throughout the region? And what do these shifts portend for Asia's margins, many of which have and continue to be sites of intense securitization, instability, conflict, and expansion? What similarities and differences do these transformations share? This volume ventures a series of initial studies of these questions. Each chapter offers a rich ethnographic and/or historical study of a particular resource frontier. Yet collectively, we begin to trace broader patterns of contemporary frontier making and their effects.

To do this, we turn our attention to what we call *frontier assemblages:* the intertwined materialities, actors, cultural logics, spatial dynamics, ecologies, and political economic processes that produce particular places as resource frontiers. Frontier assemblage is a term that is both descriptive and analytic. Contributors to this volume use it to map the histories and geographies that coalesce in specific places and moments to produce resource frontiers. At the same time, we use it to raise questions

about the continuities and disjunctures of what we understand as the current round of incorporating margins across Asia. Resource frontiers are sites in which new forms of territorial power are formed through the convergence of a variety of forces. They are also windows onto broader processes of managing risk, facilitating accumulation, and reconfiguring sovereignty. Through the analytic of frontier assemblage, contributors offer a perspective on such transformations that does not – a priori – privilege specific causal understandings, but augers a mapping of flows, frictions, interests, and imaginations that accumulate in particular places to transformative effect.

Asian Margins in Flux?

As a rich literature shows, the dynamic tension between centres and margins is a key trope in Asian history. Whether for purposes of settling and managing questionable populations, instituting sedentary agrarian regimes, opening up new spaces for trade and capital expansion, shoring up colonial and national security, or producing 'buffer' zones between competing empires, the production and management of margins as frontiers has been a constant and unfolding challenge in the making of Asian sovereignties, territories, and regimes of rule. The tensions of incorporating fugitive landscapes in pre-colonial Southeast Asia (von Schendel, 2002; Tagliacozzo, 2005; Scott, 2009); the imperial management of peripheries in early Modern China (Crossley et al., 2006; Bryson, 2016); the colonial attempts to settle unruly frontiers in South Asia (Bayly, 2000; Ludden, 2011; Zou and Kumar, 2011); and the politics of managing postcolonial and Cold War rivalries in upland and remote spaces throughout the continent (McGranahan, 2010; Eilenberg, 2011, 2012; Guyot-Réchard, 2016); are but a few well known moments in which marginal space has become central to regional and geo-politics. A constant throughout this frontier history has been the uncertainties, anxieties, and failures inherent in attempts to incorporate marginal spaces into logics of territorial rule. Read broadly, frontiers in Asian history emerge not just as the bleeding edge of territorial expansions and empires, but as ambiguous sites where opportunity and possibility are intimately linked to resistance and official unease. The dynamics under examination in this volume, then, might be thought of as only the current round of a much longer historical dynamic.

Yet, the scope of this current moment of frontier expansion – alongside its human and ecological costs – demands a critical interrogation of the resonances and disjunctures in the making of new resource frontiers across the continent. There are a range of proximate drivers of this

current expansion. Ongoing waves of neoliberal reform have contributed to the opening up of both economies and particular spaces to foreign direct investment and corporate management. This is particularly apparent in the explosion of export processing and concession zones that have emerged across Southern Asia during and in the wake of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s. Alongside these dynamics of liberalization, neo-Malthusian narratives about scarcity have heralded massive expansions of plantation-based monocultures in marginal and upland space. A parallel Malthusian logic of energy security has wrought similar expansion. Marginal spaces across the continent are increasingly the sites of prospecting for oil, natural gas, and coal, as well as the locations for new and often massive hydro-electric projects. These processes constitute an important part of the broad and much debated 'global land grab' (Dwyer, 2013; Wolford et al., 2013b; Baird, 2014).

Collectively, these transformations in land and the meanings of both frontiers and marginal space might be thought of as a critical conjuncture in the longer trajectory of capital in Asia and beyond. Indeed, these phenomena have been a focal point of both activism and concerned scholarship in Asia over the past two decades. Scholars have critically examined the processes of producing marginal spaces as frontiers through analyses of enclosure, concessions, and special economic zones; the mapping of networks of national and transnational capital; and the exploration of the networks and circuits of labour involved in resource extraction (Tsing, 2005; Bach, 2011; Levien, 2011; Arnold, 2012; Eilenberg, 2012). Such analyses often figure resource frontiers as spatio-temporal fixes (Harvey, 2001): locales bound up in both producing value and solving a range of crises of over-accumulation. In other words, the political economy of these new resource frontiers situates them as key sites of capital: securing its expansion and insuring against its collapse.

