Rethinking Border Cities:
In-between Spaces, Unequal Actors and Stretched Mobilities across the China–Southeast Asia Borderland

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INTRODUCTION

What happens to border cities in this age of widespread urbanization, intensified globalization, and accelerated mobility? How does urbanism manifest itself and change in previously isolated and recently opened border regions? In what ways do rapid growth and greater opening of border cities affect local governance and everyday life? We are living in a world where cities have become more diverse and fluid than ever before. A small number of heavily studied cities like New York and Shanghai, the two largest and most cosmopolitan cities in the United States and China, respectively, exert and project powerful global influences due to their size, geographical location, and highly developed and diverse economic strength. At the same time, many small cities have gained stature through accelerated growth and new global connections despite their less advantaged locations, as in frontier regions. We know a lot more about the former type of cities than the latter, which act more as urban gateways to two or more connected countries. As border cities become more and more important and even central to understanding such critical urban topics as mobility, despite their relatively small size and peripheral location, they deserve our renewed attention and creative inquiry.

Two salient, and somewhat paradoxical, features of border cities quickly stand out. On the one hand, they are small in size, located in underdeveloped and vast ‘frontier’ regions, and somewhat isolated. On the other hand, the international borders near these cities are more fluid than fixed, and they are caught up in the uneven trans-boundary distribution
of state power and lubricated by dense cross-border cultural and ethnic ties. This unique combination of top-down and bottom-up pressures makes border cities very susceptible to both regional and global flows, or mobility in general, which can split them into both local and non-local, or a new kind of in-between space. Border cities, once fully open and in flux, pose a major challenge to the notion and category of bounded national territoriality and governance. At the core of this challenge is the velocity and complexity of mobility within and beyond the cities embedded in borderlands across multiple national boundaries.

To probe the relationship between changing border cities and mobility, and its varied impacts and implications, we focus on pairs of directly linked cities between the China–Myanmar (Ruili–Muse) and China–Laos (Mohan–Boten) borders. These cities possess the dual paradoxical attributes mentioned above. Despite being relatively small with fairly large hinterlands that span international borders, these cities experience disproportionately strong and intensive cross-border flows of people and goods, largely because of the uneven trans-boundary distribution of state power that accelerates flows in favor of China, ensuring its primacy. Thus, these cities are much more than just movers of people and goods. They represent a dynamic cross-national realm whose contemporary place and identity rest on the intensive, state-directed cross-overs of goods and peoples. As a result, these border cities have undergone drastic transformations in their demographic composition, development trajectory, and governance capacity. Shaping these transformations are three key actors, namely the nation state, the city, and the citizen, which interact to continuously de-border and re-border once outlying cities and lands.

Looking at these three actors across the in-between spaces of China, Myanmar, and Laos, we argue that the Chinese state, and, by extension, its border cities, exert the strongest impact on mobility across the China–Southeast Asia borderland. Within this China-dominated space, however, the other actors at the national and local level play generally lesser but varied roles. This mix of actors with uneven power produces varied mobilities that not only strengthen cross-border cooperation, but also lead to tension and challenges in governance. This essay examines how the uneven fortunes of border cities in frontier regions are brought about by cooperation and competition between the differentially positioned states, cities, and citizens across national borders between China and Southeast Asia.

BORDER CITIES’ ELEVATED IMPORTANCE FOR GLOBAL URBAN STUDIES

The 21st-century city has become an increasingly diverse terrain for new and innovative interdisciplinary research that advances our understanding of complex issues like mobility and sustainability. This says a lot about how much the city – the primary and conventional unit of urban studies – has been changing or ‘churning’ in relation to the restructuring of its larger and enveloping (regional and global) geographical contexts. While the city remains the core of larger scale global urban transformations, the latter prompt us to rethink the boundary, meaning, functionality, and externality of what is still the city, both its resilient foundation and flexible extensions. As we reflect more broadly on the city today, we should rethink how the less studied border cities and their existential
permutations and consequences point to alternative trajectories of urban life in the 21st century.

In rethinking beyond the conventional city, we turn to a new conceptual and empirical challenge in re-examining a less studied unit – the border city – in the regionalizing and globalizing context of the China–Southeast borderland. This focus offers a timely opportunity to address why and how border cities have become more central to understanding the relationship between the state, the city, and the citizen across blurred and often contested political and cultural borders. Border cities in their regional environs also prompt us to look at them as a new kind of political-economic space where the state takes on greater salience but intervenes more surgically to shape microeconomic activities and social mobilities. To guide the empirical analysis, we develop a framework to triangulate the state, the city, and the citizen with the goal of deciphering their complex relationship spanning multiple in-between spaces. More importantly, we aim to demonstrate how this triangular relationship matters to mobility and its broad ramifications.

As urbanization becomes more regionalized (Soja, 2014) and globalized (Sassen, 1991), border cities and regions that were once remote frontiers have become spaces where urbanization is picking up speed and scope. Small and isolated cities and towns have sprung up from once politically trivial and economically marginal landscapes (Chen, 2005). This process has benefited from targeted state policies, more open borders, and improved connectivity of transport networks. Yet research on this topic has not developed at the same rapid pace. We redress this deficit in the literature by examining two pairs of cities on the China–Myanmar and China–Laos borders. These cities have emerged as new sites for understanding the relative roles of the state, the city, and the citizen in creating a new kind of in-between space and thus reshaping mobility across the de-bordered and re-bordered borderlands.

Global urbanization has not only accelerated, but also taken on more diverse and complex attributes with more unintended consequences. This ‘churn’ of process has given rise to more variants and tangents of the city as a basic urban form. The deeper tangling of the urban process and form has set off a stream of efforts to reconceptualize what this means for new empirical study and theorizing.

In an ambitious reformulation of the conventional city-bound approach to urban studies, Brenner (2014: 19) ‘goes beyond global’ with the notion of planetary urbanization, which offers two powerful theses that may open up new avenues of empirical inquiry. One is to widen the scope of urban studies to a planetary horizon so that all spaces of capitalist global urbanization, such as the extraction of commodities in remote regions, can be adequately included. The other is a call to ‘blur, even explode, long-entrenched socio-spatial borders – not only between city and countryside, urban and rural, core and periphery, metropole and colony, society and nature, but also between the urban, regional, national and global scales’ (also see Brenner and Schmid, this volume). The coupling of the two messages points research attention to urban processes and forms that have either been basically left off the scholarly radar screen or fallen into the literature’s interstitial crevices and largely missed.

