



# Variegated borderlands governance in Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture along the China-Myanmar border



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## ABSTRACT

International borders and associated borderlands—especially as viewed at the national and international scales, and via regional and global-scale maps—are generally thought of as being primarily governed by national governments. In reality, however, national borders and associated borderlands are complex and varied spaces, ones that are governed not only through national laws and regulations, but also an array of policies and localized practices, both formal and informal, conceived and implemented by government agencies and other non-government entities operating at various scales. This is especially the case for the borderlands we are focusing on. In this article we conceptually apply Agnew's idea of the 'territorial trap', Ong's notion of 'graduated sovereignty', Laine's conceptualization of the 'multiscalar production of borders', Amilhat Szary and Giraut's concept of 'borderity', and Brambilla's understanding of 'borderescapes' to consider the multiscalar and multi-sited nature of borderlands governance along the China-Myanmar border in Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. Focusing on the China side of the border, we emphasize how different scales of government agencies and non-government entities variously interact. Ultimately, these different actors create multiscalar borderescapes dependent on various situational factors, ones which are more complex than is typically acknowledged by national governments.

## 1. Introduction

The border between China and Myanmar (Burma) is typically associated in the international media and in academic writings with security, lawlessness and danger, including insurgent activities (AFP News Agency, 2015; Hua, 2015; RFA, 2015), illegal wildlife and timber trade (Nijman and Shepard, 2014, 2015; Phillips, 2015; Mizzima, 2016), drug trafficking (Su, 2015, 2016), vice and prostitution (Ripper and Saxer, 2016; Zhang et al., 2011), and dangerous diseases, especially malaria (Hu et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2014). There has, however, also been some more positive reporting related to transboundary business expansion along the border and the use of the border as an energy conduit (Lin, 2016; Ptak and Hommel, 2016), even if others are appropriately critical of these types of interventions (Kramer and Woods, 2012). While these are certainly important issues, they sometimes contradict another contrasting image of China as authoritarian, rigid, and centralized (Nathan, 2003; Mertha, 2005). Indeed, Ripper and Saxer (2016) have recently argued that the circumstances along the China-Myanmar border, including the development of large amounts of infrastructure and intensive resource exploitation, actually represent a

'successful' example of border development in the Chinese state vision. Su (2012) has also effectively demonstrated—again in relation to the China-Myanmar border—how the Chinese state has rescaled borderlands governance to facilitate transnational regional development initiatives, including the Greater Mekong Subregion programme and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar forum.

We emphasize the flexible and decentralized nature of the Chinese state when it comes to remote borders, through focusing on the policies and everyday multiscalar practices associated with borderlands governance that are evident on the Chinese side of the China-Myanmar border, in Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture (DAP) in Yunnan Province, southwestern China.

The objective of this article is to better understand the different scales of borderlands governance that are evident in DAP. To do this, we adopt a conceptual framework founded on five important scholarly works, ones that have not previously been used in combination. The first, which is well-known in borderland studies and geography more generally, is John Agnew's 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994, 2015). The second is Aihwa Ong's (2000) notion of 'graduated sovereignty', which is widely known within human geography and Southeast Asian studies.

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The third is Jussi Laine's (2016) idea of 'multiscalar production of borders', which emphasizes the different scales of existing borderland governance. The fourth is Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary and Frédéric Giraut's (2015) idea of 'borderity', which builds off Michel Foucault's well-known work on governmentality. The fifth is Chiara Brambilla's (2015) idea of 'borderscapes', which emphasizes the multiplicity of social spaces where borders are negotiated by varied actors. These five scholarly works, when combined in a single framework, are useful for helping us better understand various important aspects of borderlands governance, not only in our area of study but more broadly.

Our main argument is that borderlands governance as practiced by the Chinese State, particularly along the China-Myanmar border in DAP, takes on variegated forms, thus resulting in what some might consider to be surprisingly flexible policies and everyday practices, what we call 'variegated borderlands governance'. Our view is in line with an overall trend toward seeing borders and borderlands governance in more diverse and complex ways (Newman, 2010; Jones and Johnson, 2014; Amilhat Szary, 2015). This has not, however, been sufficiently investigated in relation to China's borders.

In the next section we present the different elements within our theoretical framework. We then describe our research methods, followed by a brief description of some of the overall characteristics of DAP. We then turn to the China-Myanmar border in DAP, providing numerous field examples to support our argument. These include considering borderland governance generally, cross-border trade, cross-border education, cross-border marriage, and the everyday workings of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). We finally provide some concluding remarks.

## 2. The territorial trap, graduated sovereignty, the multiscalar production of borders, borderity, and borderscapes

Five theoretical ideas are particularly relevant for conceptualizing our research. The first is the idea of the 'territorial trap', which was introduced by Agnew (1994) and revisited by him in 2015 (Agnew, 2015). Scholars in borderlands studies such as Paasi (2009), Newman (2010), Reid-Henry (2010), Shah (2012) and many others have variously engaged with this concept, which has become influential in borderland studies and geography more generally.

Agnew engaged with three main interlocking geographical assumptions that he warned us to beware of. The first relates to the often assumed association between state sovereignty and state territoriality. In reality, as he points out, the direct association between the two is often fictive. Indeed, imperialist ventures by powerful nation states on other less powerful ones clearly indicate that sovereignty is often not fully contained within territorial boundaries. For example, transnational corporations have long been able to use their influence to affect policies and practices in nation states apart from those where they are based (Agnew, 2015).

The second geographical assumption relates to seeing territorial or nation states as singular actors competing with other states operating at the same scale, and artificially squeezing or compartmentalizing other entities that operate at different scales within territorial states for the purposes of creating models of interstate competition. However, one only has to acknowledge that mercantilism has not been the guiding force for all economic policies of nation states over history to recognize the severe limitations of this assumption (Agnew, 2015).

The third assumption is that territorial states are strict containers for society. While it is true that nation states have often been quite effective, especially during the modern era but even before, of inspiring those living within their geographical boundaries to view particular problems and solutions through the lens of the nation state (see Winichakul, 1994 amongst many other works), it is also the case that various scenarios, both in the past and the present, have resulted in populations in certain parts of nation states to identify more with other groups of people located within the confines of different (and often

adjacent) states (Agnew, 2015). This is particularly the case when it comes to certain ethnic and religious communities that straddle national borders and hold irredentist views (Baird, 2010a, 2010b), but it can also be true for other groups of people politically inspired, or motivated by a combination of politics and ethnicity or religion (Baird, 2010c).

Many have already recognized the value of Agnew's argumentation, yet it is important that we continually remind ourselves of his warnings, so as to avoid inadvertently slipping into the 'territorial trap' in one way or another.

The second key theoretical idea is what Ong (2000) has called 'graduated sovereignty'. This concept is now well known within human geography and the social sciences generally, and also within Southeast Asian studies. Ong's original idea was not, however, formulated with specific reference to territorial borders, although she does discuss the development of certain specialized production zones involving more than one nation state. Her main focus, however, is on the unevenness of sovereignty across spaces constructed through interactions between global capitalism, non-market entities and middle-range Asian states. Ong's two main points are to:

- (1) illuminate the different modes of governing segments of populations that either variously relate or do not relate to global markets; and to
- (2) Expose the different mixes of legal compromises and controls that emerge and are tailored to the requirements of special production zones.

