

Spatial control and symbolic politics at the
intersection of China, India and Burma

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies

By

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May 2010

Authorship declaration

I hereby certify that this thesis is the result of my own work except where otherwise indicated and due acknowledgement is given.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Farrelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Signed: Nicholas Farrelly

“Manau, *n.* A great nat-feast and religious dance, supposed to be of supernatural origin”.

Dictionary entry by Ola Hanson, missionary and translator (1906: 428).

“The King believed in what the Singpho had said and so he got some cages made and put himself in one of them and the other Chiefs in the other cages and had all the cages kept up over deep waters. The Singpho then cut down all these cages and the King and all his chiefs got drowned. After that, the cunning Singpho himself became the King”.

Extracted from the folk tale, “A Cunning Singpho”, Borgohain (1975: 22).

Acknowledgements

It is years since I launched my first tentative foray into the borderlands where East, South and Southeast Asia meet, and over that time I have accumulated many debts of gratitude. During my periods of field research, and on other occasions, the friendship and support of so many people in Thailand, Burma, India and China have been crucial to my learning and exploration. Without their generosity, good humour and humanity this dissertation would not have been possible. There have been countless times when strangers have gone out of their way to make my life easier and to help me understand. Some of these strangers have gone on to become friends. Owing to the prevailing difficulties in some of the areas in which many of these assistants and informants live I have chosen to leave them unnamed. They will know who they are.

In Oxford, Professor David Gellner and Dr Nandini Gooptu have been heavily involved in my education since my first term in 2005. Both have advised sagely, inspired strongly and waited patiently while I have brought this doctoral dissertation to submission. Many of the anticipated strengths of the work presented in these pages are the result of their good judgement and diligent feedback. My memories of Oxford are also punctuated by the special friendships I made with Matthew Pennycook, David Knezevic, Silas Xu, Tim Soutphommasane, Ryan Manuel, Anna Oldmeadow, Caroline Kuo, Diya Dutta and all the rest. It heartens me that we remain such close friends. The staffs of Balliol College and Queen Elizabeth House also deserve my thanks for their unfailing efforts to ensure that I have remained on track.

Since leaving Oxford in 2008 I have enjoyed many special opportunities to reconnect with family, friends and colleagues in Canberra. My parents, Sue and Pat, continue to offer amazing support for my academic interests, as do my brother and sister, Paul and Catherine, my parents-in-law, Geoffrey and Marilyn Jenkins, and all of the other members of the Farrelly and Jenkins families.

Among those who have continued to offer their support at the Australian National University are Andrew Walker, Craig Reynolds, Aat Vervoorn and Chintana Sandilands, while Kent Anderson, Paul Hutchcroft and Ed Aspinall, Tony Milner and Des Ball, and Peter Grabosky and Rod Broadhurst, have created new opportunities for me to pursue scholarly work in Canberra. Andrew Walker, perhaps more than any other, has helped show me the way in academic life and, for all of his efforts over the past nine years, I will remain forever grateful.

From my current perch at the ANU it is also only appropriate that I remain deeply appreciative to the Rhodes Trust, and to Sir Colin Lucas and his staff, for the opportunities offered during my years in the United Kingdom.

It is to Ali, my wife, that I dedicate this work. She was there at the beginning and is here at the end. It is only fair that she receives my utmost thanks for all of her support, encouragement and love.

As ever, while I received assistance from many people any errors and omissions are my own.

Note on languages and names

This dissertation draws on ideas spoken and written in Jinghpaw, the *lingua franca* of Burma's Kachin State, and an important language in adjacent areas of northeast India and southwest China. Parts of the thesis also rely on words in Shan (a major Southeast Asian language), Burmese, Hindi, Assamese and Chinese.

Jinghpaw uses a roman script and thus requires no independent system of transliteration. The few Shan words transcribed in this dissertation rely on the most commonly used presentation. Burmese transliterations follow the framework devised by John Okell, et al. (1994). Indian languages are transcribed using the common anglicisations and Chinese transcriptions follow the *pinyin* conventions.

In 1989, the military government of the Union of Myanmar commenced correcting English language references to the country's geography. In this dissertation I follow the official usage as it more accurately represents the pronunciation of local toponyms. It is, therefore, "Yangon" and not "Rangoon" and "Ayeyarwady River" not "Irrawaddy River". All quotations repeat the toponym spellings used in the original. In other cases I note any ambiguity, particularly where a place or person is known by two names: for example the town of Ruili (Chinese) is known as Shweli in Burmese. Most non-English words are italicised throughout the dissertation. The major exception to this pattern is Manau (Jinghpaw for a specific type of festival) which is left unitalicised.

There is one further and similarly important exception to this standard presentation. There is no consensus on how to refer to the country known as Burma or Myanmar. Scholars of mainland Southeast Asian topics customarily annotate their usage of “Burma” or “Myanmar” and explain the cultural or political significance of their chosen presentation (see, for instance, the usages introduced by McDonald, 1995: 183; Falla 1991: xx; Seekins 2006: xi-xiv; South, 2008: xv-xvi; Banki and Lang, 2008: 59; O'Brien, 2008: 127). The best scholarly discussion of their vernacular equivalents—*Bama* (colloquial) and *Myanma(r)* (literary)—comes from Gustaaf Houtman (1999: 50-54) who describes how “there is in reality little difference between the two in terms of meaning” (1999: 50). While there are various linguistic, cultural and political matters to consider, in this dissertation, my compromise—“Myanmar” for the government and “Burma” for the whole country—is a precise, if somewhat opportunistic, way of clarifying a range of contested political claims (see Callahan, 2003: xvi, for details on this approach, and Steinberg, 2010: xx-xxi, for another respectable expression of the “Burma/Myanmar” conundrum).

As this dissertation makes clear, discussions of the country’s fringes are necessarily complex. My effort to use both names helps clarify the recognisably “Myanmar” claims in “Burma’s” contemporary politics. These choices of language and presentation are all designed, first and foremost, to ensure a clear and precise introduction to the sociolinguistic heritage of these Asian borderlands.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Note on languages and names.....	vi
Introduction to the intersection of space and politics.....	
Festivals and government	1
Examining nodes of control	3
Spatial control and legibility.....	7
Defining the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw	10
Local development elites	12
Structure of the dissertation	16
Social science for the borderlands	18
SECTION ONE.....	
Chapter 1: Spaces for states and societies at the intersection	
Governing states and societies	24
Civilisations and borders.....	28
Borders of nation-states	33
The power of exceptions	39
Graduated sovereignties in the borderlands	43
Clarifying the “geo-body” of “Zomia”	52
Spatialisation and scholarship in Zomia	57
Contingency and interaction in Zomia.....	65
Conclusion	68
Chapter 2: Researching the borderlands	
Ambiguities and power in research design	71
Appraising the borderlands	74
Models of political research.....	82
Ritual in borderlands field research	86
Nodes of control and nodes of research	94
Studying local elites	98
Research in Practice	100

Conclusion	106
SECTION TWO	
Chapter 3: Politics and peoples of the borderlands	
Histories of truth and politics.....	108
Sovereignty and resistance.....	113
Territory and control in the borderlands	118
National territories in political imaginations	121
Contesting national society	125
Categories of ethnicity	130
Nationalities and questions.....	130
Tribes and identities	134
Ethnicities and conglomeration	138
Conclusion	140
Chapter 4: Local elites in the borderlands	
The blurring of wealth and power.....	143
<i>Sutdu</i> : Wealth and power	147
Making <i>Sut</i> in the borderlands	152
Jade mine politics.....	159
The complexities of local development	162
<i>Sutdu</i> at the nodes of control.....	166
Working outside nodes of control.....	172
Non- <i>Sutdu</i> among the local elites	175
Conclusion	182
Chapter 5: Contest and control at the Myitkyina Manau	
Manau explained.....	184
Grand Manau festival.....	190
Myanmar nodes of control	192
Welcome to the 2008 Myitkyina Manau.....	194
Government at the Manau.....	208
Jinghpaw at the Manau	211
Fragmentation at the Manau	213

Creative ambiguity	216
Resistance and hopes for the future	222
Conclusion	226
Chapter 6: Dominating Manau, controlling the nodes	
The symbolic politics of Manau	228
A Jingpo Manau	231
Manau implications in China	239
Dancing on Indian soil	242
Shapawng Yawng Manau 2008	248
Affiliations and belonging at Manau	254
Conclusion	259
SECTION THREE	
Chapter 7: Festive spaces and symbolic politics	
Festivals of sovereignty	263
Nodes of control between “geo-bodies” and Zomia	266
Legitimation in the borderlands	269
Instability and order	273
The “safety-valve”	276
Conclusion	278
Conclusion: Controlling development in the borderlands.....	
Symbolic control and political spaces.....	281
Controlling Zomia’s nodes.....	284
Zomia at the intersection of understanding.....	289
Governing with creative ambiguities	291
MAPS, APPENDICES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	
Map 1 – Political map of the borderlands	296
Map 2 – Map of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw cultural area.....	297
Map 3 – World Map from Huntington (1998)	298
Map 4 – Zomia from van Schendel (2002)	299
Map 5 – Zomia from Scott (2009a)	300
Map 6 – The borderlands from satellite	301

Map 7 – Myitkyina Manau ground from satellite	302
Appendix 1 – Summary of politico-cultural characteristics	303
Appendix 2 – Titles in the borderlands	306
Appendix 3 – List of “ceasefire” groups.....	307
Appendix 4 – List of ethnic categories in the China, India and Burma borderlands	309
Appendix 5 – Photographs of Manau	310
Bibliography	331

Introduction to the intersection of space and politics

Festivals and government

The independent nation-states of China, India and Burma were formed in successive years immediately after the Second World War. The Republic of India was the first, on 15 August 1947, followed by the Union of Burma on 4 January 1948, and the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949. For the peoples of these three countries, festive commemorations of their "birthdays" help to define recognisable national cultures and histories. The governments of China, India and Myanmar punctuate their annual celebrations with proud remembrance of historic struggles, laudatory words for development achievements and fervent pronouncements of national destiny. On these days, the nation-state is imagined as a unitary geo-body, which envelopes its people in a single system of government and control. The prevailing mythologies of birth and destiny have special significance in the distant borderlands of the nation-states where non-national cultures and political imperatives vie for precedence. It is in these borderlands that the most substantial threats, and some enticing opportunities, test the resolve and capacity of the central government systems.

The Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments share the borderlands in the corners of their respective territories where East, South and Southeast Asia meet (Map 1). That intersection is where northern Burma's Kachin State meets China's southwestern Yunnan province and northeast India's Arunachal Pradesh. In this region of common concern the capacities of these three systems of post-colonial government are regulated so as to prevent excessive political conflict and discourage territorial fragmentation. My research focus is how the

governments seek to exert spatial control in areas occupied by the closely-related Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw peoples across these borderlands (see Map 2 for an approximation of their geographic spread). With a total population of fewer than one million, they are a small minority compared to the millions of other citizens of China, India and Burma.

The Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw share much in common—in terms of language, culture and history—but are distinguished by their contrasting citizenships and religions. The Jingpo of China are predominately animist, the Singpho of India are mostly Theravada Buddhist and the Jinghpaw of Burma are, since 19th and 20th century conversions, usually Christian. Notwithstanding these differences, a syncretic and assimilationist approach to religion and culture is largely shared. Furthermore, in each country there is a local Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw elite that endeavours, under local conditions, to manage interactions with the central governments so that they are not overwhelmed by other ethnic, economic or social groups. In each country the relative population of Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw also influences elite capacities to mobilise their ethnic cohort. In round terms there are 120,000 Jingpo in China, 10,000 Singpho in India and 750,000 Jinghpaw in Burma.¹ As part of their efforts to shape interactions with the central governments, the local elites have defended and expanded elements of their Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw cultures, particularly their annual Manau festivals. Seeking a way to analyse the relationship between governments and those they govern I draw on the illustrative potential of these large-scale events.

¹ There is significant dispute about each of these figures, and in fact one scholar argues that “[t]hese people now number...some 1.5 million” (Tanner, 2003: 18). Later in the dissertation these numbers become relevant to discussions of the various ways that the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw interact with the central governments. At this stage it is worth clarifying the the Jinghpaw are demographically more significant in Burma (almost 2 per cent of the national population) than the Jingpo or Singpho in China or India.

Manau festivals, called *Manau Poi*, are the major cultural occasions for the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw. The largest Manau festivals last for up to a week and draw participants from all parts of this borderlands region. The festivals are potent in political, military and cultural terms, and are made accessible by their open, public nature. Manau festivals provide opportunities to understand the local elites in symbolic and cultural contexts where their relationships with the central governments are, crudely, “on show”. In this dissertation my main focus is Burma where Manau festivals have come to exemplify the ongoing contest between the Jinghpaw elite and a central government that seeks to further consolidate its spatial control. In China, festivals are infused with the symbolism of recent economic success and provide opportunities for non-antagonistic celebrations of Jingpo ethnic pride. Both of these examples contrast with the situation in India where the Manau celebrated by the Singpho are more modest, but still strategic, interventions in the politics of bureaucratic eligibility and communal membership that define local development options. More generally, Manau are also formal manifestations, and indicate government acceptance, of what Agrawal (1999: 19) describes as the reality that “...hegemony, power, and marginality are never complete, are always under revisionary contestation”. What I show is that Manau festivals are spatially and temporally concentrated markers of sovereignty and strategy that serve to buttress the power that is claimed by the central governments in their efforts to maintain the marginality of those who could contest their control.

Examining nodes of control

In these borderlands, central government control remains incomplete and, after over six decades of rule, the three governments still seek to fully consummate their visions of

development. Using development as justification the Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments have taken control of a portion of the available peoples and resources of this region. Nonetheless, many of the people who come under such central government control consider that their primary allegiance is to a sub-national group, such as to their Jingpo, Singpho or Jinghpaw ethnic cohort. To meet the challenge of these divided loyalties the implementation of central government control is also, to varying degrees, intolerant of dissent and designed to deter open rebellion. My argument is that countering alternative claims to legitimacy is what defines government presence in the borderlands.

To command development of the borderlands each system has created nodes of control, which are the dominant sites of central authority. Nodes of control are sites where the governments concentrate power in order to manage their geopolitical ambitions. These nodes succeed when they encourage the acquiescence of dominant local economic and cultural elites. Nodes of control provide privileges, grant access and concessions, offer government services and infrastructure, and provide a base for the implementation of government security protocols. Moreover, such installations of government authority help to regulate movement, define social categories, cultivate a unified nation-state identity, and impose a regulatory regime that often compromises, or even displaces, local aspirations. The key to their success is that the nodes are legitimised by the contingent, and sometimes ambiguous, cooperation of the local elites. Nodes of control facilitate access to development for those who accept these terms.

Such nodes have been established in the Chinese, Indian and Burmese portions of the borderlands to structure and define the “local state” (Oi, 1995; 1998). Without these robust assertions of control at this level, the level that Joel S. Migdal describes as “the dispersed field offices” (2001: 118), the nation-state systems of these borderlands, and the governments they represent, would be even more vulnerable to subversion and attack. At this level, above what he calls “the trenches” but below both “the agency’s central offices” and “the commanding heights”, Migdal identifies how “[p]oliticians and implementers in the dispersed field offices are in a nexus that...draws the considerable weight of domestic and foreign social forces”. It is the dispersed sites of authority at this level that I call nodes of control. As such, my concept of nodes of control moves beyond the “nodes of control and resistance” briefly introduced by Bryant and Bailey (1997: 43). For Bryant and Bailey nodes of control are limited to “infrastructural projects”. Such “projects” are worthwhile sites for scholarly attention but in an effort to consider different interpretations of nodes of control I have explicitly researched the cultures that support them, especially at Manau festivals. My major concern is the symbolic and cultural politics of the nodes.

What I have found is that not all nodes of control fulfil the same role or have equal significance. There is, in fact, a portfolio of nodes, in terms of their political, military and cultural ontology but also with reference to their spatial character. This complicates their analysis and ensures that nodes of control are not a homogeneous category. Two ontological types bear close scrutiny.

First, some nodes are designed as sites for the economic activities that are integral to government agendas. These are the mines, dams, markets, factories and similar installations where economic control is asserted, and where taxes, and other financial impositions, provide a rationale for government interest. The three central governments have each developed mechanisms for managing the economic potential of these nodes. These are Bryant and Bailey's "infrastructural projects".

Second, there are the nodes that are managed for the explicit purpose of fulfilling greater ambitions, often at a national or even mythological scale, for social and political control. In contrast to the merely economic nodes, these are sites that are designed to strategically regulate culture, politics and communication. This second type of node serves to facilitate access to development and, even more critically, to define whether individuals or groups are acceptable beneficiaries of the nation-state's resources. It is at public events, including festivals, where the central governments interact with the local elites at their nodes of control. So rather than providing a comprehensive account of all nodes, I have chosen to emphasise my understanding of this second type and, particularly, its festival manifestations. I have also elected to emphasise my research on nodes of control in northern Burma because it is in this context that the most revealing comparative insights emerge. It is from my time examining politics in northern Burma, and its various symbolic characteristics, that my attention first turned to Manau festivals. I have now found that these festivals provide special opportunities for examining the relationships that help to define the nodes of control. My question is: what do the symbolic politics of these festivals tell us about spatial control in the borderlands of China, India and Burma?

Spatial control and legibility

In more theoretical terms, my explanation of the nodes of control requires a conversation with prevailing ideas about spatialisation. In the work of social scientists on the countries of Southeast Asia there is a common view that the region was distinguished historically by overlapping suzerainties. From the centres of political power, influence was extended to lesser centres and then, as that power faded, other loyalties emerged in more distant parts. The most famous explanation of this point is offered by Thongchai (1994) who argues that in mainland Southeast Asia a “hegemonic regime of mapping” displaced traditional spatial knowledge and replaced it with the map: what Thongchai calls “the geo-body”. According to Thongchai, before the map the main goal of government control was to manage and accumulate people without necessarily controlling territory. The regime of mapping that arrived in mainland Southeast Asia with colonial backing, primarily through British and French imperial designs, provided the technology for a recognised national territory. In this process, according to Thongchai, the peoples of the region’s borderlands, like the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw, became legible subjects for nation-state power.

Claims for the resulting legibility remain cautious; nonetheless they define a paradigm in social science research on this region (see Scott, 1998: 54; van Schendel, 2002: 652; Rigg, 2003: 197). In this dissertation I show that the nodes of control of the Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments are calibrated so that their success as sites of authority does not imply popular acquiescence or consistent legibility (see Appendix 1 for a summary of nodular characteristics). Instead, what these nodes offer is a realistic structure for the three governments to collaborate with the local elite (or “neo-elite”, following Pandey, 1991: 203).

That collaboration is delimited, to a large extent, by the development that the three central governments have sought to implement in the borderlands. On this general point, Leftwich (1995: 405) emphasised that “[d]evelopmental states are distinguished by the character of their developmental elites”; part of my inevitable challenge in this dissertation is to examine the character of such elites in the borderlands context. Leftwich also makes the point that “developmental elites” are “not monolithic”: discerning their variety and relationalities is an ongoing challenge, particularly at the local (i.e. sub-national) level. In the borderlands, I found that some individuals among the local elites have been co-opted to the possibilities of the nodes of control. The most important implication of this co-opting process is that the central governments maintain, and sometimes expand, their control. By instituting these nodes in Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw areas, the three central governments (what the local elites call the *asuya*)² have maintained their prestige and position without over-stretching through unrealisable territorial or political claims.

Crucially, the nodes of control help the governments create ambiguous opportunities for interactions with their elite collaborators in the borderlands. By opening up opportunities for such collaboration, the nodes buttress the strategic links—cultural, political, economic, transportation and communications—that are the main interests of all central governments. Moreover, the governments’ relative disregard for many areas outside the nodes ensures that it is the nodes *alone* that have come to take on preminent positions. Obviously a blunt statement of that preeminence should not ignore the creative ambiguities and potential inconsistencies that must also be implied. But under the right circumstances spatially discrete and limited nodes can, in fact, fulfil the most crucial nodular functions. Keeping government

² “*Asuya*” is a Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw term for “government”. It is a cognate of the Burmese “*Asoya*”.

presence in *all the areas that matter* is fundamental to maintaining central government control. And it is the intrinsic limitation of government ambitions, and their willingness to allow creative ambiguities, that suggests the direction in which ideas about spatial control in these borderlands can be re-conceived.

Over the past decade there has been considerable critical discussion of spatialisation in these borderlands, particularly in the claims for a territory called “Zomia” made by Willem van Schendel (2002, 2005) and James C. Scott (2009a).³ Through their complementary arguments, these scholars seek to re-imagine the space of mainland Southeast Asia, and the broader region, to contest prevailing national and “Area” boundaries. My conversation with their ideas about space and control has evolved into an analysis of how contemporary states and societies interact in this region. In this dissertation, Scott’s Zomia model—finessed from van Schendel’s (2002) more restrained conception—of a “stateless”, “non-state” or “anti-state” space is explored with recent evidence about spatial control in the borderlands.⁴

This evidence shows that the three national governments that make contemporary claims on these borderlands face the same basic problem of periphery management. Why and how do governments defend their interests so far from their centres of power without losing too

³ The concept of “Zomia” has yet to be universally accepted by scholars of the borderlands region. In a recent contribution, Michaud (2009: 27) reasserts the value of his alternative phrase “the Southeast Asian Massif”. He explains that “[t]his area encompasses a large portion of what van Schendel has arguably named *Zomia* and equates roughly to what Scott, following van Schendel, terms eastern *Zomia*”.

⁴ Scott and van Schendel readily acknowledge that they were not the first to highlight the “statelessness” associated with highland peoples in this area of Asia. For instance, Corlin (1994: 11) sought to analyse the multiple histories and narratives of the “[s]tateless highland societies of Southeast Asia”, while Steedly (1999: 444) pointed to an effort to “move away from the binaries of national/local or change/continuity, which position small or ‘stateless’ communities as besieged relics of bygone times”.

much in blood and treasure? This question approximates a reformulation of one that has preoccupied many other social scientists. In Migdal's clear description (2001: 255) it is "why and how can states avoid stationing police every fifty meters".

Defining the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw

To answer these questions I explore the role of the local elites of the Manau-celebrating Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw peoples. Each of these is the local, vernacular name of groups more commonly known as "Kachin" in, respectively, the China, India and Burma portions of the borderlands (Maran Brang Di, 2005). "Kachin" is, in fact, a Burmese term which is not used in the local vernacular. So to describe all of these people—Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw—as simply "Kachin" is to miss the important categorical discordance with which the central governments—from Beijing, New Delhi and Naypyidaw—manipulate ethnicity. Consequently, I only use the term "Kachin" when referring to the official Burmese categorisation or to the organisations, such as the Kachin Independence Army, that use it in their English language names.⁵

Otherwise I have gravitated towards explaining the three different national contexts by invoking the local, vernacular ethnonyms: Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw. A brief historical overview clarifies the reasons for this choice of presentation. One of the first Western scholars of this region, missionary and translator Ola Hanson (1906: v), suggested that "[t]he original name of the race known as Kachin is Jinghpaw, or probably more correctly Singpho,

⁵ To reinforce this point it is worth clarifying that the "Kachin Independence Army" is known, in Jinghpaw, as the "Wunpawng Mungdan Shanglawt Hpyendap" (or, in more extravagant terms, "Our Nation's Independence Army").

as they still call themselves in Assam”. I have found that his interpretation is now the consensus view among borderlands intellectuals. More recently, Abbott and Han (2000: 371) explain that “Kachin [are a] cluster of groups in Burma's mountainous north [who] have traditionally called themselves Wunpawng, and the name Kachin seems to have been applied to them by the lowland Burmans”. This idea of a pan-regional collective of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw “nation” known as *wunpawng* has also now gained wider acceptance.⁶ However, the resulting solidarity is hardly inevitable and one older report noted that while “[m]any of the Kachin are aware of ethnic unity...[t]he feeling of unity is not intense...[s]uch an awareness...may be a very recent phenomenon, a product of British rule” (Roberts, et al, 1968: 61). There is, as a result, notable internal diversity among those who are combined in these three categories. The crucial point, and the one that justifies my trans-regional, pan-borderlands comparisons, is that these three different groups enjoy close historical and contemporary connections.

Those connections have cultural, linguistic and political dimensions. As a consequence, in some descriptions the conflation of the three groups, and their muddle of local designations, is almost complete. According to George van Driem (2001: 572), “[t]he Jinghpaw dialects constitute the largest cluster of languages within the Kachinic subgroup. The majority of the Jinghpaw dialects are spoken in Burma and China...The Jinghpaws in northeastern India are called ‘Singpho’”. Terminological precision is lacking in other accounts too; usually borne of

⁶ “Wunpawng” is a standard way of referring to the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw as a community. A discussion of its use, and the related terms Jinghpaw and Kachin, is provided by Robinne (2007a: 48-50). “Wunpawng” is often abbreviated in Jinghpaw language publications to “W.P.” (KNG, 2007a). On other occasions the phrase “*Jinghpaw Wunpawng*”, with priority on the ethnic label, is used and can be abbreviated to “J.W.”. It is possible, for instance, to refer to “*J.W. Hking*” (Jinghpaw clothing). The word is also often partnered with “*anhte*” (which means “our”). Thus, it is common to hear invocations of “our community” or, more poetically, “we Jinghpaw”.

awareness that the links between the different groups remain relevant to their self-imaginings. For instance, in the China case the various and overlapping designations of the Jingpo are introduced as “Jingpaw, Chingpo, Chingpaw, Kachin, Kakhieng, Singpho and Thienbaw” (Olson, 1998: 159). In the final analysis it is important to remain aware that Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw refer, in broad terms, to people with similar cultural heritage but who live under different systems of central government control and official ethnic classification.

Local development elites

Examining the role of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw elites adds another layer of complexity to the contemporary politics of the borderlands. Scholars of development regularly highlight the role of elites (see Leftwich, 1995) and have recently devoted particular attention to issues of “elite capture” of resources (for instance, Iversen, et al., 2006; Dasgupta and Beard, 2007) and “elite perceptions of poverty” (Hossain and Moore, 2009; Kalati and Manor, 2009; Reis and Moore, 2005). In this dissertation I am preoccupied, much more generally, with the relationships between the local development elites and the three central governments. In each case, it is these elites who generally enjoy the most success interacting with the governments through the opportunities provided by the nodes of control. Importantly, the distinctions between elite roles are often blurred and intentionally distorted (see Appendix 2 for a list of relevant honorifics and titles).

In these borderlands, wealth and influence emerge from many sources and are publicly presented under different guises. A government official can fulfil simultaneous commercial,

military, cultural and political roles, as can a businessman (see, for a helpful Burmese example, Wintle 2007: 232). A point of comparison for my dissertation is Ko-Lin Chin's (2009) study of drug production and trafficking in Burma's eastern Shan State. For the borderlands that form the heart of his study, he argues that legality and illegality, regular and irregular economy, all blur together. His analysis introduces the "[b]ur[r]ing of] distinctions between politicians, criminals, and businessmen and between politics, crime, and business" (2009: 85; for a very similar dynamic elsewhere in Southeast Asia see Tsing, 2005: 34).

This process of blurring has implications for my study. For instance, in northeast India it is common to hear assertions that the Jinghpaw leadership across the border in northern Burma is complicit in the regional narcotics business. Elsewhere, but particularly in Burma, Thailand and China, there is seemingly little awareness of this reputation. It would not be altogether surprising if some of the senior figures captured by the phrase "local elites" were, as in Ko-Lin Chin's case-study, involved in the narcotics business. However, I am not in a position to offer any firm evidence on this matter and assume, with some justification, that profits from other activities, such as logging and mining, make drug trafficking a less appealing activity for members of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw elites.⁷ Nonetheless we must remain open to their possible complicity, precisely because narrow classifications of different elite responsibilities and activities are difficult to maintain. This is especially the case for those among the elites who are forced, through their efforts to secure their economic

⁷ However, there is a general acceptance that before its ceasefire with the Myanmar government the Kachin Independence Army *would* traffic quantities of opium with its jade shipments (Chouvy and Meissonier, 2004: 16; see also Hla Oo, 2010). Opium and heroin continue to be used in this part of the borderlands (see Khaund, 2003; Xu, 2006; Chaturvedi and Mahanta, 2004, for some details). Of course, there is a much longer history of opium consumption in almost all of the areas under discussion in this dissertation. Huke's (1954: 20) study of a Jinghpaw village west of Myitkyina reported, for example, that "almost everyone above the age of 18 smokes opium".

and social standing, to constantly re-assess their political positions with respect to the central governments. These elites are apparently comfortable with the ambiguities, what I have elsewhere called “controlled ambiguities” (Farrelly, 2009a: 292-293), that largely define their capacity to collaborate with the central governments.

Examining the local development elites in each country is a way of explaining how such collaboration and control works in practice.

