

Oscillating Border Policy: Is It a Triumph for the Government or for the Myanmar IDPs in China?

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Abstract

In recent years, several large-scale internal military conflicts in Myanmar, represented by the “8.08 Kokang Incident”, have led to an influx of Burmese into Yunnan, a border area between China and Myanmar. China’s border management has faced serious challenges, most directly reflected in a change in its border policy. China has not used enforced power to directly stop the influx of Burmese, such as building walls or barbed wire. But neither has it recognized the status of these people as refugees. China’s new border management policy is more about blurring their official status, in practice, allowing them to enter easily to the Chinese border city (Ruili) for work. But it also restricts them to the southeast coast of China in search of better income. This seemingly contradictory attitude of the Chinese government reflects the complexity of a multi-actor participation in governance in the China-Myanmar border region. Using Gramsci’s “hegemony theory” and Ho’s affinity ties theory, this paper explores how IDPs can flexibly use affinity ties networks to proactively influence the Chinese government’s new border governance policy from the bottom up by interacting with grassroots multi-actor border practices.

Keywords: IDP, hegemony, affinity ties, border governance policy

1. Introduction

If the war in 2009 did not attract enough attention from Beijing, the Kachin war in 2011 has made Beijing realize the importance of proactive involvement in Myanmar’s domestic political affairs. On September 1, 2009, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu, in a press conference on “the Kokang refugee issue,” emphasized that the Burmese government should take active measures to resolve domestic disputes. (Note 1) Han argues that Beijing’s attitude toward the Kokang conflict has been rather lukewarm and has not shown a strong interest in getting involved (Han, 2016). However, at a press conference on 17 January 2013, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei expressed strong dissatisfaction with the Myanmar government, criticizing the nonchalance of the Myanmar side and calling on both sides of the conflict to negotiate. China is willing to actively participate in a coordinated dialogue. (Note 2) The shift in the central government’s attitude toward the situation in Myanmar can also be seen that in 2011 Beijing revoked the Yunnan provincial government’s autonomy to independently handle territorial issues with its Southeast Asian neighbors. Centralized management by the central government (Li, Luo and Xiong, 2015).

Beijing has recognized that Myanmar is no longer an absolutely reliable political ally. Myanmar’s domestic political reforms since 2011 are aimed at gradually breaking away from Chinese control and gaining a greater voice in political and economic with China by strengthening ties with the United States and the European Union (Han, 2017). Beijing’s attitude toward the Myanmar government and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) in northern Myanmar has therefore quietly changed. The Chinese government has used economic means to increase Beijing’s influence among the Myanmar government and ethnic minority areas by allowing agricultural products from Myanmar border areas to enter the Chinese market.

For example, the Chinese government supports farmers in the Sino-Myanmar border areas (central government-controlled areas, KIO/KIA-controlled areas) to grow sugar cane as part of the government’s opium substitution program (Kramer and Woods, 2012). China has attempted to find a balance between the central government and the ethnic armed organizations that serves China’s best interests. The issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) resulting from the civil war in Myanmar has become more acute and complex due to the lack of effective resolution of internal political problems and the delicate shift in relations between China and

the Myanmar government.

2. Chinese Scholars' Lens of the China-Myanmar Border

Chinese scholars' current focus on the China-Myanmar border is mainly on social governance. Zhong (2016), Yang and Meng (2015) and Zhou (2019) introduce the historical, political and ethnic factors of internal conflicts on the China-Myanmar border from the perspective of border governance, and analyze the identity issues of the Burmese under the conflict triggers. However, these articles focus more on the daily life and social security situation of Chinese citizens in the China-Myanmar border areas. Analyses of Ren (2017) and Zhao (2013) are from the field of jurisprudence to elaborate on the refugee issue, arguing that in governance practice, China needs to make a breakthrough in establishing cross-border interventions for refugees and setting up overseas refugee assistance. In Zhao's article, there is no mention of how the refugee status of war influxes on the China-Myanmar border is screened. Some scholars explore the refugee issue from the perspective of frontier geography. Yu (2015), Qin (2020) and Lu (2017) affirm the positive role of cross-border labor (war influxes) in promoting economic development along the China-Myanmar border cities, but also point out that the entry of large numbers of Burmese laborers also brings negative impacts on the security and labor market in the border cities. Jasper and Li (2015) analyzed the current situation of refugees in Yunnan and the problems of social integration from a management perspective based on a field survey, and proposes that the refugee community should be addressed and their basic rights should be guaranteed. Yang and Hui (2016) using field research, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews, explore the spatial distribution of Kokang refugees and its causes from the perspective of the physical geographic conditions and social factors and provide guidance for border control. Gan and Mou (2015) study reveals that Vietnamese refugees in China face multiple identity confusions, including identity, ethnic identity, and national identity, and proposes the realistic interests hidden under the multiple identity confusions.