While Agnew warns us of what we should beware of, Ong gives us a sense of what we should be looking for in relation to sovereignty and governance. In particular, Ong asks us to be attentive to how unevenness develops with regard to relationships with global markets. We would go farther and say that we could simply remove the word 'global' altogether and state that people have different relationships with all kinds of markets operating at numerous but interrelated scales. Possibly more importantly, however, at least for this article, is that Ong's graduated sovereignty encourages us to search for legal compromises and controls that are specifically crafted to meet the needs of specialized production areas.

The third element is represented by Jussi Laine's (2016) idea of the 'multiscalar production of borders'. In particular, Laine draws on examples from Europe and Southeast Asia to demonstrate how borders tend to be complex, multiscalar, multidimensional, and yet dynamic entities, but that despite these qualities, also have important material forms, functions and locations, ones that deserve to be taken seriously.

The fourth element relates to the work of Amilhat Szary and Giraut (2015), who usefully explain how bounded forms of thinking emerged in Europe, and then were eventually transported to other parts of the world. They have made a particularly important contribution to the theorization of boundaries and borders, through focusing on what they call 'mobile borders', and usefully coining the term 'borderity', which builds on Foucault's earlier governmentality work, and can be defined as the governmentality of territorial limits. This idea is thus useful for examining how political subjects are both enabled and disabled by borders, and how borders can be sites of both power and counterpower. In particular, their work builds on a trend in borderland studies that emphasizes the importance of examining boundaries and borders through "the individual and his/her personalization of a mobile device" (Amilhat Szary and Giraut, 2015: 1).

The final element of our framework is represented by the 'borderscapes' approach developed by Brambilla (2015) (see, also, Brambilla et al., 2015). This work draws attention to the multiplicity of social spaces where different actors negotiate borders, as well as symbolic and material influences. Indeed, this approach envisions borders as mobile, relational and contested sites, ultimately endeavors to consider 'alternative border imaginaries 'beyond the line'' (Brambilla,

## Dehong Autonomous Prefecture location Between China and Myanmar

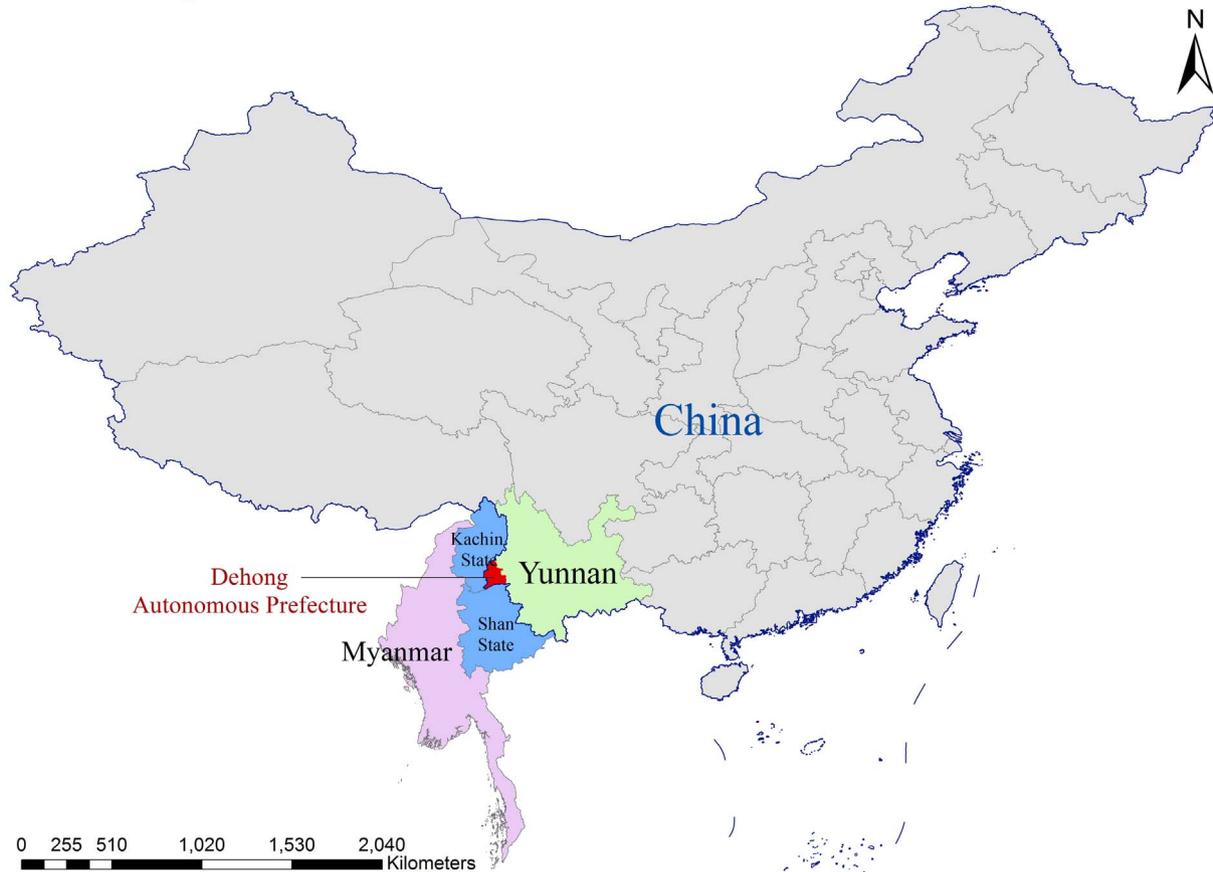


Fig. 1. Dehong Autonomous Prefecture location between China and Myanmar.

2015: 17). It also is useful for critically assessing borders and their meanings to different actors, and for seeing borders as assemblages.

Through interlinking Agnew's and Ong's older work, which has never been combined, and expanding their views more explicitly beyond the realms of economics and production, and combining their ideas with more recent borderlands theorizing by Laine, Amilhat Szary and Giraut, and Brambilla, we find ourselves with a framework that draws on important past work, but also relates well with recent borderlands studies scholarship, and is both robust and sufficiently sensitive to conditions on the ground to be useful for making sense of the types of everyday variegated borderlands governance found in DAP.

### 3. Methods

Studying the governance of borderlands along the China-Myanmar border is not easy, as there are multiple players operating at different scales. Fortunately, we were able to conduct the main research that is the basis of this article due to the second author's excellent connections with the DAP government, which resulted in us being able to gain full access to the borderlands, including government officials and locals living there. We also, however, had a chance to talk with regular people, and make observations about circumstances on the ground. The core research occurred over a week of intensive field investigations in June 2015, and some follow-up work in 2016.