First, in northern Burma, the local elite—who generally maintain links to their ethnic political and armed allies, like the Kachin Independence Organisation/Army (KIO/A)⁸—have sought to position themselves as brokers and collaborators for those on all sides of that country’s long-running conflicts. Their difficulties have been compounded by the reinforcement of Myanmar authority under the current ceasefire agreements (see Appendix 3 for details on the ceasefires). In the Kachin State there are two major ceasefire armies, and some smaller ceasefire groups; all have accepted inferior positions to the Myanmar government that serve to clarify the significance of the nodes of control. Opportunities to share in the mineral, timber and other resources of northern Burma have, on the other hand, guaranteed significant, even unprecedented, income streams for the local elites.

Second, in the Chinese portion of the borderlands the local development elites have harnessed themselves to the economic juggernaut that has moved from China’s eastern

⁸The Kachin Independence Organisation/Army remains the most prominent Jinghpaw political and military group. While there are technically two distinct entities, the “Army” and the “Organisation”, they are often conflated in popular descriptions and in operational matters. Their supreme body is the “*Ginjaw Komiti*” (Central Committee).

seaboard all the way to the western frontiers. Yunnan, the province that hugs the long border with Burma's Kachin State, remains a relatively poor province by Chinese standards but it is now so thoroughly linked to the national infrastructure that it can project its influence, from its nodes of control, across the border to Burma and beyond. For this reason, the Jingpo in China have little history of overt resistance to government control and have managed to deploy their "exotic" culture as a way of securing their place in the world's most populous nation-state.

This contrasts, third, with the situation in India where the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh borderlands have also seen the emergence of local development elites, what Ali (2001: 48) calls "chief agents of development and modernisation in their respective societies". They are best positioned to manipulate the resources made available through local and state electoral politics. Arunachal Pradesh is, according to Barua (2005: 33), "a part of the eastern Himalayas [which] was until recently relatively insulated from processes associated with development". Datta (1991: 77) explains that the "[t]ransformation of a 'tribal' economy...is always a stupendous task [which] becomes all the more complicated when the economy, which was somewhere in the tribal-feudal continuum, is suddenly exposed to a highly developed market economy of the non-socialist variety". While this observation also holds true for China and Burma, the local elites in India are distinguished by their participation in local electoral politics. At this stage there are no regular elections in the China or Burma portions of the borderlands and, consequently, it is only in India that local elites claim their popular legitimacy from electoral politics.

Notwithstanding these variations, in all three countries the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw elites are well-positioned to take advantage of the nodes. In each case they are tied to the nodes of control not only in an obvious physical sense—through their residence, markets, communications, transportation, negotiations, festival performance, leisure, etc.—but also through more general perceptions of political mechanics, social prestige and historical purpose. Their success, often manifested in wealth and outward displays of influence, marks them out from non-elite Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw.⁹ But while the elites are often protected in key ways, they are also vulnerable to the particular vagaries of politics and must remain aware of their relative marginality, and symbolic subordination, with respect to the central governments.

Structure of the dissertation

To compose and justify my argument about the interactions between spatial control and elite political culture, the dissertation is divided into three sections.

Section One clarifies the theoretical and methodological orientation. It begins, in Chapter 1, with a number of ideas about the relationship between governments and those they govern in these borderlands. In this chapter I draw, most significantly, on recent writings by Scott (2009a) and van Schendel (2002) about highland and lowland spatialisation, and engage with more general arguments about civilisations, borders, exceptions and graduated sovereignties.

This is followed by Chapter 2 which deals with the research design that has evolved during

⁹ The non-elite members of these ethnic cohorts make only rare appearances in this dissertation but this does not imply that they are unimportant. On the contrary, non-elite Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw all play significant roles in local life; it just so happens that much of the public performance that is the focus of this dissertation remains the preserve of elite figures.

the course of my studies. In this chapter I show how the dissertation has drawn evidence from field research in the borderlands alongside its examination of the available scholarly and popular literatures. I also clarify some of the practical and logistical challenges that have influenced the research design.

Section Two provides the empirical heart of the study. It emphasises research on Burma but also includes material from the China and India portions of the borderlands. Chapter 3 examines the politics and peoples of the borderlands in comparative perspective. It highlights the ways that the three governments—Chinese, Indian and Myanmar—interact with the historical, territorial and ethnic dimensions of the borderlands. This examination is followed by Chapter 4 which discusses some key members of the local elites and the specific ways that they interact with nodes of control. The three figures who are featured in this chapter demonstrate different aspects, or personalities, of the larger cohort that I call the local development elites. The two final chapters in this section, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, examine Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw Manau festivals in detail. Chapter 5 is devoted to the large-scale 2008 Kachin State Day Manau in Myitkyina, northern Burma. This Manau provides evidence about the contested interactions between the Myanmar government, the Jinghpaw ceasefire groups, and the local Jinghpaw elites. Chapter 6 deals with smaller Manau festivals held in other contexts, especially in China and India. In each case I clarify the symbolic politics that are on public display during the festivals, and use my analysis of these politics to nudge forward my more general argument about spatialisation and nodes of control.

Section Three, which includes Chapter 7 and the Conclusion, draws these threads together and explains my thesis about symbolic politics and spatial control in the borderlands to its fullest extent. The nodes that I have described are, in this Section, used to clarify broader issues of minority cultural revivalism and local ethnic ambitions for nation-states to call their own. Across these three Sections, the dissertation builds an argument about development in the borderlands that China, India and Burma share, and about the way that each government seeks to govern with the collaboration of local elites. Through this analysis of spatial control I show how the three central governments, and elite groups in the respective local societies, have created useful sites for political interaction called nodes of control.

Social science for the borderlands

There are many potentially valuable ways of undertaking scholarly research on the politics of these Asian borderlands. Among one group of social scientists, such politics are most often studied in the abstract; from an institutional, geopolitical perspective, and without much attention to local political cultures (a relevant example is Mehra, 2007). In a very different direction, some other social scientists have sought to peripheralise and stigmatise state-making and border-making projects (Prasit, et al., 2008; Grundy-Warr and Dean, 2003; Dean, 2005; 2007). The current trend in borderlands studies is to re-emphasise alternatives to the nation-state and to challenge its supposed hegemony (starting with examples like Amadiume, 1997: 16; Strange, 1996: 92-93). The consequent prioritisation of networks, *ethnies* and non-state groups has ensured that a steady output of local studies undermines the pre-eminence once enjoyed by the nation-state as an analytical unit (see, in this borderlands

context, Lehman, 1997; and for recent Southeast Asian examples, Wasan, 2007; Sturgeon, 2005; Davis, 2005).

In a clear enunciation of the value of these efforts, van Schendel (2005: 10) has argued that “[b]orderland studies benefit from this endeavour to escape the iron grip of the nation state”. More recently, van Schendel (2006: 15) has posited that “[t]he study of borderlands may suggest new ways of conceptualizing social space in a century in which state-centric concepts are widely felt to be insufficient”. This is sensible in a period when the legitimacy of many nation-states—founded, as many are, in exploitation, dispossession and disenfranchisement—continues to be questioned. Indeed Scott has now made the case for “a non-state-centric history of mainland Southeast Asia” (2009a: 38). But this cannot be the end of the process of re-imagining. Have scholarly efforts to critique state-making and border-defining projects left some important gaps in collective understanding? What form does the “local state” take for those who live at the peripheries of national control? What strategies are used by governments and others to manage what could become unmanageable spaces? These are the questions that inform my analysis of politics, and its festival manifestations, across the China, India and Burma borderlands. My conception of nodes of control is a cautious way of continuing the process of re-imagining social space at a time when nation-states are forced to defend their interests at the fringes of government power. To further that process, and in answering these questions about spatial control, I seek not to endorse the nodes but, rather, to critically explain them.

In general, the spatial character of these borderlands, and what that character might mean for social scientific theories, has not been closely examined. Part of the reason for this oversight

lies with an excusable, but short-sighted, lack of interest in distant peripheries. Reluctance to argue for the merits of such studies against more “mainstream” topics is common. In the case of Zomia this may change now that Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009a) has been published.¹⁰ Over the next few years it is likely that further studies will help to clarify the achievements and limitations of Scott’s work. In the meantime, I have found that research in this relatively inaccessible borderlands area is only possible if it is specially designed to account for local conditions. Such research is complicated by the inability of all non-locals to legally cross the relevant borders and for that reason I have spent many days travelling to and from the various outposts of borderlands life.

I have been undertaking this research since 2006 when I began my Oxford University M.Phil thesis (2007a) on “post-conflict development” in this same region. The key issues that are explored in this doctoral dissertation build on those findings. During my D.Phil field research in the borderlands (in 2007 and 2008) I discovered that a set of compelling research questions derived from my existing work on what, in my M.Phil, I called the “development space” of northern Burma’s Kachin State. In my doctoral research the interaction between nation-state systems and the borderlands elites is more fully and comparatively explored. It is with this comparative evidence that issues of spatial control and symbolic politics in the borderlands grabbed my attention.

¹⁰ History shows that it is likely that Scott’s most recent book-length study will change wider perceptions of this borderland region. It is also clear from his previous monographs, which include *Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (1977) and *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (1998), that this 2009 volume will be widely read and reviewed, and will eventually find a place, even if it remains heavily contested, in the political science canon.

My M.Phil dissertation argued that the political cultures of the borderlands elite were harnessed to a recent economic boom, fuelled by Chinese demand for gems and timber, as a defence against the imposition of centralised state control. Recent prosperity benefited the local elites who then used their positions as leverage in the Kachin State's developmental and political realms. Before I began my doctoral research I expected that in both India and China similarly assertive commercial leaders and their enterprises would draw on reservoirs of "development" solidarity to support their own positions right at the edge of the most populous countries on earth. I had already found that this was the case in Burma's Kachin State but outside that specific "post-conflict" ceasefire context my hypothesis had not been tested. It is from China and India that fresh challenges to my ideas have come. With some empirical material from those contexts I have sought to develop a more comparative argument about the character of spatial control and symbolic politics for the borderlands more generally.

My argument is one that will hopefully motivate further social scientific reflection and critique, and encourage others to explore new theoretical frontiers and the endless possibilities that come with methodological eclecticism. The argument in this dissertation takes on questions about the roles of local elites in material and symbolic negotiations between nation-states (whether Chinese, Indian or Myanmar) and societies (in this case of the local Jingpo, Singpho, and Jinghpaw varieties). Members of these elites are among the most prominent individuals in their societies, and they maintain a sometimes awkward position between the governments (representing the "nation-states") and those they govern (who sometimes make competing claims as "nations"). My point is that key sites of their

symbolic and material interaction with the governments are the nodes of control: spaces where the central governments and local elites seek to shape their collective futures.

SECTION ONE

Chapter 1: Spaces for states and societies at the intersection

Governing states and societies

The many permutations of what is often conflated as “State-Society” have been a standard part of social science theory for over three decades. The legacy of this scholarship (Callaghy, 1984; Migdal, 1988; Shue, 1988; Perry, 1994) ensures there is no easy way to escape the inherent complexities, and problems, of any relationship between the government and the governed; the official and the common; structures and processes. It is somewhat inconvenient that general social theories do not naturally emerge from these reflections on the multitude of ways that states interact with the societies they seek to manage, although there have been some illuminating attempts (see Migdal, 2001). What tends to emerge are insights about contextually-specific and locally-acceptable forms of interaction where social scientific understandings of the relationships between the governed and government are open to ongoing refinement. Those refinements are an essential part of the debates that now see new approaches to studying government introduced and prevailing models of socio-political action challenged. In the specific political and social context of the China, India and Burma borderlands there are complexities and problems that can, as such, be helpfully considered with respect to the critical impulse of “State-Society” scholarship. It therefore makes sense to begin this dissertation by examining the context of government, culture and power in the borderlands.

The borderlands discussed in this dissertation are a zone of interchange, exchange, conflict and collaboration, where different social influences are immediately apparent. In southwest China, northeast India and northern Burma, languages from some of the world's major language families coexist, and waves of migration have left populations with disparate physical, cultural and religious heritages.¹¹ From the perspective of language, the layers of interaction and overlap become apparent. As David Bradley reports, "I have met Kachin and Lisu [both are local ethnic categories] who can converse happily in at least half a dozen languages, with native knowledge of three or more" (2002: 4). His experience of this polyglot mix is not unique; on many occasions during my field research I have been startled, and even bemused, by the linguistic competence and flexibility on display. These languages are an immediate, obvious and public manifestation of long-term social processes. In this region, invasions from all directions, some long forgotten and others that are arguably still only in their early days, have left clear marks on the people and their cultures. These distinctive local histories challenge the national governments who seek to manage borderlands life as part of their respective national wholes. One writer has gone so far as to suggest that under these conditions the region is "an anthropologist's dream and a statesman's nightmare" (Narahari, 2002: 5).

For anthropologists this borderlands region provides an arguably unparalleled set of social and cultural units that meld influences in novel and exciting ways. There is a long tradition

¹¹ For a helpful overview of this diversity see Corlin (1994: 6); and for a specific instance of its international scope see Maitra (1993: 9-1). Nath (2002: 126) makes the key point that, for hundreds of years, "...there were trade relations of Assam with China, Burma (Myanmar), Bhutan and Tibet"; the same could be said of all of the other parts of these borderlands (Phukan, 2004: 51; Pei, 1988: 119; Singh, 2005: 84). These social and linguistic interactions have meant that multilingualism is common and is perhaps even the norm in most of the areas discussed in this dissertation.

of examining the ways that the cultures interact. These interactions were most famously studied by British social anthropologist Edmund R. Leach (1954) who suggested an “oscillation” model for the political and cultural history of the region. In that model, supposedly distinct groups such as “Shan” and “Kachin” would change political forms in a dynamic way. It is possible in Leach’s model for “Kachin” to become “Shan”, and vice-versa. Since then it has been largely agreed by scholars that this is an ongoing process and the blurring of ethnic categories that occurs in these Southeast Asian borderlands is now generally taken for granted (for a recent re-endorsement see Sahlins, 2010). Given this history there is no surprise that two of the most potent contemporary political words in the borderlands are close cognates: *Shanglawt*, the Jinghpaw word for “independence”, and *Lawnlawt*, the Shan term usually translated as “freedom”.¹² The corollary of these interactions and overlapping discourses is that managing the borderlands requires a strong sense of purpose and a willingness to engage with countless communal, political, cultural and economic interests. That so many among the local populations have historically fought against central government control only serves to remind the “statesmen” of the borderlands that their presence may remain, forever, tenuous.

It is in this context that Chapter 1 provides a critical examination of the formation of civilisations, ethnicities and national spaces, and introduces the framework for the broader argument of the dissertation. This chapter introduces specific ideas about borders, states and power to help clarify my key concern: spatial control and the symbolic politics that shape life

¹² Linguists of this region tend to focus on either the Tibeto-Burman language family, which includes Jinghpaw, or the Tai-Kadai language family, with the Shan and the other Tai languages. Nonetheless it is apparent that these two distinctive linguistic heritages share important vocabulary in ways that suggest even greater interaction over the long-term than is commonly realised.

in this region. To begin the process of positioning my argument it is worth examining the corpus of “civilisational” and “national” studies that illuminate social interactions. Because my research has largely contemporary preoccupations I will begin with what many scholars have identified as the most important social, and epistemological, change in the past 60 years: the end of the Cold War.

At the end of the 1945-1989 Cold War between the “West” and the Communist “Eastern Bloc”, social scientists—most of whom had failed to anticipate the collapse of the Soviet Union (see Keohane, 1995: 185, for an explanation)—were forced to develop revised typologies for understanding the new social and political realities. Dichotomous and oppositional approaches to understanding international and national affairs were, at this time, replaced by tentative efforts to appreciate the apparent complexities of the “new order”. It was during this period that “State-Society” analysis became fashionable and the roles of civic engagement, and collaboration, in political life were brought into sharp focus. Social scientists interested in these changes at a geopolitical level sought to problematise recent history by examining the new spirit of ideological and economic integration. As one Chinese scholar reflected, “[w]ith the end of the Cold War the confrontational division between East and West is no longer there, and in that sense the world is more united” (Zhang, 1995: 89). Obviously, any sense of unity in the immediate post-Cold War period was short-lived and incomplete; in so many important aspects the world was not united at all (see, for an exposition on this point, Inoguchi, 1995: 135; and in the post-September 11, 2001 period, Lincoln, 2006). From this confusing milieu, prominent scholars turned their attention to

constructing frameworks that had global relevance at a time when the old certainties of polarised ideological confrontation had been made redundant.

Civilisations and borders

The most famous and controversial of these typologies was introduced by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in an essay published in *Foreign Affairs* (1993). Titled “The Clash of Civilizations”, it argued that after the demise of the Soviet Union the fault lines in the international arena would be defined by cultural units rather than by political ideologies. It was a provocative argument that elicited much debate in journals, magazines and newspapers around the world. Huntington later expanded and refined his argument in a book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1998). In this dissertation I do not propose to argue that his “clash of civilizations” is a realistic framework for understanding the interaction of ethnicity, culture and nationality in the borderlands of China, India and Burma. Nonetheless I consider it helpful to begin with a general typology for understanding the history of cultural formation and political control that is prepared to take on big questions about social change. Huntington is a useful starting point even though, as I will show, my study of these borderlands can fruitfully develop and critique his approach and the approaches of other political historians who have sought to introduce new paradigms for post-Cold War politics.

Huntington makes it clear that he did not set out to provide an argument that is supported by the deployment of social scientific research methodologies. In fact, he (1998: 13) explains that:

This book is not intended to be a work of social science. It is instead meant to be an interpretation of the evolution of global politics after the Cold War. It aspires to present a framework, a paradigm, for viewing global politics that will be meaningful to scholars and useful to policymakers.

He justifies this framework by writing that “simplified paradigms or maps are indispensable for human thought and action” (Huntington 1998: 30). To provide the foundations of his paradigm, Huntington actually relies on one map in particular (Map 1.3, reproduced as Map 3 in this dissertation). In that scheme, he divides the world into Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist and Japanese “civilisations”. For Huntington, the civilisations of the borderlands that I have studied are mapped as follows: Burma is “Buddhist”, India is “Hindu/Muslim” and China is “Sinic”.

This is a set of unremarkable observations and delineations except that under Huntington’s scheme there are relatively few places where more than two civilisations actually “clash”. There is the India-Burma-China intersection that I am concerned with, the two Tibet-India-China intersections, the India-Pakistan-China intersection, the Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan-China intersection, and the two Mongolia-Russia-China intersections. Nowhere else on Huntington’s map—except perhaps for two small and ambiguous pockets in the southern Philippines and in the northeast portion of Latin America around Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana—do more than two different “civilisations” come together at a common point. In fact, the only clear places on Huntington’s map where multiple major cultural zones share a common hub are along China’s expansive borders. China shares borders with 14 neighbouring countries and has over 22,000 kilometres of land frontier (Guo, 2005: 73). This

is more than any other country. India (Hindu/Muslim) and Burma (Buddhist) are two of those neighbours.

So the borderlands of China, India and Burma are a place, in Huntington's terms, where a "clash of civilisations" occurs and where the resulting cultural overlap will continue to influence local political mechanics. According to his analysis, "in the emerging era, clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world war" (Huntington, 1998: 321). This claim justifies Huntington's focus on the cultural roots of societies and nation-states. It also motivates some of his critics who argue that in Huntington's case "the main thrust of [his] arguments amounts to a severe underestimation of the continued importance of states combined with a tendency to reduce regional diversity to one-dimensional notions of civilizational conflict and anarchy" (Holm and Sorensen, 1995a: 205). For Huntington, but not for some of his critics, the current preoccupation with nation-states and their boundaries creates imbalance in the international system.

What does Huntington mean by civilisation? He writes (1998: 41) that "civilization and culture both refer to the overall way of life of a people, and a civilization is a culture writ large". This conceptualisation of large cultural units is based on a belief that these abstractions are at the level where competition for resources and the maintenance of misgivings about the priorities of *other* groups is most telling. Some further reflections clarify this provocative point. As Wilson (1997: 461) reminds us, "Lucian Pye, the MIT sociologist, used to describe China as a civilisation trying to be a state. This double identity

makes China difficult to analyse”. Drawing on this logic, and using it to help explore political and other conflicts, Huntington (1998: 218) explains that, “[e]conomic exchange brings people into contact; it does not bring them into agreement...If past experience holds, the Asia of economic sunshine will generate an Asia of political shadows, an Asia of instability and conflict”. Huntington may have been hinting at places like the borderlands of China, India and Burma when he made this pessimistic observation.

It is in this regard that his argument is more nuanced than he is sometimes given credit for. Huntington (1998: 43) further argues—again contrary to the clear lines of his map—that:

Civilizations have no clear cut boundaries and no precise beginnings and endings. People can and do redefine their identities and, as a result, the composition and shapes of civilizations change over time. The culture of peoples interact and overlap. The extent to which the cultures of civilizations resemble or differ from each other also varies considerably. Civilizations are nonetheless meaningful entities, and while the lines between them are seldom sharp, they are real.

This is a reasonable delimitation of an expansive argument and offers an indication of Huntington’s awareness that his grand paradigm of cultural interaction and conflict does not withstand close empirical scrutiny. What he accounts for, in terms described by Rizvi (1995: 79), is a sense of civilisation where although “peoples, cultures, and religions are inextricably interwoven...boundary demarcations invariably cut across communities and tribes”. “Tribes” themselves are, often, “heterogeneous” (Dutta and Duarah, 1990: iii), as are their political priorities (Fink, 2001: 255). For the borderlands it is this lack of “sharpness”

that often preoccupies writers: in fact, one scholar suggests that “[h]eterogeneity is the single most [important] feature of this region” (Pankaj, 2001: 22).

So there is no question that Huntington’s clean lines on his map of civilisations fail to capture processes of boundary arbitrariness and, more importantly, of cultural overlap. This does not, however, mean that analysis of state and society in the China, India and Burma borderlands should disavow any reference to “civilisations”. On the contrary, many of the claims made by local and national discourses are framed around the assumed cultural integrity of civilisations. China, for instance, “sees itself fundamentally as a world culture” (Goodman, 2004a: 73), and India and Burma are, to lesser or greater extents, predisposed to similar self-imagination. The problems, and ambiguities, of such self-perception are obvious: the cultural/political units that Huntington describes for this region (Buddhist, Sinic and Hindu/Muslim) are only one part of a finer, local, cultural mosaic that is, itself, riven by systemic political and cultural differences. This is what Mehra (2007: 10) calls the “internal boundaries [that] evolve in a haphazard manner...few of them are demarcated”.

It is the fine-grain of political interaction and civilisational contestation that interests me in this dissertation. I remain intrigued by the notion, voiced by some Indians (including local elites such as C.C. Singpho, 2004: 19), that the Stilwell Road, and other transport or communications links between China, India and Burma, are more than strategic or trade routes but are, ultimately, “cultural, human civilizational route[s]...route[s] of relationship between two [the Chinese and Indian] civilizations” (Sharma, 2004: 91). The idea that civilisations matter should not preclude a further commitment to problematising and

historicising the interaction of civilisations at a common hub. The borderlands of China, India and Burma are a critical site for Huntington's purposes, and they are even more crucial for the argument that I make in this dissertation about spatial control and symbolic politics.

Borders of nation-states

For the purposes of this study, the theorisation of nations and states, and non-states, requires further interrogation beyond that introduced by Huntington's more abstract thesis. It is at these subsidiary levels of social and political organisation that considerable scholarly attention has been devoted since the end of the Cold War. As one demonstrative example, Crawford Young, a political scientist from the University of Wisconsin, provided a seminal argument on the structure of nations and states. Young (1993: 3) suggested that:

[b]y the 1990s...[g]one with the cold war were the comfortable certainties concerning the nation-state. Both 'nation' and 'state' were now subject to relentless interrogation: the former by deepening cultural cleavages in many lands, the latter by currents of economic and political liberalization now girdling the globe. The potent force of politicized and mobilized cultural pluralism is now universally conceded.

According to this line of reasoning the years immediately after the Second World War saw "the apotheosis of the nation-state...[w]ith the idea of progress still robust, those polities were perceived as leading humanity's march to a better future had singular power as authoritative models" (1993: 7). Young goes on to explain how this led to unhelpful dichotomies within the vocabulary of social science. In his words it became "saturated with such imagery: 'modernity' versus 'traditionality'; 'developed' versus 'underdeveloped' (or 'developing'); 'advanced' versus 'backwards'". The idea of "progress" that was captured by

this vocabulary was wedded to a certain conception of political organisation where nation-states mandated usually by some civilisational claim took control of defined spaces.

Defining those spaces has meant that, at least from a distance, the borders of the global map mark substantive, and even “natural”, differences between nation-states. The “geo-body” introduced by Thongchai Winichakul (1994) implies territorial delineations and distinctions that are defended by governments concerned by their mastery of every last part of national terrain and, it follows, national sovereignty. Thongchai’s description of the links between the nation and its territory clarify that even though there is blurring at the edges, there are certain contexts and places where governments are prepared to fully defend their perception of national interests. For his part, Huntington acknowledges that in his civilisational model there *is* blurring and interaction at the borders that can lessen the impact of political demarcations. This is a process that Sturgeon, for the mainland Southeast Asian example, calls “landscape plasticity” (2005: 10). Awareness of the ways that geo-bodies merge, and for how borders are blurred, is appropriate. However, such awareness mostly serves to clarify that the general effect of political demarcation is, simply, to divide regardless of the flexibility that may be ascribed.

Indeed, in this dissertation I show that the borders between China and Burma, between Burma and India, and between India and China, all mark differences in *national* political and cultural approaches even when *local* physical and social characteristics remain similar (on those similarities see McKinnon and Michaud, 2000: 1). So while models of nation-state or civilisational interaction do blur together it is only sensible to acknowledge that nation-state

divisions are still relevant: mostly because there remain widespread assumptions that they do matter. Enquiring about the local understanding of borders in the borderlands it is striking just how much credence is given to these “national divisions”. The nation-state statuses of China, India and Burma are almost constantly invoked in ways that their sub-national equivalent, the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw conception of *Wunpawng*, is not. The discursive supremacy of the nation-states means that the nation-state borders that cut across any pan-Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw realm have been accepted even by those who respond strongest to local sub-national rhetoric about secession and independence. There is a sense, as a young Jinghpaw told me in 2007, “that this is Burma, and that is China, and there is a border between us”. Perceptions of such borders, and the related associations with nation-states and civilisations, need to be given appropriate scrutiny.

But from a more culturalist perspective, what is most compelling about the borderlands of China, India and Burma is that throughout the frontier region that they share all three countries are, unquestionably, inhabited by a mixture of people who identify, at cultural and other levels, with each other. As a starting point, local people speak similar languages in all three countries and, in fact, most of the languages spoken across the borderlands are represented by dialects in each country. More generally, in China, India or Burma the cultural similarities breed a sense of familiarity that the rigid national boundaries are designed to ignore. From language to dance, food, traditional clothing and agriculture, there are strong links, of both historical and contemporary importance, between the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw. Their Tai (Shan) neighbours also share much in common not only with other Tai-speaking groups in the region (following the description in Kondinya, 1990:

191), but also with the Jinghpaw, Naga, Lahu and others. This mix of people and politics in the borderlands is one extra challenge for the central governments to manage.

The challenge is that all of these groups claim to be nations, in the standard expression, and many retain at least some ambition for greater territorial and political authority. The “civil wars” that have reverberated around the borderlands in recent decades, particularly in the India and Burma portions, are the obvious outcome of such unrealised ambition. Nonetheless these sub-national groups do not, under current conditions, take on the character of nation-states, except in the most exceptional circumstances. The “Special Regions” that have been arranged under northern Burma’s ceasefires could be considered “micro-states” or, perhaps, “quasi-states”, but I prefer to see them as nascent nodes of control. In contexts where the Jinghpaw feel threatened by encroaching Burmese or Shan populations, and even by the prospect of renewed war, there is obvious comfort in the knowledge that certain spaces are explicitly hospitable. Like elsewhere in the world, the recognition and defence of “home” and “homeland” (*buga* to the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw) is potent for peoples who feel dispossessed or marginalised. However, the nascent character of such “micro-state” nodes means that I still need to insist that the most important machinery of control is the preserve of nation-state authorities (on this point see Migdal, 2001: 137-147). They alone enjoy the prestige of nation-state status, and can capitalise on the legitimacy that is marked by the Chinese, Indian or Myanmar government imprimaturs.

Where does this leave the other nations of these borderlands? As I have suggested, long histories of migration and cultural interaction ensure that the Jinghpaw in Burma have much

in common with not only the Jingpo in China and the Singpho in India but also with the Tai Khamti in India and the Lisu in China, among others (for examples of how this works in practice see Grewal, 1997: 215; Chowdury, 1997: 66-81; Barua, 2004: 67; Nath, 2004: 81; Sharma, 2004: 95; Robinne and Sadan, 2007; Sadan, 2007a). Leach's (1954: 2) seminal statement on this point is that the different peoples are "very much mixed up together".¹³ As such, cultural and social links stretch across the national boundaries in ways that are hardly unexpected (Jha, 1986: vii). Borderlands' peoples inhabit different nation-states, and may even have allegiance to different nations, but they also share much in common. In some cases there is even a line of reasoning that in the recent past international boundaries were "absolutely unknown" to local peoples (Mibang, 2002: 44; see also Wasan, 2008: 327n11).

