

Universality of Bilateral Cities

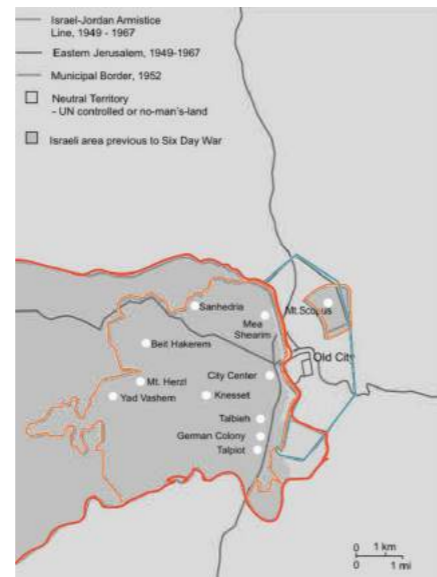
Before discussing the complex issue of the boundary line between the US and Mexico, we can extend the scope to the whole world where we can find that it has long been a very common problem for such similar boundary between two countries. Among them, some countries have expanded bilateral trade and strengthened economic exchanges. On the contrary, some other countries have created many contradictions and hostility to each other because of this boundary, resulting in such thick walls. In the case study below, several well-known global boundary issues will be analyzed, from which we will learn how the two countries benefit from this boundary by developing bilateral relations or how this boundary brings a series of social problems and economic contradictions.

Israel-Palestinian border

When you open Google Maps to find Israel, you may be confused by various lines or interlaced or parallel solid lines and dotted lines. Some of them are ceasefire lines, and some are treaty lines. It is a really complicated thing for those who want to figure out what is true Israel-Palestinian border. Since the end of World War II, a large number of Jews have returned to the Palestinian territories. This "exodus" has led to more and more Jews in this area, thus causing great conflict and hostility with the Palestinians who originally lived in this area. After the "Six-day War" in 1967, the Israelis gradually controlled the West Bank of the Jordan River, including the Golan Heights.¹ When this land originally belonging to the Palestinians were taken over by the Israelites, the conflict and hostility naturally broke out. The conflict that took place on the border between Palestine and Israel was accompanied by the explosion of suicide bombs and the bombing of aircraft. It has not been alleviated until now. The reason behind this kind of conflict is not only the difference between the nation and religion, but also the interference of different international forces in the situation. All of them make the Palestinian-Israeli border an extremely complicated political issue.

North Korea-South Korea border

This boundary is parallel to the 38° north latitude, which we call 38 line. The number of mines buried between the demilitarized zone and the borders of massive military forces on both sides makes this border the most dangerous border area in the world. In the Panmunjom area, you will see a very dramatic scene: on both sides of



1 Israel-Palestinian border <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/Maps/Pages/Israel%20in%20Maps.aspx>



2 African migrants try to cross a border fence and enter the Spanish enclave of Melilla, March, 2014. José Colón—AFP



3 El-Pasot(left) and Juarez(right), October, 2017. Muran Yang

the cement line, people wearing different styles of military uniforms stand about 5 cm high. They can only stand side by side, but can not move forward. It is hard to imagine that there are two opposite ideologies and political systems on either side of the two shallow cement lines in the world. On April 27, 2018, the leaders of the DPRK and the ROK once again crossed this military demarcation line. The relationship between the two sides reached the most moderate stage after the armistice. However, we still need to observe the future development of the DPRK-ROK border.

Spain-Morocco border

The borders between the two countries are very special in many of the world's border issues: Ceuta is one of Spain's two overseas enclaves, surrounded by Morocco with an area of only 18.5 square kilometers. In recent years, in the background of a large number of African immigrants flocking to the European continent, Ceuta has been the bridgehead for these illegally invaded refugees entering Europe because of its special geographical location

In the past, as many as 800 African refugees rushed over the 6-meter-high border wall to reach the streets of Ceuta, which made the Spanish government and people miserable. This border has much in common with the US-Mexico border: one country is underdeveloped, such as Mexico and Morocco, and the other is a developed country. In addition, Spain's population aging problem will be particularly evident compared to the United States. It is estimated that by 2050, the proportion of Spaniards over the age of 65 is expected to reach 37%. Faced with such a serious problem, Morocco, located in opposite of the Iberian Peninsula, is able to provide a large number of young and middle-aged labor. In the face of such a dilemma, the Spanish government seems extremely vulnerable.