Although the first author has considerable experience conducting field research in mainland Southeast Asia, including along sensitive borderlands, this was his first visit to the China-Myanmar border. The second author, who is ethnic Bai, is a native of Yunnan Province, and has been working along the China-Myanmar border for five years; he

has visited the borderlands in DAP many times.

Our findings are based largely on Chinese language semi-structured and informal interviews with key government officials operating at various scales, including the prefecture, country, town and village levels. We supplemented these interviews with unplanned short informal interviews with people we randomly met along the border, and personal observations.

Methodologically there are two main weaknesses with this study. First, our core fieldwork occurred over a relatively short period. However, this was partly mitigated by the close relations that the second author has with many officials we interviewed, which allowed for often surprisingly frank and informal discussions in various contexts. Second, because we worked closely with government officials, the governance we learned about was largely linked with different scales of government. Therefore, we had less access to more informal and non-governmental forms of borderlands governance, although we certainly heard about and observed various forms of non-government borderlands governance during our time in the field. We do not claim that this study is necessarily representative of all the things happening along the border in DAP, but we do think that our findings are useful for understanding this particular border and also borders and borderland governance more generally. We recognize that the officials we met generally provided us with official responses, ones that might not have revealed all relevant information. To address this, we did some work with others to independently verify a number of their points. Second, and more importantly, even the official responses of those we interviewed indicate the varied ways that the official structure of borderland governance occurs, which is important for making our overall argument. The reality, however, is likely to be even more complex than what we have included here.

#### 4. Dehong Dai-Jingpo autonomous prefecture

Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture (DAP) is one of China's 'Autonomous' administrative areas, and is located adjacent to Myanmar to the north, west and south, with only its eastern border being linked to China (Baoshan City). In relation to its borders with Myanmar, it is adjacent to Kachin State to the north and the west, and Shan State to the south. In many ways, Dehong is an ideal place to study border policies and practices, as it is mostly surrounded by parts of Myanmar. Its altitude is highly variable, and ranges from 200 m above sea level (asl) in the lowlands to 2400 m asl in the high mountains. It covers an area of 11,526 km<sup>2</sup>, and spans 170 km from north to south, and 122 km from east to west (Fig. 1).

Autonomous administrative areas exist in parts of China where large numbers of ethnic minorities, or 'Ethnic Nationalities', as they are referred to in China, reside. Autonomous areas can exist at various scales, including the regional level (equivalent to provincial level) (Shneiderman, 2013; Kerr and Swinton, 2008; Harrell, 2001) prefecture level (Bie et al., 2014; Dean, 2005; Harrell, 2001), county level (Harrell, 2001) and town level.<sup>1</sup> Autonomous areas are designed to protect the autonomy of numerically dominant groups, with each area being linked to between one and three Ethnic Nationalities. In the case of DAP, it is associated with the two more populous Ethnic Nationalities in the prefecture, the Dai (Shan)<sup>2</sup> and the Jingpo<sup>3</sup> (Kachin).

There are 30 Autonomous Prefectures in China (Colin, 2003). Each is supposed to help ensure that people from the Ethnic Nationalities are able to maintain considerable control over local affairs (Lai, 2009). DAP was established as an Autonomous Region in 1953, but in 1956 it was rescaled as a prefecture. It is now one of Yunnan Province's eight Autonomous Prefectures.

According to Colin (2003), who wrote about the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in northeastern China, genuine autonomy was allowed to the Korean minorities who live there between 1952 and 1957. However, with the assimilationist policies of the Great Leap Forward and then the Cultural Revolution that followed, real autonomy was largely stripped away. In the case of DAP, large numbers of mainly Hunanese people immigrated to the area in 1960, which led to the same kind of weakening of autonomy. However, according to Colin (2003) during the Deng Xiaoping era, the promulgation of the 1982 Constitution and then the 1984 'Law on the Autonomy of Regional Nationalities' effectively reinstated some of the autonomy previously lost. For DAP, the head has to be either ethnic Dai or Jingpo, but that the Party Secretary can be from any ethnic group. However, as Harrell's (1997) edited volume makes clear, the Han Chinese have continued to try to impose their ideas on Ethnic Nationalities throughout China, including those in so-called autonomous areas.

DAP, as of 2010, had a population of 1,211,490, and as of 2003, when the population was 1.02 million, 48.2 per cent of the population were Han Chinese, with 51.8 per cent being various Ethnic Nationalities. Apart from the numerically dominant Dai and Jingpo, others found in DAP include the Lisu, Achang, and Der Ang (Palaung). Since 1982, DAP has been the fastest growing prefecture in Yunnan (Dean, 2005).

Within DAP, there are five administrative county level areas, including Mangshi City (where the capital of the Prefecture is located), Ruili City, Lianghe County, Yingjiang County and Longchuan County. Of those, three of the five county-level areas, Ruili City, Yingjiang County and Longchuan County are located adjacent to the border with

<sup>1</sup> Hu Sa Town, in Longchuan County, DAP is, for example, the only ethnic Achang autonomous area in China.

<sup>2</sup> Dehong is one of only two Prefectures in China devoted to the Dai, along with Xishuangpanna, father to the south, and bordering with Laos and Myanmar. However, the Dai people in Xishuangpanna largely speak a very different dialect of Dai, one unlike the Shan spoken in DAP and more like the Lue spoken in parts of northern Laos.

<sup>3</sup> There are actually five Jingpo sub-groups located in DAP.

Myanmar, a border that evolved after the establishment of two States, the Union of Myanmar in 1948, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Although the initial border was established between the British and the PRC, China felt that it had been imposed on them and so was later unwilling to accept it. Protracted negotiations occurred in the 1950s, ones that finally led to a settlement on January 28, 1960, despite intense local dispute and opposition to splitting up the Kachin. In particular, some Kachin villages were included in China, and this was one of the reasons for Kachin upheaval and the establishment of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in February 1961. This resistance to Burmese rule led General Ne Win to arbitrarily close the border between Burma and China between 1962 and 1988, an act that only served to promote inter-State relations and associated multiscalar and extra-nation state bordering processes involving the KIO and China, since the border was new, and the Burmese government only controlled 60 km of its 2,200 km border with China by the end of the 1980s. Since the mid-1980s, however, Chinese interest and investment in Burma has increased dramatically (Dean, 2005).

The three county-level administrative areas in DAP that straddle this border are the focus of this article. Fig. 2 is a map of DAP that includes the county and city boundaries.

Due to the remoteness of China's borders with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam in the past, prior to 2010 the Yunnan provincial government was given authority over national level foreign affairs associated with these borderlands. When, however, fighting between the Myanmar government and KIA began in 2011, the central government decided to take over that role.

#### 5. Variegated Borderlands Governance along the China-Myanmar Border

##### 5.1. Yingjiang County

We begin the empirical portion with an anecdote that Ong's (2000) idea of graduated sovereignty, which relates to the unevenness of sovereignty across space, can help to explain. Thirty-one kilometres from the border with Yingjiang County and Myanmar, on our way to the border crossing with Nabang, we encountered a well-guarded border police checkpoint, where we were stopped. Although our paperwork was in order, the provincial-level border police interrogated us for well over an hour. Why, they wondered, did we want to go to the border town of Nabang? The situation was tense, and we dared not take photographs. We were told that security was tight due to fighting along the border between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Myanmar military (*Tatmadaw*).