Yet, as contributors to this volume demonstrate, capital is only one, if a central, force producing contemporary resource frontiers. Indeed, the chapters to come demonstrate a range of forces, actors, and processes equally crucial to the understanding of the current conjuncture. Many contributors highlight the various ways that futures and presents of environmental collapse lurk at the heart of frontier projects (Zee, Anderson, Paprocki, Choi). Others highlight the ways that the dynamics of imagination and fantasy shape new frontiers (Günel, Woodworth, McDuie-Ra). Still others trace the ways that the pasts of frontier production linger on and generate new possibilities and challenges within frontier space (Middleton, Lentz, Rubinov, Swanson). Key to all of these investigations are the ways that political economies of frontiers are always entangled with a broader array of factors that structure the

transformation of marginal space into frontier zone. Indeed, these entanglements themselves prove to be fruitful in understanding not only the dynamics of contemporary Asian resource frontiers, but the ways these spaces do and do not articulate with each other. Mapping these dynamics, then, offers ways to not only rethink resource frontiers, but to reimagine debates over globalization, with their often-narrow focus on urban space and networks of capital circulation. Indeed, such an outlook allows us to rethink and decentre the broad geopolitical paradigms that shape existing debates over resource frontiers and to open new questions about the structures and workings of both frontier space and global flow. To better understand these dynamics, we turn to our analytic of frontier assemblages.

Assemblages and Frontiers

'Frontier assemblage' brings together two highly, some might say hopelessly, overdetermined concepts in a single phrase. Both of these terms have been explored and debated in exhaustive detail elsewhere (Prescott, 1987; Donnan and Wilson, 1994; Baud and van Schendel, 1997; Wendl and Rösler, 1999; Geiger, 2008; Nail, 2017). Rather than rehearse these debates in full, we offer a thumbnail sketch of their genealogies before making a case for understanding resource frontiers *as* frontier assemblages.

The notion of assemblage springs from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 1987). It articulates an approach to understanding compositions of various sorts (social, ecological, territorial, etc.) beyond an analysis that reduces them to simple consequences of human behaviour. The concept is notoriously open-ended. As Deleuze argues, 'an assemblage is first and foremost what keeps very heterogeneous elements together: e.g. a sound, a gesture, a position, etc. both natural and artificial elements. The problem is one of "consistency" or "coherence", and it is prior to the problem of behavior' (Deleuze, 2007: 179). Assemblage, then, is a loose theoretical framework that seeks to destabilize classical models of social theory with their emphasis on human causality, and to replace it with what Deleuze calls 'hodgepodges': contingent collections of things whose coming together itself is not the precondition, but rather the object of inquiry.[3]

Our use of the notion of assemblage builds on framings in anthropology and geography that use it to map historically contingent convergences (Ong and Collier, 2005; Marcus and Saka, 2006; Li, 2007a; Anderson et al., 2012; Dittmer, 2014) and the ways they often coalesce in objects, spaces, and landscapes (Braun, 2005, 2006; Ogden, 2011; Ranganathan,

2015; Smith and Dressler, 2017). We use it not as a means of rejecting history, political economy, or biopower but rather to trace particular possibilities at specific moments and places. We offer readings that inquire into the material and discursive, human and non-human agencies involved in shaping connections between the often heterogeneous elements at play in the making of frontier space. Writing of conjuncture, a framework to which our notion of assemblage shares significant resemblance,[4] Tania Li writes, 'Rejecting notions of a functional equilibrium, a conjunctural approach treats practices that appear to hold constant for a period of time as a puzzle, as much in need of examination as dramatic change' (Li, 2014a: 18; see also Müller, 2015). Read as such, the examination of assemblages offers a way of understanding the temporalities and spatialities of configurations of frontier opportunity, value, and violence.[5] As Li further notes, within these assemblages 'elements are drawn together … only to disperse or realign, and the shape shifts according to the terrain and the angle of vision' (Li, 2007a: 265). Assemblage thus provides a 'frame of specific complexity around the vision of unstable, heterogeneous structure' (Marcus and Saka, 2006: 104). It directs us to understanding the social world as transitory, mosaic, and fluid and helps us understand or decipher the messy interactions between new strategies of capital accumulation and the politics of space and place in frontier zones (Massey, 1994). And perhaps most centrally, it offers a non-deterministic frame for thinking through the shifting temporalities, interests, materialities, and imaginations that cohere at particular moments to produce particular spaces as resource frontiers.