It is worth clarifying that this history and the resulting cultural politics are not captured by Huntington's rubric or complementary efforts to model global dynamics. Nowhere on his map are the specific cultural mixes and border-defying interactions discussed in this dissertation given a place in the more abstract argumentation about civilisations. Civilisations are, by definition, the prestige cultures and forums for assimilation and co-optation. In the borderlands there are three internationally recognised nation-states, with their "civilisations", but there are also a plethora of other "nations" and "nations-in-waiting" (Bahcheli, Bartmann and Srebrnik, 2004: 8). The societies that are under discussion in this dissertation—Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw—are sub-nations that, at least in the case of Burma, have developed political platforms as a "nation-in-waiting". Shamsul A.B. (1996) and Mikael Gravers (1996)

¹³ This is a point that has motivated significant efforts to build complex social scientific models based on "Kachin" society. Friedman described his *own* post-Leachian attempt "to account for Kachin variation in terms of a single model of social reproduction" (2004: 307) in somewhat unflattering terms. Years later he reflected (2004: 24) that it "was the result of the excessive theoreticism of the [1980s] period".

suggest that such “nations” in Southeast Asia are “nations of intent”. Their aspirational quality requires the type of imagination and creativity that generates fear among central governments convinced that their minorities, whether they are Karen in Burma or Chinese in Malaysia, are seeking to subvert the existing nation-state. Aspirations or intentions to greater local sovereignty have remained a key challenge for the territorial integrity of the respective national wholes. Advocates of alternative spatial frameworks are vulnerable to charges that they are disloyal, even treasonous. From Beijing, New Delhi or Naypyidaw, any efforts to precipitate radical ruptures from established nationalisms—whether emerging from the politics of the Jinghpaw, Naga or Shan, etc.—are considered threatening to the central governments and provocative tests of their responsibilities to guarantee territorial control.¹⁴

It follows that the argument in this dissertation draws its strength from a simple observation: preventing such fragmentation is the over-arching priority of the central governments. The Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments do not wish to surrender any territory or people to any of the other existing nation-states, or to the multitude of prospective “nations-in-waiting”. Obviously, the maintenance of this unity is only realistic while there are strong legitimising factors that bind the nation-states together. However, the machinery of this binding process, and the elite negotiations that support its success, has been overlooked in these borderlands. Since the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, since Taiwan has been ruled separately as the Republic of China, and since the Myanmar

¹⁴ Pomfret (2007: 110) explains how “[a]fter ‘Long live Chairman Mao,’ the second sentence a student learned at elementary school was ‘Beijing is the capital of China’”. In a similar way Sircar (2006: 9) laments that, in India, “[e]veryone seems to know more about Delhi than his own state. The old adage of ‘*Delhi Ka Ladu*’ [eager to get to Delhi] keeps coming back again and again as an afterburner. People seem to be obsessed about this state and capital of India”.

authorities have made national unity one of their key mantras, each government system has been devoted to the idea of a natural, inevitable nation-state.

Local variations in history, culture and politics, not to mention the relatively short history of these modern nation-states, all suggest that there is actually very little about the contemporary claims that are either natural or inevitable. It is, instead, worth examining the ways that the three central government systems have sought to perpetuate their control against competing claims for sovereignty. In each case, claims for the nation-state are premised on a multiethnic mixture of peoples, languages and religions. There is no single way to be Chinese, Indian or Myanma.¹⁵ There is, at the same time, a need for each nation-state to defend itself against the splintering that could, perhaps very easily, undermine the governments' ambitions for ongoing spatial control. Controlling the national territory has required a variety of approaches, almost all of which rely, to one degree or another, on exceptions to the standard rules and on efforts to specify gradations of sovereignty.

The power of exceptions

Many scholars seeking to understand the limitations of political systems, and strategies of government control, have recently held to the idea that the “exception” has special significance. This emerges from Giorgio Agamben’s notion of a “state of exception” and in the context of this dissertation its most relevant application is in the work of Aihwa Ong (2006). She is the key proponent of this idea in Asia and deploys the “exception” as a way of

¹⁵ It should be clarified that “Myanma” is often used by the Myanmar government as the collective noun for the people of the country. It has not entered international usage in any consistent fashion but may, at some stage, become a more common classifier for the people of Burma.

conceiving different types of political space. The major thrust of her argument is that neoliberal projects in East Asia provide exceptions to standard methods of government management and control. For instance, she (2006: 3) outlines her understanding that:

...the difference between *neoliberalism as exception* and *exceptions to neoliberalism* hangs on what “normative order” is in a particular milieu of investigation...We find neoliberal interventions in liberal democracies as in postcolonial, authoritarian, and post-socialist situations in East and Southeast Asia.

Her specific concern is how those neo-liberal interventions seek to articulate types of citizenship and belonging “in political spaces that may be less than the national territory in some cases, or exceed national borders in others” (Ong, 2006: 6). Ong targets the “selective development” of these neoliberal exceptions with reference to spatialisation in East Asia (2006: 18). Preoccupied with special economic zones, free trade areas and other “neoliberal exceptions”, she looks to the ways that governments can disregard their own ideological and political commitments if the contradictions prove effective. Contradictions of these sorts sometimes also justify “exceptions to neoliberalism” (that is, through authoritarian impositions) which ensure that the governments respond forcefully to any perceived weaknesses. She argues that in these environments “the state tends to be robust and centralized”. This argument takes the contradictory spatial organisation deployed by some Asian nation-states and gives special consideration to the way that neoliberalism is integral to contradictory spatial logics.

The generalisability of Ong’s analysis requires some considered reflection and I am unpersuaded that “East Asia” is a reliable foundation for what must become, at the end, a

much less abstract discussion. Clearly, as Nugent (1997: 321) points out, there are risks inherent to any attempt to generalise on the basis of a presumed category of nation-state-building: “East Asian” for Ong, “western European nation-states and their colonies” for Nugent.¹⁶ Exceptions to “rules” for these larger cultural and political units (which are almost recognisable as Huntington’s “civilisations”) are merely one of the probable outcomes of large nation-state-making projects in *any* situation. Nonetheless, the value of Ong’s work is in her discussion of the evolution of particular “neoliberal” conceptions of state space; whether less than the nation-state or more than it.

Such exceptions have been concerning scholars for over a decade, and are often discussed in relation to capitalism, particularly when it is partnered with ideas about democratisation. As one example, Holm and Sorensen (1995b: 17) make the point that “the dominant notion of global liberal democracy sustained by an economy controlled by market forces” can ultimately “create...severe problems in several parts of the periphery when translated into concrete measures of rollback of the state”. Special economic zones in China and elsewhere, not to mention the ceasefire-defined Special Regions of Burma, demonstrate awareness that not all territory needs to be controlled to the same rigorous extent. Anna Tsing has pursued this logic in the context of Southeast Asian borderland spaces. Her conclusion is that “[f]rontiers are deregulated because they arise in interstitial spaces made by collaborations among legitimate and illegitimate partners: armies and bandits; gangsters and corporations; builders and despoilers” (2005: 27). The resulting “confusions” lead to what Tsing calls

¹⁶ The confluences inherent to the term “nation-state-building” is important for the wider argument of this dissertation. Sometimes the two entities—“nation” and “state”—are treated without due awareness of their links. One example comes from Goodman (2004b: 10) who writes of China’s “capacity to build the state and the nation” without exploring the possible ways that these two concepts are strategically conflated in Chinese, or other, imaginations.

“extravagant new economies of profit—as well as loss” (2005: 28). As Tsing demonstrates, there may be good commercial or political reasons for allowing portions of the nation-state’s territory, its “geo-body”, to be left with an exceptional, and therefore contradictory, system of control.

From interrogating these spatial insights as they relate to the borderlands of China, India and Burma, it is clear that some form of special spatial logic, built on exceptions, although not always of neoliberal kinds, has a role in the management of territory and people. But it does not follow that this is analogous, in any empirically grounded way, to what is described by Ong. Exceptions to the rules of governance in China, India and Burma proliferate in the borderlands. There are countless spaces along these borders where the central governments have mandated extra security and commercial restrictions (India’s Inner Line Permit system as used in Arunachal Pradesh is a good example), while simultaneously allowing some spaces to flourish without strong government oversight (China’s Jiegao Border Trade Economic Zone enjoys many important exemptions: see d’Hooghe, 1994: 307, for some details; and Geng, 2007: 5-6, for others). In any of these cases, the exceptions do not require the supposed logic of neoliberalism to support their inconsistencies.

On the contrary, there is an argument that the “exceptions” in these areas lead towards the politics of authoritarian, or at least undemocratic, control, even in “democratic” India (for the full rehearsal of this argument see Farrelly, 2009a). In northeast India, which is “[t]o most people...a distant, remote, violent and largely forgotten part of South Asia” (McDuie-Ra, 2006: 35), it is apparent that development priorities, and new spatialisations,

are often used to frame efforts “to change the social organisations so that the tribal communities can move to higher stages of development” (as argued in Das, 2001a: 13).¹⁷ Such development tends to be precipitated by the expansion of government control and thus by exceptions to the less onerous control that tends to be exerted in other parts of the nation-state. Over time, governments appear to find an equilibrium with the exceptions that they are most prepared to encourage or maintain. There are contradictions in the ways that exceptions are managed, but this is precisely their point and purpose. Where exceptions are prioritised, politics has also often been accompanied by social strife; in the words of one scholar, “[t]he Northeast of India has been somewhat disturbed by political problems for many years” (Morey, 2005: 3). Exceptions to Indian, not to mention Chinese and Myanmar, approaches to government control help to orientate the analysis in this dissertation away from any rigid expectations about what these systems of government should look like on preconceived normative grounds. The communist, democratic or military dictatorial credentials that tend, in many characterisations, to define particular systems of government obviously require further interrogation, particularly once their exceptions are acknowledged. It is their contradictions and ambiguities which are part of what allows the three central governments to pursue systems of rule that allow, or even encourage, gradations of sovereignty.

Graduated sovereignties in the borderlands

Throughout this dissertation the notion of exceptions to standard governance practices inform the ways that spatial control is explained. It is not neoliberal projects that have

¹⁷ Willem van Schendel has, however, made the provocative and significant point that such borderlands are only “seemingly remote” (2006: 1). He shows that, in fact, a closer examination “reveals a hive of activities with unexpected transnational importance”.

defined exceptions but, instead, a set of graduated sovereignties that usually dictate more government involvement rather than less. Graduated sovereignties are, as such, crucial to any discussion of “exceptions” in the borderlands. This concept helps explain the ways that governments have created and enforced schemes of control that define spaces as different *and* unequal. The specific outcomes of these gradations of sovereignty are intriguing for one major reason. In the China, India and Burma borderlands there have been largely unheralded efforts to develop forms of government that are not premised on unmanageable demands for full territorial control. Instead the governments have managed their ambitions for sovereignty to account for potential local competition.

In the borderlands there are “geo-bodies” which incorporate different levels of sovereignty with respect to government priorities and capacities. In this sense, Scott and van Schendel’s conceptions of Zomia are one extreme of a continuum of sovereign control and sovereign disinterest. Their Zomia is a space defined by sovereign disinterest and, as Scott would have it, by local cultural, political and economic resistance. For students of development this is an argument that has implications for how the logic of government is understood. In her study, Ong (2006: 78) clarifies the governmental implications in comparative terms:

Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines have labor, tourist, and timber zones, and postsocialist Vietnam and Burma have followed this logic of configuring the national territory into multiple zones of development...Indeed, China may have been most audacious in deploying zoning technologies, as evidenced by the three main planning strategies that have re-spatialized its capitalist development: special economic zones, special autonomous zones, and urban development zones.

This “graduated sovereignty” helps to explain engagements with the logic of global capitalism. But this should lead us to question how far such sovereignties are graduated for capitalism’s purposes and whether, in fact, such graduation actually has other impacts too.

One of the more compelling approaches to graduated sovereignties was taken by Veena Das and Deborah Poole in a volume titled *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. In the book’s introduction they clarify an intention to “move...away from the idea that these [neoliberal] reforms had somehow produced a weakening or shrinking of the forms of regulation and belonging that supposedly constitute the modern nation-state” (Das and Poole, 2004: 3). The capacity to manage systems of graduated sovereignty, particularly in marginal areas is, they suggest, actually a sign of government strength. It is the approaches that governments take to maximise this strength, especially through specific spatial governance, that I am concerned with in this dissertation. Clearly, such government strength, and the contrary preconceptions about exceptional spaces that many social scientists declare, have a methodological implication too. Going to the margins of the nation-state and returning with evidence that suggests the nation-state is weak may often reinforce our preconceptions but it may also serve to interpret resistance where none really exists.

So there is another side of the analytical matrix that requires careful consideration. Andrew Walker (1999) has shown how Southeast Asian trade networks rely on government involvement to protect them, *even* in exceptional circumstances. He argues that under such circumstances government control can expand with the endorsement of both petty and elite traders to defend “exceptional” spheres of influence. According to Walker, that defence is

never complete and it is through subversions or manipulations of state control that traders, officials and others define their roles. Creative and even explicitly experimental approaches to business, love and politics are one of the outcomes. It is the opportunity to strategically undermine regulatory processes that serves to support an entire system where most people benefit from the implementation of regulation *and* its subversion. From the northeast Indian perspective of “free trade” (that is, “free” from government “negotiation and regulation”) this is obvious: Bhattacharjee (2002: 40) writes that such “freedom” helps to ensure “mutual advantage”. The advantage is that extra and even exceptional freedoms can work for governments and regulators too. From a slightly different angle, Das and Poole (2004: 4) describe how “[a]n anthropology of the margins offers a unique perspective on the understanding of the state, not because it captures exotic practices, but because it suggests that such margins are a necessary entailment of the state, much as the exception is a necessary component of the rule”. Understanding the margins requires consideration of exceptions. But it is those necessary entailments that are, in a more general sense, at the heart of this dissertation, and my effort to explain spatial control and its symbolic dimensions.

Exceptions of wealth, language, ethnicity and location are, at the same time, exceptions to national practices that *do not* necessarily undermine the nation-state. Nodes of control provide the central governments with special advantages: short- and long-term, tactical and strategic. What I argue is that these exceptions and graduated sovereignties are, in so many haphazard and inconsistent ways, ultimately what have supported the three central government structures as they have sought to control and then manage the borderlands that they share. Das and Poole go on to make a substantial point about the role of nation-states in

such situations. They ask “...do the forms of illegibility, partial belonging, and disorder that seem to inhabit the margins of the state constitute its necessary condition as a theoretical and political object?” (2004: 6). The necessary condition of nation-states in the China, India and Burma borderlands is not only relevant to my study but also to the ideas about state-repelling space that have been introduced by Scott. A focus on “illegibility, partial belonging, and disorder”, which is, itself, a Scottian flourish, leaves us, from the perspective of spatial control, asking questions of the inverse: “legibility, partial belonging, and order”. What is legible? How much partial belonging is enough? Whose order ultimately decides? In answering these questions the order at the nodes of control is, I accept, an exception to the reputed disorder of Zomia, and to the strategies of illegibility that we assume define relationships between the governed and governments.

There are three expositions of this argument that are relevant to the rest of the dissertation and they should be introduced before I move on to the full discussion of Zomia.

First, we need to consider how graduated sovereignties are enforced through checkpoints and similar nodes of control. Checkpoints are part of daily life in the borderlands of China, India and Burma. Travelling on major or minor roads through big towns or small hamlets, it is common to be halted by police or military personnel. Even short trips in Burma’s Kachin State or in northeast India can require numerous stops at official premises. In China, the number of checkpoints is generally lower but it is still rare to travel along the Sino-Burmese border without being occasionally stopped, asked for identification and invited to answer some, usually trivial, questions.

These checkpoints, whether menacing or benign, serve to structure an environment in a way that supports the interests of those who control it. There has been little scholarly attention to checkpoints in the Chinese, Indian or Burmese cases. This is intriguing because in all three countries the “checkpoint” has come to fill a range of spatial functions for the exercise of government power. Studying checkpoints is one way that it is possible to examine the micro-politics of day-to-day authority and its transgression. For the Sri Lankan example Pradeep Jeganathan (2004: 69) argues that:

At its most basic and ordinary, a checkpoint is staffed by low-ranking soldiers, men or women, who stop the flow of traffic, usually vehicular but quite often pedestrian, to ask questions of those who pass by...The checkpoint lies at the boundaries of a target. As such, it delineates and focuses attention on the target.

As Jeganathan points out, many checkpoints also do more than delineate a target. Checkpoints demonstrate the extent to which the government, or other authority, can maintain a sustained presence, when and as required, in its key areas of concern. Those areas could be borders, roads, bridges, markets, government buildings, airports or hotels. Checkpoints are not merely erected to define targets. They are, in the theoretical language that I am using in this dissertation, a crucial graduation of the sovereignty claimed by a node of control. And they are, as a result, part of the wider-ranging and continuous negotiation of sovereignty, access and management. On this point, Sanford (2004: 235) has described “...one of the many internal frontiers where we can see how the mechanisms of state control are reconfigured”. Frontiers and demarcations of all types help clarify the mechanisms that define and delineate, and even reconfigure, nodes of control.

In China, India and Burma it is such checkpoints which serve to define the daily operation of graduated sovereignties and the exceptions to Zomia that these imply. In my experience the most significant checkpoints are found in India where the system of “Inner Line” regulations dictates who can cross certain internal boundaries, including from Assam to Arunachal Pradesh. This system seeks to specify that those who reside in Arunachal Pradesh have the appropriate authorisation to do so. Even brief visits to areas beyond the “Inner Line” require permits from the Indian government. At some places, like on the road to Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, the checkpoints that regulate access are as substantial as international border crossings. These are checkpoints where military, paramilitary, police and civilian agencies all monitor the traffic and determine the legality of access. Legible citizens and non-citizens—those people with identity cards, passports and permits—can pass. Those who fail to meet the required standards for access are denied.

To further illustrate the significance of checkpoints, it is worth explaining that some of my informants in China and Burma told stories of the inconvenience and harassment that they face with local checkpoints. In the case of China there are police checkpoints on roads heading away from the border with Burma. These internal controls are presented as components of counter-narcotics operations although they must also serve to restrict access to China for those Burmese citizens who do not have the appropriate permits. Controlling access across national borders may, in such a scheme, be only one layer of security and surveillance. Certainly in Burma there are countless local installations which serve to monitor travel on regional arterial roads. Almost everybody is expected to regularly present their paperwork (usually with a photocopy for the office records of each checkpoint) before

being allowed to pass. As one example, travelers on the road from Myitkyina to Bhamo must usually negotiate at least five checkpoints. In my experience travelling on roads in the Kachin State the only vehicles which do not automatically stop for such checkpoints are those which belong to the local elite, particularly high-ranking officials in the KIO/A or businesspeople. Their vehicles carry prominent and readily identifiable markings that indicate their affiliations and status. In the town of Myitkyina itself, where Myanmar government control is strongest, improvised checkpoints are regularly manned by the security authorities. They seek to regulate everything from unregistered motorcycles to illicit firearms, unauthorised house guests to non-approved mobile phones. In all cases the checkpoints structure the graduations of sovereignty and control that are strategic for the governments and their nodes.

Second, we need to better understand how those mechanisms of control are manipulated or undermined for specific goals. As I have already indicated, Walker's (1999) account of trade and traders in the Thailand, Laos, Burma and China borderlands provides evidence of the disparate ways that official borders are part of ongoing negotiations about the extent of government authority. These manipulations do not, in any inevitable progression, rely on confronting or ignoring nation-state power. On the contrary, government efforts to control cross-border dynamics can offer opportunities for those with the resources and savvy to exploit them. In the case of the Thailand-Burma border and, in particular, the Shan minority who straddle that frontier, I have already argued (Farrelly, 2009b: 67-86) that borders provide special opportunities and protection. In that exposition I quote an elderly Shan man who says "the Thai side [is] heaven" and the "Burmese side [is] hell" (2009b: 83). Far from

hoping to eliminate the national demarcation, many Shan who reside in Thailand are convinced that the nation-state border provides the best opportunities for their future security and prosperity. During my research in China I found that very similar sentiments inform how the border with Burma is imagined. Living on the Chinese side of the border is considered such a privilege precisely because it is contrasted, immediately, with conditions in Burma. When Chinese citizens do cross legally into Burma it is either for commercial visits or, just as commonly, for the opportunity to briefly consume Burma's peculiar blend of degraded infrastructure, illicit opportunities and accessible entertainment.

Third, beyond the immediate environment of such borders there are other spatial governance issues which require consideration. In Ferguson's (2006) discussion of capitalism and globalisation in Africa he makes points about exceptions and sovereignty that bear repeating in the context of the China, India and Burma borderlands. He describes how in mining areas "...a variety of powerful and well-armed interests...[are] attempting (with mixed success) to carve out such exclusive spatial enclaves" (2006: 37). This occurs in a context where "the links between resource-extractive enclaves, chronic warfare, and predatory states" have ongoing relevance (2006: 13-14). Ferguson is interested not only in "how such enclaves participate...in the destruction of national economic spaces but also in the construction of 'global' ones". According to Ferguson these spaces are not only fenced off from their surrounding societies but are "flexibly" linked to global resources and networks that are "exemplary of the most up-to-date, 'post-Fordist' neoliberalism, both with giant transnational corporations and with networks of small contractors and subcontractors that span thousands of miles and link nodes across multiple continents".

Ferguson is concerned, in the end, with the way that these nodes are linked together in a global tapestry of exploitation and disempowerment. Taking his impression of extractive “enclaves” and linking it to the nodes of control that exist in the China, India and Burma borderlands is a potentially valuable refinement. However, it is a refinement which is most directly relevant to the nodes of control of the first ontological type: the economic nodes, such as infrastructure projects. The challenge is to consider whether analogous forms of exclusive spatial enclaves are reflected in the second type of node of control. These are the nodes that I am most concerned with here and it is those nodes that strategically regulate culture and communications, not to mention government legitimacy and political action. Ferguson’s goal in raising these issues is to foster “a discussion of social relations of membership, responsibility, and inequality on a truly planetary scale” (2006: 23). Analysing nodes of control could arguably also serve such lofty concerns. However, my goal in this dissertation is more modest; I am cautious that any discussion on a global scale cannot be brought to the China, India and Burma borderlands until sub-national, national and regional dynamics are reconciled.

Clarifying the “geo-body” of “Zomia”

Sub-national, national and regional dynamics are best examined with respect to the specific spatial context of the borderlands. I have already pointed out that Thongchai Winichakul’s influential discussion of Thailand in the period of mainland Southeast Asia’s colonial competition requires a close reading before any assessment of nodes of control can be made. He made the memorable point that a regime of mapping shaped the “geo-body” of Thailand.

According to Thongchai (1994: 129) in the triumph of this new logic, the “ultimate loser was the indigenous knowledge of political space. Modern geography displaced it, and the regime of mapping became hegemonic.” In the Thai case, the new logic of modern geography brought a number of disparate political realms into the national embrace. For Thongchai it made the people “Thai”—replacing their previous, sub-national identities—and provided them with the beginnings of a coherent national identity. And, with even greater impact, it gave them a map. As technologies of government in the region improved the obvious ambition of central authorities (and not just the Thai government) was to characterise and demarcate spatial control (see, for instance, Sturgeon, 1997). This spatial control legitimised and maximised other opportunities for remaining in authority. It is often asserted that the “geo-body” (of Thailand; or of other states such as China in Callahan, 2009; or India in Ramaswamy, 2002) displaced a system of spatial organisation that predated colonial impositions in the region. This idealised, borderless, transnational realm of interchange can be positioned (such as in Sturgeon, 2004; 2005; Chiranan, 1989: 75) as the antithesis of the border-mapping, fence-building world that Thongchai described so well.

Since Thongchai’s analytical intervention the most exciting argument about spatial organisation in Southeast Asia has come, not from a Southeast Asianist, but from an historian of Bangladesh, Willem van Schendel.¹⁸ In 2002, he introduced a contrarian interpretation of the entire borderlands region that took on two related targets (van Schendel, 2005, is also relevant here). The first target was the way that “Area” Studies in Asia are demarcated. Since then others have taken up a complementary critical mission (see Glassman, 2005; Purdue,

¹⁸ It is notable that one of the few critical reviews of van Schendel’s Zomia argument has come from within the “territorial” Southeast Asianist fraternity (Henley, 2005: 152). To be fair, other reviewers of the broader Zomian argument, such as Tapp’s (2010) analysis of Scott (2009a), have been far more sympathetic.

2008) but van Schendel remains the most eloquent advocate for the position that South, Central, East and Southeast Asia, as imagined by scholars, are historical and geopolitical accidents. In response to those accidents van Schendel took on a second target. That target, for which he popularised the term *Zomia*,¹⁹ is the large space in between the “Areas” of scholarly attention and, more importantly, in between the various nation-state political systems (Map 4).

In van Schendel’s argument it is countries like India, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand and China that have historically, and even today, struggled to rule the parts of their territory that fall inside *Zomia*. He posits that people in *Zomia*, whether they live in Thailand, India or Bangladesh, might have more in common with each other than with their lowland neighbours. For scholars of this borderlands region, van Schendel’s arguments require sustained consideration. These are provocative, playful and challenging points, and ones that lead to general questions of marginality and sovereignty (as explored in, for instance, Sanford, 2004). In response, Southeast Asianists have become newly preoccupied with their space of scholarly enquiry. Bonura and Sears (2007: 12) argued, in van Schendel’s wake, that “there is an opportunity for scholars of Southeast Asia to productively reconsider the boundaries of the region itself”. Barua (2005: 235) has even gone so far as to suggest that “our intellectual horizons must go beyond the natural order of things...beyond today’s reality [to] imagine transnational regions of the future”. Such horizons have now been investigated by James C. Scott who has, for the better part of the last decade, devoted his attention to

¹⁹ In a footnote to his major account of “*Zomia*” van Schendel (2002: 653n3) describes how the term is derived from “*zomi*” which means “highlander in a number of Chin ^Mizo ^Kuki languages spoken in Burma, India, and Bangladesh”. These languages are part of the broader Tibeto-Burman family of which the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw languages are members. Other Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken across the length and breadth of “*Zomia*”.

explaining the historical details of Zomia (2007; 2009a). He actually focuses on somewhere more specific: an area he calls “eastern Zomia” (reproduced in Map 5), which includes parts of India, Bangladesh, Burma, China, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. The borderlands of China, India and Burma are right in the heart of this region.

For Scott, eastern Zomia is a space where the locals went to great lengths to minimise their legibility by governments through what he calls “state-repelling techniques” (2009a: 180). He describes a process of “self-barbarianization” (2009a: 126) where the local populations—the Kachin and Naga, etc.—are “barbarians by choice”. With titles like “Why civilisations don’t climb hills” and “Zomia: The Last Great Enclosure Movement and Stateless Peoples in Southeast Asia” Scott has toured the world (see, for instance, 2009b) lecturing on this conceptualisation of the region and its history. These insights have now been consolidated in his book on the topic (2009a). He argues that “one of the largest remaining nonstate spaces in the world, if not *the* largest, is the vast expanse of uplands, variously termed the Southeast Asian *massif* and, more recently, Zomia” (2009a: 13). Scott is cautious, understandably, about the claims made for this vast area but is convinced that “[t]he signal, distinguishing trait of Zomia, vis-à-vis the lowland regions it borders, is that it is relatively stateless” (2009a: 19). For Scott (2009a: 63) the point is that “the physical, coercive presence of the state in the remotest, hilly areas was episodic, often to the vanishing point. Such areas represented a reliable zone of refuge for those who lived there or who chose to go there”.

Scott acknowledges the historical contingency of this argument and tends to quarantine his analysis to the period before *about* 1900; a time when major technological, administrative

and cultural changes may have precipitated the end of Zomia and those societies that we might, together, refer to as “Zomian”. In charting this process Scott offers a compelling synthesis of the scholarly challenge. As he puts it, “[o]ne challenge for a non-state-centric history of mainland Southeast Asia consists in specifying the conditions for the aggregation and disaggregation of its elementary units” (2009a: 38). For Scott “the point” (2009a: 39) is that the peoples of Zomia used “strategic adaptation to avoid incorporation in state structures”. My more tentative argument is that since eastern Zomia has been forced into conversations with the post-independence nation-states of China, India and Burma there has been an even more compelling adaptation. The local elites—from among the Jingpo, Singpho, Jinghpaw and others—have sought to encourage *their own* incorporation, albeit temporary or incomplete, in nation-state structures.