Also global in scope but with a different approach, Robinson (2006) argued and advocated for studying cities as ‘ordinary’ cities that must escape and transcend the dominant confines of Western-based and oriented theorizing. This reformulation also carries two significant analytical implications. One is to reposition the urban studies lens away from the West to the South where new analytical points of departure can be identified and solidified. The other is to turn that lens onto a much wider variety of cities as opposed
to a small number of heavily studied global cities in the West (also see Robinson, 2015). This combination has helped to stimulate more research on more cities in the Global South in their own historical and geographical contexts, as well as along and beyond their path-dependent trajectories.

Both perspectives above provide complementary guidance for rethinking border cities. A different view from a familiar scholar (Sassen, 2013) has also offered new insights on border cities. Further challenging that the state has exclusive authority over its territory, Sassen (2008) has demonstrated that varied global or denationalizing dynamics have deeply embedded themselves inside the state’s borders and thus eroded the latter and their legally based territoriality from within. While global finance clustered in global cities is a familiar example of entrenched anti-state power, weakened state control over borders exposes citizens and migrants to more risks like illicit activities stemming from easier border crossings. Yet does this unbalanced outcome of power hold when a strong state is capable of projecting inside-out power through its strategic border cities? This question directs our focus back to how border cities themselves act as active agents or urban gateways in channeling and redistributing state power while funneling more mobile and less loyal citizens across porous borders.

**Mobilities across new in-between spaces**

To characterize borderlands as in-between spaces is not really new. Many scholars have pointed out that borderlands are both divided and united by national territories on both sides given the historical legacy of colonialism that has redrawn political boundaries, the continued social construction of borders and their meanings, and increased cross-border flows in the age of globalization (see Banerjee and Chen, 2013). Yet two forces can inject new dynamism and volatility into well-established and relatively stable borderlands bounded by local and internal conditions. One is the rapid growth of small border cities into new hubs capable of exerting much greater influence on the entire borderland and beyond. The other is the shift in the relative power of national and local states across the borderline that can tilt the direction and strength of economic influence from one side to the other. Both forces combine to shake up a given borderland by altering the triangular relationship between the state, the (border) city and the citizen, which in turn reshapes the scope and velocity of cross-border mobility and then creates a new spatial pattern of uneven development, with unequal costs and benefits.

The recent rise of some border cities, while having a lot to do with globalization, has occurred through the simultaneous shift of their national and regional contexts. Previously, almost all border cities were subject to certain unfavorable conditions such as marginal locations, small populations and markets, insufficient support from national governments, less developed transport infrastructure, and likely cross-border conflicts. These conditions tend to constrain the otherwise advantageous opportunities for border cities to thrive, including strategic locations as customs checkpoints, convenient exposure to cross-border mobility, and benefits from spatially contiguous and adjacent trade routes, historical connections, migration circuits, and ethnic ties, which constitute a sort of collective social capital (Chen, 2000, 2005). The balance of these conditions and factors differentiates border cities’ level and stage of development and inward (national and regional) vs. outward (global) impact.
The relatively closed interaction between these conditions at the national and regional level has been disrupted by the growing impact of globalization and its regional and local penetration circumventing varied levels of national territorial regulation and border control. This outside-in influence has converged with the inside-out policies of states to open up border cities to more trade, foreign investment, and cross-border tourism, and build up their infrastructure to enhance the positive effects of these economic flows. This convergence has led to de-bordering, characterized by borders shifting from a barrier role to a bridging one that turns some marginal and remote border cities into dynamic and networked centers for the larger borderlands. Despite simultaneous re-bordering, which refers to the state (re)imposing control or regulation over borders so as to stem negative effects including terrorist activities and illegal crossings such as drugs and human trafficking (Chen, 2013), the rise of border cities has benefited from the stronger process of de-bordering relative to re-bordering, that is, more openness than closure. This dynamic parallels and contributes to more varied and multiplied borderings that further denationalize the state and create new local assemblages of the global (Sassen, 2008).

As a result of the push and pull of de-bordering and re-bordering, via both state-directed and market-driven globalization, the more important cities have taken on two key new dimensions. First, they have strengthened and intensified cross-border mobility as larger hubs and wider channels. The newer and more connected infrastructure (border economic zones and new highways to and through borders) built by the state allows greater and denser flows of goods, services, and people across the enlarged borderland. Second, border cities have gained more autonomy and influence vs. their states and citizens in the triangle discussed earlier. While both dimensions facilitate more cross-border and mutually beneficial cooperation, they generate not only friction against greater mobility, but also conflict among stronger but unequal actors, due to the uneven distribution of economic mobility and political power. It is this contradictory co-existence that renders the border cities in this chapter a new kind of in-between space.

What does mobility look like in this in-between space? Or, more broadly, does this in-between space pluralize and concretize mobility in ways to create new flows? Who shapes the meaning of these mobilities? What are their new drivers? Where are the anchors or moorings for them? Besides the greater density and volume of traditional cross-border flows of trade and visitors, new forces shaping cross-border mobilities in Asia have emanated from larger global concerns and contexts of geopolitics and geoeconomics (Lin and Yeoh, 2016). China again looms large and projects widespread footprints stretching and stitching previously unconnected and weakly connected cross-national border regions. These take the forms of long-distance cargo movement across the vast Eurasian land mass (Chen and Mardeusz, 2015) and lengthy oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia to China’s east coast (Fazilov and Chen, 2013). In a large-scale parallel move through its land borders with Southeast Asia, China has extended some tentacles of transport infrastructure (roads and high-speed train) into Myanmar and Laos via the key border cities (Chen and Stone, 2013). This has invited some resistance to what is perceived as top-down inter-government policies to dictate cross-border mobilities (Lin and Yeoh, 2016). As anchors and nodes for these new mobilities reshaping the traditional borderland into new in-between spaces, the border cities between China and Southeast Asia constitute the main focus and locus of inquiry.
BORDER CITIES BETWEEN CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