We then witnessed something that vividly demonstrated some contradictions frequently evident in variegated borderland governance. As we sat being interrogated by uniformed and heavily armed border police, small groups of local ethnic Jingpo (Kachin) people casually walked past the police post without being asked a single question, and without having to produce any identification. The border police must have recognized them as 'local villagers' who were walking between their houses and their agricultural fields on the other side of the checkpoint. The contrast between how we were being treated, and how they were, could not have been starker. In line with Ong's (2000) idea of graduated sovereignty, it was evident how the local scaling of governance occurs unevenly.

A modern border crossing still exists on the Chinese side of the border at Nabang. However, it is only possible for local people to officially cross the border, and even then, those crossing are only allowed to travel on day passes, with the expectation that they cross in the morning and return by the evening. Large-scale trading had seemingly come to a halt, but some small-scale trade involving local people continues. Indeed, the idea of the borderscape, following Brambilla (2015), informs us that borders transform along with power relations, an idea that is also in line with Amilhat Szary and Giraut's (2015) idea of

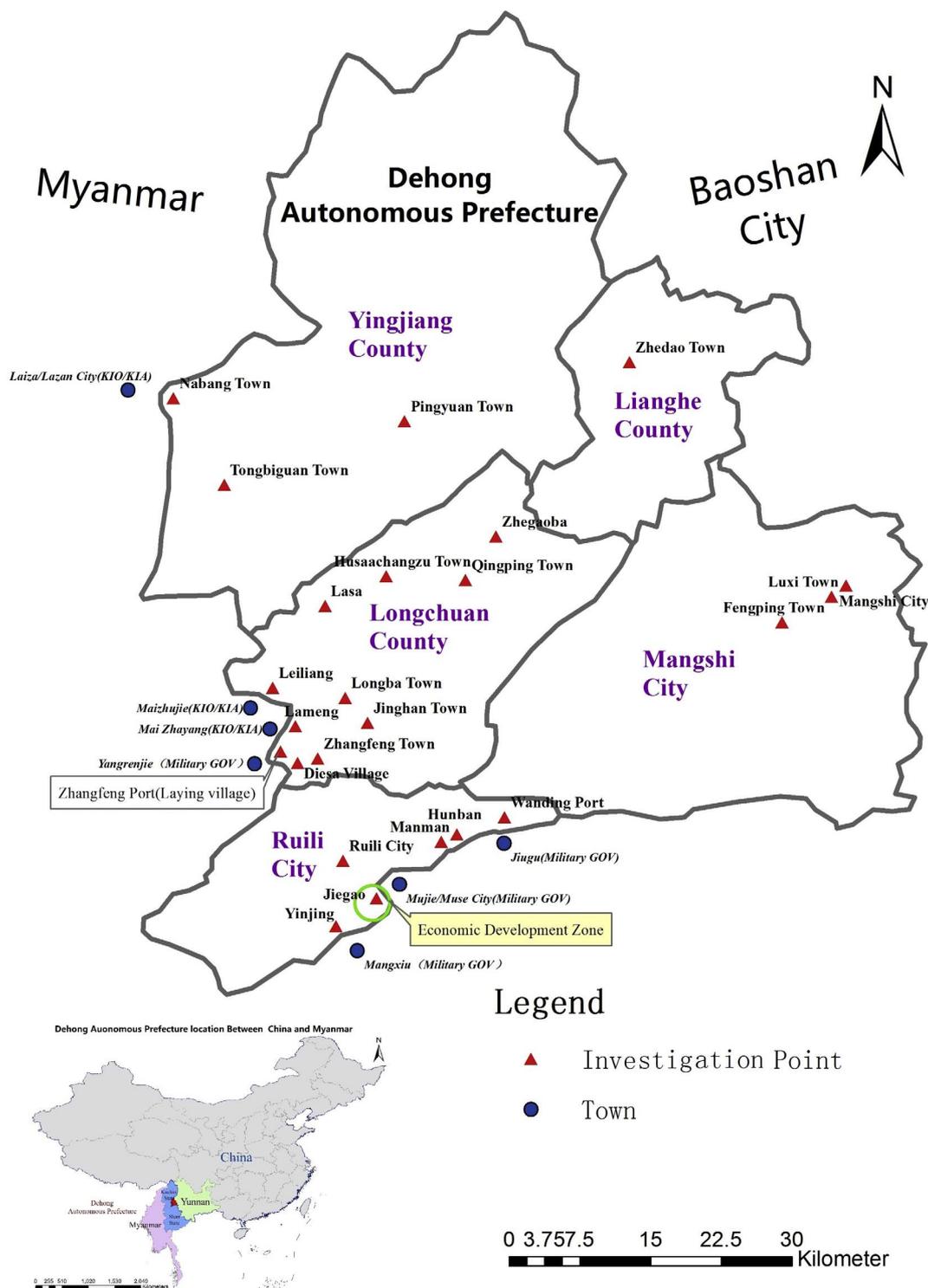


Fig. 2. Dehong Dai-Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture.

borderity. Still, various foreign journalists and academics have been able to unofficially cross the border in recent years, especially since 2011, which fits with our conceptualization of variegated borderland governance.

The situation at Nabang changed rapidly beginning in July 2011 when the KIO, and its armed faction, the KIA, decided to end its long-standing ceasefire with the *Tatmadaw*, and to return to full-on armed conflict. The KIA were able to secure some territory along the border with China, including the town of Laiza (spelt Lazan in Chinese), which the KIO made their independent state capital. This dramatic change in

the sovereignty of the territory across from Nabang had a huge influence on Nabang, and also on Chinese investments on the Burmese side of the border. The establishment of large numbers of internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps along the China-Myanmar border in Kachin State since the 2011 fighting began forced tens of thousands of Kachin people to flee their homes (Woods, 2016), which has also affected border dynamics. Here we can see, following Agnew, how events on one side of the border can dramatically affect circumstances on the other, thus disrupting the idea of contained nation states. Similarly, Hu and Konrad (2017) have recently demonstrated how the Kokang conflict on

the Myanmar side of the border with China, to the north of DAP, has fundamentally affected borderland governance on the Chinese side of the border.

In the case of DAP, beginning in the 1990s a Chinese investor set up a large gambling casino in Laiza, and once the conflict began the investment became jeopardized. Moreover, the conflict between the KIA and the *Tatmadaw* coincided with increasing government of China concerns regarding large Chinese-run gambling casinos just on the other sides of their border, and catering specifically to Chinese gamblers unable to legally gamble in the same way at home. Concerns existed regarding the links between gambling, corruption, prostitution and crime more generally (Zhang et al., 2011), reflecting the influence of national concerns and policies on the border. Thus, using Agnew's thesis demonstrates how a combination of factors—especially the fighting—led the central Chinese government to use its influence to shut down the big Chinese casino in Laiza, and greatly stem the flow of Chinese gamblers across the border to KIA controlled territory. Indeed, Chinese influence stretches beyond its strict territorial boundaries, especially when it comes to investments outside of China but near its borders and involving Chinese business interests.