If assemblage's history is fairly short, the notion of the frontier has a longer and more ambiguous trajectory. The term has been widely, and often unreflectively, applied as a heuristic device to describe processes of transition, exclusion and inclusion both physically and figuratively. There are myriad ways to approach the subject and a lack of anything resembling conceptual consensus has made defining the concept a challenging endeavour. The concept of frontier first emerged in Europe in the fourteenth century with the French word 'frontière' indicating a façade in architecture. Only later did it come to mean the limits of state control or edge of empire (Rieber, 2001: 5812; see also Febvre, 1973). There is an intimate, but often unclear, relationship between the word and the concept of frontier (Febvre, 1973). Within the English and American tradition this is further complicated by the use of the word interchangeably to denote literal borderlines, figurative borderlands, regions just beyond the pale of settled areas, and the process of territorial expansion of state authority or civilization into remote 'wastelands' and margins (Wendl and Rösler, 1999; Brown, 2010). As Redclift argues, 'The frontier is both a boundary *and* a device for social exclusion, a zone of transition *and*

new cultural imaginary' (Redclift, 2006: viii). Frontiers often refer to regions where the state is presumed to struggle to assert its authority and is thinly spread (hence the notion of 'frontier justice' as a form of violent rule that is negotiated at an eminently local level). But frontiers are also liminal spaces open for production and inventiveness (Korf and Raeymaekers, 2013). They can be zones of Schumpeterian creative destruction and transformation where imagined wastelands and back-waters presented as unoccupied and vacant are turned into sites of capital accumulation. At the same time, they may also become spaces of social experimentation, innovation and hybridity where new political subjectivities are shaped and new governance structures tested.

For our purposes, we understand frontiers as *imaginative* – zones in which the material realities of place are inextricably bound to various visions of and cultural vocabularies for what the frontier is and might be. To that end, three classic framings of the frontier are useful to keep in mind as we develop our argument. These framings are not objective realities or ideal types of frontier spaces. Rather, they are imaginations of the relationship between margins and centres that, as authors in this volume show, have grave and eminently tangible implications for these spaces and those living within them. First, the frontier is often imagined as integral to broader economic activity. The frontier has historically been framed not only as a space of entrepreneurial opportunity, but as a zone that is fundamental to the survival of capitalism itself. This argument can be traced through any number of theories of political economy, but is particularly evident in the Marxian tradition. Here, the frontier figures alongside of surplus-value as the (other) engine of capital. Frontiers are the condition of possibility for capitalist expansion (Patel and Moore, 2017). They are the sites in the midst of incorporations and enclosures through what Marx called primitive accumulation (1976) and what Harvey reframes as accumulation by dispossession (2005). Here, frontiers are sites where capitalist crises of over-accumulation are resolved in ways that forestall broader crises and systemic collapse. In other words, frontiers are imagined to be the necessary historical counterweights to industrialization. Our suggestion in calling this an imagination is not to take issue with Harvey. Indeed, in many of the sites explored in this volume, accumulation by dispossession seems an apt descriptor. Rather, it is to call attention to a particular vision of frontiers that reduces them to functions of capital. This vision of the frontier, we suggest, animates a broader understanding of frontiers as crucial spaces that hold the key to economic expansion, development, and growth.

The second is the anxious imagination of the frontier as a site of danger and lawlessness. Here, frontiers are construed as the rims of empire – spaces at the limit of the reach of state control. The frontier is

the literal margin of the state, a zone ambiguously within state power, where law and order are limited, loyalties are questionable or ephemeral, and security is at once crucial and tenuous (Das and Poole, 2004; Tambiah, 2013). A classic articulation of this imagination is Lord Curzon's famous *Frontiers* lecture (Curzon, 1907). Written against the backdrop of the Great Game for empire in central Asia, Curzon, the Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, imagines frontiers as spaces that are little understood even as they are at the heart of colonial politics. Curzon argues that frontiers are potential instruments of rule – spaces that, if they *could* be demarcated, managed through sound colonial policy, and settled, might prove as bulwarks against chaos. Yet, his treatise simultaneously identifies them as spaces that are unquiet and hard to govern. He thus imagines the deployment of political technologies of territorial rule (Elden, 2013) as able to transform these spaces from sites of imperial anxiety to instruments of imperial peace. At the same time, his lecture points to the limits of such technologies for settling imperial space. Curzon's piece is thus a paradigmatic framing of the 'unruly frontier': a zone that is once ungovernable and in urgent need of government, a space that needs territorial incorporation but might be unincorporable.