In general, Chinese scholars have focused their research on displaced people from Southeast Asian countries in China on aspects such as social governance. They have not explored in depth their identity issues, survival conditions, and the reasons that drive them to cross the border to China in search of opportunities. Meanwhile Chinese scholars have more often viewed these groups, which the Myanmar government views as a surplus population, as a hidden problem in the social governance of China's border cities. However, the reliability of such assertions by scholars (that IDPs in the border trade are engaged in illegal trade) is questionable. As Baird and Cansong (2017) found in their fieldwork, although a large number of Chinese went to gamble in Maizayang and Lesa before 2014, these casinos belonged to Chinese business interests in Yunnan and Fujian, respectively. This proves that much of the illegal activity in the China-Myanmar border area is manipulated by Chinese interests and should not be absolutely attributed to the fault of the locals.

3. Western Scholars' Lens of the China-Myanmar Border

In contrast, foreign scholars are more likely to analyze it from a microscopic perspective. Bennett (1998), Seshadri (2008) give a clear definition of IDP and compare the definition of IDPS with that of refugees to explain why IDP are often ignored by national governments and international organizations. Cohen (2006) was the first to raise concerns about IDP as a group and creatively suggested that the reason for the tragic situation of IDPs is due to their contradiction with sovereignty. Some scholars do not identify war influxes from a political perspective, but rather see them as a surplus population and reposition them in population geography (Tyner, 2013).

The vulnerability of IDP is analyzed from an economic perspective, showing the potential crisis they face and the inescapable responsibility of international organizations, sovereign states in solving the crisis. Li (2010). Some scholars have also studied the actual lives of IDP, using the cross-border livelihoods of IDP in the China-Myanmar border region as an example to explore how this group of people can improve their lives in the absence of international assistance. (Zhou and Su, 2022). Corbet (2016) reveals that emotional care and a sense of belonging are more important to these IDPs by contrasting the functioning of NGO-provided camps and spontaneously formed IDPs communities with local Haitian displaced persons. Border governance is also a focus of scholarly attention, using Agnew's concept of "territorial traps" to track the implementation of policy within immigrant communities by grassroots government bureaucrats and social organizations in border regions to reveal the interaction of government agencies and nongovernmental entities at different scales (Baird and Cansong, 2017) and the reasons for policy deviation and how service provision is carried out in resource-poor migrant communities. Carte (2017) and Doty (2011) argue that sovereign states are defending through deterrence in border management, making unauthorised border crossing activities more difficult.

The complexity of borders and the relationship between sovereignty and borders has been a popular topic of

research. The complexity of borders and the relationship between sovereignty and borders has been a popular topic of research (Su and Cai, 2020). Demonstrating the complexity and dynamics of borders by showing some of the compromises of the Chinese central government. Burrige and Martin (2017) argue that borders are no longer geographical and that different participants involved in border governance have an impact on the boundary. Déobert (2020) argues that the transformation of international organizations from humanitarianism to developmentalism demonstrates the role of social organizations in the struggle for territorialization in border areas. Affinity ties networks can coalesce into bonds of horizontal social connections, as reflected in Pascucci (2017). Turner (2013) explains the challenges and opportunities posed by border spatialization in terms of commodity trade and ethnic exchange in the Sino-Vietnamese border region. Hu and Konrad (2018) interview with Chinese and Myanmar IDP in the China-Myanmar border areas reveal how the border is creatively used by the local inhabitants, their neighbours and their government, and how cross-border cultures operate to mediate borders even in conflict situations Agnew's (2015) "territorial traps" points out that the direct link between sovereignty and borders is often fictional, and that powerful multinational corporations often intervene across borders in the politics of small states. Within the China-Myanmar border region of China, grassroots government bureaucrats do enjoy managerial authority over IDPS, but IDPS groups can use kinship networks to act upward on grassroots government leaders and thus influence central government border policy.