Amilhat Szary and Giraut's (2015) idea of borderity, or rather how the reconfiguration of borders has the potential to disempower some while empowering others is useful for thinking about this particular situation, as we can see how the shutting down of the large casino in Laiza has had a major economic impact. Hotels are shuttered, and whole streets of businesses have been closed. Locals confirmed that business has slowed down immensely since 2011. However, while border crossing at the official border port is now highly restricted, there are still less formal ways to cross the border. One can walk a short distance down the road from the official crossing and easily sneak into Laiza. Furthermore, informal truck border crossings exist not far from Nabang, and some commodities are continuing to unofficially flow across the border. Thus, at the moment those able to engage in informal trade across the border have benefited from the border closure, while others have clearly been negatively affected. The contradictions of border life in DAP are evident. Laine's (2016) view of borders as complex, multiscalar and dynamic spaces, ones with particular geographies and material realities, such as national border crossings, roads, etc. are also useful for helping us to view the winners and losers of border changes.

## 5.2. Longchuan County

There are a series of small and relatively remote rural villages located adjacent to the border in Long Ba Town. They are all inhabited by ethnic Jingpo people. They have close linguistic and kinship ties with the Kachin people on the other side of the border (Dean, 2005). Moreover, the Jingpo people in China are highly sympathetic with their Kachin compatriots across the border, and are openly supportive of the KIO/KIA (see, also, Sadan, 2013). Dean (2005) emphasized that the Kachin on both sides of the border strongly see themselves as being part of the same 'nation', one constructed by six loosely connected but affiliated tribes.

Many Kachin people from the other side of the border crossed into China as temporary refugees at the time of the fighting in 2011 (see, also, Human Rights Watch, 2012). In 2011, one bomb fired by the *Tatmadaw* also crossed into Chinese territory and killed a local Jingpo villager. The Chinese government reportedly put heavy pressure on the Myanmar government to provide substantial compensation to the victim's family, which they did, indicating the power of China beyond its borders, something that is especially evident along this particular border, due to China being much more powerful than Myanmar, a nation that is characterized by internal ethnic divisions. Moreover, Myanmar is just now emerging from decades of economic and diplomatic isolation, and has long been dominated by the *Tatmadaw* and various ethnic armies and militias. Furthermore, the borderlands in

question have been relatively marginal when it comes to state-building in the region, and the people living there have long resisted being swept up in centralized state formations. In any case, not long after, once the KIA gained control of most of the area, the Kachin refugees returned to the other side of the border. Still, the *Tatmadaw* continued to control one mountain nearby, until they were finally forced to withdraw in 2014.

Some Kachin from the other side of the border previously studied in schools on the Chinese side, with Chinese government support, but in the mid-2000s, before the Kachin-Myanmar conflict, many ethnic Jingpo people from China crossed over to the other side of the border to study at Kachin and English language schools. Our framework indicates that this should be expected, since interactions with and across borders are constantly being revamped. Government officials told us that this concerned the Chinese government and led to increased educational support to keep Jingpo students studying in China, including support for Jingpo language instruction. From the perspective of the Chinese state, these changes were successful. Furthermore, many Kachin students from the other side of the border now cross back and forth on a daily basis to study in Chinese schools. They pay 200 RMB/student/year for part of the cost of their lunches. All students are provided with free breakfasts. Although the government on the Chinese side of the border is much more powerful than the state on the other side, this example can be made most useful through applying Amilhat Szary and Giraut's (2015) concept of borderity, which alerts us to how borderlands can fundamentally empower certain groups and impact on government practices, even the nature of education, which is often thought of as a rather top-down system firmly under the Chinese state.

We were told that the mountainous and remote border landscape could not possibly be closed, due to the remoteness, ruggedness and long length of the border (a point also made by Dean, 2005), even if the Chinese government wanted to, and so there was no reason to attempt to do so, as that would just cause tensions and insecurity along the border, which would not benefit anyone. It is hard, however, to know to what extent this argumentation simply represented an excuse to keep the border open, or whether closing it would really be impractical. What is obvious, however, is that the Kachin, who control a strip of territory along the border that is only a few kilometres wide in some places, are heavily reliant on China for supplies of gasoline and other essentials. In fact, this has been the case for decades (Dean, 2005). The KIO sells timber and gems (especially jade) to pay for these goods. There are numerous crossings along the border that are not manned on either side, and pedestrians and motorcycles casually cross the border with seemingly little concern. Here, again, our framework is useful for helping us conceptualize the ways borders are constructed and governed in certain ways based on a variety of contexts.

There are also two larger and more formal border crossings in Longchuan. The first is located at Zhangfeng Town, and is adjacent to a small town named Yangrenjie, which is in Leiji City, Kachin State, an area controlled by the Myanmar government. An official border post was only established there in 1985, and was further upgraded in 2014 (see below for more details).

The border police are considerably less strict in Longchuan compared to Yingjiang, indicating that even the same government units do not always act the same in different places, even within a single prefecture. The idea of variegated borderland governance is useful for thinking about these types of dynamic borderlands. There was much more stress in Yingjiang because Laiza is the KIO capital, and the whole border in that area is controlled by the KIO/KIA, whereas in Longchuan parts of the border are controlled by the KIO/KIA, while others are administered by the *Tatmadaw*. Our framework for thinking about borderland governance make it easy to recognize how spaces have emerged where tacit agreements exist that allow both sides to operate, at least to some degree. These spaces are also, however, the same ones where tensions are frequently high, and intermittent fighting sometimes breaks out.

### 5.3. Cross-Border Trade

There are often noticeable changes in how regulations and policies from higher levels of government are interpreted and implemented when the heads of particular government agencies change. Indeed, individuals are important players in variegated borderland governance, as indicated by [Amilhat Szary and Giraut \(2015\)](#), who like other borderland scholars have put increasing emphasis on individual borderland subjectivities, something that we can also observe here. [Ong's \(2000\)](#) focus on market forces as explanatory factors also helps us understand how different levels of sovereignty emerge.

Cross-border trade is an important aspect of borderlands governance in Longchuan. However, there are different standards regarding export taxes, something that our understanding of multiscale governance helps explain. While 'companies' have to pay export taxes, 'local villagers' are not required to do so, as they mainly export small quantities of agricultural products, and often do so via remote informal border crossings where officials are not based. These multiscale and flexible governance practices are in line with the concept of borderscapes. We were told that local villagers rarely front for companies to export goods without paying tax because, (1) the small dirt roads that villagers use are not appropriate for the large trucks that companies tend to use, and (2) that if villagers abuse their tax-free privileges, village headmen in the local communities report such abuses to the government. It must be recognized, however, that there is likely to be more overlap between these categories than reported.