In addition, there are a large number of borders facing the same problem. In the early twentieth century, countries only considered the boundary issues from the perspective of security strategy. The border was regarded as a sacred embodiment of national sovereignty, and it played an important role in resisting external aggression. However, after the end of the war, with the rapid development of globalization, the state no longer existed as a single entity in the system of international transactions. The explosive development of cross-border trade has made labor costs the most important factor for business consideration. A large number of border cities have developed rapidly, especially

those between the First World and Third World countries, such as the US-Mex border, the Singapore-Malay border, and the Western European border. These border cities appear in pairs in the form of "twin cities." Although the political and economic systems on both sides of this border may be quite different, social, economic, and cultural exchanges have made both of them a great development at the city level. As some scholars have said: the urbanized borderlands are spaces of exploitation and exclusion, with serious economic and social inequalities and political disenfranchisement.²

Capital and Manpower Exchanges On the US-Mexico Border

—Space Connection

Among all the borders between developed and developing countries, the US-Mexico border is the longest in the world. The world's busiest borderline has also become extremely complex as it is full of bilateral trade, communications, drug trafficking, murder, corruption, etc. This complex set of factors are intermingled to form this boundary. "After Canada and China, Mexico is the other most important trade partner of the United States. with the common border between the two nations- a site of rapid development and exponential growth in trade-plays an integral role in the partnership's dynamics."³

When it comes to the US-Mexico border, the role of NAFTA is by no means looked down upon. Since the entry into force of NAFTA in 1994, the United States has accounted for 62% of foreign investment in Mexico.⁴ However, this free trade agreement for the three North American countries did not create enough jobs for Mexico to reduce Mexican immigration to the United States, as originally expected, but greatly increased Mexican immigration. For example, just as the problem faced by Mexican farmers is the share of wheat produced in the United States in the Mexican market has increased from 56% to 75% due to the implementation of NAFTA.⁵ In order to survive in such an extremely shrinking market, farmers have to choose to abandon their work to seek new development opportunities and the best one is to go across the border to pursue

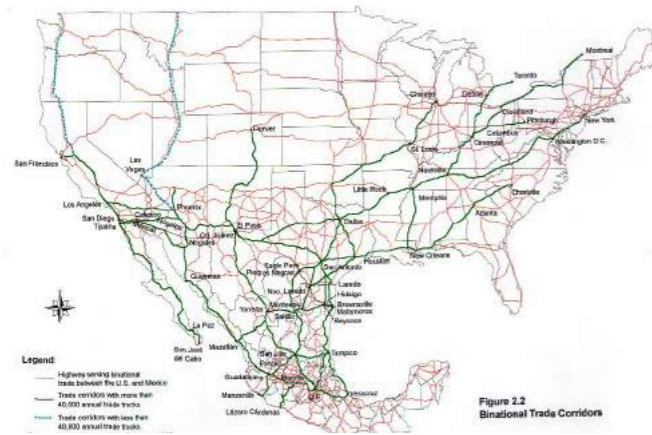


Figure 2.2
Binational Trade Corridors

4 From Binational Border Transportation Planning and Programming Study, Task 2, 1998 (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration)



5 Lanes of cars line up along the U.S.-Mexico border at the port of entry at San Ysidro, California and Tijuana, Baja California. The port is the largest land border crossing point in the world. Tomas van Houtryve—VII



6 An auto parts manufacturing facility, located in Nogales, Mexico, where electronic parts are made for vehicles worldwide. Known in Mexico as a maquiladora, it is a factory with a special customs designation. Image by © Louie Palu/ZUMA. Mexico, 2012.

the dreams in the north. Not only Mexicans, but also other South Americans regard these cities as their first stops in the United States which tend to become a paradise for criminals because of the lack of adequate facilities and sufficient manpower to manage them. The relationship between these border cities of the United States and Mexico also become complex due to the inequality of capital and human exchange, which is embodied in the aspects of economic and social connections.