In reality, national border areas are complex and diverse, and they are governed not only through national laws and regulations, but also by a range of policies and localised practices, both formal and informal. These local policies are implemented by local government and other non-governmental entities operating at different scales.

Baird (2017) analyses the relevant policies and daily practices of the Dehong Dai Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture (DAP) in border governance highlights the flexibility and decentralized nature of the Chinese state in dealing with remote border issues.

In reading the literature and news reports, the author found that after the Myanmar civil war in 2009, a large number of Burmese labors did exist in the border city (Ruili), most of whom did not have official work visas. Instead of expelling them from China, the Chinese central government chose to accept most of them and allow them to work in China (Ruili). It appears that the Chinese government does not outright deny Burmese labors access to the Chinese economic market, but uses coercion to restrict them to a specific city (Ruili), a puzzling oscillating border policy.

With this context, I ask two questions, First, why Chinese government does not use coercive force to prevent them from entering China. Second, why the Chinese government use coercive force to restrict IDP in specific city (Ruili).

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1 Gramsci's "Hegemony"

Gramsci (1971: 144) believed that both the ruling and the ruled were real. At the heart of hegemony is a balance of power that relies not only on the reign of terror and the suppression of the masses by force, but also on the heartfelt recognition and loyalty of the people to the rulers.

On how to gain and maintain hegemony, Gramsci suggests the importance of alliances. Gaining majority support through alliances and forcibly weakening the opposition (Su, 2013). From this we find that the essence of hegemony is the compromise of power, making partial acceptable concessions to the ruled class in exchange for the continued support and loyalty of allies without affecting the overall interests of the ruling class. Williams points out that no hegemony can have an absolute character. At all times, the politics and culture of informal or direct resistance are always present, and a constant reminder that rulers must learn to control and compromise in real life." (Williams, 1977) Hegemony is therefore not a static relationship, but a dynamic process of change.

Within this process, different groups coordinate with each other to negotiate compromise and oppression. A temporary balance of compromise is reached in order to gain a relatively favorable position in economic and cultural activities.

In Ruili, multiple levels of border governance subjects provide the possibility for IDPs to contest; different levels of government are responsible for managing the official border crossings. Security is handled by provincial border police, with customs officials mostly from DAP, while district-level commercial and foreign trade officials provide day-to-day regulatory guidance related to cross-border trade. The central government provides legal guidance, while the district level is responsible for day-to-day implementation (Baird, 2017).

The central government requires all foreigners in transit to provide official documents, but in Ruili, grassroots law enforcement officials have discretion, and Beijing maintains a tacit attitude toward this. Rather than using

walls and laws to prevent Myanmar IDPS from entering China (Zhou, 2022), the Chinese government has made partial compromises. (Strict border checks remain in place, however, primarily to combat smuggling and drug trade from abroad (Su and Zhou, 2019).

4.2 Affinity Ties Network

Affinity ties refers to relationships arising from the dynamic combination of cultural attributes related to identity constructs such as ethnicity, place, language, religion and history (Ho, 2016). Despite the real existence of physical and perceived boundaries. But there do exist networks of connections that can link people from different countries and societies horizontally, creating emotional attachment through identification with similar cultural attributes between them. This kinship evolves in political life into compassion from one group of people for another group of disadvantaged people, which in turn will give practical help (Yuval-Davis, 2013).

HO also emphasizes the importance of language, which can easily bring two groups closer when people from different countries and regions communicate using the same dialect. Also relational networks develop through human mobility (Ho, 2014), such as international volunteers (Bosco, 2007; Pedwell, 2008; Griffiths, 2014), allowing emotions to develop and consolidate both inside and outside the geographical space.

This explains well why the relief for IDPS in Myanmar does not only involve Chinese co-ethnics (Jingpo), but also receives help from Han Chinese people in the border areas (Ho, 2016). As well as the few Burmese who are granted precious Chinese work visas still choose to seek survival opportunities in the border areas.

5. Methodology

I will be drawing on Gramsci's hegemony (1971) and Ho's theory of affinity ties networks (2016), the paper shifts the previous perspective of the IDPs group as passive recipients of border policy, but rather as participants in influencing Chinese border policy, how they can influence the formulation of central policy from the bottom up by working with Chinese grassroots government bureaucrats and social organisations in the context of the ambiguity of sovereignty and border spatialization in the border region.