In addition, because Dehong is an autonomous prefecture, some special items produced by minorities are tax-exempt, such as ethnic Achang-made ceremonial swords. Moreover, swords can be carried openly in DAP, which is not the case in most other parts of China. This is because they are especially recognized as a special type of material culture to the Achang people. The idea of graduated sovereignty is useful for demonstrating why cultural factors can be crucial for understanding variegated borderlands governance.

Officially, the central government of China does not have any diplomatic or trade relations with the KIO/KIA, only with the Myanmar government. However, according to government officials in DAP, about 80–85 per cent of the borderlands on the Myanmar side are controlled by the KIO/KIA, even if much of the border under KIO/KIA control is located in remote or sparsely populated areas. These conditions are ripe for the type of multiscale borderlands governance that [Laine \(2016\)](#) wrote about. Government officials at the prefecture and county levels reported that it is necessary to maintain a pragmatic stance with regard to the KIO/KIA, in order to maintain security along the border, and to ensure that ethnic Jingpo people in China who support the KIO/KIA remain satisfied with the Chinese government. Therefore, trade between China and the KIO unofficially exists. Both sides create 'non-government organizations' or private companies to facilitate trade, so as to avoid direct Chinese government contact with the KIO. These private groups are responsible for all the medium and large-scale trade along the border with the KIO. As one Chinese observer commented, 'This is business, not politics.' [Kiik \(2016\)](#) has reported similar types of depoliticization of development related Chinese investment in Myanmar, particularly in relation to the highly controversial Myitsone dam. What we see in DAP is multiscale graduated sovereignty that allows for the emergence of narratives that separate business from politics, and ultimately result in the construction and reconstruction of diverse borderscapes.

Trade conducted with the KIO mainly goes through the Lameng border crossing, which is adjacent to the KIO controlled town of Mai Zha Yang, Kachin State. In the 2000s up to one million Chinese people crossed into Myanmar at this crossing per year, along with 410,000 trucks. Most private individuals went to gamble at a Chinese owned casino in Mai Zha Yang. A white American graduate student doing research in this area crossed from DAP to Mai Zha Yang in October 2012, passing through a very informal border post managed by a KIO official

working with a Chinese person employed by the casino. As our framework helps explain, borderland governance has involved non-government commercial interests, such as Chinese casino officials working with the KIO.

Over the last few years, however, the number of border crossers has fallen 70 per cent. This has partially been due to the KIO/KIA reaffirming long-term control over Mai Zha Yang, but more importantly, the decline has been especially the result of the shutting down of a large Chinese-owned casino there. Interestingly, while the casino in Laiza was shut down through Chinese pressure in 2011, the one in Mai Zha Yang was not closed until 2014, three years later. China government officials reported that this variation occurred due to border police and local officials at the prefecture and county levels having had close ties and financial interests with the Mai Zha Yang casino owners. Some officials may also have received payments to block the closing of the casino, further complicating borderland governance. In contrast, the casino at Laiza was owned by Chinese Fujian business interests located far from DAP, and with less connections with local government officials. Therefore, local officials were quicker to implement the 2009 anti-gambling policy of the central government, and to respond to the fighting between the KIA and the Burmese military. However, with the rise of Xi Jinping as the leader of China, the policy became stricter in 2013, finally forcing the casino to close.

As would be expected based on our framework, local officials clearly play an important role in interpreting central level policies. However, there are limits to this agency, and in the end they had to follow central level policy. Nevertheless, some smaller gambling operations with much lower profiles, and thus out of the view of the central government of China, still exist in Mai Zha Yang, and some citizens of China continue to cross the border to engage in gambling. However, since 2012 the KIO has stopped manning the border at Mai Zha Yang, so the only officials that check people who cross there are on the Chinese side.

Cell phone connections in Mai Zha Yang and various other places along the border all come from China. Kachin people in Myanmar have relied on cell phone connections for many years ([Dean, 2005](#)). This should not be surprising, as informal cell phone flows across borders occur in many parts of the world (see [Tawil-Souri \(2015\)](#) for a good example from Israel-Palestine).

Cross-border Chinese investment in agriculture and associated trade across the border are another important issue, one that our framework can help us think about productively. The largest sugar processing plant in Yunnan Province, owned by Jing Han Company, is located in Longchuan County. It was established in 2013, and produces up to 21,000 tonnes of sugar per year, as well as some other products using by-products, such as yeast. It relies on raw sugar cane produced locally, but also sugar cane grown with Chinese government support on the Myanmar side of the border (in both Myanmar government and KIO/KIA controlled areas), as part of the government's opium substitution project ([Kramer and Woods, 2012](#)). Government officials in Longchuan explained that 35,000 hectares of sugar cane have been planted in Myanmar with the support of the Chinese government. Some mulberry cultivation has also received Chinese government support. Apart from concerns associated with the social and environmental impacts of land grabbing in Burma (see [Kramer and Woods, 2012](#)), the international market price of sugar had declined considerably just prior to our visit to the border. This reportedly resulted in the Chinese government being forced to pay a subsidy of 400 RMB/tonne for sugar cane to farmers on the Chinese side of the border, in order to ensure that they would not switch to growing more profitable crops, such as watermelon and tobacco. These subsidies are very much linked to power relations affected by borderity. The Chinese government was also heavily subsidizing sugar plantations being run by Chinese companies on the Myanmar side of the border, including in areas controlled by the KIO/KIA. Following Agnew's work, we can see how extraterritorial control beyond official Chinese territory occurs.

Located just 11 kilometres away from Lameng, Zhangfeng border

port (mentioned above) is a much more active crossing, as it is adjacent to an area under the control of the Myanmar government. There are three types of border crossings in close proximity. The first is a large official crossing designed specifically to facilitate large-scale trade involving Chinese trucks. The second is somewhat smaller, but still official, and is designed for private cars and pedestrians. The third, which is located between the above two, is a totally informal hole in a feeble bamboo fence, and is designed for unregulated movements across the border. Essentially, within short distances different types of cross-border mobility and trade are facilitated by both formal and informal border crossings, indicating the multiscalar and dynamic nature of variegated borderlands governance.

Furthermore, as our framework helps explain, different levels of government are responsible for managing the official border crossings. Security is handled by the provincial level border police who are sourced from all over the county. Customs officials are also sourced from all over the country, but most come from DAP, and business and foreign trade officials at the county level provide everyday regulation direction associated with cross-border trade. Crucially, these officials claim that they do not interfere with border security or ‘politics’, even if this is likely to be a discursive move that makes it possible for them to play certain roles. In addition, national level governmental departments provide legal direction, the prefecture produces rules and regulations, and the county level is responsible for day-to-day implementation. Governance is clearly multiscalar and constitutive of particular borderscapes.