Social connections

International border commuting is different from that of international immigrants. Workers who travel through the US-Mexico border every day do not want to leave their homeland, but need to work on the other side of the border. The daily transit to work is actually more like a bridge inside a city across the domain. However, the existence of the border line makes this road take much longer and become more difficult to go. Since 1924, a series of bills have made fluctuation to the status of these international commuters. However, according to statistics, there are about 160,000 commuters in these “twin cities” on the US-Mexico border every day. It is estimated that there are still 100,000 illegal border crossers working in the United States.⁶ These commuters bring not only the output of manpower, but also the connections of social networks on both sides of the border. With the frequent daily interaction of commuters, these traditional settlements on both sides become the international residential space which has the same natural environment.

Economic ties

In many economic activities, the emergence of export processing zones is the most important thing to promote the rapid development of the border cities of the United States and Mexico. Maquiladora, a term that specifically represents the US-Mexico factory, accounted for 54.7% of Mexico's manufacturing exports in 2000.⁷ In the early 1960s, a large number of assembly plants begin to appear on the US-Mexico border which is also a signal of transition from the global manufacturing industry to new technologies. When the capitalists divide the manufacturing steps into research and development, component development, assembly, and distribution, they find that the process of production and assembly is actually a labor-intensive industry and foreign cheap labor can be utilized to greatly reduce the cost. Since the mid-1960s, about 1,500 foreign assembly plants have been built in Mexico, and nearly 90% of these foreign-owned factories



7 Carrying one passenger and pulling another, a ferryman leads aliens across the river and into the U.S. (el_paso_carry_across_bw_1992.jpg - Photo Credit: Bruce Sharp)

in the country are located on the US-Mexico border where they can enjoy the cheap labor of Mexico, the developed American highways and infrastructure networks.⁸ On the north side of the border is a capital-intensive economy that provides inputs for labor-intensive economy on the southern side of the border. Once the products are ready, they will re-enter the United States again. At the same time, this seemingly symbiotic relationship has also brought some concerns: the northern interests are worried that Mexican workers will have an impact on the employment of American citizens, while the Mexicans on the south worry that a large amount of capital input leads to a large number of loss of property and shares.

The Concrete Manifestation of the Border Problem of El Paso

“I love that El Paso has the dual culture of two countries. — Amy”

When the plane I take slowly skims across the city, I try to find the dividing line of the sister city, but what disappoints me is that there are only small buildings on the earth in front of my eyes, extending from the front to the horizon. In addition, the texture of the city merges with the earth. “Where is the border wall?” With such doubts, I start a trip in the city of El Paso.

As we drive on a highway parallel to the border between the two countries, I keep looking south and find a 18-foot-high steel wall stretching across the highway between the cities of El Paso and Juarez. Through this steel cable wall, I can clearly see the messy small houses in Mexico which seem to cover the land on the other side and become a unique landscape attaching to the earth. We finally have the opportunity to get in touch with the border wall, but when we get off the van, a green and white border patrol car quickly approaches us along the cable wall and



8 This banner, located in Terlingua is emblematic of some south Brewster County residents. Photo: John Waters.

the soldiers ask us about our intention to get close to the cable wall. In an instant, there comes the tense atmosphere in the air.

Driving at the highway close to the boundary, to my surprise is that we can clearly see the concrete passage under the cross-border bridge where there is a shallow turbid river. In my mind, the river that originates in the snow-capped mountains of Colorado should be a river with a wide water surface or a rich natural environment, but what appears is that a nearly dry water flow traps in a narrow concrete passage. After the US-Mexico War ended in 1848, Mexico cedes the current California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico to the United States and the centerline of Rio Grand's river is set as the border between the two countries. At the border meeting in 1884, as the river changes its course every year, US officials propose a plan to maintain a fixed border between the two countries in a fixed manner which is finally implemented in 1963. The river is fixed on the bank of concrete, thus, the border between the two countries is fixed.⁹ As the river is transferred to one side of the irrigation ditch, it causes the Rio Grande's river to become almost dry with less and less water, so there is only a concrete river bank as a symbol of the boundary in front of my eyes. "I grew up here 50 years ago," said Susan, a white woman in her 60s. "The

situation now is different. We played on the banks of Rio Grande, which would flood the river and change direction. Suddenly you don't know what the country you are in. You know, the border will cross you."¹⁰ As time goes by, the changes in policy make the original life of El Paso no longer possible.