The multinational urban and regional contexts

Before probing the deeper causes and wider consequences of the border cities as a new in-between space, it is necessary to highlight the status of these cities conditioned by the national pattern of urbanization in China and the Southeast Asian countries in question. Table 26.1 shows three indicators on urbanization in the six countries that belong to the so-called Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) through 2010. It is worth noting that even the most urbanized units of the GMS members – China’s Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces – remained lower than China’s national level of urbanization. Most GMS countries experienced accelerated urbanization during 1990–2003. Yunnan, Guangxi, and the least urbanized countries of Cambodia and Laos urbanized most rapidly. Except for Laos, urbanization in the GMS countries slowed from 2005 to 2010. Generally speaking, all GMS countries have reached the level of urbanization (over 30%) that is usually associated with faster economic growth stemming from large cities with more functional strength.

While the level of urbanization in the GMS has been relatively low, there is a persistent dominance of a few major cities that are also capitals of their respective countries. Table 26.2 displays the ratio of the capital cities’ population to the total urban population in these countries. The data confirm the disproportionately large size and weight of the capital cities. Besides the extreme primacy of Bangkok, Phnom Penh accounted for about

Table 26.1 Urbanization in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Countries, Selected Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Urban Population (in 10,000s)</th>
<th>Percent Urban Population (%)</th>
<th>Urban Population Growth (annual %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>226,330</td>
<td>301,570</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>103,228</td>
<td>161,436</td>
<td>184,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>31,110</td>
<td>49,800</td>
<td>66,029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunnan</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>1,610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>1,235*</td>
<td>1,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>2,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>1,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>2,070</td>
<td>2,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Data for 1990 and 2003 are from the World Bank through Song (2005: Table 1); 2010 Data from the United Nations (2011: various tables); data for Guangxi provided by Yina Zhang at Fudan University in Shanghai. This table was recently published in Chen (2016).

* Data for 2000 as data for 2003 are not available.
# For the period 1990-2000 and 2000-2010, respectively.
half of Cambodia’s total urban population around the year 2000. Over time, however, the demographic dominance of these cities declined and their dominance is projected to drop further as secondary and ever-smaller cities grow more rapidly. This acceleration—deceleration logic is beginning to reflect the shifts in the relative balance of influence that change over time in the triangular relationship model.

The relatively low level of urbanization overall coupled with the dominance of a few capital cities in the GMS means that only a handful of urban centers have more diversified functions and that most other relatively small cities are narrowly specialized in single sectors like trade, transportation, and tourism, with little manufacturing strength and weak physical connectivity to project their influence very far. They are also spread unevenly over large distances and thus incapable of generating many economic linkages and spillovers within and across the borders and border regions of the GMS countries. It is this vacuum of cross-border regional dominance by large urban centers that has created an opening for the only real power in the region – China – to step in with its targeted and timely initiative to produce a new regional zone of cross-cutting power and influence.

**Table 26.2 Urban primacy in the GMS countries (percentage of largest city in the total urban population), 1960 -2015, selected years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kunming, Yunnan Province</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanning, Guangxi Province (1964)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>(2010)</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnom Penh, Cambodia</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane, Laos (1985)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(2010)</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangon, Myanmar</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok, Thailand</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Adapted from Song (2006: Table 2); data for Guangxi provided by Yina Zhang at Fudan University in Shanghai. This table was recently published in Chen (2016).

China’s cross-border regional reach

Yunnan Province and its border cities were important trade outposts historically. Yunnan’s active historical role in border trade, however, stagnated from the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) to the early 1980s, when coastal provinces and cities were heavily favored over inland border provinces. While Yunnan’s international trade rose from
$130 million in 1980 to $750 million in 1990 (Wang and Li, 1998), its growth lagged significantly behind most coastal cities. The 1990s, however, saw the return of Yunnan’s important role in international trade, especially in border trade. Yunnan’s foreign trade grew 20% annually and amounted to $15 billion in 1997. Foreign trade as a share of provincial GDP rose from 1.8% in 1978 to 10.3% in 1997. Yunnan’s border trade grew from a cumulative total of $24 million during 1978–1984 to $431 million in 1994, averaging an annual rate of over 30% (Chen, 2006).

Yunnan’s six border prefectures accounted for just about all the provincial border trade through 1995. Dehong Minority Autonomous prefecture received the lion’s share of the total border trade due to its strategic location. Bordering Kachin and Shan states of Myanmar for over 500 kilometers, Dehong is close to such important Myanmar cities as Lashio, Myitkyina, and Mandalay. From the Burma Road (built as a vital supply route after Japan’s 1937 assault on eastern China) between Kunming and Mandalay at Lashio, there is a road link to India via Myitkyina and rail and the Irrawaddy River connections to Yangon (Rangoon) and the strategically important Indian Ocean.

Figure 26.1 [Map 1] Yunnan Province and Its Economic Zones and Cities Bordering Myanmar and Laos (www.traveltibetguide.com/Trip_Overland_from_Yunnan_to_Tibet_tour.html/)
The onset of the 2000s saw the launch of China’s ‘Go West’ campaign, which was designed to shift investment and development weight to the relatively underdeveloped interior and border regions. This large-scale policy shift at the central level unleashed a new wave of opportunities for Yunnan to expand its cross-border regional cooperation. On May 6, 2011, China’s State Council issued, ‘Supporting the Accelerated Construction of Yunnan as the Important Outpost for the Southwest Region,’ which tasked the capital city of Kunming to become the international hub and ‘bridgehead’ for China’s southwestern region facing the GMS. Symbolically, Yunnan’s tallest building has risen in Kunming’s Panlong district, which will serve as the financial and commercial zone for the local presence and regional expansion of multinational companies.

