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## *On the Edge*

*Life along the Russia-China Border*

**Franck Billé and Caroline Humphrey**

*“Wonderfully illuminating...This is an important book that draws on the past and present—and has obvious implications for the future.”*

—Peter Frankopan, author of *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*

The border between Russia and China winds for 2,600 miles through rivers, swamps, and vast taiga forests. It's a thin line of direct engagement, extraordinary contrasts, frequent tension, and occasional war between two of the world's political giants. Franck Billé and Caroline Humphrey have spent years traveling through and studying this important yet forgotten region. Drawing on pioneering fieldwork, they introduce readers to the lifeways, politics, and history of one of the world's most consequential and enigmatic borderlands.

It is telling that, along a border consisting mainly of rivers, there is not a single operating passenger bridge. Two different worlds have emerged. On the Russian side, in territory seized from China in the nineteenth century, defense is prioritized over the economy, leaving dilapidated villages slumbering amid the forests. For its part, the Chinese side is heavily settled and increasingly prosperous and dynamic. Moscow worries about the imbalance, and both governments discourage citizens from interacting. But as Billé and Humphrey show, cross-border connection is a fact of life, whatever distant authorities say. There are marriages, friendships, and sexual encounters. There are joint businesses and underground deals, including no shortage of smuggling. Meanwhile some indigenous peoples, persecuted on both sides, seek to “revive” their own alternative social groupings that span the border. And Chinese towns make much of their proximity to “Europe,” building giant Russian dolls and replicas of St. Basil's Cathedral to woo tourists.

Surprising and rigorously researched, *On the Edge* testifies to the rich diversity of an extraordinary world haunted by history and divided by remote political decisions but connected by the ordinary imperatives of daily life.

**Franck Billé** is Program Director at the Tang Center for Silk Road Studies, University of California, Berkeley. He is the author and editor of three books about East Asia, including *Sinophobia: Anxiety, Violence, and the Making of Mongolian Identity*. **Caroline Humphrey** is Fellow of King's College, University of Cambridge, and founder of the university's Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit. She is the author of several books about the anthropology of Inner Asia and has recently edited and contributed to *Trust and Mistrust in the Economies of the China-Russia Borderlands*.