My argument leads us to question what has happened to Zomia: has it retained its state-repelling character? I can accept that Zomia, in its Scottian version, may remain in isolated places far from sites of economic, strategic and other significance; places that are of little, if any, interest to civilisation-making, border-creating, nation-state-building governments. Thus wherever the leaders of the nation-states decide they do not need a presence—in unimportant hamlets, by the sides of seasonal creeks, on lonely mountain passes—then abandonment prevails. Following Scott, these places should logically remain “relatively stateless”.²⁰ In the

²⁰ Important for Scott’s argument, and mine, is the fact that many parts of Zomia proper, at a distance of at least one day’s walk from the nearest major town, remain difficult to access. However, as transport and communication infrastructure improve, as roads are pushed deeper into Zomia, and as governments discover more interests worth defending in these remote areas, any residual “zones of refuge” (Scott, 2009a: 22-26) are incorporated as (and, to an extent, if) the governments see fit. For future understandings of Zomia’s non-nodal space these may prove to be interesting observations come the time when scholars enjoy superior access to such areas. In “non-nodal” parts of the Wa hills along the China-Burma border, Magnus Fiskesjö (2010) recently described a situation where some groups have embraced “activist statelessness”. This is a formulation that I hope to examine more closely in future.

political systems of borderland Zomia there is a process of hardening the nation-state in places that matter and withdrawing from places that do not.

My argument is that nodes of control have been established by the central governments in parts of the borderlands that are useful for the survival, and success, of the central government systems. They may also, under the right circumstances, be merely temporary nodes that are constructed and defended for specific political, commercial or cultural reasons. Some of the checkpoints that materialise and then quickly disappear in parts of eastern Zomia are precisely of this form. There is no requirement that nodes are managed on a continuing basis, although in most cases it proves important to have some plan for controlling the node in a contingency. So nodes of control are eastern Zomia's "middle ground" (as hinted at in works like Jonsson, 2006; Giersch, 2006, and others). As strategic areas—along the various borders, the major transport and commercial routes, and at the main population centres—they are spaces where the governments have firmly fortified themselves. In other spaces, perhaps in the residual zones of a Zomia subjected to central government neglect, there are few efforts on the part of the governments to establish or defend a substantial presence.

Spatialisation and scholarship in Zomia

This government disinterest mimics academic social scientific indifference; on both counts this borderland region has escaped concerted scrutiny. One reason for the lack of social science research on the China, India and Burma borderlands is that it is unclear where the responsibility for such study lies. Over recent decades, disciplinary specialists—with job

titles like anthropologist or geographer—have vied with those who see their scholarly vocation directed to particular areas of the world (for an overview of the debating positions see Bates, 1997: 166-169). There are, as a result, well-known academic programs in Latin American Studies, South Asian Studies, Pacific Studies, Balkan Studies and others, all based on geographic logics. The complexities of the debate between the two, admittedly complementary, approaches to social science are beyond the scope of this dissertation. This is a debate that continues to shape the structure of universities, and the educations of their students, in almost all parts of the world. It is, nonetheless, important to recognise the ways that academic programs and disciplines have shaped the understanding of political and social processes in the China, India and Burma borderlands.

As a result of these scholarly structures, any study of the borderlands must treat the concerns of specific area specialties (whether centred on China, India or Burma) with caution but never with contempt. South, East and Southeast Asian Studies all have something to offer the study of their shared frontiers. However, these borderlands are, as Huntington's typology shows, peripheries for the rulers of China, India and Burma, and are even more obscure for most of the academics, diplomats and journalists who play such major roles in shaping wider perceptions of global society. Even within the three countries, the local conditions of most border areas are not commonly known or acknowledged. Events in these areas are rarely reported in national-level media. It is, as a result, very unusual to meet residents of, say, Calcutta, Mandalay or Shanghai who have much knowledge about the workings of their respective country's distant corners.²¹ These are vast countries and the local political and

²¹ To be fair, a very similar point could be made about countries like the United Kingdom, United States or Australia. Distant issues, in supposedly marginal areas, rarely excite much attention from metropolitan centres.

social concerns of the myriad border areas are, most of the time, of little consequence to life in big cities.

Scholarly preoccupations with large, urban settlements have led to classic statements about centres and peripheries. In Southeast Asia, in particular, the cascading spheres of influence (a graduated sovereignty of a sort) that developed in the traditional lowland polities ensured that many peripheral areas were beyond the immediate control of the central rulers (as described by Scott, 2009a). Taking up the analysis of these cascading political structures has, of course, led to many blank spaces (Scott's "zones of refuge") that fall, largely, outside the general models that have been proposed. This is not, however, a unique set of circumstances. In China, there has been a long tradition of distant rulers accepting notional tribute from subordinate states that fall, perhaps vaguely, within their area of influence and control (for a relevant example see Wade, 2006: 89). The Indian pattern, which was replaced by the central colonial authority of the British, saw numerous local rulers exerting control over inter-locking domains (Morrison and Sinopoli, 1992). In each country the centre and the periphery generally maintained dialogue and trade. However, in all cases, distance tended to dim the glow of the central power.

That dimming has motivated some scholars to get beyond the straitjacket of nation-states and their elitist territorial mandates through the theorisation of "non-state" and "non-Area" spaces. This is an argument that I introduced in the earlier discussion of Zomia but it makes sense to devote some further attention to the specific claims that have been made for its exceptional spatial logic. Zomia is usually described as a mountainous, state-repelling space

between Central, South, East and Southeast Asia. According to Sing Khaw Khai (1995: 3-4), in an early example of writing on this topic:

The Zomis are...those ethnic or linguistic, or cultural groupings of people who had commonly inherited the history, the tradition and culture of Zo as their legacies, irrespective of the names they adopted and the culture to which they adapted later.

What I call the borderlands of China, India and Burma is, conveniently, right in the middle of Zomia. Parts of this area have previously been described as “a political no man's land” (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1955: xii). Building on such longstanding analytical efforts, van Schendel’s argument about Zomia has become a polemical challenge to the structure of “Area Studies” and the national or civilisational justifications for its demarcations. In his foundational statement on the topic, he pointed out that “[a]rbitrary decisions made in far-off studies and conference rooms have allocated [four adjacent villages] to four different world areas: Gohaling is in Yunnan (‘East Asia’), Sakongdan in Burma (‘Southeast Asia’), Dong is in India (‘South Asia’), and Zayu is in Tibet (‘Central Asia’)” (2002: 652).

In this dissertation I cannot help but explore the arbitrariness (or otherwise) of these various categorisations and their relationship to what van Schendel (2002: 665) describes as “spaces, scales, and flows”. Does it matter if a place in “Zomia” lies within the borders of China, Burma, India or Tibet? In essence, I argue that borders—between nation-states and between what could, following Huntington, be termed “civilisations”—retain salience not only for nation-states but, more importantly, for those who live *around* the modern national frontiers. For the residents of van Schendel’s four villages, and hundreds of others like them, nation-

state borders across “Zomia” dictate their inclusion in much larger political and economic systems, and their connections to nodes of control.

This has epistemological relevance for my dissertation that may not be immediately obvious. Instead of focusing on “Areas” like “East Asia” (China), “Southeast Asia” (Burma), “South Asia” (India and Bangladesh) or “Central Asia” (Tibet), proponents of this new spatial configuration advocate the study of “Zomia”. Van Schendel (2002: 657) demonstrates how with “three handicaps—political ambiguity, absence of strong centres of state formation, and insufficient scholarly clout—prospective Zomianists lost out in the scramble for the area after World War 2”. In a speech to the Canadian Council of Asian Studies, Terry McGee argued that these “distortions” mean some of the realities of Southeast Asia “received little attention” (2005: 18). In response to these “distortions”, what van Schendel calls an historical “accident”, some, such as Scott, have even begun playfully using the term “Zomianist” to describe the academic observers of this space.²²

As a critical foil to the preoccupations of regional “Area” specialists it has much to commend it. Writing well before the current preoccupation with Zomia, the anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1980: 1) noted that:

[t]hroughout the ages the Himalayas acted not only as a barrier between the peoples of India and their northern neighbours, but also as a refuge where archaic styles of life and culture could persist in the isolation of secluded valleys unaffected by the march of progress in the rest of the subcontinent.

²² For instance, Scott describes Simon Fraser University’s Janet Sturgeon as “*avant la lettre*, a practicing Zomianist” (2009a: xvi). For more on her “Zomian” work and the reasons for this designation see my interview with Sturgeon (Farrelly, 2008).

In another study he waxed poetic when describing the borderlands “where numerous radically different racial and ethnic groups dovetail and merge, distinct ideologies coexist, often within a narrow space, and a multitude of mutually incomprehensible languages are spoken” (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1982: 1). This is the region that van Schendel has now given a memorable, and challenging, designation. Part of the challenge of Zomia comes in the way that its residents have sought to evade inclusion in nation-state systems. Arguably the most compelling example of this evasion is in cropping patterns and, in parts of Zomia, it has been pointed out that “[o]pium is the cash crop *par excellence* in the mountains” (Joo-Jock, 1984: 164). Physical seclusion, cultural diversity and economic evolution have allowed many people to “escape” from state control, and to develop modes of living which were mostly independent of lowland suzerainty.

James C. Scott has fully embraced, and formally defined, this model of spatial logic and political argument. Before the completion of his *Zomia* book, he noted that his next major scholarly contribution would focus “on hill and valley relations in Southeast Asia, which is the age-old and most important cleavage in that part of the world” (Scott, 2007: 367). Scott hoped to “say something about why the state has always been the enemy of people who move around and why there is something about a state that wants to fix people in space. I’m going to focus on Burma, so I’m studying Burmese”.²³ His approach to Zomia has since come to integrate ideas about “state-repelling” and “state-evading” practices which are, in his view, the hallmark of the Zomia area in the pre-colonial period.²⁴ Such characteristics are

²³ While Scott has gone on to a distinguished career as a student of “resistance” and “state-making” in many different parts of the world it is rarely acknowledged that his first significant exposure to Southeast Asia, in the late 1950s, was in Burma. Fascinating details on that period of his scholarly life are available in Scott (2007).

²⁴ These ideas complement the model of “outwitting the state” introduced by Peter Skalnik (1989: 1-19).

encouraged by descriptions of a "...*'frontier world'* [where] there existed a crucial cohesive force that helped integrate them into some sort of functional unit" (Chiranan, 1989: 33). Other scholars of this region are interested in "how indigenous people respond to constrictive policies imposed upon them by nation-states" (Prasit, et al., 2008: 7-8). What can be overlooked is that after British expansion into northern Burma, and particularly since the upheavals of the early and mid-20th century, the model Scott (2009a) proposes breaks down. This is a failing that he is quite ready to concede in the many public lectures he has delivered on this topic. However, others still take his argument to an extreme. Woolcock (2007), for instance, asserts that "the residents of 'Zomia' (in southeast Asia) who could in fact have access to formal education, financial services and police protection may nonetheless actively choose to remain outside the purview of the state".

Understanding Zomia on these terms can be productive, but so is understanding Zomia as a space *within* the various other systems of governance and knowledge. As Goswami and Gogoi (2004: 109) explain, "China, India and Myanmar can be called a sub-regional zone having varied topography and inconvenient transport and communications systems...the entire zone is regarded as underdeveloped". Zomia has, over the past few centuries, been carved up by the nation-states that have captured parts of this region for their respective geobodies. It is thus available, to a greater or lesser extent, to the central government authorities for their own purposes. Zomia has become an integral part of the way that all of the nation-states in this region, whether Burma, China or India, or Thailand, Bangladesh, Laos or Vietnam, have imagined themselves, not only against their peripheral, minority populations, but against themselves. Carving up and then managing the terrain and the people of Zomia

has been a crucial component of their ongoing nation-state-building and border-making projects.

There are two points that are worth emphasising following these generalisations. First, the borders that have been demarcated and managed (in what Scott, 2009a: 4-11, calls “The Last Enclosure”) in eastern Zomia have made the region somewhat simpler for the central nation-state systems to control. Lawless, trans-national realms are not only difficult for governments fighting counter-insurgency campaigns, as in northeast India (Das, 2005: 252; Lama, 2001: 256), but they are also difficult for those who hope to bring formerly rebellious people into the national mainstream, like in northern Burma, or who want to control and tax the trade that leaves the country, as in China. So each central government has its own reasons for delimiting and defining the extent of the national territory.

Second, appropriate emphasis must be given to the fact that the nation-states have imposed effective discursive control. On this point, Scott (2009a: 337) introduces a flourish to his other arguments about “hill peoples” and their efforts to evade state-making projects. Instead of accepting the “barbarianisation” (“pre-padi cultivation, pre-towns, prereligion, preliterate, pre-valley subject”, etc.)²⁵ that goes with Zomian life, he suggests re-framing the history of mainland Southeast Asia to insist that “[h]ill people are not pre- anything” (2009a: 337). He prefers a formulation of “anarchist history” that sees these people as “post-irrigated rice, postsedentary, postsubject, and perhaps even postliterate”. For Scott “[t]hey represent, in the

²⁵ Scott’s tentative argument that illiteracy can be a deliberate “escape” strategy for people hoping to repel the state is among his most contentious. Nonetheless I am intrigued that others are tilting in similar directions with, for instance, Pine (2008: 234n11) mounting a defence of what she calls, in the Lahu case, “[t]he Other without-writing, as a voiceless subaltern”.

long durée, a reactive and purposeful statelessness of peoples who have adapted to a world of states while remaining outside their firm grasp”. This is an argument that will exercise critical minds for many years to come. In this dissertation my research compels a response that strikes at a continuing accommodation: parts of the territory of eastern Zomia have now been sufficiently, but perhaps not completely, integrated into the systems of control that emanate from the nation-state centres.

Contingency and interaction in Zomia

One success of that control is a more fundamental breakdown of the common distinction between the political and social life of “highlands” and “lowlands”. The lowlands of these borderlands are defined, in many accounts (such as in the critique by Scott, 2009a: 32-36), by their Indianised cultures (Burmese, Shan, Thai, etc.) and their long histories of feudal rule. It is around pre-modern lowland polities that the major nation-states of mainland Southeast Asia (Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma) were consolidated. It is also these states that have, as van Schendel observed, garnered the majority of scholarly attention. In the highland areas, a large number of different cultural groups have been kept at a distance from the lowland centres; some groups even understand their histories in these explicit terms (Ma, 2008: 275). The highlanders usually speak Tibeto-Burman, Sinic or Mon-Khmer languages, and practice swidden agriculture. Of course, there are many areas where these “minorities” are “local majorities” (Joo-Jock, 1984: 23). And according to Jonsson (2006: 15), “[t]he bifurcation between peoples of the plains and those of the forested mountains contributed to the structure of the region’s social landscape...set[ting] the terms

for the diverse constructions of identity and history that informed social relations as much as ritual practice.”

Later in this dissertation I tentatively develop this critical exploration of the highland-lowland divide and show that there are few credible ways that the current politics of the region can be explained in this conventional framework. Before modern transport and communication systems, and before the nation-states of this region had the means to better control their national territory, there was some residual value to the bifurcation. However, under the conditions of development in both highland and lowland areas there has become no clear way to demarcate them with respect to altitude alone (an illustrative summary is found in Lyttleton, Cohen et al., 2004: 6). So the differences between “highland” areas like Hpakant (Burma), Longchuan (China) and Zayu (India) are potentially just as stark as the differences with “lowlands” like the Hugawng valley (Maran Brang Di, 2008), Ruili (also known as Shweli, which Mirante, 2005: 33, describes as “a decadent scene right out of ‘Bladerunner’”) and Changlang (see Chaturvedi and Mahanta, 2004). Each locality, whether in a traditional highland or lowland zone, demonstrates its own system of interaction and negotiation that is not, crucially, altitude dependent. The most basic division, as taken to its intuitive extreme by Scott (2009a), between paddy rice-growing Buddhist lowlanders and animist, swiddening, opium-cultivating highlanders, is now passé. The economies of the modern borderlands do not now rely on highland/lowland divides in the same way that perhaps they did even 10 or 15 years ago.

Today, the distinctions between highland and lowland societies are not fixed and there is a continuing process of assimilation and interaction between them. Of course, as Jonsson explains (2006: 40) “[u]pland-lowland relations provided contact zones within which particular identities were routinized”. But more tellingly the highland groups and the lowland groups are not static cultural categories and they have been repeatedly shaped and re-formed by each other and by outside influences. This has led to the creation of portfolios of overlapping and even complementary ethnic identifications. This is why the association of particular *ethnies* (merely “historical communities built up on shared memories” according to Smith, 1988: 25) with highland or lowland terrain can be misleading in many circumstances. Leach (1954) demonstrated that such transformations have occurred throughout history. Is it, as such, still reasonable to assume that “[h]istory and geography...combined in the far eastern frontier to protect the hill tribes in Arunachal Pradesh from the encroachments of the flatlanders” (Zurick and Karan, 1999: 91)? Who are these so called “flatlanders”? There are, for instance, countless “lowland” Jinghpaw, Naga and Lisu throughout the China, India and Burma borderlands. At the same time there have been increasing incentives for the expansion of traditional lowland power into highland areas. Motivated by these incentives there are gradual movements of traditionally “lowland” peoples—whether Shan, Burmese, Assamese, Han Chinese, etc.—into highland areas (see Pan Kachin Development Society and Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, 2004: 14). To garrison troops, develop new markets and procure resources it has been important for lowland governments to assert a greater presence in many parts of what were long considered highlands. The processes of spatial control that I examine in this dissertation are the logical outcome.

Conclusion

In response to the displacement of Zomia's traditional spatial organisation we may, as Joseph and Nugent suggested (1994), embark on a journey of "bringing the state back in without leaving the people out". Scott's (2009a) history of eastern Zomia challenges preconceptions about both "the state" and "the people". But the greater challenge, as Sayer (1994: 369) pointed out, is to answer an enduring question in social science: "How cohesive historically are supposed hegemonic projects?" He replies by noting that "Max Weber...said...every state is founded, in the final analysis, on force" (1994: 377). More recently, Das and Poole (2004: 25) have argued that "...sovereignty is best defined in terms of power over life and death". The analysis in this dissertation endeavours to keep these insights in mind. So profound is the role of the nation-state in the borderlands of China, India and Burma that it is difficult to justify a conceptual framework that does not begin with a concerted examination of the relationship between states and societies; governments and those they govern. In this sense the analytical starting point here is not unique: "[d]omination and change have frequently been analysed as part of a process in which the state is the fulcrum" (Migdal, 2001: 7). Caution about this process is, obviously, appropriate because "[t]he general analytical claim concerning the primacy of state can easily lead, for example, to the fallacious view that states in low-income settings are always and inevitably the most significant social actors on the scene" (Kohli and Shue, 1994: 293). However, the next, and more immediate, problem is to decide what part of the various societies—the governed—should be examined most closely. In this dissertation I have chosen to frame my arguments around the interaction between the nation-states and the local elites. In practice, this has

required an examination of the role and status of groups from the Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments and the borderlands peoples who negotiate with them.

It follows that the local elites of all three countries are defined by the extent to which the nation-state systems have become crucial to their political futures. These elites have manoeuvred themselves to take advantage of the prevailing government priorities that confront them. Each of the three nation-states wishes to secure itself against internal and external threats, harness development and maintain its political control. So the three systems are, in their own ways, working towards a set of common (although not always harmonious) goals. To dismiss the role of the nation-state in this context is a misjudgement of intentions and, most importantly, a misalignment with empirical reality. Even the most ardent local nationalists—such as combative elements in the Jinghpaw and Naga armed resistance movements—do not seek to impose non-state solutions on their claimed territories. The fight for a state of their own, and for a way of protecting their nation, is an enduring war-cry.²⁶

Such nation-state-centrism is integral to the formation of the borderlands and their elites. This is an argument that some readers may find unpalatable. To displace the local and its assumedly “anti-state” characteristics and replace it with a re-energised conception of how the nation-state operates in these borderlands will not bring joy to some faces. There are passionate forces in academic and activist circles who voice concern about the continuing subjugation of *the local* by *the nation-state*. The hegemony of central government politics and priorities has generally been portrayed as a cause of hardship and destitution. Distant,

²⁶ Talk of a “Kachinland” that creates a new “nation-state” in mainland Southeast Asia for the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw peoples is not uncommon. Vernacular invocations of a “*Jinghpaw asuya*” (Jinghpaw government) or a “*Jinghpaw wunpawng asuya*” (Jinghpaw peoples’ government) serve this purpose.

cynical bureaucrats from the centre are generally blamed for their role in limiting opportunities for those on the peripheries. When ethnic, religious or cultural differences are marked, as they are in all of the examples in this dissertation, it is tempting to dismiss the central government role as fundamentally corrupting and destructive. This is a simplistic temptation that the following chapters of this dissertation have endeavoured to avoid.

Chapter 1 has discussed the impact of ideas about civilisations, nations and sovereignties for my wider analysis of the China, India and Burma borderlands. This conceptual framework has introduced some of the ideas that situate my subsequent arguments, with particular attention to the idea of Zomia, while also suggesting theoretical language for dealing with the inherent complexities of the borderlands context. Taking a critical perspective on the shape of contemporary social science as it can be applied to the borderlands opens up space for analysis of the ways that governments interact with those they govern in this region.

Chapter 2: Researching the borderlands

Ambiguities and power in research design

Arun Agrawal begins his *Greener Pastures: Politics, Markets and Community among a Migrant Pastoral People* by explaining how “[t]he marginality of a people means something very different to those who live it than to those who write about it” (1999: 5). When designing the research for this dissertation, marginality has not been a principal consideration. The local elites among the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw enjoy relative status, power and prosperity; the more “marginal” people in the borderlands have remained, to an extent, outside the immediate focus of the research. Nonetheless, the antithesis of marginality—elite power—also means something very different to those who write about such power than it does for elites themselves, or, indeed, for those they dominate. While marginality may be clearly identifiable when it is observed, the behaviour of elite groups, and their relative statuses, can be harder to describe. The challenges of “studying up” (as described by Nader, 1969; Conti and O’Neil, 2005; etc.) will always confront those researching local elites. Focussing on such elites has scholarly value because “virtually every society has its privileged minorities...whose interests and normative ideas set the agenda” (Shore, 2002: 2). Shore (2002: 4) points out that elites “are typically incumbents: the leaders, rulers and decision makers in any sector of society, or custodians of the machinery of policy making”. More recently Nader (1999) insisted that her concept of “studying up, down, and sideways” was designed so that the “the ethnography of the colonizers would also be revealed to the colonized”. Such revelation is predicated on challenging the asymmetries of power that complicate ethical research design.

To a great extent in India and Burma, and to a lesser extent in China, there are many groups that oppose the central governments in both open conflict and more cautious subversion. The specific character of these groups, their operational capabilities and their current ideological or organisational status is not the core focus of this research. Such a study would be relevant to the governments of China, India and Myanmar, and to any other entities that seek to co-opt these rebels and their resistance. It is social scientific studies of this general flavour—defined by their analysis of insurgent or potentially insurgent groups—that so divided anthropologists in Southeast Asia at the height of the Cold War (see Wakin, 1992; and other reflections on what is euphemistically known as “the Thailand controversy”). Debates about the role of social scientists in war zones have continued, and the current conflicts in places like Afghanistan and Iraq have motivated a fresh round of recriminations and justifications (for an overview of the issue see González, 2008; and for a more critical discussion there is Marlowe, 2007). The relevance of these debates to my research design is that the patterns of marginality and domination I found in the China, India and Burma borderlands breach the neat demarcations of conflict, collaboration and collusion that distinguish the antagonists in these debates.

In the borderlands any fine distinction between war and peace evaporates in the face of the difficult ceasefire conditions that prevail in some areas; in other areas the persistence of conflict makes it even harder to determine the battlelines. These ambiguities, which I have described elsewhere as “controlled ambiguities” (Farrelly, 2009a), are instrumental in the fashioning of local political cultures and, for that reason, to the production of social scientific

research. Ambiguous interactions mean that speculation for example on the membership and objectives of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) is rife (Hussain, 2000; Cline, 2006). By the same token there is ongoing effort to explain how northeast India's many other key "underground" (shortened, often, to "U.G.") forces survive (Kotwal, 2001; Nardi, 2008). In Burma almost every resistance force is the subject of colourful mythology that clouds assessments of their roles in the difficult post-ceasefire politics of that country. The relationships between these armies, and their relationships with the Myanmar government, are similarly ambiguous. Even in the portion of eastern Zomia that is part of China there are persistent intrigues about cross-border trade and trafficking, some of which implicate Chinese authorities. For many years, rebel minorities from India and Burma reputedly enjoyed access to Chinese weapons and training, and perhaps other military and political support. Contemplating the implications of these ambiguities and interactions can help to dis-endorse scholarly tendencies towards romanticism or methodological myopia.

Therefore it is explicit methodological eclecticism, but not of an uncritical kind, that informs this dissertation. An eclectic approach means that I draw on concepts and theories from across the widest range of the social sciences, but that I also integrate sources from across historical periods, and from a range of field research settings. To explain the approach I have taken, Chapter 2 clarifies the politics of research design in the specific borderlands context. It describes the approach to this research and offers a methodological consideration of what I call nodes of research. Various practical and logistical matters described in this chapter help to clarify how the mechanics of a research project ultimately influence its final outcomes.

The challenges that I have encountered along the way now shape the research that is presented here.

In this dissertation, my key concerns are inter-locked: the comparative analysis of spatial control and the negotiation of elite interactions. This control and negotiation is influenced by insurgency and counter-insurgency, the position of local elites within their own societies, the politics of ethnic identity, the contest for defining “legitimate” development, and the orchestration of large-scale cultural events. It is analysis of these large-scale cultural events, the Manau festivals, which has proven integral to this dissertation and its argument. Studying the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw has also stretched my existing scholarly engagement with mainland Southeast Asia far beyond the Tai-speaking peoples of this region that I know best (see Farrelly, 2003a; 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2009b; etc). It has also encouraged me to continue a decade-long effort to better understand and explain how Southeast Asian politics matters in a global context. In its final incarnation this dissertation sets out a wide-ranging argument based on the empirical details of the China, India and Burma borderlands.

Appraising the borderlands

The borderlands were chosen for this D.Phil research because the area offers special opportunities for social scientists to explore the interactions of states and societies. As in other areas of life, fortune and happenstance played their habitual roles in determining my interests in this region. Exposure in earlier years to the potential for analytical work related to the mountainous areas of Southeast Asia inculcated a desire to better understand how politics works in distant corners of the Asia. What I already knew before starting the borderlands

research for my M.Phil and then this D.Phil dissertation is that there are few places in the world where the traditional patterns of life—languages, agricultural systems, social organisation, cultural practices, etc.—across three distinct contemporary political systems demonstrate such a high degree of similarity, and where they remain “vibrant systems” (Bhagabati, 1998: 7). Of course, the uneven disruption of those traditional patterns by decades of upheaval cannot be ignored and this has remained a key preoccupation during my years of research and writing. For social scientists it is relevant that cultural similarities in terms of language, festivals and other practices remain in Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw areas. But, even more importantly, since the ceasefires in the late 1980s and early 1990s halted hostilities among most of the region’s ethnic armies a transformation has occurred swiftly with road and dam construction symptomatic of major economic changes.

Those changes have seen arguably unprecedented government efforts to actively pursue political, economic and social goals in the borderlands. It is these government efforts that have contributed to the inconsistency of the transformation. Visible changes—new buildings, bridges, roads, dams, etc.—are most apparent in southwest China but major transformations, often of a fundamental kind, have also occurred throughout northeast India and northern Burma. In northeast India a gradual process of pacification and national incorporation has tended to be ignored in analyses that continue to focus on sporadic explosions of political and social conflict. The situation in northern Burma continues to see periods of sustained uncertainty followed by relative lulls where the stalemate conditions return to cautious equilibrium. In all cases there are many political, economic and social matters which remain fluid. The shared borderlands of China, India and Burma are not, therefore, simply an

intersection where the three nation-states rub together. This part of eastern Zomia is also a space where substantial social and economic change has occurred. It is very rare to meet an informant in these areas who does not offer a personal narrative of profound life transformation (see, for some examples, of the genre: Mibang and Behera, 2004: vi; Moloney, 1974: 419). Numerous informants in the borderlands spoke of the lifestyles experienced by their parents with a mixture of astonishment and familiarity that is made convincing by their direct personal experience of hardships, war and poverty.

Such difficult personal histories in the borderlands are defined, in part, by the region's remarkable geography. It is characterised by the "south-easterly extensions of the Himalayan system" (Joo-Jock, 1984: 59) that "serves, like Afghanistan, as a rugged hook over which to tuck and gather an untidy end to the ragged Himalayas" (Keay, 2005: 246). As the mountains run out through northern Burma and then down against three of the major rivers of the region (the Salween, the Mekong and the Yangtze) they make an abrupt turn to the south. The mountains continue down to Laos and northern Thailand and, further to the east, into the highlands of Vietnam. These mountains could be described as a series of steps that eventually dribble out into the sea in the Gulf of Tonkin. This entire region is what Scott (2009a) calls "eastern Zomia". It is, by seasonal turns, hot, wet, lush and cold. In the higher reaches there is significant snow in winter. On the highest peaks, even in "tropical" Burma, there is year-round snow and glaciation.