Kunming was a scenic but sleepy and historic but less developed provincial city through the early 2000s. Since then it has been pushed by both Beijing and Yunnan to become a much more powerful international metropolis that will spread and distribute growth benefits to and around the smaller secondary cities in Yunnan, at the same time projecting long-distance influences over the border to the GMS. To extend Kunming’s influence in the direction of the GMS countries south and west of the border, the Yunnan government approved the establishment of six border economic cooperation zones in May 2012, including one around the city of Tengchong (see Figure 26.1), giving them the autonomy to offer financial incentives and approve investment projects. This provincial initiative augmented the central government’s approval of opening three border economic cooperation zones in the cities of Ruili, Wanding, and Hekou in 1992 when the GMS was launched.

**The Yunnan–Myanmar border zone**

The city of Ruili located in Yunnan Province is a major border crossing between China and Myanmar. Of the growing number of cooperation zones along the extensive China–Southeast Asia borderland, the Ruili–Muse zone stands out as the most established and important case for studying how mobility is shaped by the power between the state, city, and citizen that is distributed across and lodged deep inside an in-between space. This in-between space called Ruili, located at the tip of Guomen (National Gate) Avenue just across a portion of the Ruili River that is entirely in Chinese territory yet also at the edge of Myanmar, is indeed the southwest doorway to China. The mobilities of people and goods in this dynamic cross-national realm, however, have been intensified and accelerated by both convergence and contestation among new state policies, more autonomous localities, and diverse residents and migrants. All this has converted a bordered zone into a more in-between space with the blurring of separate yet interrelated national and local interests.

Ruili’s role as a key city for stimulating lagged economic development in its border region and for bridging the latter with the neighboring Southeast Asian economies began when the city created the Jiegao Border Economic Development Zone in 1991 to facilitate trade with Muse on the Myanmar side. Jiegao’s role for economic development was further elevated when a special export processing zone policy was implemented in 2000. In more recent years Ruili’s importance has moved far beyond a mere border market. This bustling city with a large international population has become more regionally linked to China’s overall strategic plan to develop its vast western region while...
extending its influence across its borders, and thus both the central and local governments have been building Ruili up to a regional hub. For example, the Master Plan of the Ruili Experimental Zone, which was approved by China’s National Development and Reform Commission on August 12, 2013, included 238 projects intended to boost Ruili as a gathering place and gateway for economic activities and flows with the neighboring Southeast Asian economies. One such project was a new oil/gas pipeline from western Myanmar into Yunnan (Chen, 2015).

Major infrastructure investment over the years has strengthened Ruili’s role as an increasingly open, though rather complicated, land port. Cross-border travel has been largely encouraged by Chinese authorities, dependent on the security situation in Myanmar, and the zone has become a testing ground for cross-border finances. Strong cross-border intercourse has created numerous economic opportunities, transforming this once sleepy border town with a sparse population into a lively city with a population size (160,000) about equal to that of New Haven, Connecticut (Figure 26.2).

On the other side of the border Myanmar is also making efforts to gain influence over this cross-national zone. One notable example is the creation of a 150 hectare border trade zone situated at Muse on China’s border, called the Muse 105th Mile Border Trade Zone (Figure 26.1). The adoption of an open-door policy officially opened the border for trade with China. Under the border trade agreement signed in August 1994, Myanmar set up a border trade office in Muse, which was later expanded to provide more rapid service in April 2006. Now merchants can freely export goods from across the country to Muse and export licenses can be issued on the spot within one day after a formal sales contract is confirmed with buyers on the Chinese side. This has greatly facilitated trade between the

Figure 26.2  The large and growing Myanmar community in Ruili (Photo by Curtis Stone, 2013)
two sides and allows Myanmar citizens to export more goods such as capital goods, raw materials and, daily use products.

In addition to the huge 150 hectare border trade zone set up in Muse to facilitate trade with China, Myanmar has also been connecting Muse to Mandalay, the country’s second largest city. Not only is Mandalay the second largest city in Myanmar but it borders Thailand, an economic giant in Southeast Asia. To better connect the Ruili–Muse zone to the Mandalay–Thailand zone overland, Myanmar upgraded the 460 km road that connects the border town to the city. This upgrade not only reduced the travel time from up to a week to 12–16 hours, but also made the longer journey from Muse to Myanmar’s capital city of Yangon in the south much more convenient. Now Myanmar traders operating in the space between Muse and Ruili can board a long-distance bus and get to Yangon in about 24 hours, and many traders do in fact make this trip on a regular basis. While the road conditions between Muse and Mandalay (and Yangon) are not as good as between Ruili and Yunnan’s capital city of Kunming, their improvement has nevertheless elevated Muse’s important role as a regional hub.

The Yunnan–Laos border region

Compared to the established trade-centric border ties between China and Myanmar, the Yunnan–Laos border region features weaker but growing connections. Like Mandalay in Myanmar, Laos itself serves as a type of overland passageway that connects China to Thailand as well as other Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam. From Jinghong, the largest city in Xishuangbanna and the seat of government from which Xishuangbanna (Sipsongpanna) Dai Autonomous Prefecture exercises its authority, one can get to a small city called Mengla by bus in about four hours. From there one can easily reach the border town of Mohan located at the China–Laos border (see Figure 26.1). Mohan is the gateway to China from Laos. Whereas Ruili connects China to a changing Myanmar and provides China with raw materials and access to the Indian Ocean, Laos supplies China with raw materials and access to larger Southeast Asia.

The importance of Laos as a supplier of key resources as well as its importance as a major land route to Southeast Asia has encouraged the Chinese government to build up this cross-border space. For example, in late 2015 China announced an investment of $31.4 billion to build a 4,500 km² pilot economic zone on the border with Laos in an economic development park in Mohan in order to boost the two-sided development. At the time of the announcement more than 240 projects in fields ranging from transportation to education and energy were included. In addition, under construction in this zone is a railway linking two important cities in Yunnan: Yuxi (about 90 km south of Kunming) and Mohan (gateway to Laos), and there is planned preparation for a new airport at Mengla. The railway and airport are expected to be in use by 2020.