The third is the imagination of the frontier as a wilderness space: untouched, unpeopled, and open for exploitation. This framing is resonant with Frederick Jackson Turner's 'Frontier Thesis'. Turner's well-trod and critiqued argument describes the influx of European settlers into the American 'wild west' in search of 'free land' as transforming spaces of wilderness and vastness into spaces of civilization and order. For Turner, this was part of a short-lived linear process of exploitation, conquest and pacification that steadily would engulf the wilderness and its primitive population, therein closing the frontier. In the words of Turner the frontier was thus the 'meeting point between savagery and civilization' (Turner, 1920: 3). Turner's writing describes a specifically North American process. Yet, it resonates with a much broader contemporary and historical pattern of representing frontiers in terms of discovery, emptiness and underuse – a trope that legitimates 'progressive' development and control of the margins (Li, 2014b). As Anna Tsing notes, 'frontiers create wildness so that some – and not others – may reap their rewards' (Tsing, 2005: 27). In other words, part of the acme of frontiers are their often-fictive framing as unpeopled wilderness, pregnant with possibility and open for intervention.

Though careworn, these imaginative tropes of frontier thinking remain key ways of framing marginal spaces – borders, borderlands, upland areas, remote forest zones, deserts, steppes, coastal hinterlands, 'waste'

or 'idle' zones – as resource frontiers. They help imagine these spaces as simultaneously critical, open, and in need of intervention.

Resource Frontiers as Frontier Assemblages

Based on our collective observations of contemporary territorial transformation across Asia, we believe an alternative mode of imagining – and analysing – frontiers is in order. The analytic of frontier assemblages provides a way to interrogate the contingency, emergence, rupture, possibility, and visions of modernity at work in these projects. Yet, equally importantly, is to show how these spaces emerge as new laboratories of socio-economic, ecological, and spatial ordering (Tilley, 2011; Cons, 2018). We set ourselves the task of not only understanding who wins and who loses in these new configurations, but also how the conditions of success and failure emerge in often surprising and contingent ways. We enquire into the ways that resource frontiers become strategic spaces for assembling land as a resource for investment (Li, 2014b). Moreover, we ask about the broader processes at work that precede, constitute, and follow the assembling of resource frontiers as epicentres of extraction and production.

In developing this analytic, we build on the long tradition of work on resource exploitation in political ecology (see for example Peluso, 1992; Peet and Watts, 1996; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Heynan et al., 2007; Perreault, Bridge, and McCarthy, 2015) and rich work within this tradition that has begun to map new resource frontiers in Asia and beyond (Fold and Hirsch, 2009; McCarthy and Cramb, 2009; De Koninck et al., 2011; Laungaramsri, 2012; Hall, 2013; Bennike, 2017; Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). Existing work has provided insight into the complex, multi-scalar factors that shape these interventions and expansions. It also sheds light on the relationships between the complexities of place and broader geopolitical transformations that are increasingly central to the economic and political agenda of many Asian states (Sturgeon, 2005; De Koninck, 2006; Barney, 2009; Hirsch, 2009; Lund, 2011; Woods, 2011a, b; Laungaramsri, 2012; Levien, 2012; Cons and Sanyal, 2013; Lagerqvist, 2013; Eilenberg, 2014). This research has outlined a set of crucial dynamics for understanding contemporary frontier assemblages and their histories. Drawing on the case of Laos, Barney, for example, argues that state agencies utilize the discourse of 'the last frontier' as a strategy for attracting transnational investment and legitimating the conversion of its uplands into capital-intensive resource extraction zones. Barney here applies the notion of the 'patchworked frontier' to frame the relations between new global investments and

previous regimes of resource governance that produce overlapping mosaics of regulation and control (Barney, 2009: 147). Such 'frontier neoliberalism' is a cyclical phenomena that waxes and wanes according to the strength of the state and the pressure of global markets (Wolford et al., 2013a). Büscher reiterates that, 'frontiers have special significance in a neoliberal political economy. Neoliberalism needs frontiers … neoliberal capitalism thrives on frontiers' (2013: 10). However, these new expansions are instruments not just of profit, but also of making troublesome spaces legible, manageable, and secure. State-backed funding (and military security) for private investors has often created reassurance for large-scale investments and new business opportunities in these often politically contested spaces. Moreover, as contributors to this volume show, the current round of frontier making in Asia cannot narrowly be described as the outcome of neoliberal processes (see Rubinov; Zee; Choi; Woodworth; Lentz, this volume). Many of the frontier zones under examination herein emerge out of socialist and post-socialist histories and trajectories that resonate with neoliberal projects even as they complicate our understandings of their meanings (Collier, 2011).