But, in ways that are very relevant to a study of borderlands, there is actually no agreement on the specific point, high in the eastern Himalaya, where the three countries come

together.²⁷ Lingering animosities between the Indian and Chinese governments have discouraged them from reconciling the demarcation of their section of the border. Arunachal Pradesh, which India claims as the “Land of the Dawn-Lit Mountains”, is also claimed, in large part, as a contiguous part of China (as “Tawang”, harking back to its “Tibetan” roots). On the Indian side this Chinese territorial claim continues to cause upset and some have bemoaned the way their government has “... failed to manfully rebuff Chinese audacity in Arunachal” (Bhattacharyya, 1995: iv). Others on the Indian side of the border refer to “the international boundary with Tibet (China) in the north” as though Chinese sovereignty is incomplete (Doje, 2007: 5). Cohen (2001: 261) reminds us that “[t]he border issue remains hostage to intense feelings about the sanctity of territory on both sides”.

The intensity of those feelings justifies severe security precautions (see Smith, 2009, for details), and special considerations for prospective researchers. From the perspective of a previous period of social scientific enquiry, von Fürer-Haimendorf (1980: 7) described the “often frustrating task of trying to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles which stand in the way of one’s [that is, the researcher’s] entry into the promised land” of Arunachal Pradesh. Such hurdles remain, but they are not insurmountable. In this region, the three countries have quarrelled, sometimes violently, and have stationed large armies to deal with potentially rebellious local groups and other security contingencies. But considering that all three central governments station large military and para-military forces in the region it is remarkable that there are many entirely unguarded sections of the various borders. One explanation for a

²⁷ Nonetheless, many maps *do* accept Indian claims to Arunachal Pradesh. On these maps, the intersection of China, India and Burma is usually marked in far eastern Arunachal Pradesh, near the village of Kibithu. The coordinates are 28.21018, 97.347279. Furthermore, the Republic of China (which today only controls the territory of Taiwan) has an unrealised claim to a different part of these borderlands. It claims parts of the Kachin State and Sagaing Division in Burma based on a pre-People’s Republic of China territorial dispute.

relaxed attitude is that even though military relations between India and China are still fraught, there are reportedly close working relations between the Myanmar military and their Chinese counterparts, and, to a lesser extent, between the Myanmar and Indian armies. Andrew Selth (1996: 190) provides an overview of the long-term links between those militaries. Obviously, preparations for war and other contingencies are ongoing in specific areas, particularly in the parts of Arunachal Pradesh that were shown to be vulnerable to surprise invasion in China's 1962 assault on northeast India (see Smith, 2009; Wonacott, 2009).²⁸

More generally, the mountainous terrain and prevailing security precautions do not greatly impede ordinary crossings between the various portions of the borderlands. In fact short visits across the borders between China, India and Burma are feasible without undue preparation and it is a simple matter for local residents to cross, legally or illegally, between the territories of the three nation-states. To cross the frontier in many places is as simple as walking around a small fence, climbing a low barricade or, literally, strolling up into the hills. There is no fence along these frontiers for their full extent. The resulting "complexity" of trade routes and linkages "should not", according to van Schendel (2005: 182n60), "be underestimated".

Some foreign writers and researchers have availed themselves of the opportunities this geography presents. From China or India, walking into northern Burma is relatively easy, if you are willing to take the risks, and writers like Bertil Lintner (1990) and Shelby Tucker

²⁸ This conflict is described in Hindi as the *Bharat-Chin Yuddha* (India-China War) and in Chinese as *Zhong-Yin Bianjing Zhanzheng* (China-India Frontier War).

(2000) have shown, at least under conditions in the 1980s, how it is done. Much earlier, a 300-strong armed Naga detachment walked from northeast India to China, via northern Burma, with the intention of receiving military instruction (Nepram, 2002: 141). In all cases they were assisted by the pre-ceasefire Kachin Independence Army. Walking out again is, with luck, quite straightforward (see, for other examples, Marshall, 2003; Mirante, 2005: 37). But these relatively successful efforts to illegally enter northern Burma are only one part of the story. The case of two Tibetan activists arrested in a Kachin Independence Army controlled part of northern Burma after the 2008 uprising in Tibet is instructive (KNG, 2008a). They were deported to China, and to whatever fate awaited them there.

My effort to clarify the ways that access is controlled in the borderlands encouraged me to avoid the potential pitfalls of illegal entry and attempt to manage access through the region's official channels at what I now call the nodes of control. An education in the processes of formal access was, from the most tentative research designs onwards, considered crucial to the research. I never crossed illegally into any of the countries in the borderlands although there were no doubt opportunities when I could have done so. Instead, what I found was that the strictest access regime operates in northeast India's Arunachal Pradesh where the Inner Line is guarded and its Restricted/Protected Area Permit system is implemented. In India the layered sensitivities that are attached to the borderlands, and their security problems, are ever-present. Nonetheless, I have travelled to some of the most contentious areas of this region without undue hardship. It has only been at times when I have sought out unapprovable travel destinations that I have been politely, but firmly, rebuffed. For example, it proved impossible to visit the physical boundary between India and Burma from either side.

In that same border region, I have also failed to see the jade mines at Hpakant in the western Kachin State. However, I did manage to visit many other relevant areas—notably including Laiza, Myitkyina, Bhamo and Indawgyi in Burma; Itanagar, Dibrugarh, Gauhati and Miao in India; and, Longchuan, Ruili and Jiegao in China—in my effort to understand the borderlands.

Complementing the “muddy boots” experiences of researching this region, the wonders of publicly accessible satellite imagery mean that it is currently possible to “fly” over the borderlands and develop a very different vision of the three nation-states and their boundaries (see Map 6). Mountains, valleys and rivers, interspersed by fields, snow and lakes, give the entire region a consistently mixed array of green, grey, white and black landscapes. With the benefit of satellite maps none of it is recognisably Chinese, Indian or Burmese; perhaps one of the reasons that van Schendel and Scott’s Zomia is such an attractive idea. What cannot be observed from the satellite images is that in these borderlands the people that the three central governments claim as citizens—who call their groups Jinghpaw, Naga, Tai and dozens of other names²⁹—have their own histories and cultures to protect. Before the recent impositions of fixed national boundaries this area was characterised by social, cultural and economic flows (see, for examples, Leach, 1954, 1960; Lehmann, 1970; Jonsson, 2006; Sadan, 2007b). Anthropologists and historians tell us that these long-term cultural exchanges predate the imposition of today’s national borders (Saikia, 2004). For instance, linkages between the Shan and the Kachin are one of the enduring elements of life in the China, India

²⁹ An incomplete list of the other ethnic, linguistic and social groups in the parts of the borderlands under discussion in this dissertation includes: Nocte, Kongyak, Wancho, Tutsa, Deori, Tibetan, Chakma, Hajong, Aiton, Khamti, Khamyang, Phake, Singpho, Turung, Lisu, Tangsa, Laovow, Lachik, Zaiwa, Rawang, Akha, Wa and Lahu. A full list of the ethnic groups is available in Appendix 4.

and Burma borderlands. Junker (1999: 94-95) makes the point, echoing Leach (1954), that “[e]mulation of aspects of Shan elite culture by these Kachin elite lineages, including Shan dress, prestige symbols, and Buddhism, further reinforced the cleavage between themselves and lower ranking lineages”.

With blurring between categories like “Shan” and “Kachin”, “legal” and “illegal”, it is not entirely surprising that, in the past, the differences between “China”, “India” and “Burma” were perhaps not easily distinguished at all. Among the local people of the borderlands, long histories of migration and cultural interaction, and commitments to maintain old links, have ensured that much of their common heritage remains. The Manau festivals are the key example that I have chosen to focus on here. However, there are other festivals that serve similar transborder purposes which could be the subject of further scholarly treatments. Most of these festivals occur in only two countries. There are, for instance, “Hornbill” festivals among the Naga on both sides of the India-Burma frontier (see Saul, 2005). Similarly, there are Hmong (Hao and Bussakorn, 2004) and Lahu (Walker, 1984) festivals that occur within various parts of the borderlands (see Uchida and Catlin, 2008, for a general scholarly overview of these events and their cultural elements). Part of the justification for focussing on the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw Manau festivals is that they demonstrate unique consistency of format in contexts which are infused with an over-arching cultural framework that stretches to three national systems. As far as I am aware there are no other festivals in this part of Asia which exhibit such vitality and consistency across three different countries or, indeed, across three “Areas” of social scientific enquiry.³⁰ What has proven most

³⁰ A complementary observation pertains to the proliferation of Manau festivals in these various countries where the Jinghpaw diaspora has settled. Over recent years there have been small Manau festivals in Thailand,

intriguing about the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw festivals is that they do occur in three of the different national territories that make up the borderlands. One explanation for this consistency is that the general character of the traditional Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw economy in the borderlands of all three countries was, in the recent past, part of a single inter-locking system (as discussed by Scott, 2009a: 3-5). Accepting that historical reality is only one small step; making further steps requires an understanding that the contemporary political systems that all three nation-states seek to defend are not coherent, and include many variations and shades of grey.

Models of political research

In my initial treatment of the research design, this chapter has clarified that the borderlands are a political arena, where competing interests, histories and peoples vie for power and attention. Accounting for those politics and competitions is not merely an empirical challenge; it is the unavoidable theoretical conundrum that has shaped my research design. That design has benefited from the fact that scholarly research on India and China is a mature and wide-ranging undertaking. Such research has many components; and politics is only one part of a much wider scholarly engagement. In the case of Burma it is worth noting that social science research remains undeveloped apart from a relatively small number of specialist fields of enquiry. It is not coincidental, nor is it unwelcome, that there remains a strong connection between the study of Burma and the study of Burmese politics. Nigel Barley (1991: xi) put it best when he wrote:

Japan and the United States; and there are other occasions on which Manau dances, but not entire festivals, are performed.

The names of most areas of the world elicit a simple but powerful response in the minds of anthropologists. Each bears the burden of a particular specialisation...It is the misfortune of Burma to ‘mean’ politics. Students of anthropology cut their teeth on the politics of Burma, but a politics reduced to abstract systems that permit a sort of detached overview. There are no people in such systems, just a faceless interplay of forces and models that swing back and forth suspended in a sort of idealised time.

With the ongoing standoff between Burma’s “democratic” and “anti-democratic” forces, the academic study of Burma still “means” politics. Alternatives to the “abstract systems” described by Barley require approaches to political research that are designed to get around those “faceless” political forces and models built “in idealised time”.

Models of spatial, social and political interaction are integral to my study and in some cases these are models that, by authorial impulse or empirical inevitability, gravitate towards the impersonal abstractions that Barley criticised. This does not discount their academic value but it should motivate critical reflection on the purpose of these models. The models that I introduced in Chapter 1—Huntington’s “clash”, Ong’s “neoliberal exceptions”, Thongchai’s “geo-body”, and, most importantly, van Schendel and Scott’s “Zomia”—are all defined by relationships between culture, space and politics. This is a politics that should not be characterised, as all of these model-builders would agree, by the vagaries, or single-minded determinacy, of the models themselves. Each model captures components of complex social life that are, at least in specific places and at certain times, illustrative of patterns and processes beyond (or adjacent to) current theory. In each case, the models that are discussed make most sense when they are brought into conversation. It is through comparative

appraisal that these interpretive models come more fully to describe society. The nodes of control that exist in the borderlands are, to the same degree, best understood when compared with existing models of spatial and political control. One advantage of taking these models seriously is that it generates new insights about complex matters without lapsing into the hubris of ignoring existing contributions.

One contributor to our understanding of political models whose work requires considered scrutiny is Joel S. Migdal, the most prominent advocate of an approach to political science described as “state in society”. He has set out the challenge for comparative politics at this moment of human history in very stark terms. For Migdal (2001: 251):

The twenty-first century state, buffeted by the winds of globalization, supranational entities, and divisive ethnic conflict, must be stripped of its myths of unity and omnipotence. With new states abounding and old states struggling with disintegrative challenges, more than ever political scientists will need ways of unraveling the relationship between states and those within their borders. They will need ways of studying the fractious process of redrawing social boundaries, of creating coalitions with some and excluding others.

How can we unravel the relationship between states and those people who live within their borders? More critically, is it possible to study the fractious process of creating inclusive coalitions and exclusive spaces in ways that have comparative relevance? There are ways of understanding independent political models of single state systems but it is the conversation of systems, and their comparative responses to common conditions, which remain most

intriguing. It is comparisons of this sort—guided by the social scientific challenge that Migdal identifies—that require wide reading and explanatory flair.

To capitalise on the value of existing comparisons, this dissertation relies on the generations of scholars who have studied the borderlands where China, India and Burma meet. Not every study is featured; it is inevitable that some valuable works have been excluded because they have only marginal relevance to the current enquiry. Unfortunately it has not been possible to read all of the academic material, most notably in Chinese, which would help to illuminate a range of matters directly related to my argument.³¹ Nonetheless the studies that are included remain part of an expansive narrative, stretching through decades, between languages, and across continents, that sees a collective effort to further the understanding of this region. In this dissertation many unexpected fragments that these studies have left behind are given new interpretations and brought into novel conversations. The quantity of material published on the borderlands ensures that I have not lacked stimulating reading material of many kinds. Overall, the diversity of material that has been assembled for this dissertation should ensure that it offers an accurate picture of the politics, and micro-politics, of the region. In general, previous studies of this type have been preoccupied with either very local issues or the general character of national interactions, or with what Gurudas Das (2001b: v) describes as research that supports “meaningful policy-making”. And while the languages represented in this published record are diverse, there remains a preponderance of English language sources. One Indian scholar has even remarked that many borderlands issues are generally only

³¹ My effort to tentatively explore the range of Chinese language sources about the Yunnan borderlands suggests that there is significant material which has yet to influence non-Chinese understandings of this region. Future scholarly work on these areas would obviously benefit from comprehensive access to these sources.

examined in the language of international scholarship (see, for details, Dixit, 2004: 16).³² The fact that the intellectual *lingua franca* of northeast India and northern Burma is English is helpful in this regard. On the other hand, it has often proven necessary to file away potentially interesting source material in Chinese which I cannot read. What I have discovered during the research for this dissertation is that there is a large quantity of potential source material in Chinese that could be helpfully examined by scholars who can read that language. Unfortunately, when compared to India and Burma the range of English language (or even Jingpo language) sources published for the Chinese portion of the borderlands is significantly less. The resulting limitations in terms of primary and secondary evidence are acknowledged; in a comparative study of this breadth inconsistencies in source material can linger. One of the ways I have sought to compensate for the somewhat erratic range of written sources is field research.

Ritual in borderlands field research

The field research for this dissertation has been undertaken, on-and-off, since I first travelled to Burma in 2003. Major field visits in June – September 2006, February – March 2007 and January – March 2008 have been complemented by a number of other research trips to various parts of the borderlands, including to relevant parts of northeast India and southwest China.³³ Each trip to the borderlands has provided new opportunities to understand the region and made me, at least temporarily, part of the “academic tribe of ‘field-workers’” (Agrawal,

³² An alternative to the preponderance of English language writing may, one day, be the *Kachin Research Journal* launched in 2007 (Zunwa and Maran Brang Di, 2007).

³³ My exposure to the region is, however, wider than this. I have, for instance, undertaken substantial stints of research-related field time in Thailand over the past decade, most recently in January-February 2009.

1999: 3).³⁴ During these periods of field research I have paid particular attention to the Manau festivals held under the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw cultural rubrics. Manau are the major cultural events and increasingly the key symbolic forums for many people across the borderlands. Manau festivals are held regularly in northern Burma, northeast India, and southwest China. In each country there is at least one annual festival and, from time-to-time, major festivals marking particularly significant anniversaries or occasions punctuate the calendar. The two largest Manau of the past decade were the 2001-2002 Wunpawng Hkumra Manau (which could be translated as “Kachin union festival”) and the 2008 Kachin State Day Manau, held to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Kachin State.³⁵ That Manau festival in 2008 provides the empirical core for the analysis offered in Chapter 5. Reflecting on changes in the politics of northern Burma since 2008 I am very fortunate to have witnessed that Manau at such close proximity and with existing contacts in Myitkyina to help smooth my way. As it happens, the 2008 event may be the last Manau held on that scale in Myitkyina for some years to come. These Manau festivals are key sites for economic and political negotiations; and, as such, they provide spatially and temporally discrete opportunities to explore issues that have escaped scholarly attention, and to re-imagine political processes with material from cultural performance (as in Jirat, 2006). Drawing cautious conclusions from these types of events—even when they leave questions unanswered—remains a standard component of social anthropological method (see, for instance, Cheater, 1989: 129; Bloch, 1992: 55-57).

³⁴ There are good reasons for attempting an abstract statistical survey of my field area. Unfortunately, it remains logistically impossible and would probably, under current circumstances, elicit research data of dubious value. Reflecting on the inherent and predictable problems of such a study, an otherwise very sympathetic account of doing business in Burma warns that “[i]nternational businessmen should be wary of using Myanmar official statistics to make their business decisions” (Sim, 2001: 108).

³⁵ Both festivals were held in the National Manau Park in the northern part of Myitkyina, the Kachin State capital, in Shatapru quarter.

This style of interpretative social science, and descriptive political analysis, is justified by the way that it illuminates ritual and cultural contexts. David Gellner is one anthropologist who has defended the need for political studies that demonstrate cognisance of the social processes of which political life is one important part. He argues that “[m]odern political science, obsessed with economic models of voting patterns and other scientific paraphernalia, has completely missed the extent to which ritual of various sorts is still a central concern, both of political leaders today, and of the people who voted them into power” (Gellner, 2001: 64). Many kinds of rituals are potentially relevant to the critique of the way that abstract models are used in political science. For my study the preoccupation has become the role of festivals in political systems where authority comes from non-electoral (or semi-electoral) endorsements. I would like to suggest that in such cases there is even greater reason to examine how rituals remain a “central concern”. Gellner goes on to explain that “if we want to understand why people perform rituals and what it means when they do so, we have to take into account their political aspect” (2001: 80).

The “political aspect” of rituals or festivals requires a fuller engagement with “political uses of ritual” (Kertzer, 1988: x). David Kertzer’s treatment of this topic showcased the potential for “historical and anthropological eclecticism” as a valid way to demonstrate the importance of political ritual in modern societies. His argument is that “ritual is an integral part of politics in modern industrial societies; it is hard to imagine how any political system could do without it” (1988: 3). Drawing on evidence from around the world, and stretching far back into human history, he explains how symbolic rites build political organisations, create

political legitimacy, engender solidarity in the absence of consensus, and mould understandings of the political universe. Kertzer argues that “[a]ccording to mainstream Western ideology, ritual occupies at best a peripheral, if not irrelevant, role in political life” (1988: 12). To counter this ideology, Kertzer suggests an approach to the study of ritual that examines “how political competitors struggle for power through ritual, how ritual is employed in both defusing and inciting political conflict, and how ritual serves revolution and revolutionary regimes” (1988: 14). Gellner’s (2001) critical appraisal of methodological priorities in “modern political science” suggests that Kertzer’s argument needs careful attention.

Kertzer sets out a four-part scheme for understanding the various relationships between politics and ritual that can be relevant to the framing of other studies, including my analysis of Manau festivals. He begins, first, by suggesting that “[f]or many observers, the political effects of ritual consist primarily of legitimating the existing system and the power holders of it” (1988: 37). This is probably the least remarkable part of his scheme. Second, he leaves room for cases of political ritual that prove contradictory; “rituals that are used to revile the leader rather than exalt him” (1988: 54). This intriguing ethnographic possibility, based in part on studies of chiefs in southern Africa, highlights the ambiguities that Kertzer implies are intrinsic to these rituals. He goes on to suggest that “[i]t is the very ambiguity of the symbols employed in ritual action that makes ritual useful in fostering solidarity without consensus” (1988: 69). These more general points are equally applicable to the China, India and Burma borderlands context but he uses this idea to showcase the various ways that ritual influences “ideas” about “political events, political policies, political systems, and political

leaders” (1988: 78-79). Third, Kertzer shows that those ideas, particularly when they are ambiguous, are not necessarily conducive to stability in political systems. He is aware that “[f]ar from simply propping up the status quo, ritual provides an important weapon in political struggle, a weapon used by both contestants for power within stable political systems and by those who seek to protect or to overthrow unstable systems” (Kertzer, 1988: 104). In the Manau festivals of the borderlands it is the contestation that influences the shape of ritual and festival action. Fourth, Kertzer explains that the conventional interpretation of potentially subversive rituals is that they actually serve to dissipate anti-authority tendencies and end with “the system and its leaders intact” (1988: 128). Such rituals thus act as a “political safety-valve” (1988: 131-134; 144). Each of these four elements is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, and Chapter 7, where the empirical details of the Manau festivals are examined.

In a more recent study of rituals in politics, Guss (2000: 10) identifies, in the Venezuelan context, a “semiotic battlefield...in which festive forms have become part of local histories, reflecting both their antagonisms and their contradictions”. He goes on to argue that “as participants well know, festivals, for all their joy and color, are also battlegrounds where identities are fought over and communities made” (2000: 172). This description fits the analysis offered in this dissertation in the sense that the ongoing (and arguably perpetual) contest between the governments and the governed is a battleground. In the borderlands, key symbolic sites of that battle are Manau festivals. Taking the insights of Gellner, Kertzer and Guss it is clear that festival contexts should not be misconstrued as apolitical spheres of social life. The challenge, after all, is to assess how the key moments and spaces of Manau

festivals clarify the political uses of ritual. At Manau festivals political organisations are built, legitimacy created, solidarity engendered and understandings moulded. But, as Kertzer suggests, there are various purposeful ritual behaviours to legitimise power, to subvert, and to contest, that require scrutiny. Kertzer has prompted me to ask whether there are unexamined connections between the Manau festivals and the political contexts in which they are held. Is there a pattern of relations between governments and the governed exemplified by the Manau festivals?

My effort to answer this question emerges later in the dissertation but a partial consideration of the answer is relevant to the research design, particularly in terms of the methodology for comparing Manau. One Manau in northern Burma is my leading example, supported by evidence from Manau festivals in China and India. The unevenness of empirical materials cannot be justified on strictly methodological terms and, ideally, this dissertation could have presented a completely balanced comparison of the three national contexts. Such balance has proven impossible, mostly because restrictions on access to various areas, and the research value of my own previous training in the languages of Southeast Asia, has ensured that Burma has retained much of my attention. There are very few scholars who can claim to evenly straddle more than two of Huntington's "civilisations" and my efforts to understand the politics of China, India and Burma should be seen in that context.

The point that I am most keen to emphasise is that the contemporary importance of the Manau festivals in the borderlands of China, India and Burma is, in all three countries, the consequence of different local circumstances but a shared historical moment. As the Cold

War drew to a close in these borderlands there was a need for the local elites to fill the cultural space left behind when prevailing ethnic and political antagonisms were rendered, temporarily, obsolete (see, for details, Sadan, 2002). With the end of open hostilities in Burma's civil conflicts in the north of the country, with a more confident India taking charge of its northeastern extremities, and with China turning away from Maoism and onto a path of pro-market economic growth, it became clear that the borderlands needed major events that were benign, unifying and commercially beneficial. The Manau in the three countries rose separately but with a sense of shared, pan-regional purpose. Along with other examples of borderlands cultural revival that emerged at the same time (see Liu, 2007: 20-24; Hillman, 2004; Schein, 1989), the Manau festivals of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw filled this gap.

From the early 1980s to the early 1990s this revival gathered pace across the borderlands. In each country space was allowed for cultural performances that did not, in the eyes of government authorities, imply any overt political threat. Large amenities for hosting these festivals were constructed in all three countries, with designated Manau grounds constructed or rejuvenated to demonstrate political and cultural harmony. This history of government-endorsed festivals that helped legitimise status quo political control fits one part of Kertzer's (1988) framework of political ritual. The ambiguities of the borderlands mean that potentially subversive elements also require due consideration. I have heard of one festival that took on the character of a "Padang Manau" soon after the ceasefire in northern Burma (1993-1994) between the KIO/A and the Myanmar government was declared.³⁶ This type of Manau is held to declare "victory" after a battle. There is a subtle but very deliberate way of dancing under those circumstances which, while not obvious to outsiders, signifies that

³⁶ I am thankful to Mandy Sadan for providing this insight from her own research in Jinghpaw areas.

“victory” is claimed. In Kertzer’s framework this is the use of ritual as a weapon in political struggle. Do we need to consider whether Manau festivals can serve a similarly subversive purpose even when an explicit “victory” is not claimed?

To begin exploring this question some history is required. Manau festivals have always enjoyed a strong association with local elites (see, for some interesting details, Silverstein, 1959: 101). In many societies the performance of public rites is similarly the domain, if not the sole preserve, of those who claim the highest social status (even in socialist societies: see Lane, 1981, for examples from the Soviet Union). High-ranking economic, political and religious figures tend to have special claims in festivals. Manau festivals are not exceptions to this general pattern. In fact, the structure of Manau during the recent period has ensured that those with the best connections and the most power have taken on the most prominent roles. But can such elite figures be subversive? Seeing an elite festival patron following the dance leaders around a Manau ground the assertion is clear: “I make big donations, I am in charge, I lead the dance”. The opportunities for those of more humble circumstances or of more critical inclinations to participate fully in a contemporary Manau festival are often limited. They may even be barred from entering the Manau ground unless they are part of a designated, formalised dancing troupe. This process of exclusion is particularly apparent at Manau in northern Burma. It is those festivals that are probably most strictly policed for subversive intent. The local elites have, to a great extent, already accepted the terms of the nodes of control; they are publicly and generously welcomed into the full range of festival activities. But those who are not affiliated with the local elites may, in fact, find that the other important events of a Manau festival—the meals, the concerts and the meetings—are not

open to them. The heavy schedule of feasting and toasting that often accompanies these festivals is, with some exceptions, usually the preserve of the local elites and their guests.

Nodes of control and nodes of research

In this way festivals reproduce a pattern of inclusion and exclusion which is exemplary of the nodes of control. In the hierarchy of nodes, from the least significant to the most, it is the towns where Manau festivals are held that are the most significant. In some cases these are small settlements, of only a few thousand people. Their size is not their distinguishing characteristic. It is the hosting of Manau festivals that sets them apart because a major Manau festival is such an important cultural and political event they are held only at sites of cultural and political significance. Such sites are, without exception, key nodes of control. Mimicking the attention I give to the three Manau festivals featured in this dissertation I also focus on the places that host them: my three examples as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 are Longchuan in Yunnan, Miao in Arunachal Pradesh, and Myitkyina in the Kachin State. These sites are different sizes with populations ranging from a few thousand to almost 150,000. These were the nodes of research where I gathered my empirical material and around which I have now built my argument. Among these three nodes, it is Myitkyina—formally referred to as *Myitkyina Myo* in Burmese and as *Myitkyina Mare* in Jinghpaw (both mean “Myitkyina town”)—that I have studied most closely.

Myitkyina is the largest settlement in the borderlands of China, India and Burma and enjoys arguably the most strategic position. Its name literally means “near the big river” in Burmese. On the eastern flank of the town, the Ayeyarwady River is almost one kilometre wide. There

is a relatively new bridge across the river which was only built after the ceasefire was signed with the KIO/A. That bridge connects Myitkyina to the satellite town of Waing Maw. Since recent road refurbishments it takes only a few hours to travel past Waing Maw to the KIO/A controlled town of Laiza, which is right on the border with China. Myitkyina's proximity to the Chinese border, its continuing status as the northernmost rail terminus in Burma, and its traditional role as a market town, have only increased its importance since the Myanmar government made it the region's most significant node of control. Economic advancement and political opportunities have tended to go together in a place where only recently "lightbulbs...replaced candles and kerosene lamps" (Webster, 2004: 333).³⁷ Its status as a node and as a space where Zomia has been largely banished has made it an attractive site for my research.

Today, Myitkyina is a bustling town of approximately 150,000 people. It is also the heart of the Myanmar government campaign to control northern Burma. The town is ringed by their large military bases. One quarter, Shatapru, is dominated by the Jinghpaw elite, including many KIO/A leaders and their families. However, elsewhere in Myitkyina the population is quite evenly split between Jinghpaw and Burmese. The Burmese may, by my reckoning, just have an upper-hand population-wise and, most importantly, they continue to arrive in greater numbers. The Northern Commander of the Myanmar Defence Force (the *tatmadaw*) runs the town with an awareness of the government's uncertain, and unpopular, position.³⁸ In his

³⁷ Even as recently as 2008 electricity in Myitkyina was a major topic of discussion. Complaints about the sporadic flow of electricity meant that most wealthy families and large businesses (such as hotels) used generators to ensure consistent supply. Poorer families and small businesses usually remained captive to the erratic government supply.

³⁸ Alongside this study of spatial control and symbolic politics I have written a long paper on one of the recent Northern Commanders, Lieutenant General Ohn Myint. Readers intrigued to learn more about "the power of a Burmese general" will hopefully want to consult that contribution once it is published.

heavily armed convoy he speeds back and forth, wary of assassination but also aware of his key role as a custodian of the node of control.