From the photo listed aside, We can find that although this concrete river bank is built, it does not seem to stop the Mexicans from heading to the United States. They will cross the shoal or look for gaps and eventually pursue their American dreams. But since 2016, the 166-mile steel cable wall has been built close to the river bank, forcing these people to take risks by crossing the arid desert, eventually causing more deaths. As De Leon wrote, the US federal government has turned the desert into "a huge open grave."¹¹ From the satellite images, we can clearly find that people and vehicles traveling between the United States and Mexico. The vehicles to the United States have long queued, but the vehicles to Mexico are able to pass quickly. People are waiting for the border inspection and immigration officer's review. Some of them just go to school or Wal-Mart. However, the tightened policy makes time of the customs clearance longer and longer leading to more and more grievances. These people living in the same city often have to

take two to three hours to complete the process which can be done in 15 minutes in previous days. On January 28, 2017, hundreds of people separated from family or friends hold a short meeting in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez on the US-Mexico border. This concrete-reinforced border and the tens of thousands of miles of steel cable walls deepen the gap between people's hearts, and make those who stand in the sand become increasingly cherish such hard-earned opportunities.

The city is famous for its Rio Grande and it is also distinguished by this dividing line traversing the middle of the city. This borderline has long been more than just a berm on the river bank or a steel cable net through which people can see the other side. It has already affected people's lives which are engraved on the faces of the people crossing the border and it also becomes a wall in the hearts of these people.

Not Only a Physical Wall, But Also a Heart Wall

The current political environment has led to the physical wall proposed by the Trump administration on the border. They hope to use this simplest and rudest method to solve the illegal immigration issue. But it will cause higher rate of death because the illegal immigration will become more rampant. The erection of the wall will result in a large number of Mexican families living on the border to slowly losing their main source of income (the remittances account for 80% of their income) and falling into poverty, which will lead to more smuggling and drug trafficking. Recently, we have often heard the voice of anti-Americanism in Mexico: There is some voice on the social media to call on everyone to boycott American brands such as McDonald's and Starbucks. In addition, some factories also suffer labor shortages in the southern United States. The US economic policy toward Mexico has erected a wall of hearts in people's minds. The tightening immigration policy and the renegotiation of NAFTA have constantly deepened the psychological barrier between Mexicans and this powerful neighbor. Therefore, this heart wall, the obstacle between the peoples of these two countries, has already been erected.

1. Wikipedia, "Six-Day War," last modified September 14, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-Day_War
2. Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen, "Bordering, Ordering and Othering," *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 93(2002):125-36; Henk van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer, *Bordering Space, Border Regions Series* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005).
3. U.S. Census, "Top Trading Partners- Total Trade, Exports, Imports." Pctpber, 2006,"
4. Canas, Coronado, and Gilmer, "Southwest Economy."
5. Mark Stevenson, "Mexicans Angered by Spread of Genetically Modified Corn," Dec. 29, 2001, Associated Press, <http://www.genet-info.org/genet/2001/Dec/msg00039.html> (accessed Sept. 5, 2006)
6. Lawrence A. Herzog, "The Cross-Border Metropolis in a Global Age: A Conceptual Model and Empirical Evidence from the US-Mexico and European Border Regions," *Global Society* (2014): 448, accessed September 18, 2018, doi:
7. Lucinda Vargas, "Maquiladoras Impact on Texas Border Cities," *The Border Economy*, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas (June 2001): 25.
8. Lawrence A. Herzog, "The Cross-Border Metropolis in a Global Age: A Conceptual Model and Empirical Evidence from the US-Mexico and European Border Regions," *Global Society* (September 2014): 448, accessed September 18, 2018, doi:10.1080/13600826.2014.948539
9. "Bibliography on Water Resources and International Law: Rio Grande". Peace Palace Library. Retrieved 2010-12-23.
10. Sapiens, "Where a River of Life Became a Border of Control," last modified March 22, 2018, <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/us-mexico-border-anthropology/>
11. Jason De Leon, *The Land of Open Graves—Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (University of California Press, 2015),