Broadly across Asia, resource frontiers are emerging as spaces of legalized lawlessness where aleatory forms of sovereignty determine who qualifies for citizenry and who will be excluded from the nation-state project (Dunn and Cons, 2014). We see these accelerated processes of dispossession in states such as Myanmar and Indonesia where resource frontiers are often militarized spaces for control and extraction (Woods, 2011a; Eilenberg, 2014). Military involvement in resource extraction and land dispossession in Asian frontiers as a whole is not a novel phenomenon. It can be traced back to the counter-insurgencies of the Cold War era where many of the burgeoning Asian nation-states were plunged into violent conflict, instigating processes of forced resettlement, resource exploitation and firm military control (De Koninck, 2006; Peluso and Vandergeest, 2011). Many of these frontier zones have since been under various forms of military authority, often becoming zones for economic exploitation generating revenue for military budgets. As noted by Rasmussen and Lund, 'Frontier spaces are where the often violent destruction of previous orders take place, and the territorialization of new orders begins' (2018: 396). In this sense, converting marginal spaces into resource frontiers has codified state power in these unruly landscapes and strengthened control of areas that often trouble territorial sovereignty. Both in their past and present iterations, their reframing as resource frontiers heralds a new wave of interventions within them.

The Dynamics of Frontier Assemblage

Frontier assemblage draws attention to the lifecycles of these frontier spaces, the dynamics of their emergence, their unravelling, and their aftermaths. While these dynamics fluctuate in ways that defy simple causal explanations, they do share characteristics and resonances that demand comparison. In the remainder of this introduction, we frame a set of dynamics that contributors show are key to, but often obscured in, processes of making new resources frontiers.

To do this, we suggest decentering, though not eliminating, a focus on financialization in the making of frontiers. The financialization of frontier space might be thought of as, following Randy Martin, a process whereby socio-spatial relationships and affiliations are 'reconfigured to extract wealth as an ends by means of risk management' (Martin, 2007: 7; see also Roy, 2012). Understood this way, resource frontiers appear as key sites in a broader terrain of what Ananya Roy calls *riskscapes* – formations of territory organized around broader technologies of managing accumulation and risk (Roy, 2012). In this broader territory, resource frontiers are risky sites of risk management – spaces in which broader crisis is mitigated through extraction carried out in often short-term, capital intensive, and speculative ways (see contributions to this volume by Anderson and Paprocki). Yet to understand the formation of these riskscapes, we suggest, requires understanding financialization, social transformation, politics, and ecological change as mutually constituted with and in resource frontiers. To that end, we trace three linked dynamics that are intimately connected to financialization but often take surprising relationships to it.

Frontierization

Frontiers are mutable, temporal, and mobile entities (Cronon, 1996). They emerge at particular conjunctures and disappear at others. They have lifecycles, deaths, and occasionally, peculiar rebirths (Geiger, 2008; Korf and Raeymaekers, 2013). Moreover, they do not have fixed boundaries. From any one place, a 'frontier' can bleed out, expand, and contract. The frontier can move on and return. At the same time, the frontier might be resurrected in new forms that build on the ruins of others (see Lentz, Middleton, and Rubinov, this volume). Such dynamics often serve the needs of capital. But their emergence hinges on a broader range of techniques than land acquisition and investment alone. Indeed, of crucial import here are the temporalities of frontiers, the ways that

they form and deform at particular conjunctures and disjunctures. As contributors to this volume show, understanding the framings and potentialities of frontier space requires thinking equally about frontier time.

Anna Tsing argues that a frontier is 'an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, not yet regulated. It is a zone of unmapping: even in its planning, a frontier is imagined as unplanned…. Their wildness is made of visions and vines and violence: it is both material and imaginative' (Tsing, 2003: 5100; see also Bridge, 2001). Tsing's evocative description highlights a need to think beyond a narrow framing of frontiers as places where resources are discovered and subsequently exploited. Rather, it underscores what we see as a need to understand the processes of making the frontier as eminently entangled: anchored in the imaginative, the material, the known and the unknown.