Elsewhere in the borderlands there are less significant nodes of control where the government and its officers are still highly visible and even dominant. These are the checkpoints, customs inspections houses and other places that provide strong evidence of government “in action”. But these specific sites of activity are currently less attractive and accessible as nodes of research. During my research it dawned on me in conversations and through observation that it is currently impossible to manage the entire borderlands of eastern Zomia in the same way that the major nodes manage their specific responsibilities. Specific towns and certain transport routes or important junctures can be guarded, taxed, made orderly and, ultimately, controlled. However, the full extent of the territory—particularly the potentially lawless areas far from roads, from towns and far from the core interests of nation-state-building projects—is only controlled if and when required. If there is no pressing need for major government involvement away from the nodes then it is quite simple for the government to retreat from these places until such a time as a significant presence is required. The problem in the borderlands is that a presence beyond what is required for basic administrative duties is hard to justify; there are, as a consequence, almost no superfluous outposts of the nation-state.

This argument about spatial control did not come to me easily or quickly. In fact, when I think back to my earliest assumptions about the borderlands these ideas were far from my hypothesising. Over the years, as I have traced changes in the supposedly borderless realm of

historical Zomia, I have become increasingly preoccupied with ways that this region has been controlled. It was not obvious, at first, that it has been made legible by the government nodes that have been implanted, reinforced and consolidated, first by non-Zomian outsiders and then, second, and more importantly, by a union of the Zomian elites and the central government systems that seek to govern them. Finding a way to explain the contemporary spatial dynamics of Zomia forced me, with the weight of experience and empirical insight, to consider the role of the nodes.

But on reflection there are many analogous situations where government nodular control is both the most efficient and the most effective way of managing diverse and distinct areas of the national terrain. Depending on the conditions, European colonial governments implemented analogous systems wherever it was feasible. In northern Thailand, as just one other example, it is the countless Royal Project field stations and other outposts of government life that serve as the nodes of control (as described, in general terms, in Farrelly, 2003b). This is a pattern replicated, to one extent or another, across mainland Southeast Asia, and up into other parts of India (Steiner, 1959; Rangaswami, 1973) and China (Giersch, 2006: 17, 71-72; Bello, 2003).

So just how different are China, India and Burma in their management of nodes of control? Designing a way to answer this question in the borderlands of China, India and Burma has been a very significant challenge. Certainly, the need to explain how inter-dependent comparisons are possible has been one issue. Furthermore, the nation-states do not maintain a government presence at the local-level by spreading influence too thinly or by transparently

declaring all of their activities. The ideal pattern is to keep influence centralised under an orderly power structure, at specific strategic points (and moments), where it can be consolidated and stored. These stores of nation-state power and influence have their limits, and it is for that reason that they have so successfully amalgamated with the interests of Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw elites. Some of these elites are directly cultivated as collaborators in the nodes of control, whereas in more complex situations these local elites become partners or linkages between the various other forms of spatialisation and political authority that persist in some parts of Zomia.

Studying local elites

Local elites do not form in isolation or without taking in influences from beyond their immediate environment (see, for instance, Brynen, 1995). Their linkages and connections are crucial to the way that they shape social, economic and political processes. Those processes are not merely nation-state-centred but they are often defined by the priorities and interests of the central government, well before other interests can find enough space to dictate a strong position. In each country, but particularly in Burma, this raises other issues. As Callahan (2003: xv) pointed out in her historical study of the Myanmar army, “[e]very social scientist who writes about militaries laments the difficulties of conducting research on these secretive institutions”. Local elites can also be difficult to study. They are formed by a continual interplay of identities, positions and contexts that is defined by the particularities and conditionalities of everyday life. As one example, the “[t]he Khamptis [of northeast India] have the institution of chieftanship and there is only one chief in the community” (Deuri, 1990: 217) and “[t]ill one or two generations back the Khampti Chief used to get the land

taxes from the land holders” (Deuri, 1990: 219). This is not necessarily the case among other groups. A paramount chieftanship is not a pattern of political organisation that is familiar to all borderland peoples.

Furthermore, the contingency of any elite position in the borderlands is demonstrated by the apparent ease with which even the most senior figures can, quite abruptly, find themselves on the outer. While reports in 2007 of the political and economic demise of Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng, who is discussed in Chapter 4, were premature, a number of other members of the Kachin State’s elite have, over the years, left the scene. Some have, like anywhere in the world, been bankrupted by changing economic conditions. Others, rather more dramatically, have been assassinated for their roles in politics or business, or both (Naw Seng, 2004a; 2004b; Choudhuri, 2008). The most notorious political killing of this type occurred in 1975 when two of the founders of the KIO/A, Lahtaw Zau Seng and Lahtaw Zau Tu, were ambushed by unknown assailants near the Thailand-Burma border. Their lives and deaths remain an important part of KIO/A mythology but there is no conclusive proof about who was responsible for their murders.

Such cases highlight the special kinds of contingency and risk that accompany life for elite figures in the borderlands. Assassination efforts and ongoing commercial and political strife are realities for some of the individuals studied in this dissertation and, for some of them, are an unremarkable part of life.³⁹ In some cases this means that reliable information about their activities is closely guarded. Under these conditions even some of the information that I have

³⁹ Lees (2007) on violence in northeast India, and Xinhua (2007) on a Sino-Burmese border gunfight, illustrate just how unremarkable such violence can become.

succeeded in accessing cannot be safely or ethically included in this dissertation. Moreover, the illicit dimensions of some negotiation at the nodes of control ensure that the foundations of violent incidents are not at all widely known. Guarding against threats takes time and effort, and a great deal of money, even in the less dangerous contexts of China and India. This is something that the local elites in all three countries have in common. They are preoccupied by the need to guarantee their own safety and security. A research design which ignores this practical reality overlooks one of the defining characteristics of the local elites.

Research in practice

The conceptual and methodological details that have been introduced in this chapter are best examined in the context of the practical challenges, and limitations, of the research design. While the borderlands of China, India and Burma might appear to be inhospitable areas for research I found that it was possible to meet, and in some cases get to know quite well, many key informants across the borderlands. Manau festivals provide advantages for the researcher in areas which may not be conducive to long-term research. While I had travelled to Burma on a regular basis since 2003 I began this research in 2006. At that time I made my first visit to the Kachin State to undertake field research for my M.Phil dissertation. I spent one month in Burma itself, and another two months in neighbouring areas, particularly in Thailand where I could continue to accumulate source material and develop useful contacts.⁴⁰ After

⁴⁰ There are relatively few international scholars who have managed, in recent decades, to undertake long-term field research, particularly of an ethnographic kind, inside Burma. Those who have succeeded with such field research have tended to be Japanese. For other scholars a set of inter-locking, but ultimately compromised, strategies have generally been implemented. My chosen approach to the conundrum of studying Burma and the sensitive borderlands that it shares with India and China has been to make brief visits founded in wide reading and a long-term commitment to understanding this region.

completing my M.Phil dissertation I turned to the challenge of an expanded research project that would engage with the political and social context of the borderlands in novel ways.

After inspecting Manau grounds in Myitkyina and Laiza in 2006 I noted that Manau festivals were clearly a crucial forum for Jinghpaw culture and their contemporary manifestations were likely to prove an interesting way of understanding politics in the borderlands. In 2007 I travelled to the Longchuan Manau held on the Chinese side of border. This was my second trip to China and required a long solo journey to one of the farthest outposts of the country. My experience at that Longchuan Manau convinced me that a multi-sited analysis of these festivals was merited. In early 2008 I returned to northern Burma to attend the Manau festival commemorating the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Kachin State. This was the largest Manau held in the region for years and it is likely that it will retain that preminent position for some time to come. By this stage of my research my knowledge of the region, local contacts and access to informants had improved considerably. I had also spent time during the research for my M.Phil reading Jinghpaw and Burmese language sources so that my capacity to absorb information at the festival was increased. Soon after that Manau in Myitkyina in January 2008 I travelled to northeast India for the Miao Manau which was held in February. During that Manau season I actually made two trips to Arunachal Pradesh and also spent more time in Thailand and Burma.

Studying these festivals as discrete events ensured that I was able to focus all of my attention on their social, cultural and political aspects. During each of these festivals people from various parts of the borderlands would come together but, more importantly, elite figures

were more accessible than they may be at other times of year. During my relatively brief visits to the festivals I concentrated my attention on observing events and closely following the rhythms of proceedings. This necessitated late nights and early starts as I sought to maximise my ability to decipher many different kinds of social and political interaction. This is one of the few ways that I could foresee achieving a genuinely comparative perspective on the borderlands.

This approach has a number of limitations concerning sample size, observational technique, ethical considerations and the problems of comparative analysis where the compared sites are not entirely independent of each other.

First, through my direct field studies at the Manau I have only managed to develop a good understanding of a small number of members of the local elites. Through long-term field research it may have been possible to expand this number but in all of the areas studied in this dissertation such long-term field work proved impossible. This has led to a modicum of unevenness with respect to the biographical, economic and political information presented in the dissertation. One justification for this situation is that the key member of the local elite described here, Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng, is the major figure for the Manau festivals that I describe. He is arguably the most prominent Jingpo, Singpho or Jinghpaw in the borderlands and his public stature means that my unique opportunity to introduce his activities in a comparative context balances my lack of exposure to some other elite figures. My other key case-study member of the elite, Sutdu Bawmwang La Raw, is similarly a crucial Manau patron and these two figures are well positioned to clarify important parts of the relationship between the governments and those they govern.

Second, the eclectic methods that I have used to collect information, and to observe events, mean that I was not as deeply immersed in the contexts of the festivals as a long-term ethnographic participant-observer would have been. I sought to compensate for this lack of direct exposure by digesting the available written sources on the region and by continuing to expand my knowledge of eastern Zomia as a whole. My capacity to understand written and spoken Jinghpaw, combined with my knowledge of the T(h)ai and Burmese languages, was an asset during my time in the field and in my subsequent efforts to assemble the evidence needed for this dissertation. My observational technique was founded, in part, on a constant awareness that my outsider status, while it posed some obvious difficulties, also meant that I could meet with and talk to a wide range of people in the borderlands. I conducted around 80 semi-structured interviews during my various research trips to the borderlands (40 in Burma, and 20 in each of China and India), and constantly sought to refine my understanding while also protecting my informants.

Third, it is the need to protect potentially vulnerable informants, often living in difficult circumstances and with few of the resources available to a foreign researcher, which has helped decide how the dissertation is presented. I do not cite informants by name, and nor do I indicate where and how I contacted those who have provided much of the most important information for this dissertation. For the same reason I opted not to use research assistants during my periods in the field. In part, I could justify this based on my earlier success as a field researcher in other areas of Southeast Asia but it is the ethical, and security, dimensions which truly served to discourage any formal relationship with local collaborators who could

become vulnerable in my absence. In all parts of these borderlands, but particularly in northern Burma, some of the sensitive issues that are examined in this dissertation require significant and persistent caution.

During the time when this research was undertaken Burma was still under the formal control of the State Peace and Development Council, the Myanmar military government that had been in power for almost two decades. Over the course of this research from 2006-2010 tensions were rekindled between that government and many of the country's sub-national ethnic minorities. In August-September 2009, as one example, there was a short battle between the Kokang ethnic ceasefire army and Myanmar military. At the time of writing there are daily confrontations between ethnic armies, and the KIO/A is preparing for the prospect of renewed hostilities. The preamble to these re-ignited tensions was part of the research for this dissertation. Paying close attention to political currents while also respecting the need to protect the anonymity of informants have been dual challenges. From an ethical perspective the need to balance scholarly curiosity with safety, integrity and political sensitivities has ensured that many tough decisions have been made to exclude information which may prove destructive to those who have no control over its final audience or interpretation.⁴¹

Fourth, the connectivity between the three countries and contexts that I studied needs to be explained more fully. A foundational justification for the approach taken in this dissertation is that comparing Manau festivals across three different national contexts is

⁴¹ To emphasise this point, these ethical considerations will need to be thoroughly re-examined if parts of this dissertation are to be published in the years ahead.

epistemologically interesting in ways that may be overlooked by narrower, single-sited studies. A practical challenge, however, emerges once the links between the various borderlands sites are appreciated. The Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw do not live in isolation from their own national centres nor from each other. While borders serve to delineate national frontiers, the entire region presents an inter-locking and historically rich set of relationships that are not simple to fully integrate into a comparative model. For many scientists, or perhaps for some quantitatively minded social scientists, the potential for supposed “contamination” would make such interdependence cause for research design reappraisal. In practice there are sound epistemic reasons for acknowledging the potential of an interdependent comparative sample particularly where the political questions at the heart of the study cannot be imagined without reference to the connections and links that influence political life.

These various practical challenges faced during the process of researching and writing this doctoral dissertation are now part of its character. The challenges of managing theoretical and methodological concerns that were first imagined in a range of different contexts and then integrating them for the analysis of the China, India and Burma borderlands have proven to be large. Research in Burma has been difficult at the best of times and during the periods of field research that inform this study it is a fact that northern Burma and parts of northeast India have remained bedevilled by social and political conflict. Many of the decisions about research orientation reflected in the remainder of the thesis are a product of those local conditions and the ways that a particularly difficult contemporary moment can be safely harnessed to an outsider’s research agenda.

Conclusion

Chapter 2 has provided an overview of the practical and theoretical ideas and challenges that inform the research design for this dissertation. Understanding the borderlands is a task complicated by a range of political factors which have become among the most important ways of discerning how life in the borderlands actually works. The restrictions, limitations and complications of research have helped to structure an argument where I am not only observing distant social, economic and political relations, but also examining them from the perspective of somebody who has felt some of the excitements, frustrations and tensions of borderlands life. Those experiences have shaped the reading of sources in a way that is only feasible alongside field research. During the production of this dissertation I have examined the intellectual foundations of the social scientific models that I am examining with an open mind.

As I have explained, my examination of the nodes of control that form the framework for my analysis of Zomia's contemporary politics relies on the nature of conditions that emerge at major Manau festivals in the borderlands. This is an approach that builds on the methodological insights of Kertzer, Guss and Gellner. In Section Two of this dissertation the initial theoretical and design components are welded to the realities of spatial control and symbolic politics faced by the local elites. With a foundation from the early chapters on theoretical and practical matters, the remainder of this study seeks to explain how nodes of control have become symbolic sites for the central governments to interact with the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw peoples of their shared borderlands.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 3: Politics and peoples of the borderlands

Histories of truth and politics

Contemporary politics in the borderlands are built on three different models of central government: Chinese, Indian and Myanmar. As important parts of global society, these nation-state systems are the subject of considerable and ongoing scholarly attention. Given their scale and complexity it is only natural that a full, comparative study of these three political systems is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In fact, such a study would require many hundreds more pages before it even began to do justice to their politics. Instead, my intention in this chapter is to provide an outline of the specific manifestations of the national political systems that are relevant to the borderlands and to my argument about nodes of control. This chapter discusses territoriality, the contest over what constitutes national society and incommensurable categories of ethnicity in the borderlands. That the borderlands are situated at the very edge of national consciousness means there are some unexpected components of each political system (that may not receive attention in other analyses) which require exposition.

Such an exposition struggles to find an obvious or equitable starting-point. And with the exception of Scott (2009a) there is no historical study which takes up the comparativist ambition and integrative scope that I deal with in this dissertation. Studies that are nested inside one particular national border are far more common than the supposedly inter-connected character of the region would suggest. The curious reinforcement of the national borders when structuring knowledge about the region implies that there is something

natural about these divisions and their claims to spatial control. In every direction there are gaps for new transnational and comparative histories that challenge some of the principles of regional history.

What has been produced are histories of politics in the borderlands of China, India and Burma which emphasise competing the claims of indigeneity and ownership which continue to influence collective visions (see Lintner, 1994: 62; Dutta and Karottupuram, 2004: 55). In the early written record, both Needham (1889: preface) and Phayre (1883: 6) provide examples of these claims. Phayre reflects on the Singpho history of migration and offers the assertion that “[t]hey have advanced from the south into Asâm only from towards the end of last [that is, the eighteenth] century”. Those who live next to the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw have their own traditional accounts of residence, displacement and conflict. In all directions there are what could be called “invented traditions” which, as in European cases, “appear or claim to be old [but] are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (Hobsbawm, 1992: 1). In this context it is not always possible to reconcile competing interpretations of invasion, migration and assimilation with the various “truths” that are offered by historians, politicians and other members of borderlands society. Maurice Bloch (1986: 194) makes the point that “[h]istory has no beginning: People always act in a world constructed by previous generations”. In the Jinghpaw case, Mandy Sadan (2007b: 71) describes the resulting inconsistencies and ambiguities as “epistemological ruptures”. These ruptures serve to create incomplete, and even incompatible, versions of ethno-historical memory. John R. Gillis explained the irony that “fierce battles over identity and memory are erupting at the very moment when psychologists, anthropologists, and historians are

becoming increasingly aware of the subjective nature of both” (1994: 4). Such inescapable subjectivity ensures that there are many ways to carve the early history of the region and to specify relations between politics and peoples.

The “retrospective invention” of tradition as described in European contexts (see Trevor-Roper, 1992: 15) is relevant to the situation confronted in these borderlands. The creation of a newly-conceived and “independent” tradition of Scottish highland culture was, Hugh Trevor-Roper reports, a product of the “the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (1992: 16). That the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw have their own highland culture to define and protect means that the analogy with Scottish history fits. What Trevor-Roper argues is that heritage and identity are, everywhere, complicated by ties of kin, culture and language, and by the more abstract notions of invented affinity that so effectively influence group and individual behaviour. The vagaries of such feelings of connection to the past are explained by David Lowenthal (1994: 54) who makes the point that “[w]e validate public and private memories and construct self-identities not just through single-minded obsession with one thread of our past but through catholic awareness of the whole patchwork quilt”.

In the borderlands the patchwork of history and culture is coloured by various sub-national loyalties which can make universalising assertions of national coherence difficult for the central governments to maintain. In parts of the world where diversity is less pronounced it may be simpler to define what constitutes “national heritage”. In the China, India and Burma borderlands the range of ethnic and social identities, and the profound shifts in loyalty and rivalry that have marked recent history, ensure there is no immediate and obvious way of

fully integrating, say, the Jingpo of Yunnan, the Naga of India or the Shan of Burma into their respective nation-states. Alongside the claims to cohesion, Zomia is defined by the differences between its various and distinctive peoples (a point made by the comprehensive ethnic and geographical glossary in Scott, 2009a: 407-413). In response, each central government has tried, with varying success, to offer an official path towards integration. The corollary is that such paths to historical truth are not necessarily attractive to those who see their future wedded to an imagined, or an invented, sub-national sovereignty.

To begin writing about historical truths, particularly in an area like these borderlands, the historian usually requires two distinct skills. The first is the capacity to integrate a huge range of local narratives about political and social organisation in forms that can be grounded in some chronological or thematic framework. The second skill requires historical vision to weave such local stories into a broader narrative of social change, economic development and political culture. There are few histories of this region which have succeeded in harnessing both of these skills to the historical project. It is the histories of the borderlands that draw on the traditions of anthropology and the other social sciences which tend to mobilise those two different skills most consistently. It is not a coincidence that the two most thorough histories of the region, Leach's (1954) *Political Systems of Highland Burma* and Scott's (2009a) *The Art of Not Being Governed*, are both informed by ethnographic preoccupations even, and perhaps especially, when local evidence for historical dynamics is lacking.

So what is the history, at both local and national levels, of these borderlands?

First it is a history of inter-mingling peoples who have tended to interact in ways that are not captured by written sources. The palace chronicles and other “lowland” materials that illuminate the borderlands have been regularly dismissed for their lack of attention to the perspectives of borderlands peoples (see Leach, 1960; Nugent, 1982; Lieberman, 1991). The apotheosis of the counter-narrative has come with Scott (2009a) but he admits that his contrarian study is not the first to consider the history of this region from the perspective of those who often evaded historical scrutiny.⁴² Peoples without widespread literacy, and who in many cases have only experienced written forms of their languages in living memory, are generally not in a position to challenge the narratives of nation-state formation that are imposed by outside historians. The Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw were, until quite recently, all part of this category of “peoples without (written) history”. The re-imagination of local pasts and their relevance to contemporary life is thus a process that continues. Obviously it does not exist independent of other stories about this region.

Second, the history of the borderlands tends to emphasise the profound changes that have occurred with the arrival of the central governments. In Thailand it is Thongchai’s (1994) study of “the geobody” that marked a new way of thinking about border areas. In highland areas of Vietnam there is Michaud’s (2007) discussion of the role that the colonial government maintained in highland areas. For China, India and Burma there are only glimpses in the historical record that help to shape understandings of the political and social changes that have followed the expansion of government control. As such, the history of government consolidation in places like Longchuan, Miao and Myitkyina still needs to be

⁴² In fact, the almost constant citation that Scott (2009a) uses to build his case is a strong indication of the ways that different sources can be brought into novel conversations to help explain the borderlands. This is a technique that I have also attempted to use in this dissertation.

written in ways that chart the early experiments with nodes of control. Such histories are intrinsically problematic. The challenge is to weave together a convincing and balanced discussion which takes into account the cross-border and trans-national aspect of eastern Zomia's development. In the mountains, the ongoing contest over sovereignty and what it means is a foundation for these histories and their discontents.

Sovereignty and resistance

While such sovereignty is often tied to the assertion of a primordial origin it is also, in most cases, the product of more recent linguistic and social categorisation (Proschan, 1997: 91). In historical terms, aspirations to different spatial and political configurations, as represented by the region's many sub-national resistance movements, can be traced only to the colonial period (Brown, 1988). French and British colonisation, alongside the influence of other quasi-colonial governments such as the United States, created strong identities in the borderlands and the machinery to defend them. It is not a coincidence that the groups who were most fully associated with the colonial projects and particularly with Christianity—such as the Naga, Jinghpaw, Karen and Chin—have been some of the groups most dissatisfied with the post-colonial orders and most inclined to rebel against them. The “colonial” religion has left behind a legacy of strong sub-national affiliation and collective purpose that is rarely matched among non-Christian groups (Thawngmung, 2008; Christie, 2000: 104-105; and for comparative perspectives, Freston, 2004; Tapp, 1989). For the Christian Jinghpaw, calls for rebellion have an explicitly religious dimension, which first emerged in 1962 when the KIO/A justified its resistance on the grounds of religious freedom (Taylor, 2004: 703). In that instance the Christian Jinghpaw voiced their opposition to the Buddhist socialism of

those who ruled Burma. In this and other cases dissatisfaction was generated by how nation-states were structured by post-independence leaders wary of Zomia's diversity and its potential for territorial fragmentation.

In the early years of its rule, the Communist Party of China moved to emphasise ideological commitments to national diversity as an antidote to the secessionist fragmentation which it feared. Chinese military incursions into Tibet, which began in 1950, ultimately led to the expatriation of the Dalai Lama and enduring tension in those areas of the Tibetan plateau where the Chinese government asserted its sovereignty. In China it has only been relatively large ethnic minority populations such as the Tibetans, or the Uigurs in the far west of the country, that have been able to mount long-term resistance to Chinese claims. In the borderlands discussed in this dissertation there has, by contrast, been little open separatist sentiment in China. Those who are inclined towards sub-nationalist struggles have tended to join resistance movements inside Burma where persistent conflict has encouraged their participation in ethnic armies that have demonstrated at least some capacity to succeed.

Over the same period the situation in northeast India has remained contested between the central government and those minorities who challenge its mandate in the borderlands. In this region, dozens of armed insurrections, usually of an ethno-nationalist flavour, have sought to undermine the centralising project of Indian nation-state-making. While the Singpho have not developed their own armed opposition to the government they live alongside many groups that have. Singpho are arguably demographically too weak (as are the Jingpo in China) to take on the government in any significant fashion. This contrasts with

groups like the Naga which have, since India's independence in 1947, regularly confronted their lack of opportunity to decide on an autonomous or independent political system. In other parts of northeast India, particularly in Mizoram, concessions have been made to sub-nationalist ethnic groups that now enjoy fair degrees of political authority. While much that is written about northeast India's histories of sovereignty and resistance is framed in very general terms around central government repression and local struggles for autonomy, Duncan McDuire-Ra (2007) has endeavoured to explain how the resulting political economy in parts of northeast India has been captured by local elites that use their government connections, and their ethno-nationalist credentials, to gain wealth and position. It is a situation replicated elsewhere in the region where "rent-seeking" leads to exceptional profitability. By fulfilling these key economic roles many individuals from local ethnic groups have managed to use the fractured political landscape to their advantage.

Arguably, the challenges of political territorial and social fragmentation have been most keenly felt in Burma. Since 1948 most parts of the country have experienced periods of civil unrest. Areas along the Burma-Thailand border—where the Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan States meet Thailand's western frontier—have been notoriously challenging for the central government. The United Mon State Party, the Karen National Union and many other armed ethnic groups have all demanded what they consider inalienable rights to a federal system of government. Such challenges have, occasionally at least, threatened the very existence of the country that we know as Burma and there were brief periods in the 1950s and then again in the 1970s when rebellions imperilled the government's control. As a result, the threat of

fragmentation has remained a prevailing concern for the Myanmar government since it took control in 1989.

Negotiations to avoid fragmentation saw the Myanmar military government organise a 1993 ceasefire with the KIO/A, the largest and most assertive anti-government military force in northern Burma.⁴³ That ceasefire, which followed agreements between the Myanmar authorities and some of the KIO/A's splinter ceasefire armies, finally paused a 32-year "ethnic" war between the Burmese and the Jinghpaw. The other major Jinghpaw ceasefire groups in the Kachin State are the New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA - K) and the Lasang Awng Wa Group. The NDA - K is a longstanding Communist Party of Burma offshoot, which currently controls a Special Region along the Sino-Burmese border, while the Lasang Awng Wa Group is a more recent faction that broke away from the KIO/A. It is named after its leader, a former KIA colonel who headed, for a time, the ceasefire army's intelligence service. With the ceasefires, opportunities for major development have emerged. Roads, nearly impossible to build or maintain during the war, could finally be planned (Nareerat and Supannabul, 1996). Ideas for bridges, dams, electricity and better drinking water also came thick and fast. A symbolically and practically important bridge across the Ayeyarwady River just north of the Kachin State capital was built. And with the KIO/A ceasefire emerged what are probably unprecedented opportunities for making money in northern Burma and, with those opportunities, the formation of new types among the local elites.

⁴³ As late as 1989 the Government of the Union of Myanmar was producing maps of the country where the areas of operation of "KIA insurgents" were marked out from the rest of the national terrain (Myanmar, 1989: 250).

After the finalisation of the truces these local elites began ongoing negotiations that continue to this day. These are negotiations about access to mineral wealth, particularly jade, and about the bountiful forest, agricultural and water resources that make northern Burma a treasure-trove for whoever controls it. Scott's "Last Great Enclosure" (2009b) looks more like a gold rush up close.⁴⁴ It is the KIO/A ceasefire that makes the requisite access possible. The KIO/A's willingness to allow the Myanmar government access to many areas—such as the Hugawng valley, the areas around Laiza, and the "triangle area" between the Mali Hka River and N'Mai Hka rivers in the central Kachin State—where the KIO/A dominated only a decade ago is indicative of the concessions that have emerged. Government efforts to position over a dozen extra army battalions in northern Burma have also continued stealthily (Farrelly, 2007b) since the ceasefire with the mobilisation of war weapons and vehicles regularly reported (KNG, 2010).

As the Myanmar government finalised its plans for the November 2010 national election even more army units were mobilised and sent to sensitive border areas (for details on the early part of this build-up see Myo Gyi, 2006). There are Jinghpaw complaints but, at the same time, there is an acceptance that without a resumption of formal hostilities there are few alternatives.⁴⁵ The KIO/A, with its reputed military strength of around 6,000 active duty troops, has been forced into a negotiation that, while sometimes lucrative, has actually required surrender in important ways. Critical Jinghpaw voices publicly deride the KIO/A

⁴⁴ Pointedly, Scott (2009a: 406) saves the volume's penultimate footnote for a critique of what he calls "today's euphemism for civilization": development. The footnote offers a "thought experiment" which compares "the discourse of 'development' ... with the unseemly NGO scramble for turf and loot in, say, Vientiane [Laos]".

⁴⁵ In 2010 talk of actually resuming hostilities reached its highest level for years. The uncertainties swirling around national politics almost guarantee that, for the foreseeable future, there will continue to be tensions for many of the ceasefire groups, including the KIO/A.

stance as “missing...the point of Independence” (see Zai Dai, 2008). Its ceasefire means that the KIO/A’s Zomia, or “Kachinland” as the sub-nationalist forces prefer, is now dotted with the installations of the “enemy”. This situation has led some expatriate Jinghpaw to claim that “[t]he injustice inflicted upon our people calls for action and this is to be accomplished by uniting all the people in uprooting the enemy from our land” (KNO, 2009). This strident rhetoric must ignore the reality of the nodes of control. In northern Burma, the KIO/A jostles, often awkwardly, with the legitimacy that accrues to a central government prepared to fortify itself in the places that matter most.