#### 5.4. Cross-Border labour movement

Collyer (2016) has advocated for making stronger connections between borderlands and migration scholarship. Taking up this call, we considered the relationship between migrant labour from Myanmar and local government officials on the Chinese side of the border. In doing this, we feel that the idea of ‘borderscapes’ (Brambilla, 2015) is especially useful for thinking about the cross-border labour movement, as the concept draws attention to the multiplicity of social spaces associated with cross-border labour where different actors negotiate borders. Moreover, we can see how multiscalar governance has resulted in legal pluralism. Indeed, according to village and town level government officials in Longchuan, citizens from Myanmar who cross into China to work near the border on a short-term basis, such as for just a few days at a time to harvest sugar cane, generally do not require any official documentation. However, if these workers want to stay for longer periods, or work farther away from the border, they need to apply for up to one year work permits from the Labour Department. These permits are valid in DAP, but not beyond. A worker needs three pieces of documentation:

- (1) An identification card – either from the Myanmar government, the KIO, or other local minority groups nearby the border. People without official identification cards may, however, provide birth certificates issued by local hospitals.
- (2) A health certificate from the Labour Department, and a physical examination document from the county hospital, indicating that the worker is in good health.
- (3) Labour Department permission to work, as already mentioned above.

Officials from one of Longchuan County’s nine towns initially told us that the town government does not play any role in borderlands governance. However, upon further discussion, it became clear that town-level officials actually play important roles through issuing documentation. The idea of borderity is relevant here, as the border is affecting the subjectivities of officials in relation to how they see their roles. According to officials who we interviewed, the documents they issue are:

- (1) Health cards necessary for gaining access to health care services in China.
- (2) Short-term resident permits for citizens of Myanmar living in China, which are valid for up to six months.
- (3) Identification cards for citizens of Myanmar living in China, which are valid for up to one year.

The strategy for developing DAP is to rely on cheap labour from Myanmar to attract investment, something that typically happens when economies transition at wage levels rise locally. The cost of labour in China is rising rapidly, thus making it increasingly attractive for labour intensive Chinese businesses to relocate to DAP to take advantage of cheap labour from Myanmar. There are some contradictions, however, as the DAP government is reportedly wary about allowing large industry into the area, due to concerns about possible pollution problems. These contradictory concerns are a part of the complex nature of multiscalar governance that allows for particular borderscape assemblages to emerge.

#### 5.5. Cross-Border education movement

Applying Agnew’s (2015) concept of the ‘territoriality trap’ and Amilhat Szary and Giraut’s (2015) idea of ‘borderity’ is useful for thinking about cross-border education, since both emphasize the importance of contextual negotiations and recognising the role of extra-territoriality. In this case, the Chinese government policy is to provide education for Myanmar citizens living along the border, and this allows for large numbers of people from Myanmar to cross into China to attend school. The government of China hopes that this policy will help maintain good relations with citizens of Myanmar, and also contribute to development on both sides of the border. Undoubtedly, however, the idea is to influence borderland subjectivities. Variegated borderlands governance allows for the flexibility necessary for this, provided that written permission from parents to attend school in China is received, and some form of identification papers, either issued by the Myanmar government or by the KIO are provided. In addition, relatives living in China can vouch for students. There are few schools on the Myanmar side of the border, since most children study in China, or not at all.

Once permission to attend a Chinese school has been obtained, the actual way that students interact with a school depends a great deal on geography. Many students who live near the border commute back and forth on a daily basis. Others who live farther away stay in dormitories at the school they attend, only returning to visit their families in Myanmar occasionally. At one school near the border that we visited, 150 of the 450 students were reportedly from Myanmar. Of those, 40 crossed the border on a daily basis.

The Chinese government pays the cost of boarding, and while the families of students have to provide 100 kg rice/year/student to help feed their children when they are at school, the Chinese government provides the remaining food costs. The Chinese government also provides 10 RMB/day/student to pay for all students to eat breakfast at the school, whether they come from China or Myanmar. Students from Myanmar who commute daily do not have to provide any rice like the full-time boarders, and they receive 1000 RMB/year/student to pay for their lunches at school (3 RMB/student/lunch). We heard similar stories in villages in Long Ba Town earlier. Indeed, sovereignty and territoriality are multiscalar, power laden, and complicated, and not strictly confined by national borders.

#### 5.6. Cross-Border marriage

Village leaders living on the Chinese side of the border in Longchuan County reported that cross-border marriages between Burmese citizens and Chinese citizens are common. However, most couples choose to move to the Chinese side of the border. This is apparently because in China there are more opportunities. Laine’s (2016)

ideas about multiscale border governance and flexibility can demonstrate why the type of local level governance outlined below is important.

According to village leaders, people from Myanmar generally require Myanmar government or KIO-issued identification papers to officially marry in China. Then, the person from Myanmar has the opportunity to gain five different kinds of Chinese government insurance: (1) health insurance, (2) unemployment insurance, (3) accident insurance, (4) pregnancy and mother and child insurance, and (5) old age insurance. However, if official marriage certification is not obtained, people from Myanmar can only potentially obtain health insurance. Illustrative of flexible multiscale governance, it is, however, at the discretion of village headmen to provide the necessary official stamps required to gain insurance, and one village headman explained that if an immigrant from Myanmar is believed to be ‘a thief’ or ‘a bad person’, the required stamps can be withheld. These village headmen play a front-line role in screening those who come to China through marriage. Negotiations and compromises are clearly part of everyday life in the borderlands, which can be explained by the multiscale graduated sovereignty that ultimately leads to shifts in borderscapes. In particular, the idea of borderity is relevant here, as the border, as a mobile device, is affecting the subjectivities of village headman, many of whom see themselves as borderland gatekeepers. This helps to demonstrate how borderland politics develops and manifests itself in everyday encounters. In line with this, Janet Sturgeon (2004) explained the crucial roles that village headmen on the border between Yunnan Province and Myanmar play in relation to border governance, including facilitating access to valuable natural resources located along the borderlands. She referred to some of these influential village chiefs as ‘small border chiefs’, reflecting the important roles they play in borderlands governance.

### 5.7. Ruili city

Wanding port is the most historical border crossing in Ruili, as it is famous for being the crossing used by allied forces during World War II. It is also one of the only two border crossings in DAP where people with passports can cross the border.<sup>4</sup> It used to be the busiest border crossing in DAP, but after 1998 Zhangfeng port became more significant. Ruili border crossing in the Jie Gao SEZ (see below) has also become more important.

Nearby, signs in Chinese warn not to cross the border illegally, but much more flexible borderland governance is actually at play. A man situated on the other side of the border charges five RMB to carry people across the small stream that marks the frontier on his back, in case people do not want to get their feet wet. Two RMB is also collected as a ‘family customs fee’ to guide people to small-scale gambling dens in Wanding town. This fee came with a guarantee of being kept safe when gambling.

However, not everyone who crosses the border unofficially does so to gamble. We met an ethnic Dai family as they crossed back into China through the informal crossing near Wanding after shopping at a market on the Myanmar side of the border. Similar to what Dean (2005) described from a Kachin part of DAP, these Dai people did not appear to be challenging the boundary when going shopping; they were simply continuing to follow a long-established practice associated with variegated borderlands governance.