5.1 Data Selection

Due to practical reasons, I couldn't interview Myanmar IDPS in Ruili. Therefore, I mainly summarize the data and contents of the field interviews of previous scholars. The selection of secondary data is particularly important. In order to make the results of the study as objective and accurate as possible, not only by selecting field research data and reports from Chinese scholars, Yang (2016) interviews with Burmese IDPs and local Chinese residents within the border in Gengma and Zhenkang; Tian (2017) interviews with Burmese Muslim traders, the president of the Myanmar Chamber of Commerce, Chinese residents and Burmese IDPs in the village of Shangnongan in Jiegao, Ruili city's jewelry neighborhood. Tang (2019) conducted two weeks of interviews with Burmese laborers, Chinese owners of furniture factories at WBH Mahogany Furniture Factory in Ruili City. Zhou and Li (2020) Interviews with Burmese IDPs and Chinese residents in Dengga village, Ruili City. It was easier for Chinese scholars to get the real thoughts of Chinese residents in the border areas because of the convenient transportation and the similarity of language and culture. And the visits lasted longer and the frequency of return visits was higher.

The authors likewise selected research data from foreign scholars, Ho (2016) conducted field research on six refugee camps in the China-Myanmar border region and employed a Kachin interpreter to interview the heads of refugee camps in Myanmar, traders and priests in China. Baird (2017) conducted field research on the DAP region in China by employing a Jingpo interpreter to interview traders and residents in China, and Myanmar IDPs, and interviewing a Chinese grassroots government administrator anonymously through a Jingpo interpreter. The authors argue that the interview and questionnaire data from foreign scholars will more objectively document the actual attitudes and actions of Chinese grassroots government bureaucrats, but there is also a risk of outsourcing data collection to non-profit and other social organizations because of the distance.

6. Myanmar IDPs

6.1 Reasons for the Emergence of Displaced Persons

The emergence of IDPs in Myanmar can be attributed to both historical and practical reasons. During the colonial period, the British government divided Burma, ruling directly over the Burmese, who were the majority of the population and located in the plains, while supporting proxies for the ethnic minorities living in the mountainous areas, or following the traditional chieftaincy (Zhu, 2010).

With the signing of the 1947 *PangLong Agreement*, the Myanmar government promised to establish a federal state, granting the Kachin, Karen, and Kokang ethnic groups the right to self-determination (He, 1992). However,

after Myanmar's independence, instead of establishing the promised federal state, the Burmese government pursued the ideology of Greater Burmese Nationalism in the construction of a nation-state (Lian, 2012), causing resentment in ethnic minority areas.

And the competition for resources between the Myanmar government and local armed groups (KIO, KIA) is the main practical reason for the ongoing civil war in Myanmar. Kachin State is rich in natural resources and has a high demand for Chinese exports (Ranir, 2015). Although the Constitution of Myanmar stipulates that the Republic of the Union of Myanmar is the ultimate owner of land and natural resources, but in the actual China-Myanmar trade, it is with ethnic minority organizations (KIO, KIA) and border people directly at the ports. KIO, KIA-controlled areas export timber, jade and other goods directly to China without the approval of Myanmar's central government in between (Tian, Hu and Wang, 2019). And Beijing's more ambiguous attitude has led both the Myanmar government and ethnic local armed to believe that they are more likely to receive Beijing's support.

Dean argues that in border areas where countries overlap, the existence of such social structures contradicts the demarcation through national territorial boundaries established by sovereign states due to the common language, culture, and religious beliefs among communities, and that it is the disputed nature of border territories, and that in politically contested areas, disputed territories can prompt the surplus population perceived to be a risk to the sovereign order (Dean, 2011: 238).

6.2 IDPs Ambiguous Status

IDPs are people who are forced to flee their current place of residence in order to avoid violence such as internal armed conflict, or disasters caused by natural or human factors (UNCHR 1998) They do not cross the geographical borders of the country.

Since IDPs remain in their home countries, they do not enjoy the same rights and guarantees as refugees. In the 1951 "*Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*", IDPs can only seek help from their own government, but the fact that the government persecutes them or the low capacity of the government to help them is the root cause of their displacement.

Cohen (2006) was the first to note the embarrassing situation of IDPS and the need for a coordinated international system of protection for this group of people. Cohen insists that sovereignty cannot be separated from responsibility, and that when sovereign states are unable or refuse to protect the lives and property of their citizens, international forces should be allowed to intervene. Sovereign states cannot actively ignore the basic needs of their citizens on the grounds of their internal affairs (Deng, 2000). Although it sounds plausible, this will not be actively adopted by the rulers.