What might this mean for investigations of 'frontier' assemblages? As various authors have shown, a critical element in making the frontier is the framing of these spaces as timeless, unpeopled lands – open to extraction and exploitation of various sorts. This suggests that frontierization must be understood as a process of radically simplifying the meanings of a space to, primarily, the things valued within it. This simplification implies that the relationship between resources and spaces is anything but incidental. Rather, in resource frontiers, resources and frontiers are co-constituted. Yet, this relationship and the techniques on which its production hinge, are highly unstable. Making the frontier, as Tsing notes, is an unmapping of place – a reduction and elimination of the dynamics that constitute a specific locale through a process of rendering extractable: transforming space and place into land and property ripe for exploitation. Accomplishing such feats requires a range of representational and inscriptive technologies – maps, satellite images, fences, property titles, etc. (Li, 2014b). Yet, the relationship between reality and its representation is never an innocent one. As Timothy Mitchell notes, the mapmaker, or the inscriptive technology more broadly, 'cannot keep reality out of (its) representation' (Mitchell, 2002: 116). Landscapes and the people, flora, and fauna within them are active participants in the making of the frontier, even as they are rendered invisible or as technical problems to be managed through discursive and material force. The notion of the frontier then might best be thought of as an enframing strategy whereby space is rendered as an extractive territory temporarily open for frontier management (Mitchell, 1991; see also Heidegger, 1977). Yet resource frontiers are spaces that regularly fail to conform to such renderings. These various failures constitute the terrains of breakdown, contestation, and conflict that

often characterize resource frontiers in contemporary Asia. The things erased in the making of the 'frontier' return: sometimes as hauntings, sometimes as unanticipated dynamics which foil neatly laid plans, sometimes as violent resistance.

An analysis attentive to the ways that landscapes themselves are entangled in the making of the frontier, opens a set of critical questions for understanding frontier assemblages (Ogden, 2011). It points towards a rethinking of the materiality of terrain and a necessity to see violence not only as the byproduct of capital (Sivaramakrishnan, 1999; Elden, 2010). Yet, it also focuses our attention on the outcomes and effects of the frontier itself, and the ongoing questions of life in the midst of ruination (Stoler, 2013). Resource frontiers, precisely through their 'productive' capacities, produce ruins (Choi, this volume). They denote extractions from landscapes in ways that often irrevocably transform them. Frontiers leave land in their wake in which the relationships between landscape and the people, animals, and plants found within them might be permanently transformed (Hall et al., 2011). Moreover, the kinds of transformations wrought by extractive projects have unfolding and ongoing effects – whether through pollutants and toxicity, the integration of margins into the fold of governmental power through new infrastructure, or the permanent alteration of land and property relations (see Choi; Woodworth; and Zee, this volume). As Gaston Gordillo notes, attending to the rubble that remains in the wake of such projects 'helps us understand the ruptured multiplicity that is constitutive of all geographies as they are produced, destroyed and remade' (Gordillo, 2014:2). To understand frontierization and its production of mobile, mutable frontiers thus demands attention to what happens when frontiers move on and, as Kasia Paprocki argues here, to the ways ruination itself is imagined as an object and opportunity in planning schemes.

Remoteness/proximity

The concept of a 'frontier', not dissimilar to that of a 'colony', articulates a relationship of spatial control. The frontier is a zone at once 'in relation to' and 'at a distance from'. It exists in dialectic tension with metropoles and centres of various sorts (Stoler and Cooper, 1997). The production of the frontier as an anomalous zone is a relation of distance that licences certain forms of experimentation within it (Sivaramakrishnan, 1999). This presumed distance is precisely what characterizes and legitimates intervention and redistribution within it (Swanson, this volume). Yet, frontiers often prove to be much more proximate than they are

imagined – whether as spaces which become intimately linked to metropoles through migration, through atmospheric displacements such as those discussed by Jerry Zee in this volume, or through infrastructures such as pipes and roads. Indeed, as urbanization driven growth models increasingly characterize expansion around Asia, the distinction between frontiers and centres further blurs (see McDui-Ra; Choi, this volume). The imaginations of distance often give way to realities that tie the frontier tightly to the space from which it is framed as remote (see Günel, this volume). Thinking through this dynamic tension, we suggest, is productive for understanding the ways that frontier assemblages emerge.

Particularly instructive here is a classic essay by anthropologist Edwin Ardener which posits a phenomenology of remote areas. For Ardener, the relations of remoteness must be understood as a social relation intimately bound up in power. As he writes, 'The actual geography (of a remote area) is not the overriding feature – it is obviously necessary that "remoteness" has a position in topographical space, but it is defined within a *topological* space whose features are expressed in a cultural vocabulary' (Ardener, 2012: 532). For Ardener, the geography and geometry of remoteness are fundamentally relational in character, constituted by the social and cultural configurations and imaginations of territory. This topology articulates a relationship whereby spaces might be simultaneously imagined as peripheral and central to national, and other kinds, of territory (Cons, 2016, 2018). Remoteness, as such, is a dialectical formation that produces possibilities, opportunities, and relationships of power. As Harms and Hussain write in a recent commentary on Ardener, 'remoteness is not so much a place as a way of being' (2014: 362; see also Mathur, 2016).