Before the formal start of these ambitious projects that will project and propel China’s influence into Laos and other parts of Southeast Asia even further, we find an existing paved road built by China that already connects Boten to Luang Namtha, the capital of Luang Namtha Province in northern Laos and a large settlement north of Luang Prabang, which then stretches 630 km all the way to Vientiane, the capital of Laos. To give a sense of how this border zone is becoming more of an extension of China than a shared space, we find that China’s cell phone service extends about 6 km into Laos, just like it does from Ruili into Muse over the border. As Stone observed during his field work in 2013...
the deeper one goes into Laos from Boten, the more the mountains look stripped of their trees because of China’s huge appetite for lumber. And in Luang Namtha, you will find many shops that sell Chinese goods as well as various Chinese-owned and operated businesses, including a motorcycle store and a hotel.

While all this may appear as China pushing its influence across the border with Myanmar and Laos, it has actually left new footprints and expanded facilities of economic activities and transport and communication infrastructure that characterize the growing border cities. Moreover, these cities have been stretched by state-directed accelerated development on and from both sides of the borders into larger regional spaces overarching traditional discrete local places (the old border cities) and their extended activities. This alerts us to the emergence of new trans-border regional nuances that should be spatially classified and more deeply analyzed.

**ACTORS FILLING THE IN-BETWEEN SPACES**

As the description above indicates, both border regions are characterized by the strong and uneven Chinese influence originating from China’s and Yunnan’s policies to connect more strongly with Southeast Asia through improving the conditions and extending the reach of border cities. China’s cross-border influence in Myanmar and Laos has grown via: (a) the amassing of economic activities from institutional arrangements like the well-supported border zones; and (b) the spatial spread and extension of economic reach through large-scale transport infrastructure (highways and railways) from inside China and Yunnan Province all the way into the border regions of and farther afield inside Myanmar and Laos. While weaker and more passive in responding to China’s cross-border influence, both Myanmar and Laos have engaged with it in ways that have thrust their border zones and cities into a broader in-between space filled with greater mobilities and more contentious politics.

From a more conventional interstate perspective, we can take the empirical analysis of this phenomenon in the direction of better understanding the sub-regional dimensions of cross-border relations between China and Myanmar and Laos, respectively. While this analysis can shed new light on how informal regionalism and simultaneous de-bordering and re-bordering lead to both integration and fragmentation of traditional borderlands (see Chen, 2013), it is not sufficient for rethinking border cities as a kind of in-between space that reshapes mobility and governance. To secure this new analytical purpose, we use a tripartite analytical approach to examine the relative role of the state, city, and citizen in reshaping the border cities and mobility between China’s southwestern region and mainland Southeast Asia.

**Three key actors in cross-border space**

The state at the national and local level, together with the citizen, are three critical actors that shape cross-border spaces and mobilities, even though the relative power of each vs. the other two varies a lot across the combined historical, geographical, and socio-cultural conditions of cross-border spaces. While the national state is usually the most powerful actor as the shaper and enforcer of border policy, the state’s capacity to control more open
borders under globalization has been eroded, leading not only to a further decoupling of national political and territorial integrity, but also to greater trans-border mobility, especially between physically linked border cities. As a result of this intentional and reactive decentralization initiated by the national state, the local state at the border has become relatively more autonomous in determining trans-boundary mobilities. Despite being subordinate to both the central and local state, the citizen in border cities has become more mobile and active in initiating and changing cross-border flows. Additionally, the citizen in border cities often relies on unique national networks that may differ from those of the dominant nationality of the state, making consistent top-down control much harder.

To unpack this shifting relationship among the three actors, we see the conventionally more powerful actor – the nation state (of China in particular) – taking on a new dimension in relating to its subnational units, the latter’s cross-border counterparts, and their citizens. While we expect some rescaling of the Chinese state’s power (Brenner, 2004) in this cross-border space, it is somewhat unexpected to witness the Chinese state scaling ‘down and out’ using both institutional and infrastructure mechanisms. By decentralizing and relocating development priority to southwestern Yunnan and its border region, the Chinese government has ‘scaled down’ administrative decision making to allow this underdeveloped frontier to catch up. By building Kunming and Ruili into more open outposts facing Southeast Asia, the national and provincial governments have ‘scaled out’ or projected out economic influence into the border zones of Myanmar and Laos and beyond. The most effective institutional mechanism for facilitating both forms of rescaling of China’s economic engagement with the Myanmar and Laos border regions is the special border zones in Ruili and Mohan. In parallel, China has created a powerful channel by building and extending large-scale transport and infrastructure tentacles in multiple cross-border directions, with a newly built oil and gas pipeline from the port city of Kyaukphyu on Myanmar’s west coast to Kunming and a planned railway that may reach from Kunming all the way to Laos’ capital city of Vientiane (see below). This stretches the mobility of goods and natural resources across more places and longer distances through rural landscapes, creating new frontier urban footprints and thus offering a kind of supportive evidence for Brenner’s planetary urbanization thesis.

While the nation state is the primary actor in the tri-actor relationship with the strongest effect on the direction and balance of mobilities in cross-border space, the (border) city acts as the primary site and vehicle for these mobilities. In addition, the border city is the direct actor for implementing any national and provincial policies intended to make different border cities more prosperous and cooperative with one another. Even more importantly, the border city is the actual producer of economic growth and also serves to distribute the benefits from new development and greater mobility. In the state–city–citizen scheme for understanding mobility, the city occupies the crucial middle layer that is capable of aligning macro state policies from national and provincial capitals with the microeconomic interests of citizens across border cities. Unlike cities in interior regions where they interact and compete with many others in closer geographical proximity, border cities between China and Myanmar/Laos are few and far between and thus play a disproportionally greater role in shaping the development of cross-border space. In other words, the border city ‘scales up’ the new cross-border mobility of people and wealth unleashed by targeted state policies and citizens’ grassroots activities.

Despite being heavily constrained by the combined institutional power of the state and the city, the citizen is released and empowered by the larger and freer cross-border
space resulting from more open borders and denser economic ties. Two other factors also enhance the role of citizens in remaking the cross-border space into more lively binational places to their advantage. One is the deep-rooted historical, cultural, ethnic, and migratory ties binding people on both sides of the border including those between China and Myanmar/Laos. The other and related factor is the more flexible and fluid identity of border residents with their less aligned national politics and territories (Chen, 2005). Under these multiple favorable conditions, the relative importance of citizens has risen through the aggregated impact of their varied individual activities in border trade and tourist visits. It constitutes the bottom-up force that further scales up and densifies cross-border mobilities relative to the top-down push by both the national and local state.