It is also worth noting that not all IDPs in Myanmar are Burmese citizens; there are Chinese citizens of Yunnan origin who fled to Myanmar with their families during China's Cultural Revolution, who have lived in Myanmar for many years but whose legal status is not recognized by the Myanmar government, and whose identity information has been cancelled in China; this group of stateless people should also be taken into account (Tang, 2019).

7. Oscillating Border Policy

7.1 A Door That Isn't Closed

Inequalities in economic development on both sides of the border often serve as new incentives for residents of the borderlands to improve their livelihoods. For example, social networks and survival strategies of cross-border traders along the Thai-Lao border (Phadungkiat and Connell, 2014). China's reform and opening up has led to the rapid economic rise of the southeastern coastal cities, far ahead of other cities. In recent years, due to rising labor prices in economically developed cities, the continuous movement of young laborers from Yunnan Province to the southeastern coastal cities has caused shortages in the local labor market in Yunnan, especially in the developed counties and cities (Tang, 2019). This has forced grassroots political leaders to think about how to bring in as much cheap labor to the local market without violating central policies.

As we mentioned earlier, there are multiple governance actors in border areas, and they do not face the same pressures. Grassroots political officials not only have to secure the border and maintain law and order. Influenced by the official promotion tournament system, the career of political bureaucrats is closely related to the economic development of the city, and how to make the border an available resource to promote local economic development is the first consideration of political bureaucrats (Mei and Zhai, 2018).

According to Gramsci's hegemony (1971), the ruler needs to make certain concessions to the ruled to gain their

support. The embodiment of this in the China-Myanmar border region is that the Chinese government has left a door unfastened for IDPS to enter China with relative freedom to choose long-term or short-term employment.

In Qin's questionnaire survey (2020), the education level of Burmese laborers was severely low, with 72% at elementary school level or below, and in Yang's survey (2016), the percentage of refugees who were jobless, farmers, and laborers was over 85%. Myanmar IDPS can provide a large amount of cheap labors, becoming the most important reason for the Ruili government's compromise.

The implementation of border management for low-end cross-border migration is largely consistent with the logic of national territorial security and the economic logic of the constant devaluation of low-end labor (Jones and Johnson, 2016: 192). The resilient immigration policy in Ruili is an important reflection of this. IDPS can provide its own Myanmar's citizenship ID card and relevant documents to apply for a Chinese border permit, (red book). It is valid for one year and is far less expensive than a work visa (Yang, 2015). Those who are engaged in short-term work do not need any documents. (one day trade, or short term work for less than 7 days such as helping Chinese farmers harvest sugar cane).

In yang's interview (2019) with a Burmese working in a supermarket, the average wage for Burmese laborers was \$250-290, with only two days of vacation a month. This is significantly lower than the per capita wage and job offer for Chinese citizens in Ruili. Despite this, Chinese wages are still 2-3 times higher than the local per capita wage in Myanmar. IDPS are forced to compete with their compatriots in the Ruili economic market and lose their bargaining power (Zhou, 2022). It appears that China uses hegemony to set "the rules of the game", and that IDPS must accept this wage treatment with not much space to fight, and if they refuse, they will quickly be thrown out of the game. As Genova in his analysis of undocumented labor in the United States, in border management, the sovereign state deports a small number of people so that more illegal immigrants can stay and be exploited by the sovereign state as cheap labors (Genova, 2002).

Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that although the Chinese government's news is full of reports that Burmese workers are satisfied with their lives in Ruili, the Chinese government's motive may not be humanitarian, but more of a potential economic exploitation.

But what I want to emphasize in this article is that the IDPS is not a passive recipient of the Chinese government's hegemony. In Tang's interviews, it emerged that every factory that employs a large number of Burmese workers has "middlemen" who communicate with the Chinese bosses and Burmese employees. Although they are not in the leadership, they have the advantage of having a wider range of contacts and resources, and they use their influence to protest to the factories for better conditions for their survival. For example, they demand that they be provided with free accommodation and food. And allow their families to live together in the group dormitories provided by the Chinese side. Judging by the results, they usually succeed (Tang, 2019).