Territory and control in the borderlands

The latent potential for fragmentation represented by the KIO/A, and other sub-national resistance groups such as the ULFA in Assam and the various Naga militias that operate in Arunachal Pradesh, has only been mitigated through the assertion, with force at times, of central government mandates to rule the borderlands. The borders that cut across Zomia are, following Thongchai’s insights about “geo-bodies”, now a key manifestation of central government control in areas at the very edge of each nation-state. These boundaries cut across the old categories that delineated political organisation. That is to say that the Naga, Jinghpaw and Tai, and other peoples of these areas, have been separated from each other by the reality, sometimes unwelcome, that they do not control the demarcation of national frontiers. Counterfactual interpretations of the regional spatial order imply that such alternatives are possible. Nonetheless there is, for example, no “Tai superstate” in mainland Southeast Asia that takes in all of the many Shan and other Tai groups that live outside Thailand (as discussed in Farrelly, 2003a).

Furthermore, there is no “Kachinland” that spreads across the borders of China, India and Burma, nor a “Nagalim” that covers most of northeast India. For the KIO/A and those who support its mission (Gumsha and Lahkang, 2008a: 1) this can lead to awkward phrasing where a “Kachin State” (*Jinghpaw Mungdaw*) is accepted as part of “Myanmar Country” (*Myanmar Mungdan*). Any “Kachinland”, what the Jinghpaw refer to as “*Jinghpaw Mungdan*”, would, in the counterfactual, stand apart from “*Myen Mung*” (Burma). Such an independent entity is an institutionalisation of “*Jinghpaw Wunpawng*”, the concept of the wider Jinghpaw community. Some Jinghpaw language speakers regularly use the phrase “*mungdaw mungdan*” a composite of “state” and “territory” to imply a “nation-state”, as they do with the phrase “*Wunpawng mungdan*” (see, for a report on this usage, Tucker, 2000: xvii). For its part, the KIO/A is inclined to refer to the “*Jinghpaw Wunpawng Mungdan*”, putting the “Jinghpaw community land” on the same discursive level as the nation-state of Myanmar. In the Naga case it is worth noting that “*Nagalim*” is designed to become a legitimate political entity spanning terrain *across* the borders of the existing nation-states. As Nag (2002: 304) reports, “[s]ince the beginning of the movement, the Nagas have been trying to internationalize the Naga issue”. Radically alternative configurations of the space are conceivable but they are not, today, a part of the physical landscape. Conceiving of these alternative spatialisations was, of course, one of van Schendel’s (2002) original goals.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Counterfactuals for the spatial organisation of Zomia suggest that we should be cautious about endorsing the logic, or prospects, of specific borderlines. Chinese and Indian ambitions for greater and more direct territorial control of these borderlands almost guarantee that tension about border demarcation will remain for the foreseeable future.

Even though they have not faltered in the face of these alternative spatial claims, there is no sense in which the territorial control exerted by the nation-states is comprehensive. People cross the borders officially, that is beyond question, but many others—through circumstances or perhaps instincts—cross borders without heeding the formalities. Their passports (if they have them) go unstamped as they jump over, crawl under or walk around frontier fortifications. The national borders across Zomia are not formally marked and policed along their full extents. And, for much of its length, the border between China and India is not even officially agreed upon.

There is a frontier but it is more accurately a line of control between the Indian Army, and its paramilitary adjuncts, and the People’s Liberation Army, and other Chinese officials. This situation has led some Indian critics to posit that the Chinese government hopes “to carve out a client state from the tribal-inhabited border areas of India's North East and North Myanmar that is virtually no-man's land” (Nepram, 2002: 143).⁴⁷ This type of argument is a rebuttal of the Indian “gullibility regarding China, epitomized in the Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai slogan of the [nineteen] fifties” (Brecher, 1977: 102; and see also Malik, 2001; Nair, 1975).⁴⁸ Now, and in response to previous foreign policy failures, “[t]he entire border belt is under occupation by Indian Forces with Chinese forces deployed opposite” (Mukherjee, 2005: 58) and there is, in recognition of tensions, regular anti-China commentary in the Indian media (Raman, 2006; Jain, 2006, etc.). Some Indian advocates of a strong defence posture now go so far as to imply that “[t]he Chinese are great masters of the art of creating a world of make-believe and

⁴⁷ The “virtual no-man’s land”, as described in this extract, conjures the Zomia that many assume lies beyond the nodes of control. A full characterisation of the contemporary form of these non-nodal spaces will be a task for future scholarly reflection.

⁴⁸ “*Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai*” means “Indians and Chinese are brothers” in Hindi.

inducing others to live in it. We made a fatal mistake in the past, we must not repeat it” (Ray, 2004: 33).⁴⁹ At the border they watch each other warily but, at least since 1962 when in a brazen attack “[t]he Chinese exploited their initial successes and advanced 160 miles into Indian territory down the southern slopes of the Himalayas, reaching the Brahmaputra Valley” (Dalvi, 1969: 1), there has been tacit acceptance that direct hostilities are unhelpful (see Ranganathan, 2001).

National territories in political imaginations

In China, the territory of the nation-state still has a special hold on official imaginations. The “geo-body” of China, including without any official hesitation the “renegade province” of Taiwan and the sometimes rebellious territories of Tibet and Xinjiang (Gittings, 1997: 279), is described as immutable by those who set the official agenda (Fravel, 2008; Carlson 2003: 677). China, as a category for reverence and spatial control, therefore dictates not just the structure of political priorities but also, and arguably more importantly, it shapes the structure of knowledge. This has become particularly apparent as China’s wealth and international status grow. To reject China’s developmentalist project, and its recent successes creating new consumer classes even in remote and rural areas, seems to be considered an unpopular strategy. Instead, there appear to be constant efforts to seek new opportunities in the world’s most populous nation-state. Such dominance helps constitute knowledge about the people who live in China’s borderlands, no matter how “Chinese” they may actually be. This is related to a set of understandings about borders that have “inscribed historical

⁴⁹ Such sentiments are, of course, not unique to India. A similar cadence of critical argument is found, for instance, in Segal (2004: 20). He suggests “suspending our disbelief and recogn[ising] the theatrical power of China”.

frontiers and modern boundaries into the minds and activities of those residing close to, across, and along them” (Carlson, 2003: 679). It is, crudely, this mental map that often defines local opportunities. Those who live near the frontiers—as in the case of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw—operate in a social context quite distinct from the national mainstream.

This is also the case in northern Burma where the Jinghpaw live throughout parts of the Kachin and Shan States. Both areas are identified in the Burmese psyche with colourful ethnic populations, dramatic mountain landscapes and, at least until the ceasefires, difficult guerrilla wars (Kyaw Yin Hlaing, 2006: 159, 169; Lim and Shanmugaratnam, 1984: 93). Those wars began to end with the capitulation of the Communist Party of Burma in 1989 and its subsequent fragmentation into many smaller, ethnically-based military units (South, 2008). The most famous of these is the United Wa State Army (UWSA) which continues to operate along the China-Burma and Thailand-Burma borders in the Shan State (Ko-Lin Chin, 2009; McCoy, 1999). The other major armed opposition to the Myanmar government in this region is the Shan State Army (South) (Shan: *Tap Hhseuk Zueng Tai*). In the Kachin State, territorial control during the resistance was only available to those prepared to use force. In *Land of Jade: A journey through insurgent Burma*, Bertil Lintner (1990) describes riding bicycles down the road between Myitkyina and Bhamo, very near the Chinese border. This was at a time when the KIO/A could still defend much of its territory. A few years later, in 1989, this area had “become a hot battle zone with almost daily ambushes and clashes between the Burmese army and the KIA” (Lintner, 1990: 312). And then, a few years later, it

was quiet again as the armies retreated to their strongholds, agreed a ceasefire, and left this major thoroughfare to fall into disrepair.

However, since those quiet years after the Kachin State's ceasefires were agreed, the road from Myitkyina to Bhamo has started to hum with a different sort of activity. It is no longer a basic track running along the Sino-Burmese frontier but has become one part of the major upgrades to transport infrastructure instigated by members of the local development elite (as discussed in Chapter 4). In recent years it has been the site of considerable investment and engineering work. It now carries a regular procession of trucks, taxis and buses plying the important trade route between the two major towns of the Kachin State. But for almost its full length there are signs of past conflicts. Near the roadside are villages, many of them with the remnants of heavy fortifications. These are fortifications that are not usually needed today but the high walls and barriers erected to protect houses and settlements in the recent past have not been dismantled. They are, one must assume, ready to be used again if circumstances dictate.

For now, significant changes to life in northern Burma are occurring as Chinese capital becomes an even more important part of the local economy. Criticisms of those changes are also becoming more common (see, for example, Nawdin Lahpai, 2009a). Among the most vocal critics of contemporary change is the Kachin Development Networking Group. It was established in 2004 and has published a number of reports about northern Burma with the "aim...to promote a civil society based on equality and justice for the local people in the struggle for social and political change in Burma" (KDNG, 2007: ii). It produces research

papers on environmental, economic and political issues. One of its recent reports focused on the damming of the Ayeyarwady River north of Myitkyina. According to the report (KDNG, 2007: 1):

Burma's military junta is allowing Chinese companies to build a giant 152-meter-tall hydropower dam and transmit the electricity back to China. The dam is one in a series that the junta has planned involving the export of power to neighbouring countries. While the regime will gain new revenues, Burma's ordinary citizens, who have no say in the process, will bear the costs.

The report estimates that electricity generated by this project will be worth \$US500 million per year. The report goes on to lament that “[t]he post-ceasefire expansion of the military to ethnic border areas has gone hand in hand with a Border Area Development Program that has involved the selling of the country's natural resources to the highest bidders” (KDNG, 2007: 4). The influence of the Chinese government and Chinese companies in such projects is often highlighted to assert that their partnerships with the Myanmar government dominate local politics. Clearly this is one part of a development story that many local Jinghpaw are uncomfortable with.

In response to the post-ceasefire development championed by the Myanmar military authorities and their commercial allies, the KDNG report proposes an alternative path. The report (KDNG, 2007: 49) argues that:

The ruling military junta is promoting mega-development that places all the costs and risks on disenfranchised peoples while simply fortifying military control. Small-scale alternatives that recognize the rights of local communities and empower them to

participate and manage resources are possible. China is an important neighbour that can be a positive influence in the region. KDNG therefore calls on China to abide at least by its own standards when operating in Burma and to heed the voices of affected peoples.

These “affected peoples” are locked out of the development process in Burma and in China. Neither country provides significant space to the many marginalised peoples who sit at the edge of the development process. Dam building in northern Burma is just one of many examples where it is possible to decry the involvement of government-aligned commercial cartels in mega-projects that undermine local livelihoods (Nawdin Lahpai, 2009b; Tsa Ji and Ah Nan, 2009; Khun Sam, 2007). At the same time there is an equally strong sense that electricity generation in the Kachin State will, in the long term, be one of the major ways that a Myanmar society based on “national unity” is contested.

Contesting national society

In the borderlands of China, India and Burma, countless competing social categories have been harnessed to the politics of control and membership. These categories are also tied explicitly, in most cases, to the distribution of power. For example, many of the mid- and high-ranking civil servants who administer India’s portions of the borderlands are drawn, through their membership of the Indian Administrative Service, from other parts of the country. Similarly, the Central Reserve Police Force cadre in “disturbed” districts (that is, where violence continues) of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh tend to hail from elsewhere in India. They are not, in general, from Arunachal Pradesh itself and while it is difficult to gain a full overview of their origins the pictorial list on the website of the Governor of Arunachal

Pradesh (2010) provides an indicative overview. Few are local to the borderlands. But there are many efforts to change this official profile, including more relaxed academic and physical criteria for Arunachal Pradesh applicants to government positions. In one recently advertised Head Constable position in the Arunachal Police Department they were prepared to only consider “General Candidates” over 5’ 5" in height, 5’ 3" for most “A.P Tribal candidates”, 5’ 1" for “A.P Tribal of Tirap and Changlang” districts. These exceptions are indicative of physical differences and also of the fact that most officials in Arunachal Pradesh are drawn from elsewhere in India.

A similar pattern supports the Myanmar government officials who work in towns like Myitkyina and Bhamo, and their Chinese counterparts in Ruili, Longchuan or Jinghong. Their privileged position is tied, for reasons that are already obvious to those who have digested Scott and van Schendel’s analysis, to their superior access to nation-state resources, formal education, language fluency and other characteristics that should guarantee “loyal service”. They are often drawn to the borderlands from other parts of their respective nation-states. While these are potentially arduous postings, usually to relatively remote areas, they also offer special opportunities for advancement and profit.

Individuals who are brought to the borderlands for government service can go on to play significant roles. They are rarely, if ever, elected and have, instead, been invited to the borderlands because of their technocratic or political talents. They may work as typists, drivers, surveyors or clerks. Or they may be occupied in more sensitive areas: in the Army, in an intelligence or security agency, in customs or immigration departments, or in the

various other parts of the nation-state bureaucracy that have core interests at stake in the borderlands. In the borderlands of China, India and Burma their ethnic (and educational, and even physical) stature can provide opportunities not available in the heartlands from where they have come. It is often repeated that the military posts—junior and senior—that proliferate around Burma’s borders are, far from being considered hardship postings by the Myanmar Army rank-and-file, actually attractive opportunities to advance their careers and get rich. In parts of Burma, in the big military bases near Yangon, Naypyidaw or Mandalay, it is easy to be lost in the numbers; there are, after all, around 350,000 members of the defence forces (Selth, 2009). By contrast, in the borderlands there is much excitement to be experienced and wealth to be harvested (Sturgeon, 2004: 466; Lee, 2008). It has even been reported (Steinberg, 2007) that large bribes change hands for access to the plum jobs of serving the Myanmar Army in the northern Shan State where the opium poppies grow.

Distance from the national centres has implications in India too. For many Indian writers Arunachal Pradesh is described, first and foremost, as a remote, frontier area, unknown even to Indians (Pudaite, 2009; Tamang, 2008). The term Arunachal Pradesh is a fairly recent addition to the understanding of these borderlands, it was only officially founded in 1987, and the identity of the “Arunachalee” is still a work in progress. The Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Dorjee Khandu, summed up the resulting political conundrum in a welcome message for the 2008 Shapawng Yawng Manau festival (this festival is discussed in Chapter 6). The Chief Minister extended his “sincere greetings to all Arunachalees in general and to my Singpho people in particular” (Dorjee Khandu, 2008). Communal identifications are invoked with utmost regularity and the Chief Minister, attuned to such politics, makes

sure he appropriately addresses what he refers to as the “Singpho Community”. It is remarkable that five other prominent Arunachal Pradesh identities who also composed welcome messages for this festival used an *identical* set of words (Setong Sena, 2008; Chowna Mien, 2008; Tatar Kipa, 2008; Newlai Tingkhatra, 2008; and the editorial writer for the festival publication, Tingwa, 2008).

This observation leads us to consider how, as Gurudas Das speculates, governing the borderlands has “created a hybrid political culture where political behaviour of the majority of people is largely guided by tribe/clan/kinship loyalty instead of higher social goals” (2001a: 5). The sub-national character of these loyalties has tended to militate against full affiliation with central powers. This is arguably a pattern replicated in many other parts of India and is certainly not unique to Arunachal Pradesh. Nonetheless, Das goes on to offer some judgements on the relationship of this political system to wider Indian “democratic” politics. He (2001a: 5) dismisses their efforts in abrupt terms and posits that:

In spite of its failure to develop a democratic/secular political culture, the parliamentary political structure has produced a class of power elites who are now locally acting as managers of the state and collaborating with their national counterparts. They mobilize people, and distribute...power on tribal lines, enjoy the status and privileges of high offices, make fortunes for themselves, but utterly lack in vision and foresight needed for society/nation building.

Das blames their myopia on the “growth of individualism” and what he calls “loosening the sacred primordial ties between a man and his primary group” (2001a: 8). But while those ties have been loosened they have not yet been replaced, according to Das, by loyalties to any

higher authority. There is, indeed, no entirely coherent state identity that is recognised across the valleys of northeast India (see Acharya, 1988) although there is also a reported “sharpening of the Arunachali identity” (Hussain, 2008: 32). In fact, to be from Arunachal Pradesh is, I have found, almost always to assert a strong tribal identity that does not, in the first instance, exist with any reference to the Arunachal Pradesh context. It is an identity that flows from the Indian Constitution’s provisions on Scheduled Tribes (Paul, 2007: 217) straight to the village or town in which it is useful. In Arunachal Pradesh, there are twelve such designated tribes: officially described as Abor, Aka, Apatani, Dafla, Galong, Khampti, Khowa, Mishmi, Momba, any Naga tribes, Sherdukpen and Singpho.

What is most relevant here is that the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw populations are positioned differently in the various national societies in which they live. In China, the Jingpo are 120,000 people living in a province of 30 million. As such they are less than 0.01 per cent of China’s total population of over 1.3 billion. The situation for the 20,000 Singpho in India is even starker. They live in the sparsely populated state of Arunachal Pradesh where they make up around 2 per cent of the population. For India as a whole (with a rapidly growing population of well over 1 billion) they are a miniscule percentage. In this context the much larger number of Jinghpaw in Burma is striking. Jinghpaw live in both the Kachin and Shan States. In both areas their numbers are somewhat uncertain but the best estimates are approximately 750,000. This is almost 2 per cent of Burma’s national population which ensures that in their local areas the Jinghpaw are not so significantly outnumbered. The demographic realities of the borderlands mean that there are significant numbers of Chinese,

Indian and Myanmar citizens who are designated as ethnic minorities in a process which has ongoing political implications.

Categories of ethnicity

Nationalities and questions

Examining such multitudes of ethnic categories is now an established part of the social scientific landscape. In fact, across Asia, not just in the borderlands of Zomia, scholarly attention to ethnic affinities and identities has come to dominate social science research. Defining and defending an ethnic boundary has become, as a result, as much an academic concern as a concern of those wear the ethnic labels. Scholars of ethnicity can conveniently draw on strong nation-state traditions of ethnic classification and control. It is, therefore, worth examining the various ways that “ethnicity” is defined in the China, India and Burma borderlands under discussion in this dissertation.

In the People’s Republic of China, the protocols of ethnic classification are captured by the notion of “*minzu*” or “nationality”. Early in the Communist period these classifications came to prominence (Mackerras, 2003). The “*minzu wenti*” (nationalities question) generated trepidation and needed to be “solved”: making up only 8 per cent of the total population minority peoples occupied 60 per cent of the land (Gladney, 1994). In response, Han Chinese power was defended by a scheme that saw the recognition of 56 nationalities in a system where over 90 per cent of the population were classified as “Han”. Defining these minority nationalities remains a government prerogative and self-definition, as say “Hani”, “Mongol”

or “Miao” is not enough. Of the 56 Chinese “nationalities”, 23 are found in Yunnan and many of those groups have populations in the border prefectures of Dehong, Baoshan and Nujiang that are part of the borderlands under discussion in this dissertation. Janet Sturgeon, in a study of the Akha in the borderlands (1997: 132), makes the point that “[f]ollowing the Chinese Revolution of 1949, the new Chinese state initiated policies that would formalise the centuries-old pattern of ‘including’ ethnic minorities. All ethnic groups were automatically citizens of the New China.” Their citizenship is, however, special in the sense that they are marked out, officially and in other ways, as different from the Han Chinese “mainstream”.

Categories of ethnicity in the borderlands where China meets Southeast Asia are particularly interesting. They are not, so much, interesting because so many of the peoples who live in this area wear colourful costumes or are far from the Han Chinese mainstream. They are interesting because they provide linkages for China that spill beyond the borders of the People’s Republic. For example, the Tai Lue in Xishuangbanna (Tai: Sipsongpanna) are part of a cultural web that stretches south through Burma’s Shan State to Thailand and far to the west, across the Kachin State, to northeast India. According to Casas, “[m]any Lue parents accept the idea of a temple education [vernacular language] as being an obstacle not only for their own minzu [nationality] to attain modernization, but, most importantly, for individuals who want to attain upward mobility” (2008: 299). Their “Tai family” may stretch across the borders of the nation-states (as discussed by Thai scholars such as Sompong, 1999; Chatthip, 1997; Teeraparp, 1994) but these Tai Lue still see their future in China. Other “Chinese” ethnic groups, such as the Jingpo, do the same. They are part of a cultural system that has

outposts in India, in Burma and in China but their immediate residence matters most. Clearly, giving the appropriate weight to this geographic spread is not a simple task for scholars.

This geographic spread is just as much a concern, it should be noted, for the various governments that operate in the borderlands. For those governments it is convenient that the categorisation of these groups is not simple and that among anthropologists and local experts alike there can be some contention about where the various lines of ethnic demarcation should be drawn. For example, the category of “Kachin” that exists in the Kachin State today is a different category, in scope and character, from the category of “Singpho” and “Jingpo” in India and China respectively (Sadan, 2004: 704). In Burma the pattern is to provide a wide, over-arching category that includes many similar (but hardly identical) ethnic groups. “Burmese” categories such as Kachin, Shan or Chin are categories of this type and within each group there is recognition of substantial internal variation. Among the Shan there are a number of regional and linguistic variations that distinguish various sub-groups. The Shan (Tai Khun) spoken, for instance, in Keng Tung in the eastern Shan State is very different to the Shan spoken around Taunggyi, in western Shan State, or Lashio, in northern Shan State. Among the many different Shan groups there are, at least in India, official designations that split the Tai into different, anthropologically distinguishable, memberships (Phukon, 2009: 1). They are not united as “Shan” and, as a consequence, have largely failed to institute a wide-reaching political agenda. Local categories of ethnicity like Shan and Kachin are malleable political objects.

The same cannot be said, at least in any immediate sense, for some of the other ethnic categories now represented in the borderlands. To be Assamese, Han Chinese or Burmese is to be quite separate from those people into whose “traditional” lands, the lands of Zomia, they have moved. To a certain extent, the separateness experienced by these groups has broken down as inter-marriage proliferates (Shen and Li, 2009: 84) and as their advantaged access to nation-state resources makes them sought after partners and collaborators. At the same time the key government impositions in the borderlands have been monopolised by those who are of the “loyal” centre. Burmese from Mandalay, Chinese from Chengdu and Indians from Mumbai are brought to the borderlands to serve as the administrative controllers, in ethnic as well as political processes. They are entrusted with managing the nodes of control that are crucial for the nation-state as a whole. In many cases their ethnic difference, which may be manifested in physical or cultural distinctions, is part of why they can fill the administrative and political tasks of borderlands government.

These forms of organisation ensure that the categories of Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw are both new and old ways of looking at the peoples who wear the labels. To see them as merely the inheritors of an authentic and appropriate ethnonym is to miss the alternative ways of classifying them. The Jingpo of China are, on the Burmese side of the border, merely one of the groups within the “Kachin” category. Similarly, in northeast India the “Jingpo” are one of the Scheduled Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and, in some interpretations, part of the broader Naga family of political and social connection (Singh, 2004: 5-7). They are all linked together in ways that are missed by asserting that the categories of Singpho and Scheduled Tribe, Kachin and national people, and Jingpo and national minority, are entirely nation-state

specific. It is, for instance, quite common to transform from being a Burmese “Kachin” to an Indian “Singpho”. I have heard stories about how the paperwork appears and is appropriately endorsed. Becoming Jingpo, and therefore Chinese, is reportedly a harder option, but I have little doubt that it also occurs. The many Jinghpaw from Burma who end up working on the Chinese side of the border can sometimes find themselves almost totally integrated into Chinese life.

Tribes and identities

This set of categorical issues is worth clarifying in the specific context of India where the national legislative framework includes what are called Scheduled Castes (16 per cent of the total population) and Scheduled Tribes. The complete listing of castes and tribes was made via two orders: *The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950*, and *The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950*. Some special rights accompany membership of these groups and, as a result, their composition has become an issue of wide political importance. The 2001 census reports that 84 million people in India are members of a Scheduled Tribe. According to McDuie-Ra (2007: 47), “[t]he term ‘tribal’ has persevered in independent India, largely due to the use of the term in the Indian Constitution, the dominance of the Anthropological Survey of India in maintaining colonial administrative classifications, and by tribal elites themselves”. Across India agitation by existing tribal populations, and by groups hoping to enjoy the concessions it brings, is an ongoing issue. Barua (1999: 4) makes the point that:

The North Eastern mosaic, contrary to certain erroneous assertions, is a replica of the Indian mosaic, but with the prominence of some other special ingredients. There is an

assemblage of more than 150 ethnic groups and sub-groups. All the known anthropological strains such as the Negroid, Mongoloid, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and the equally important Caucasians are here in the north-east of India with Assam state itself having more than 20 major ethnic groups. There are, in Arunachal Pradesh, 26 Scheduled Tribes and in adjacent areas of Nagaland and Assam there are many other groups that have tribal affiliations.

Tribalness has, in that wider Indian context, become a crucial way of organising ethnic categories in a system where official recognition remains most important.

The category of Singpho is one of the “scheduled” categories of “tribal” population in Arunachal Pradesh. According to Dutta (2003: 110) “[i]n the good old days...the Singphos were a warrior tribe”. Their name is often pronounced *Singfo*, or *Singpo*. The standard pronunciation among the group itself is closer to *Singhpaw*. This reflects some confusion about who is, in fact, part of the “tribe”. Using Singpho (and accentuating the aspiration of the second syllable) provides a clear local marker of difference against the Jinghpaw groups who live across the border in Burma. The local Singpho in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam are, at least officially, different than their cross-border cousins. Describing Singpho as its own language, spoken by perhaps 20,000 people, also gives rise to a claim of “endangered” status (Our Correspondent, 2007). Obviously the language is spoken (and written) by many more people across the border in Burma.⁵⁰ That reality can be easily over-looked within the ethno-linguistic categorisations that are used to delineate social life on the Indian side.

⁵⁰ Equally curious is the incorrect claim in Ming (2001: 19) that “some of the minority languages still do not have their languages in written form. These include...the *Jingpo* language”.

While the ethno-linguistic situation is complex, there is also some dispute about the population of the Singpho. George van Driem (2001: 572) reports that:

There were only 981 Singphos in India according to the census of 1971, including about 650 Singphos in ten villages in Bordumsa Circle in Tirap district, where they were concentrated in Bordumsa and Bisa villages, and 350 in fourteen villages in the adjoining Khampti-Singpho area of Lohit district.

Today I have found that the most widely used figure for the Singpho population is 20,000 (as quoted in Narzary, n.d.: 2).⁵¹ The category of Singpho also exists, in terms of local politics, within the specific ethno-linguistic classification schemes deployed in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The relationship between the Singpho and the Khamti is one that is particularly interesting. Both groups are Theravada Buddhist in official eyes (“keeping alive a great Buddhist tradition in our North-East Frontier”: Kondinya, 1986: v), and both groups also have links across into the Shan and Kachin areas of Burma, and beyond. Both groups are also relatively prosperous and politically powerful. They have done well through the system of reservations provided for “tribal” groups under the Indian constitution. They have also exploited their strategic positions along the India-Burma border, and their relatively peaceful engagement with the Indian government, whose reported aim is, ultimately, “social harmony and peace with a spirit of tolerance and cooperation” (Bandyopadhyay, 2005: 106). The positions of the Singpho and Khamti are substantially better than many others groups who live in close proximity. The “tea tribes”, the Tangsas, and others are all usually far poorer, and it is commonly argued that these disempowered groups are forced into more exploitative economic relations.

⁵¹ The accuracy of any of these numbers is the subject of some local dispute.

So being classified as Singpho can be a valuable strategy: many “Singpho” now even carry their distinctive tribal affiliation as their surname.⁵² Although they also carry other (Singpho) names they have an official identity that is enveloped by their tribalness. These names can be traced, in most cases, to the way that non-tribal teachers allocated names to students. Students would be asked to choose from a list of “Indian” names and were then given the surname “Singpho”. The tribe was, in Indian eyes, the “family”. This overlooked the fact that all Singpho carry a given name and a clan or family name. Many now have two names. Some would like to change their names “back” to their Singpho originals but, according to the practice of Indian regulations, they can apparently only change either the first or second part of their name. As a result somebody who has the surname of Singpho can only rescind one half of their name.