As each of the three actors has become stronger in the more interactive cross-border environment, they are more capable of reaching farther into both sides of the borderline and stretching it. Given the unequal power and uneven influence of these actors vis-à-vis their cross-border counterpart at each of the three levels, there are more complex interactions across boundaries that add more fissures and fusions, thus reinforcing the in-betweenness of the re-bordered spaces.

The Ruili–Muse border zone in larger context: unequal power and uneven development

From the three-actor framework discussed above, an analysis of the Ruili–Muse border zone (see Figure 26.1) will reveal its complexity with regard to the main drivers and outcomes of stretched mobilities in a reorganized cross-border space. This analysis, however, will fall short without taking into account the larger context of China–Myanmar trade that makes the framework fitting for the case. Myanmar formalized border trade with China in 1988 when the military government, which was replaced by the current civilian government under Aung San Suu Kyi in 2016, took power. The establishment of the Department of Border Trade in 1996 further boosted Myanmar’s border trade with China. From the Chinese side, China being Myanmar’s largest trading partner and largest investor (surpassing Thailand in 2011) looms large for their trade-intensive border zone. In value terms, transit trade across the Yunnan border accounts for over half of China–Myanmar trade. Over 80% of Myanmar’s exports to China and 40% of its imports from China come across Yunnan’s border (Singh, 2016). Myanmar’s trade with China accounts for 87% of its border trade, much larger than its trade with Thailand, at a distant second of 12%. But border trade did not become dominant in China–Myanmar’s overall trade overnight. From 1992 to 2004, China’s average share in Myanmar’s total cross-border trade was about 63.2%, whereas Yunnan’s shares of Myanmar’s total exports and imports were 59.0% and 70%, respectively (Than, 2005: 43). These statistics confirm that long-established border trade is the foundation for understanding mobility across the China–Myanmar border zone. Without serious trade, there would be no reason for China and Myanmar to support and develop this in-between space.

Of the all the border trading posts between China and Myanmar, none has more volume and vibrancy than the twin cities of Ruili and Muse. Ruili is China’s and Yunnan’s most important and dominant location for trade with Myanmar, while Muse has been Myanmar’s busiest among its 15 border trading stations facing China, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Laos. As of mid-November 2015, Myanmar’s border trade at Muse rose
to $3.36 billion from $2.95 billion in 2014. By comparison, Myanmar’s second largest trading station of Myawaddy on the Thai border recorded a volume of $411 million, up from $211 million in 2014. Ruili is also the all-important cross-border pass-through point for the long and recently completed China–Myanmar oil and gas pipeline that winds all the way from Myanmar’s west coast to the Chinese city of Kunming (Figure 26.3). This further elevates Ruili’s crucial importance in stretching cross-border connections and mobilities in both directions in a similar way that the twin border cities of Mohan and Boten threads the planned ambitious China–Laos Railway (see later).

The perfect place to see the close economic ties between China and Myanmar is at the vibrant jade market in the Chinese border town of Ruili. This is where Myanmar traders such as 47-year-old Soe Paing sell raw jade – one of the Southeast Asian country’s many natural resources – in the most important trading hub between the two countries. His
family has been in the jade trade for generations. While examining various pieces of raw jade in his shop office, he said, ‘Chinese people didn’t just start to like jade. They have always liked jade and used it for thousands of years.’ He went on, ‘Our business depends mainly on China though since other countries are not as fond of jade as the Chinese.’ The scale and centrality of jade trade in Ruili struck us in the face during our research field trip there in 2013. Jade trade, almost by itself, has elevated this once sleepy town to a vibrant city by attracting a large number of outside traders on both sides of the border. The physical jade market, which literally straddles the border, has turned into a large in-between space where the buying and selling with long-distance sourcing and marketing ties now define and dominate the borderland.

Jade trade aside, the fruit business has become another mechanism to stretch and reconfigure the in-between spaces and cross-border mobility. Myanmar companies based in Muse township used to buy fruit from growers in Tada-Oo, Myittha, and Kyaukse in Mandalay and as far as from Yangon. The fruit business in Muse has done well, with workers from all over Myanmar making good money from around 1,000 trucks that deliver daily. Since 2012 when Chinese traders first entered the Muse trading zone, they have slowly taken over the fruit market. ‘China is very prominent here and influences all the markets in Muse. Chinese businesspeople are engaged in both imports and exports,’ said the owner of Khwar fruit retail shop. He said, ‘The brokers, owners and shareholders are all Chinese, but the ordinary workers are Myanmar.’

The most important shift is that Chinese fruit traders have extended their operation deeper into Shan State instead of dealing with Myanmar middlemen at the Muse border post. ‘Now, Chinese brokers are connecting directly with the farmers, giving them money, equipment, and seeds. This is making life hard for small local traders,’ said U Sai Khin Maung, secretary of the Muse fruit retailers’ association. ‘They profit on both sides of the border, buying fruit cheaply in Myanmar and selling it on in China.’ ‘Local farmers are happy to do business with the Chinese brokers because they can continue to farm their own land with Chinese technology and they have access to a good market,’ he said. However, Chinese buyers could later lower the prices local farmers were prepared to pay. If that happens, he was concerned that his organization might not then be in a position to help the farmers. Additionally, many Myanmar citizens in the border region have strong Chinese ties, perhaps a generation or so apart, making it even easier for savvy Chinese to exploit this cross-border ethnic network.

Moving beyond their traditional space of operation in the border city, Chinese fruit traders have stretched their mobility and thus enlarged their role in reshaping the cross-border fruit market in their favor. In doing so, they have also created a new and larger in-between economic space inside Myanmar’s national territory. This is akin to pushing the in-between space at the border to farther beyond. The forward shift of the in-between space from the border is also accompanied by a more unequal economic practice that benefits Chinese fruit brokers at some expense of Myanmar fruit farmers.