In reality, there is a serious shortage of grassroots law enforcement forces in border areas, and since government officials are more concerned with economic development, they are neutral towards people's private trade, and although they do not give them legal recognition, the government does not send border police to stop people from trading.

In zhou's research, it appears that Chinese law enforcement and IDPS have some sort of tacit agreement to allow small-scale trade between the two sides without breaking the law. Not breaking the law means not selling goods prohibited by China such as wildlife and goods (Zhou, 2022). These small-scale markets are usually held every five days, and borderland residents are allowed to bring their produce to buy and sell. Because the stalls are not fixed, vendors do not have to pay any rental fees, nor do they have to pay customs clearance fees. In actual local Burmese prefer to settle in RMB, and in Tian's interviews, Burmese residents also commonly used opium as currency for settlement, but this is illegal within China (Tian, 2017).

This small-scale border market has a long history, and became more of a place for emotional exchange and cultural interaction between the residents of the border area. The grassroots law enforcers in the border areas have given more space to the Myanmar IDPs, no longer seeing them as the governed, but encouraging the IDPs to be partners with the government in social governance.

For IDPs in the China-Myanmar border area, due to the lack of land ownership and the destruction of their homes by war (Ho, 2016), refugee camps have become their main choice for shelter, and the camps can be roughly divided into three categories according to geographic space: under the Myanmar government-controlled area, under the control of ethnic local armed groups, and under the actual control of the Chinese side on the border (Ho, 2018). However, for the Kachin as an ethnic minority, camps under Burmese government control are

not a good option, as the case of BrawngShawn demonstrates that even civilians but can easily be convicted by the Burmese government on charges of having ties to the KIA (Nyein, 2012, 2013).

The refugee camps under KIA control require permission from the Myanmar government for international humanitarian organizations to enter, and this makes it difficult for IDPs living here to receive international relief. The lack of international relief organizations has given Kachin organizations and Chinese civil society organizations the opportunity to grow.

Corbet (2016) emphasizes the importance of spontaneous grassroots organizations within displaced communities. Barnett and Weiss (2011) emphasize that humanitarian interventions do not focus on the real needs of IDPS, as opposed to the wishes of donors. This has prompted IDPS to use Affinity networks to develop links with Chinese co-ethnics and Chinese organizations engaged in humanitarian relief. Helping them gain greater access to survival.

During yang's research (2019), the Dai restaurant owner took in four Kokang people out of sympathy and helped one of them escape the MNDAA draft. During Tian's field research, it was found that villages along the highway from Wanchai to Manhai were full of northern Burmese border people who had fled the war to join their relatives and friends. He also mentioned that the Kachin rescue group recruited Mandarin-speaking Jingpo people by making them act as interpreters and intermediaries for contacting commodity suppliers. And to act as guarantors for commodity transactions when necessary (Ho, 2018).

Affinity ties networks make spatialized borders no longer a barrier to emotional communication. People of the same historical culture are willing to provide unpaid help even when faced with potential risks. In addition to similar cultural practices, spatial proximity increases other ethnic groups' awareness of the IDPs situation inspiring their sympathy (Griffiths, 2014).

Ho interviewed a Han Chinese food supplier, and the female owner recounted her first meeting with the organization's Jingpo buyer from Burma and the Jingpo Chinese interpreter. The buyer kept emphasizing to the owner, "This is for the IDPs". Because there is a refugee camp right next to the village where the owner grew up, she has a similar feeling for IDPs and therefore she wanted to help this group of people. The owner also took some risk because she needed to purchase supplies for the Kachin organization in advance. And her husband was unhappy with his wife's behavior (the lady boss's husband is also Han Chinese, but from another Chinese province).

In practice, we have noticed that while Kachin organizations use affinity ties networks to get as much support as possible from compatriots or compassionate other Chinese citizens, spontaneous relief organizations within ethnic communities are shift toward developmentalism. A shift from the provision of basic supplies to emotional care and the provision of long-term survival opportunities.

7.2 The Locked Cage

Although this analogy is a bit exaggerated, it is important to recognize the fact that IDPS is confined to the single labor market of Ruili as a low-end labor force by the Chinese government. Political leaders reap the benefits of symbolic assertions of national sovereignty at the border (Carter and Poast, 2020: 168).