### 5.8. Jie Gao Special Economic Zone

Ong’s (2000) idea of graduated sovereignty is useful for thinking about uneven sovereignty across spaces, an idea that is especially

<sup>4</sup> The other official border crossing for people with passports is at Jie Gao Special Economic Zone, also in Ruili City (see below).

relevant when considering Special Economic Zones such as Jie Gao SEZ in Ruili City, an important economic space of exception. In 1989 a bridge was built across the Ruili Jiang River, a tributary of the Irrawaddy River that separates the SEZ from the rest of Ruili, and in 1991 the SEZ was officially established. If citizens of China have special certificates, they can buy goods in the SEZ and take them out duty free. The SEZ is across from the town of Muse in northern Shan State, Myanmar. Due to the Chinese government’s anti-corruption campaign, however, many businesses connected to Chinese government officials moved from the Jie Gao SEZ to Muse in late 2014, reportedly to avoid being scrutinized by the central Chinese government.

Jie Gao is a trading SEZ, not one where factories have been established. There are three official border crossings there. Two are for large trucks and commerce, and the third is for private vehicles and pedestrians. However, there are numerous unofficial crossings located right next to these official ones, contributing to yet another diverse borderscape. While large-scale gambling casinos on the Myanmar side of the border have been shut down, we observed shady men lurking near a fence that constituted the border. They offered to guide people from the Chinese side across the frontier to small-scale gambling dens on the Myanmar side. The area is also known for being a prostitution centre (Zhang et al., 2011).

Just metres away from one of the official ports, people on the Myanmar side of the border set up a small shop directly adjacent to the border and facing the metal bar fence that divided China and Myanmar. They sell various small products through the fence to Chinese buyers on the other side. None of the Chinese officials working nearby seem to care, although there is a prominent sign on the fence warning, in Chinese, against crossing the border or conducting illegal trade across it. This is yet another example of how borderity works, as the border provides the seller with particular tax-free competitive advantages.

There is a customs post that separates Jie Gao SEZ from the rest of Ruili, and a number of small motorized vehicles and their drivers can be observed on the side of the road about 200 metres from the customs post that separates the SEZ from the rest of Ruili. We observed them waiting patiently for chances to cross the boundary and quickly drive their vehicles and the produce they were carrying past the customs post. Clearly, they were hoping to make a profit from evading taxes. The boundary between the SEZ and other parts of Ruili is significant, but it is also permeable at particular moments, and to some groups of people carrying out certain acts in the borderscape.

## 6. Conclusions

As we have endeavored to show, the concepts of the territorial trap, graduated sovereignty, multiscale borderland production, borderity and borderscapes are complimentary and useful for explaining how the borders between China and Myanmar in DAP are subject to variegated border governance, with various government agencies and individuals operating on different scales and applying various rules and regulations, while also interacting with non-government entities and individuals. Indeed, Agnew’s work helps us avoid the territorial trap, and see borders as more permeable and subject to cross-border influences, especially those coming from the more powerful China, but also the other way around as well. Keeping this in mind is clearly important when working along complex borderlands. Ong’s work has less to say about territoriality, but helps us think of sovereignty and governance more generally as being an uneven negotiated process in which flexibility and compromise is crucial, something that is quite evident in DAP. Keeping this in mind helps appropriately conceptualize on-the-ground realities related to power dynamics. It also allows us to more carefully recognize the social and political processes associated with bordering and rebordering, something that has been of considerable interest to borderlands scholars (Megoran, 2012). For example, the observations that government officials tend to discursively separate ‘business’ from ‘politics’ so as to allow more space for flexible cross-

border dealings with the KIO/KIA is an important tool for facilitating commerce. But while Ong's emphasis on economics and trade is crucial, we also found that other socio-cultural factors, such as the ethnic Achang tradition of sword making, also play important roles in influencing the ways that uneven sovereignty emerges. Thus, while we see the value of Ong's work, our analysis goes in a slightly different direction, but without really contradicting any of her points. Laine's scholarship emphasizes the multiscalar and flexible nature of border production processes, ones 'constantly negotiated and reconfigured by its actors at different levels' (p. 465), something that is quite evident in DAP, and is also in line with Ong's thesis. In addition, we can see how Amilhat Szary and Giraut's decision to think of borders as mobile devices linked to governmentality are useful to assess how policies and practices related to bordering serve to variously produce borderlands, and finally Brambilla's idea of borderscapes as assemblages are useful for thinking about how borderlands bring together a multitude of processes and practices (Salter, 2013; Sohn, 2016). But what makes our theoretical framework particularly useful is the combination of the works of these authors, so as to deepen our understandings of the processes at play. Here, we hope the sum is greater than the parts.

Thus, through thinking about this scholarship, which is generally in line with the recent work of various other geographers and theorists of borderlands, our framework helps explain how the central, provincial, prefecture, county, town and village-level actors and institutions all play important but variegated roles in borderlands governance and the construction of particular borderscapes in the DAP. Different agencies and individuals work at various scales and with uneven power relations. Variegated border governance may, at times, seem somewhat contradictory to those unfamiliar to borderlands circumstances, but it should not. Variegated borderland governance is gradually formulated through multiscalar processes, ones that also fit well with Neil Brenner's (2004) ideas about state rescaling for specific purposes, and Su's (2012) reflections on rescaling processes in reference to China's borders. This does not mean that everything works well or 'as it should', but rather that what we have observed represents the type of multiscalar, flexible and power laden approach that Laine, Amilhat Szary and Giraut, and Brambilla remind us of.

To manage both large-scale geopolitical circumstances and local scale politics and practicalities, the Chinese state, at different scales, has had to rescale itself to fit with on-the-ground realities. This rescaling is in line with what Su (2012) described in relation to China's development strategies along the border, but this sort of thing can also occur due to explicitly political changes, and at quite local levels when there is no policy impetus coming from the central level, something that others have so far failed to mention in relation to Chinese borders. Furthermore, the central government has found it politically necessary to only officially recognize and work with the Myanmar government, but the prefecture and county governments in DAP have, due to their more intimate proximity to the political and social complexities along the border, adopted a much more flexible position, thus allowing them to work in particular multiscalar ways with both the Myanmar government and the KIO/KIA. Local people living along the border, adjacent to spaces occupied by others who they share important ethnic and kinship ties, and under the control of the KIO/KIA, have adopted yet another position, one strongly supportive of the KIO/KIA. This being the case, we can see how crucial it continues to be to avoid the territorial trap and to think about rescaling processes in relation to graduated sovereignty, multiscalar borderlands production and borderity. This can be done by adopting a variegated borderlands governance strategy. Indeed, this suggests that the government of China (considered to include various levels of interlinked but somewhat independent levels of governance) has played an important role, along with non-state actors, in constructing flexible and pragmatic borderscapes. Moreover, the Chinese government is clearly more practically decentralized along its border and open to flexible positionings than some might imagine considering the broader reputation of Chinese as

being authoritarian and rigid.

Ultimately, by looking at the border through the lens of variegated borderlands governance, we can more easily recognize and conceptualize complex borderlands. These include borderlands that are not typically depicted on regional or global-scale maps or are easily comprehensible at national and international levels far away from the particular cultural, economic and geopolitical realities. This approach has value not only in DAP, but in many other parts of the world, and is a crucial element when thinking about borderlands governance in practice rather than simply in theory.

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