We suggest that this socially constituted relation of remoteness is a fundamental characteristic of resource frontiers, one that contributors to this volume are at pains to elaborate (see Günel; Middleton; McDuie-Ra; Rubinov; Woodworth, this volume). While these dynamics shift from place to place, remoteness describes a particular landscape of opportunity, illicit intervention, and regulatory power. Ardener enigmatically writes that 'remote areas turn out to be like gangster hideouts – full of activity and half-recognized faces' (Ardener, 2012: 524). Another way of saying this is that the notion of a remote area articulates an imagination of space and the people residing within it as on the margins of the pale – as living at the limits of state power and making a living out of ambiguous relations to it. This ambiguous liminality of frontier space demands an attention that traces not only the social production of remoteness, but also the tensions, anxieties, and recursive interventions that remoteness heralds.

Overlapping rule

Our final point of departure for frontier assemblages is to build on longstanding critiques of the notion of state, sovereignty, and territory to foreground frontier spaces as especially brittle and contingent parts of the mask of state territorial control (Abrams, 1988). Frontiers emerge as spaces where the veneers and contradictions of rule are often particularly apparent. This is not to subscribe to the imagination of frontier spaces as a fault line between chaos and control and between rule and lawlessness. Rather, it is to recognize that they are spaces in which multiple interests, bids for sovereign control, and attempts to monopolize opportunity and access often accumulate (see Anderson; McDuie-Ra; Paprocki, this volume). Such accumulations are further complicated through the dialectics of official attention and neglect that often characterize margins throughout Asia (Cons, 2016).

Frontier assemblages thus often emerge out of longstanding contestations and combinations of sovereign and territorial power (Lentz, Swanson, this volume). They are spaces within which a multiplicity of interests and forms of rule accumulate and overlap to produce spaces that are *anything but* unruled, even if they may fail to cohere to state, corporate, transnational agencies or other sovereigns' logics of legibility, order, and control. Rather, the patterns of governance and rule that emerge within frontier spaces often have an aleatory character to them, a sense that rule is unknowable, unpredictable, and often accomplished by chance (Dunn and Cons, 2014). In other words, frontier assemblages are rarely projects of successfully shoring up uniform and coherent governance. More often, they are characterized by multiple interventions seeking to order land, people, and nature that unfold in ways that are often indeterminate, both for those who live within these spaces and for those who seek to govern them. Sometimes patterns of overlapping rule in frontiers produce coherent regimes of extraction, exploitation, and opportunity. Sometimes they contest with and undermine one another. Sometimes they produce surprising and unintended results which foreclose on old opportunities while evolving new ones.

These contingent configurations should not be understood as failures to develop regimes of sovereign control, but rather as, themselves, the frameworks of rule within frontier space. Christian Lund argues that patterns of control over land should not be understood as reflecting pre-existing conditions of sovereignty and power. Instead, they produce it. That is to say, the overlapping claims to control that often characterize frontier space should be understood as assembling particular, albeit fragmented, forms of sovereignty and rule (Lund, 2011). Frontier spaces thus trouble understandings of sovereignty as a project of interiorization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Agamben, 1998). Here, they emerge as ambiguous zones

that are neither clearly and coherently within nor outside the logics of territorial rule. This ambiguity is often complicit in provoking territorial and cartographic anxieties over the nature of frontier land, of the resources in it, and of its residents (Krishna, 1996; Billé, 2016; Cons, 2016). A critical task of the analyst of frontier assemblages is to understand how these fragments do, or do not, cohere (McDuie-Ra, 2016).

Conclusion

The chapters that follow trace the formation of frontier assemblages across Asia. We seek to chart a set of resonances and processes that are at once hyper and trans local. Our approach to understanding these assemblages is not to chart out an exhaustive network of factors that make frontiers, but rather to illuminate a series of often overlooked processes and imaginations at work in the assembly of new resource frontiers in Asia. Authors in this volume contribute studies from diverse regions across the continent. While far from exhaustive, we here offer explorations of frontiers in South Asia (McDuie-Ra, Middleton, Paprocki), South-East Asia (Anderson and Lentz), West Asia (Günel), Central Asia (Rubinov), and East Asia (Choi, Swanson, Woodworth, and Zee). In doing so, we offer a theoretical and methodological experiment in bringing radically different resource frontiers into the same analytic frame. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate the productive value in understanding resource frontier assemblage as a set of loosely linked processes that are happening within and across space.