There are currently nearly 1000,000 Burmese workers in Ruili (the number has declined due to the Covid-19), and if they are allowed to find work in developed cities such as China's southeast coast, this will severely squeeze the options for China's lower class workers. In using its hegemony, the Chinese government must not only take into account the voices of ethnic minorities in China who are related to the Myanmar IDPs, but also cannot ignore the interests of the Han ethnic group. The central government therefore has to balance the interests of the ruled class at large with the image of a responsible great power that China is trying to project.

From the perspective of national border security. In China's Yunnan region, there are many ethnic minorities and most of them have common ethnic ties that extend to other neighboring countries; the same ethnic group becomes the people of different countries due to the division of geographical borders, but they share the same language and cultural history, and the strong ethnic cohesion is likely to create the possibility of nationalist agitation, which can threaten the territorial integrity of the Chinese nation-state and become a burden and security risk for China (Han, 2016).

For IDPs, the southeast coastal region may not be a better choice, considering that other provinces have weaker affinity ties networks with Myanmar IDPs, and that even in the Chinese and Myanmar border cities (Gengma and Zhenkang) only 47.69% of Han Chinese people have a welcoming attitude toward IDPs (Yang, 2015).

In Hu's analysis of the spatial distribution of refugee camps in the China-Myanmar border area, it is pointed out

that IDPs mostly choose China-Myanmar camps on the borderline because these camps are closer to the villages where they originally live, and they can see their villages and fields in the refugee camps. This short distance to the refugee sites, firstly, enables refugees to see their possessions to comfort their hearts, and secondly, due to the short distance, refugees usually choose to go home to farm during the daytime truce to reduce economic losses, and then return to the safer refugee camps at night to rest (Hu, 2016).

And although this paper focuses on the impact of proactive engagement of IDPs in grassroots border governance, it should not overlook the discrimination faced by IDPs due to the compromising attitude of the Chinese government. Burrige argues that the border is not only a place of inclusion or selective exclusion (Burrige, 2017). In the Ruili renting market, there is an open chain of discrimination, and ethnic Burmese, who are the majority in Myanmar, are at the bottom end of the chain (Su, 2020).

We can see that whether it is the West's militarization of border enforcement with walls and the dispatch of large numbers of border police to patrol, or China's approach of limited inclusion, the common focus is on securing the border from potential threats posed by migrants and protecting the economic privileges of the host country (Jones and Johnson, 2016). Perhaps the compromises are shaped in ways that seem less violent and deadly, but the brutality of border control remains the same.

8. Conclusion

This paper explores the particular border policy in Ruili, explaining why the Chinese government has displayed ambivalent attitudes through the lens of IDPs, and how the seemingly compromised new border policy has integrated Burmese IDPs people into the local labor market.

In reading previous articles, the author senses that influenced by the Chinese political system, some foreign scholars develop preconceived negative attitudes towards China's border management policy and towards IDPs relief actions, believing that IDPs do not have any possibility to protest with the government in an authoritative state. The author explores how the opportunities and challenges IDPs encounters in real life from the actual interactions of multiple subjects at the grassroots of society reverse the impact of the new border policy. Borrowing from Gramsci's hegemony theory and Ho's kinship network theory, the article shows how IDPs can expand its space for survival in a context where the Chinese government does not provide legal protection.

The internal war in Myanmar has led to a large number of refugees, and the international community is more concerned about the survival of Rohingya refugees, while Chinese scholars are more concerned about border security and urban development. The subject of Burmese IDPs has been in the margins, and since China has never introduced relevant laws, it is difficult to protect the long-term interests of the Burmese IDPs group in China. At the same time, the author found that the internal composition of Myanmar IDPs is also very confusing, although it is the Kachin, Karen and Kokang ethnic groups that occupy the majority, but as stated in Tang's interview, there are still some Chinese who have given up their Chinese nationality and taken refuge in the neighboring Southeast Asian countries due to historical reasons, even though they have lived there for many years or are not recognized by the local government, and the situation of these people is even more miserable, being the bottom of the Ruili labor market. However, the author found that not many people have studied such groups.

The main problem of this paper is that the source of data can only be obtained from previous field surveys because the authors were unable to conduct fieldwork, and it is difficult for scholars from various countries to enter the local area of Ruili in the near future due to the Covid- 19, which also causes the data to be untimely updated and may have some influence on the conclusion.

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Notes

Note 1. For the text in Chinese, see <http://ec.chineseembassy.org/chn/fyrth/t581720.htm>

Note 2. For the text in Chinese, see <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cedk/chn/fyrth/t1005817.htm>

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