In the other direction, businesspeople from Myanmar entering China legally are given a renewable border pass. They are treated very much like local Chinese citizens, provided they remain in the special border zone, and are allowed to live and work on both sides of the border. All they need is an ID card, nothing else. The process of entering China via the land border in Jiegao is a painless formality. For 2 RMB ($0.30), Myanmar citizens are given a border passbook that is limited to seven days but it can be renewed.
when requested. As long as the passbooks is valid and up to date, there is no limit to how long a Myanmar citizen can stay in China. That is, they are able to carry out their business in China without any major issues; however, the border pass is limited to Yunnan’s Dehong Prefecture only. While convenient, China really has no choice. It is very difficult to control such a large, porous border in which various peoples are used to crossing the border for personal and business reasons, and making it difficult or too troublesome may just encourage more people to cross the border illegally. But China has made it easy for Myanmar citizens to live and do business in this in-between space and respects their rights. For example, one successful Myanmar citizen who does business in the border zone (and was interviewed) had lived there for years without issue and was married to a Chinese citizen.

Myanmar make up about 30% of Ruili’s population (Figure 26.2), and about 70% of that percentage are from Rakhine State. That is to say, the majority of the Myanmar population in Ruili are Muslim and mostly stateless because of political persecution back in Myanmar. From those we interviewed, who by the way where very interested in our presence and happy to be interviewed, we learned that Muslims feel safe in China and are treated well by the local government of Ruili. In Ruili, most can be seen engaging in the jade business. The money they earn is not sent back through formal channels, for instance via bank wire transfers. Instead, the money they earn in China is sent back to friends and family in Myanmar using what they call a ‘friend to friend’ network, which helps them avoid fees. On average, Myanmar citizens engaged in the jade business in China can make 3000 RMB ($500) a month. For comparison, this is what a migrant worker working a service job in Beijing might earn each month, and Beijing is much costlier. To ensure money is not wasted, it is common for five people to share a single-room apartment in Ruili, the rent of which is 500 RMB ($80) a month and includes electricity and water.

At the border gate, we interviewed a young woman from Muse who crosses the border every day to work in a hotel bookstore right at the border in a special zone that is in Chinese territory but also considered international. She is third-generation Myanmar. Her grandparents went to Muse, and she speaks Chinese. Working at the bookstore, she makes 2800 RMB ($400) a month, a relatively high salary that may have do with a possible relative connection. Another young woman we interviewed in a small, privately owned bookstore located on a street in Ruili was from Lashio, which is about 115 km from the border. Unlike the first young woman who crossed the border daily, she lived in China and made 1000 RMB ($150) a month. Elsewhere in town, we found that 80% of the workers at a Chinese furniture factory are from Myanmar as the owner has been encouraged to hire them by the local government. Local government agencies have also begun to offer Chinese-language instruction to these long-term residents from Myanmar who realize its importance.

**The Mohan–Boten border area: In the shadow of a new cross-border railway**

Compared to the scale and diversity of economic activities linking the China–Myanmar border cities, the cities, or really towns, on the China–Laos border host smaller populations and more limited activities. Mohan’s one long street stretches to the border gate that
leads right up to the Laos border town of Boten (see Figure 26.1). Along this street one can find an official money exchange building where the Chinese RMB currency can be exchanged for the Lao kip currency freely and easily, as well as people outside offering to exchange money for a fee. Once you cross the border into Boten, there are many Lao locals who speak Chinese and offer car services. Many Chinese businesspeople and tourists come across the border here on long-distance buses from cities such as Kunming and Jinghong before continuing on to their final destination, which may be in Laos or in another part of Southeast Asia. Boten was once infamous for gambling and other vices. The project that transformed this once-backward area into a beehive of economic activity was known as Golden Boten City. What followed was the proliferation of gaming halls, prostitutes, pawn shops, and pharmacies. Today, Boten is something of a ‘ghost town’ with visible leftover Chinese influence (see Figure 26.4) as opposed to a once more lively city, though a large Chinese-run hotel still operates in the area. According to one of our interviewees there, the lawless city was shut down by China because Chinese were killing Chinese over the lucrative, once lawless, space.

Figure 26.4  The disbanded spaces in the Lao border town of Boten
Source: Photo by Curtis Stone, 2013.
Note: The two Chinese characteristics say ‘Internet Bar’.
The small and underdeveloped cities on the China–Laos border will not remain so for too long if a planned China–Trans-Laos railway is built. Considering the remoteness of border towns like Mohan and Boten and their lack of transport connectivity to major urban centers, the transport infrastructure linking them from and to both sides of the border, either under construction or planning, will change their fortunes for ever. From inside Yunnan Province, a rail line from Kunming to the Laos border crossing at Mohan is already under construction. This is also part of Yunnan’s massive infrastructure development plan priced at over $10 billion and that also includes already-completed and new highways from Kunming to the border cities with both Myanmar and Laos. These transport lines are the physical manifestations and carriers of China’s and Yunnan’s grand strategy to widen and deepen economic ties with Southeast Asia (see earlier).

The most ambitious part of China’s inside-out transport strategy has been embraced halfway by the infrastructure-deficit Laos. While the idea for this project germinated in 2010, the official agreement was not signed until November 2015 and ground for construction broken in Vientiane on December 2, 2015. The line will start in Kunming and travel southward to Jinghong and Mohan until entering Laos through the Lao border city of Boten. It will then travel past Luang Prabang and Vang Vieng before arriving in Vientiane (see Figure 26.5). Designed to carry both passengers and cargo, the railway will run at an average speed of 160 kilometers per hour, which qualifies it as high–medium-speed train, and 60% of the line will be bridges and tunnels. The Lao government expects roughly 4 million Lao passengers a year to use the railway’s 420 km route through the country at first, with the figure growing to 6.1 million passengers in the mid-term and 8.1 million passengers in the long run. According to a deputy prime minister of Laos, a total of nearly 10 million passengers from China and five other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries are expected to use the railway annually, with that figure rising to 11.9 million passengers per year in the mid-term and 16.5 million in the long term. A railway of this projected capacity is not cheap to build, and it carries an estimated price tag of roughly $6.3 billion, which is more than half of Laos’s current GDP. This is a great example of the unequal political and economic power we have been discussing. Obviously this is a good thing for Laos and the larger region, but it is China that will ultimately push forward the project. China will be responsible for 70% of the investment, while Laos will be responsible for the remaining 30%. China even agreed to give a low-interest 20-year loan of $480 million to Laos to help the latter cover its portion of the cost, with no principal during the first five years of the loan period. An optimistic Lao government official believes that Laos will be able to pay the loan back within five years by selling potash to China from the five mines that are yet to be excavated. But given the size of the loan relative to the size of Laos’s GDP, coupled with the fact that Laos will have to take a large loan from China for an infrastructure project with a long-delayed return on investment, pessimistic government officials see a risk of financial crisis and high debt that will plague Laos after this project is completed. In addition to economic risks, however, Laos must also be cautious about the risks of accelerated, external urbanism eroding its distinctiveness. As noted above, the border zones tend to take on more features of the Chinese state.