This book is conceived as a dialogue between scholars of Asian frontiers and margins. It is divided into four thematic sections – experimentations, cultivations, expansions, and (re)assemblies – tracing different dynamics unfolding in and through frontier assemblages in Asia today. These thematic sections index various different processes that are at once historical and are increasingly mobilized in the production of frontiers today. Each section is introduced with a brief framing essay that situates the theoretical and empirical projects of each chapter against the broader literature on and historical trajectory of frontiers, resources, and resource frontiers in Asia.

The first section, 'Frontier Experimentations', traces a set of novel reworkings of frontier space to facilitate new kinds of management and control, particularly in the face of climate and environmental change. It charts the production of frontiers through anticipatory imaginations of climate ruination in Bangladesh (Paprocki), the reinvention of the sub-surface as a frontier of carbon storage in contemporary climate change debates (Günel), and the logics of managing dust in urban areas such as

Bejing through sedentarizing and retraining mobile populations in central Asia (Zee). The second section, 'Frontier Cultivations', maps the ways that cultivation and growth are bound up in resource frontier processes both old and new. It examines logics of cultivation and care in resource frontiers through new Green Economy policies for managing climate change in Indonesia (Anderson), social practices of grafting fruit trees in post-frontier Kazakhstan (Rubinov), and the logics of salmon cultivation and redistribution in Hokkaido, Japan (Swanson). The third section, 'Frontier Expansions', traces the articulations between urban growth and frontier space, examining the ways that urbanization is increasingly, if paradoxically, a central trope in Asian resource frontiers. It traces this expansion and incorporation through the development of new Chinese eco-cities on land reclaimed from the ocean (Choi), monuments and ghost-towns in urban peripheries in China (Woodworth), and the emergence of private healthcare markets in Imphal, India (McDuie-Ra). The final section, 'Frontier (Re)Assemblies', questions the after-lives and reinventions of frontier space. It does this through an examination of the long and unfolding history of cinchona plantations in India's Darjeeling region (Middleton) and the subsumed histories of a contemporary hydro-electric resource frontier in Vietnam (Lentz).

This volume offers a set of what Prasenjit Duara has called convergent comparisons that illuminate emerging dynamics reconfiguring relations to land and accumulation within Asia and beyond (Duara, 2016). The book interrogates this unprecedented transformation and the complex array of actors, forces, and ecologies that constitute it. That said, our notion of assemblages does not suggest a random or incommensurate coming together of these relationships. As Li writes, 'a conjuncture [or an assemblage] isn't radically contingent: all of the elements that constitute it have histories and there are spatial configurations that make certain pathways easier or more difficult' (Li, 2014a: 150). We see these relationships and their histories as the starting point of critique – a set of processes in need of demonstration and elaboration if one is to understand the ways that contemporary and historical Asian resource frontiers continue to dramatically shape politics, socialities, ecologies, and economies.

Notes

1   See for example (De Koninck et al., 2011; Pye and Bhattacharya, 2012; Fox and Castella, 2013; Verbrugge, 2015; Peluso, 2018).
2   In referencing Tsing's (1993) notion of an 'out-of-the-way place', we invoke her understanding of marginality as not simply a geography but a set of social and political relations with long and often violent histories. Margins and marginality, for her, are cultural and political constructions. These

   constructions are 'about the process in which people [and we would add places] are marginalized as their perspectives are cast to the side or excluded. It is also about the ways in which people actively engage their marginality by protesting, reinterpreting, and embellishing their exclusion' (1993: 5). The notion of margins and 'out-of-the-way places' articulates well with Ardener's (2012) discussion of remoteness, which we build on later in this chapter.

3 Such an approach has proven particularly productive for scholars engaged in Actor-Network Theory and the post-human turn because the move towards assemblage opens the possibility for a rethinking of agency – one which is not intelligible within enlightenment epistemologies organized around the binary of nature (as passive non-actant or stage) and culture (humans as the sole and heroic drivers of historical change) (DeLanda, 2006; Latour, 2007; Bennet, 2010; Müller and Schurr, 2016).

4 Conjuncture and assemblage draw from different theoretical traditions (Gramscian and Deleuzian respectively), and thus harbour markedly different epistemic positions. Yet, following work in the anthropology of the state, we argue that keeping these perspectives in productive tension with one another offers broader perspectives on the makings, ambiguities, and temporalities of the frontier (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001).

5 The notion of assemblage that we are working with here bears similarities to Althusser's notion of a 'complex whole', where multiple temporalities come together to produce a time of times that 'cannot be *read* in the continuity of the time of life or clocks, but has to be *constructed* out of the peculiar structures of production' (Althusser et al., 2015: 248). Our thanks to Vinay Gidwani for pointing this out.