While it is too early to know if this project will pay off for both sides, especially for Laos, and how, this railway will take mobilities of people and goods far beyond the
Connected border cities to cover a long regional corridor of commerce. In fact, China envisions this railway to extend from Vientiane to Nong Khai and Bangkok, Thailand, and then all the way to Singapore via Malaysia. For landlocked Laos, the railway appears to make much sense for connecting to outside markets. In reality, however, Laos’s small economy may end up benefiting much less than its larger and more developed neighbors, especially the giant next-door neighbor of China, because it lacks so much in manufacturing and domestic demand to take advantage of this large-scale transport infrastructure. Moreover, paying back a huge loan from China with valuable natural sources like potassium may set Laos further back in trying to catch up in development.

Figure 26.5 The planned route of the cross-border China–Laos railway
CONCLUSION

Border cities between China and Southeast Asia have become new in-between spaces and thus prompt us to reassess their specific and broad importance for advancing global urban studies. These cities’ in-betweeness sheds some light on three traditional and recent thematic threads in the literature. First, they have widened the narrower focus of the borderlands literature by incorporating the impact of more distant global and more expansive regional forces, as well as more targeted national policies on borders (also see Chen, 2005). They have sensitized us to the importance of understanding mobility in places that are generally perceived to be geographical margins (Anwar, 2016). Second, they offer new evidence confirming some elements of the planetary urbanization thesis. They reflect some urban–rural and core–periphery blurring, the scaling up of small peripheral places and their limited economic functions, and more layered interactions among global, regional, and local scales. Third, they align with but move beyond Sassen’s (2013) way of theorizing globalization as assemblages and borderings through denationalization and deterritorialization. If we add up these empirical insights for the border cities under study, we see them offering an integrated lens for seeing not only the scope and contour of these in-between spaces, but also the key actors who shape them: states, cities, and citizens.

These border cities would not have become more in-between without the key actors of the state, the city, and the citizen making and remaking them so. With that said, it is the city that is the main platform for states and citizens to spread their influence across formal borders. Via the city, the state effectively extends its control, and via the city, the citizen interacts with this dynamic space. Both the state and the citizen affect the (border) city’s future by intensifying cross-border exchange. The national state across the China–Southeast borderland has strongly influenced the border cities in two ways. It has adopted policies to favor the border cities by according them with development priority and incentives. This has created locally targeted special zones of various kinds in the border cities and produced clustered economies of scale. In a more direct and impactful way, the national governments have come together and crystalized the border cities into anchors for more connected regional economic spaces through large-scale cross-border transport infrastructure such as the China–Lao railway. As a result, the border cities themselves have gained administrative autonomy and new economic resources to speed and scale up their own development and external influence. Ruili in particular has emerged as one of China’s major gateways for Southeast Asia (Chen, 2015), from a small and quite town bordering Myanmar. Through their demographic and economic growth and elevated regional influence, the border cities have created larger in-between spaces of mobility around and through them. Finally, the Chinese fruit brokers and Myanmar jade traders have generated bottom-up agglomeration economies at the border. While state and city policies have empowered and incentivized these small traders to be entrepreneurial and mobile, their local and long-distance commercial networks have stretched the border cities into more expansive in-between spaces.

Given the relative power of the three actors on different sides of the borders, they affect mobilities differently. From the Chinese side, the power of the national state originating from the political center has triggered and reinforced compatible development measures of the responsive and autonomous border cities, creating a mutually synergistic effect on
mobility. However, it is the small traders who translate and transmit this effect across the border cities deep inside Myanmar and Laos. From the opposite direction, the weaker and more passive states of Myanmar and Laos appear to have been drawn into China’s orbit of cross-border influence, while their more mobile and active small traders have taken advantage of the more open borders to make money from business opportunities that otherwise would not be available without what China has become and done. At each of the three scales, the Chinese side holds and projects an undue amount of influence over the corresponding actors of the other two countries. While the states and the border cities of Myanmar and Laos can become dependent on their Chinese counterparts for the economic largesse and face an uncertain catch-up development prospect, the small Myanmar and Lao traders may benefit from more mobile economic opportunities on the Chinese side of the border, such as export/import markets and commuter jobs. Yet their long-term residency in China’s border cities may challenge their citizenship and national identity in relation to short-term material improvement in life-chances.

The more salient in-between spatial identity of these border cities is both a cause and outcome of the triangular interaction of the three key actors. The mutual reproduction of the spaces and actors has unleashed a new pattern of mobility and extended its reach and impact far beyond the borderland itself. The combination of all three foci in this chapter, namely in-between spaces, a trio of actors, and new mobilities, points to promising avenues for probing the future of global urbanization, planetary or not, and the unfolding 21st-century city, especially the border city.

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Notes

1 The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), a sub-regional economic cooperation program facilitated by the Asian Development Bank in 1992, includes Cambodia, Yunnan Province of the People’s Republic of China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Guangxi Province of China, which borders Vietnam, joined GMS in 2005.
3 ‘China polishes Myanmar relations as West closes,’ Eunice Yoon, Asia Tomorrow, A CNBC special report at ETCNBC.com, June 15, 2015; accessed from www.cnbc.com/2015/06/15/china-polishes-myanmar-relations-as-west-closes-in.html

5 Ibid.

6 Same as Note 3 above.


9 Ibid.

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