For India, the category of Singpho is further complicated by the existence of related groups across the border in Burma and China. Singpho links to the KIO/A have been the subject of long-term speculation. What is striking is that within India the Singpho are more readily, and officially, identified with the Tai Khamti than with any of their relatives across the land frontiers (see Baruah, 1998: 95-97). Within the official “tribal” categorisations the Khamti and the Singpho share a Theravada Buddhist religious culture (as described in Ghosh and Ghosh, 1998: 26) which sets them apart from the other Buddhists of northeast India who have cultural ties to Tibet and with the Indian convert Buddhist traditions that have emerged in recent years. The Singpho are, according to Borgohain (1997: 52) “Buddhist by religion and are influenced by Hinayana [Theravada] Buddhist culture. They have, however, not

⁵² For comparative interest Thanos (2008: 21-57) shows how Chinese in Thailand lost their “*chuesae*” or clan names in the 20th century in favour of “*namsakul*”, family names.

given up their old Shamanistic beliefs”. The conflation of Khamti and Singpho, even into the one category, such as the All Tai Khamti & Singpho Students’ Union, highlights the capacity for the reconfiguration of standard patterns of social relations.⁵³

Ethnicities and conglomeration

In Burma the classification of ethnicities is even more complex. Based on the seven ethnic states of the Union of Myanmar, the government recognises seven major ethnic groups other than the *Bama* (Burmese, who the Jinghpaw call “*myen amyū*”: Myanma people). These are the Mon, Karen (*Kayin amyū*), Karenni, Shan (*Sam Amyū*), Kachin (*Wunpawng*), Chin (*Hkang amyū*) and Rakaing. These eight major groups are used by the government in descriptions of the national population. It is even possible to purchase “National Tribes of Myanmar Dolls” to get a better sense of the more common ethnic groups. However, each of these classifications merely provides a geo-cultural gloss to more complex political and social divisions. A map in a Jinghpaw-language publication divides the country ethnically into: Burman, Chin, Kachin, Rakhine, Other (Naga, Lahu, Akha), Burman and Mon-Khmer, Karen (Pao, Kayan, Karenni), Karen and Burman, Tai, Mon-Khmer, and Burman and Shan (Bunghku, 2007: 84). The most regularly cited figure for the number of “ethnic groups, languages and dialects” in Burma is “over 100” (Ekeh, 2007: 1; Smith, 1994: 17).

So, within a composite Myanmar government category like Shan or Kachin there is notable internal diversity. A census conducted from 1-5 April 1983 found that in the “18 townships

⁵³ This is, however, an inconsistent pattern. In other cases it appears that exclusive, communally-based student political organisations are politically expedient. The case of the All Tai Ahom Students’ Union is illustrative. A full length study of that organisation (Phukan, 2005) gives a flavour of its history and ethnic politics.

and 699 Wards and Village Tracts of Kachin State” there were Kachins, Shans, Burmans, Lisus, Lashis, Rawangs, Marus, Kadus and Kanans. It identified how the “Kachins with 38.1 percent shares the largest proportion, Burmese constitute 29.3 percent. Indigenous races other than Burmese and Kachins constitute 25.5 percent [with] mixed Foreign and Burmese races [at] 7.1 percent” (Burma, 1987, 14). More recently, one local publication describes how in the Kachin State there are “six Kachin groups (Jinghpaw, Lawng Waw, Rawang, La Chik, Zai Wa and Lisu) and...five Shan groups (Tai Long, Tai Lay, Tai Leng, Tai Khamti and Tai Mongsa)” (Kachin State Cultural Museum, n.d.). Another official publication gives a more thorough breakdown of the numbers with 346,902 Jinghpaw⁵⁴; 174,378 for a combined category of non-Jinghpaw Kachin; 399,467 for the Burmese (“Bamar”); 333,424 for the five Shan groups; and 117,444 for “other national races” (Kachin State Cultural Museum, 2000).⁵⁵ This provides a total of 1,371,615 for the Kachin State as a whole. While they are not always mentioned it is also relevant that there are “other nationalities such as...Bamar, Kadu, Kanan, Chinese and Indians living in the state” (Kachin: Land of the Manau Dances, n.d.). And the pattern of migrations that has seen so many different peoples arrive, speaking many languages, has been sufficiently jumbled that various groups do not always live within the neatly defined areas suggested by the government classifications. Furthermore, according to Seekins (2006: 6), “[a]lthough Burma is one of Southeast Asia's most ethnically diverse countries, ethnic identity before the colonial era was not clearly defined or conceptualized”. This is an important point that should help to provoke some caution about over-emphasising the ethnic identities that appear so natural today. The naturalisation of ethnic affinities and

⁵⁴ The best guess, as noted earlier, is that the number of Jinghpaw in the Kachin State is significantly higher. My working estimate is more like 750,000, but this cannot be substantiated through official sources.

⁵⁵ The Kachin State Cultural Museum is between Thakhin Nephay and Zajun Streets in the northern portion of Myitkyina. It is surrounded by other government installations: Myanmar Post and Telecommunication, Irrigation Department, Sports Ground, Tennis Club, and the Special Branch Police office.

cohorts has been a relatively recent change in Burma and one that has been intimately linked to both colonial and post-colonial nation-state-building projects.

Conclusion

This survey of conditions in the China, India and Burma borderlands shows that local politics have often been defined by strong ideas about memory, territory, society and ethnicity. These ideas remain relevant to the organisation of life for the local elites. In my reading and research, I have found that the mixing and melding of specific ethnic and national categories is so pronounced that benefit may come from approaches to the borderlands that begin not with ethnic affiliations but with explorations of political and economic relationships. The “fact” that specific individuals refer to themselves (or others) as Kachin, Shan, Naga, Assamese or Chinese, etc., is only one part of the way the way that local elites hold their position in society and in the negotiation of political conditions.⁵⁶

Notwithstanding their contrasting approaches to ethnic identity, governing the borderlands has been a challenge for all three countries and there remain dissenting voices in each. Such dissent, whether voiced openly, or only ever in private conversations, is one consequence of the imposition of distant authority. Resistance to that authority, and its manifestations in the central government political systems, has taken various forms. Many now see the borderlands as a potential economic hub and do not want to imperil these opportunities for

⁵⁶ Lintner (1994: 63) describes some of those competing claims in useful detail when he suggests that compared to the linguistic divisions of the Kachin (Lisu, Rawang, etc.), “far more important bonds were formed by an intricate system of clans which cut across tribal barriers. Every Kachin belonged to one of five original families: Marip, Maran, Lahpai, N'Hkum and Lattaw. In one way or another, these clans were related in an all-embracing kinship network, the complexities of which were an anthropologist's nightmare. In practice, however, this system bound together a remarkably tight-knit society”.

wealth creation by challenging the central governments and their nation-states. Others remain more defiant.

The comparative dimensions of such defiance are a topic that I return to later in this dissertation but at this point I should clarify how the three different nation-states have managed the potential for fragmentation. In the case of China it has proven difficult for demographically weak ethnic minorities to challenge the central government. In most cases they have opted against any open confrontation and have instead embraced opportunities, especially during the country's recent economic transformation, to become even more ostentatiously "Chinese". The situation in India is complicated by the diversity of resistance movements that have contested government control. Nonetheless the general pattern has seen weaker sub-national populations allying themselves with government power and the economic opportunities which often follow. In northern Burma the borderlands continue to experience periods of conflict and the lack of final resolution to the longstanding ethnic civil wars determines that the risks of fragmentation will continue to preoccupy the Myanmar government. Their approach to governing this region is made more difficult by the substantial threats that they face. Organising a way of controlling these potentially unruly areas is a key priority.

As such, in the following three chapters I describe the politics of the borderlands through the activities of local elites and the nodes of control that the central governments maintain. Each chapter provides clarification of the extent of nation-state power and the strategies, symbolic and material, that can be used to cooperate with or resist its claims. In the borderlands,

competing claims cannot be examined without reference to the broader spatial contexts in which they are made. In fact, part of the justification for the multi-sited research I have undertaken is that different political systems have been cultivated in the borderlands since China, India and Burma gained their independence in the late 1940s. The relative merits of their different national political approaches are not for me to judge. However, as the next chapters of this dissertation explore, there are specific spatial and political lessons that can be drawn from the ways that these different approaches have been deployed in the borderlands environment.

Chapter 4: Local elites in the borderlands

The blurring of wealth and power

Among the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw peoples who live in this region, there are intermediaries and collaborators who have forged crucial roles in the political economy, formal and informal, of the borderlands. They are not a unified block and, indeed, different kinds of people and groups are captured by the phrase local elites. Consequently, there is potential for this formulation to be overwhelmed by the diversity of Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw that are brought together in a single category. One justification for this categorical ambiguity is that the local elites are, as I have already discussed, inclined to take advantage of blurred characterisations. Criminality, politics and business all merge in elite borderlands society and it is, for that reason, impractical to neatly demarcate the criminals, politicians and businesspeople, not to mention the other primary types represented among them. What defines them, in my analysis, is their relationship to borderlands development and to the central governments that seek to assert nodular control. Those relationships are heavily related to the ongoing negotiation of spatial control, including in festival contexts. But the difficulty for any neat categorisation of local elites returns, in the end, to the distinguishing features of the nodes of control: ambiguity, collaboration and central government agendas. The blurring of roles requires awareness of the complementary and contradictory portfolios of activities that preoccupy members of the local elites.

Their portfolios of activities, and the unclear lines between their different ambitions or responsibilities, must be examined in the broadest possible way. In northern Burma, for

instance, members of the elite are army officers such as KIO/A First Vice-President Lieutenant General Gauri Zau Seng, religious figures like ceasefire negotiator Rev. Dr Lahtaw Saboi Jum, and politicians including KIO General Secretary Dr Lahkyen La Ja and former Vice-President No. 2 Dr Manam Tu Ja. But in each of these cases the elite figures are also businessmen, collaborators and strategists. Some other members of the elite may be just as readily characterised as smugglers, gangsters or rebels. Popular perceptions of such figures also play a key role in shaping their identities; the prevailing notion that wealth and power in northern Burma must emerge from the narcotics business is one such perception (see Bhat, 2005, for instance). However, what I have found is that among the local elite it is their range of activities, and the blurring between their roles, which contributes to their success and, particularly, their ability to interact with the government's nodes of control. Crucial to the service of these various roles is the fact that the nodes of control can allow situations where public postures and private activities do not necessarily align.

Crucially, status as a member of the local elite is not defined by inherited rank. The rapid social, economic and political changes that I have described in Chapter 3 have led to a situation where the development elites assimilate new members and where old elite figures find themselves vulnerable to changing conditions. In these circumstances, one way to clarify who among them is most significant is to identify their links to the nodes of control and to the organisation and performance of Manau festivals. On both of those criteria one specific group among the local elites is preeminent and, as a result, I have chosen to focus on them in this dissertation. These are the *Sutdu*, who are arguably the most flexible and adaptable of the

local elites in the borderlands. Manau offer opportunities for them to negotiate about space in ways that permit the assertion of Jinghpaw identity. These are expensive and time-consuming events. Why do the *Sutdu* support them? One reason is that public events can generate access and popularity from across the political spectrum. At a Manau, for instance, a *Sutdu* can meet with Myanmar military officers, ethnic army commanders and Chinese tycoons, while also presenting a benevolent and generous face to non-elite festival attendees. As a subject of study this small group of elite men offer certain advantages because they are arguably emblematic of the wider local elite and its culture of negotiation, compromise and collaboration. This is the elite culture that has tended to emerge at the nodes of control where outright conflict and contestation is considered undesirable. For these reasons, the *Sutdu* have become the main focus of Chapter 4 and key examples for the dissertation as a whole.

Sutdu emerged in the borderlands after the KIO/A finalised its ceasefire with the Myanmar military government in 1993. In 1994 a committee of Jinghpaw elders “invented” the term *Sutdu*. Before the mid-1990s the term was not in use, although its component parts both have long histories. Crucially, just like the “invented traditions” described in Chapter 3, it resonates with older forms of address, hierarchy and honour. In the Jinghpaw language “*Sut*” has connotations of wealth, prosperity and fertility.⁵⁷ A “rich man” has, as such, long been known as a “*Sut lu ai wa*” (as described in Enriquez, 1919: 78). Similarly “*Sut Manau*” (as discussed in Chapter 5) is properly translated as “prosperity festival”. The other component

⁵⁷ Within the same family of words (Manam H pang, 2002: 324) are, in dictionary definitions, “Sut Manau...a great religious dance, held for the sake of obtaining wealth” and “sut hpungnung...wealth, abundance, affluence.” The term *Sut* has specific relevance to my study in other ways. In her analysis of “Kachin identity” Sadan explains that “Manau-holding chiefs claimed an exclusive relationship with Madai, a spirit of great wealth who could bestow sut (wealth and fertility) on those who made offerings” (2005: 216). My effort to probe contemporary understandings of that wealth and fertility in the context of spatial control and symbolic politics make up parts of Chapters 5 and 6.

of *Sutdu*, “*Du*” (the same as the traditional chiefly title “*Duwa*”), is directly associated with power, leadership and chieftainship (Duwa La Win Le, n.d.), usually of an inherited type (Maran Brang Di, 2004). In an early Jinghpaw language book “*Duwa*” is translated as “ruler” (Hertz, 1935: 42). When the two concepts are combined the term *Sutdu* means tycoon. The two most senior figures in this social category, *Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng* and *Sutdu Bawmwang La Raw* who are both discussed later in this chapter, are sometimes even referred to as *Sutdu Kaba* (grand *Sutdu*).

Defined by their high status and wealth, *Sutdu* have become public figures and, as such, there are a range of different sources that can be consulted when trying to understand them. News reports and other more ephemeral materials offer a starting point. There are also the many publications that are produced in conjunction with Manau festivals and other events that tend to reference *Sutdu* involvement. Their high profiles also mean that many *Sutdu* can be observed closely at public events, such as Manau. Some of my closest interactions with these members of the local elite have occurred in such settings. Conversations with *Sutdu* themselves, but also with their acquaintances and with anyone else who knows about them, have served to help clarify their personal histories and their current roles. I found that *Sutdu*, as individuals looking to contribute to their societies and to the expansion of local commercial power, have been quite open about some of their activities. The original evidence presented in this chapter is a result of that relative open-ness. Other social scientists have only ever mentioned the *Sutdu* in passing but as examples of local wealth and power, defined by a vernacular concept of status, they are clearly an emerging group for scholarly attention.

Sutdu: Wealth and power

Overall only a small number of people are referred to by the Jinghpaw honorific *Sutdu*. In this context the representativeness of any single *Sutdu* is open to some interrogation. Some of the few who regularly merit the title are: *Sutdu N'sang Tu Awng*, of the N'mai Hka Drinking Water Company; *Sutdu Lumyang Bum Yun* of the Jinghpaw Academy Company; *Sutdu Duwa Hka Mai Tang*, owner of the Sea Sun Stars Company; and *Sutdu La Wa Zawng Hkawng* who was formerly a major shareholder of the KIO aligned Buga Company. Others who have also recently been identified with *Sutdu* status are *Lajawn Nang Seng*, *Salaw Tu Mai*, *Nhkum Naw Tawng*, *Ah Dang*, and *Dawshi Yaw (Yo) Ba*. There are few others who even inconsistently merit the title. In the case of the major figures their names are rarely written, or uttered in formal settings, without reference to their *Sutdu* rank. These high status individuals all share some common characteristics; even though the small number of *Sutdu* described in detail in this chapter are probably the most exceptional of their type. *Sutdu* are all involved in significant commercial activities. While they may also play other roles as political, economic, cultural or (occasionally) religious leaders a core component of their public personality derives from their capacity to create wealth: *Sut*.

It must be stressed that the *Sutdu* are not honoured for their membership of the traditional Jinghpaw elite. *Sutdu* is a new title; an honorific conferred by acclamation on that portion of the local elite who have helped turn the current ceasefire stalemate with the Myanmar government into a prolonged economic boom.⁵⁸ The title is bestowed by ethnic peers in a

⁵⁸ Nonetheless, not all *Sutdu* live in the borderlands of China, India and Burma. I am, for instance, aware that in Japan there are a small number of expatriate *Sutdu*: *Sutdu Yiknang Ze Lum*, *Sutdu Reawn Hkun* and *Sutdu Hkyet Roi Htoi*.

system that contrasts quite starkly with what Sturgeon (2004) has explained of a process where Akha village headmen can become border chiefs in Thailand and China. In that process it is only with the endorsement of the respective central governments that chiefly positions are made possible. Nobody in the Myanmar government has formalised the *Sutdu* status of particular individuals and instead I have heard the process of becoming a *Sutdu* described as an evolutionary and iterative one. For example, a modestly successful jade trader may start to win bigger contracts and manage more substantial deals. At first his status as a *Sutdu* will be very tentative, with only sporadic endorsements from his close colleagues. However, over time, and with increasing commercial accomplishment, such an anonymous and untitled figure can become a *Sutdu*.

For the *Sutdu*, such publicly acknowledged economic prowess leads to social and political status. In almost all cases their initial fortunes have been accumulated through jade mining.⁵⁹ Some *Sutdu* also control substantial timber, gold, agriculture or property interests.⁶⁰ This accumulation has occurred under circumstances where “[a]ll land...is owned by the state; it is illegal to sell or transfer land (although in practice [this] is quite common, mostly unofficially)” (Woods, 2010: 8). With their wealth, the *Sutdu* are now key personalities in the local politics of the borderlands. They are tolerated by the Myanmar authorities, we can only assume, because they are what Blum (2001: 117), in the context of Yunnan, referred to as a “prosperous, nonthreatening and exoticized other”. Seekins (2006: 238) asserts that since the

⁵⁹ This contrasts with the situation explained by von Fürer-Haimendorf in northeast India (1980: 69) who showed that “[t]he major sources of the earnings of Apa Tanis engaged in business deals are certainly government contracts”.

⁶⁰ There is an occasional assertion that the KIO/A and its business supporters are heavily involved in the drug trade (Narahari, 2002: 22). I have not seen evidence to substantiate this claim.

ceasefires “the price” of economic change “has been environmental spoilage and social problems caused by rampant commercialization and the increased influence of the central government”. However that rampant commercialisation and increased government influence has not always been to the immediate detriment of certain individuals and groups among the Jinghpaw elite.

The best way of illustrating the relationship between the general category of local elites and the prevailing system of spatial control is to begin by introducing the most prominent *Sutdu* currently operating in northern Burma. His name is Yup Zau Hkawng and after a rapid rise through the ranks of the development elite he is now the chairman of a powerful umbrella conglomerate, Jadeland Myanmar Company Limited, which was established in 1992. He is exceptional in various ways and is currently considered the most successful *Sutdu* in economic and political terms. One report states that “Jadeland’s flamboyant owner Yup Zau Hkawng [is] widely believed to be the richest man in Kachin State” (Global Witness, 2009: 76). In some recent sources (Myitkyina Manau Komiti, 2008: 1), and even in verbal references to him, he has now outgrown the *Sutdu* honorific and is given the even grander, and unique, title of *Majoi Gintawng*. He speaks, in Jinghpaw, of “*anhthe wunpawng*” and “*anhthe Jingphaw*” (“our community”), dressed, as he often is, in Jinghpaw attire. Ashley South describes Yup Zau Hkawng as a “Kachin entrepreneur (and avowed nationalist)” (2008: 243n24). That parenthetical label is crucial to his self-perception and public-perception because over the past decade Yup Zau Hkawng has become the most “famous” *Sutdu*, the key sponsor of Jinghpaw cultural events, and a major contributor to the success of

the Myanmar government's nodes of control.⁶¹ He is, as such, impeccably well-connected and is the key patron of Myitkyina-based Manau festivals. Yup Zau Hkawng is Baptist but retains, like many other Jinghpaw, an affinity for traditional rites, including Manau. At those festivals he enjoys the most powerful organising roles through which he effectively deploys Jinghpaw symbolic authority to further his economic and development activities.

His material and political success is the result of strong links to KIO/A and Chinese business partners and similarly robust connections with the Myanmar government authorities. In one article Yup Zau Hkawng is described as “an influential businessman with close connections to some of the KIO leadership as well as the SPDC” (Moncreif and Myat, 2001). According to Sadan, in the years since he became the preeminent *Sutdu* “the government was increasingly able to manipulate Yup Zau Hkawng as they progressively gained control of the jade mines that were the source of his wealth” (2005: 237-238). More recently Yup Zau Hkawng has become very closely aligned with senior members of the Myanmar government. He has been personally recognised by Senior General Than Shwe and, on 4 January 2008, Myanmar Independence Day, one of Yup Zau Hkawng's key employees, U Tin Myint, the “Deputy Planning In Charge” of Jadeland Company was given a major government award.

Manipulation by the government is one of the hazards of the nodes of control and Yup Zau Hkawng has shown more than any other member of the Jinghpaw elite that he is prepared to maximise emerging opportunities. This requires collaboration with the Myanmar government's political agenda. While many Jinghpaw remained publicly and privately

⁶¹ Yup Zau Hkawng's reputation is examined more fully in Chapter 5. In the meantime it is worth noting that Haffenden (2005: 511), writing of Yunnan's elites in the Qing dynasty, reflects that “[p]rovincial landlords and other businessmen had earned themselves an age-old reputation for being nefarious profiteers”.

sceptical of the government's effort to introduce a military-dominated constitutional system, Yup Zau Hkawng has publicly embraced this agenda. In 2004, at a crucial moment just before the resumption of the Myanmar government's stalled National Convention, he was part of an elite party that waved off the Jinghpaw delegates (*Padang Shiga*, 2004: 14). His support for Myanmar government activities—especially the National Convention—has drawn criticism from the Kachin National Organisation. It is funded by Sutdu Bawmwang La Raw who accuses him of being merely “a Kachin businessman who appointed himself as a Kachin culture leader [who] is actually a Kachin businessman just [trying] to protect his business interest” (KNO, 2006). Such criticisms are common among those who would prefer to see *Sutdu* take a more aggressive anti-government stance. For Yup Zau Hkawng, at least, any public rebuttal of government policies would imperil his close relationships with senior Myanmar government figures. He has enjoyed ties to the former Northern Commander, Lieutenant General Ohn Myint, and the incumbent Commander, Major General Soe Win, and is also widely rumoured to have been close to another previous Northern Commander who left his post under allegations of widespread corruption.⁶²

As a result of these close ties there are many questions about “mainstream” Jinghpaw acceptance of Yup Zau Hkawng's activities. Like other members of local development elites in Burma he is not elected to his position of power and status and continues to enjoy his current position through intricate patronage relations. Unfortunately, the difficulties of

⁶² As an aside, in early 2008 it was reported (KNG, 2008b) that then Major General Ohn Myint's timber-trading son, Ko Kyaw Thura (Ko Pauk), was making preparations to build an international standard airport in Myitkyina. The former Northern Commanders' relatives have also been accused of taking advantage of their positions for business success (The Irrawaddy, 2008).

collating opinions from diverse sources in the Kachin State make it almost impossible to usefully generalise about his reception among the “mainstream”. I have heard many opinions about Yup Zau Hkawng’s activities, covering a full spectrum of views, but I am not in a position to judge which of these opinions are most common. Some refer to him respectfully as “the king” or as “the great *Sutdu*”. Others lament his intimate ties to Burma’s “blood money”. Whatever the truth, he is a public figure of much wealth and power, and the most recognisable *Sutdu* in the borderlands.

Making Sut in the borderlands

Yup Zau Hkawng and other members of the local elite in northern Burma use their positions to extract, control and market valuable resources such as jade, teak and gold.⁶³ Over the past fifteen to twenty years, the ceasefire machinations that have opened new elite negotiations in the Kachin State have been founded on a realisation that collaboration between Jinghpaw and Myanmar interests can, at least for a time, be useful and profitable.⁶⁴ This is the foundation of the government’s nodes of control. It also points to the real economic interests which are so crucial to the ongoing use of nodes of control. The versatility of *Sutdu* like Yup Zau Hkawng sees business occurring between and across any stated political dichotomies and across the nation-state boundaries too.

⁶³ Unfortunately it has proven impossible for me to quantify the financial resources of Yup Zau Hkawng’s Jadeland Myanmar Company or the other major businesses in the borderlands. It is, however, possible to speculate on their wealth through the analysis of their observed expenditure. Their expensive vehicles, luxurious residences and opulent feasting habits give some idea about the financial resources at their disposal. The education of elite children, often in Yangon’s top private schools, in Singapore or in the West, is another strong signal of their financial resources.

⁶⁴ I remain cautious about any assertion of the anticipated longevity of the current ceasefire arrangements. In August 2009 the Kokang militia in northern Shan State, who had enjoyed a ceasefire since 1989, were attacked by the Myanmar army and, in a matter of days, their forces capitulated. The KIO/A was, when this dissertation was printed in May 2010, actively preparing for a resumption of hostilities with the Myanmar government (see KNG, 2009a, for some relevant details).

Indeed it is in China that the nexus of governmental, commercial and cultural power has generated the most rapid transformation of borderland society. Dependent on resources from northern Burma, the economy of western Yunnan is now orientated towards the extraction of cross-border resources (such as teak and jade) and the consolidation of market influence for Chinese manufactured goods (see for details Siriphon, 2005). Chinese border towns benefit from the opportunities to trade with Burma while also enjoying access to the rest of the Chinese economy. The distorting influence of the border (where, for instance, even basic Chinese consumer items can cost much more down the road in Burma) means that great profits can be made by those with opportunities to trade. Northern Burma only has a small manufacturing sector but with the new wealth that has come from exporting natural resources there has been a surplus to spend on Chinese products (for a discussion of the early years of this process see Seekins, 1997: 529-530). The influx of Chinese traders to towns such as Myitkyina and Bhamo has brought sophisticated goods to northern Burma for the first time. Technologies of various types, including communication and computing facilities, are now more widely available. Essential equipment and fuel is also often sourced in China because Burma's supplies are more sporadic and are usually not produced to China's high standards. But what the commercial involvement of the Chinese hides is that there are many more Chinese than Burmese who can afford to buy any of these products.

Under these conditions, loyalty to the nation-state, affinity for sub-national political aspirations and awareness of trans-regional ethnic links can all merge in a blend of personal, political and economic purpose. To illustrate this point, the presence of *Sutdu* at cultural

events usually heralds their heavy financial and social involvement through donations or other patronage. On occasion, *Sutdu* will fund both the government and non-government components of a cultural program, and ensure that collaboration and interaction remain possible. Access to wealth, to the *Sut* that defines the *Sutdu*, ensures that they are welcome guests at most formal occasions, eagerly courted by Christian pastors, Myanmar military officers and ordinary villagers alike. Their involvement in major commercial transactions seemingly comforts the armies that have signed ceasefires with the Myanmar authorities.

Given these conditions it is the *Sutdu* who have manoeuvred most successfully to fill the spaces between the KIO/A (and its breakaway factions) and the central government nodes of control.⁶⁵ In many cases the *Sutdu* who operate lucrative mining and timber concessions are linked, like Yup Zau Hkawng, to political benefactors on all sides, and share their profits with the KIO/A or NDA-K (through levies) and also with the Myanmar government (through taxes and fees). According to Sanda (2008: 268) these “[c]ivilian entrepreneurs operate only with the blessing of the military regime, who form the elite in today's Burmese society living reasonably well and in comfort.” As part of their role, some *Sutdu* strategically exploit the rhetoric of peaceful collaboration, mutual benefit and the onwards march of “Myanmarisation” and “Union Spirit” (Farrelly, 2007: 46-47). From time-to-time they also emphasise their ethno-nationalist credentials within the shifting political terrain of ceasefire politics in the Kachin State.

⁶⁵ Of course, that space can expand and contract in sometimes unexpected ways. In 2007, during the crackdown on the widely heralded monastic protests, a *Sutdu* in Myitkyina, Sutdu Lumyang Bum Yun, was arrested by the local Military Affairs Security Unit for providing free drinking water to protestors (he owns a bottled water company). He was later released but his position in the Kachin State has deteriorated since. The Kachin News Group (KNG, 2007b) reported his case at the time.

To maximise their opportunities for profit, all members of the local elites, but particularly the prominent *Sutdu*, exploit their trade and social links with China. On the one hand these connections help to facilitate access to the economy of northern Burma for Chinese interests. On the other hand, for *Sutdu*-owned businesses to operate in the Kachin State on any scale requires trucks and other vehicles, and, in almost all cases, substantial heavy machinery. Chinese entrepreneurs supply this much needed technology and equipment for reciprocal opportunities to share the harvest of jade, gold, rubies and timber from the Kachin State. This reciprocation now sees a number of prominent Han Chinese businessmen active in Jinghpaw and Jingpo areas of Burma and China but not, as far as I know, across the border in Singpho parts of northeast India. They include Lau Ying, from Yunnan, and Leng Wun, who is ethnic Chinese but from Burma. The Hung Ki and Hung Hta Companies (both from China) are, it should also be noted, major investors in the Kachin State and are partners in many of the commercial arrangements highlighted in this chapter. Chinese influence and economic power is part of what helps support the *Sutdu* and their success.

There are now parts of the Kachin State, particularly nearest to the Chinese border in places such as the KIO/A headquarters at Laiza, where Burmese language competency is far less useful than knowledge of Chinese (for some details see Khun Sam, 2005). According to Gray (2004), “some frontier areas of Myanmar could easily be mistaken for China, with only the yuan currency and Chinese language in use”. The implications of this Chinese economic and cultural expansion are many and they have yet to be closely studied. The best stocked supermarket in Myitkyina (which closed in 2007) took both Burmese *Kyat* and Chinese *Yuan*. In Laiza, right on the border between Burma and China, the major supermarket only accepts

Yuan. The best way for the Jinghpaw elites of the Kachin State to get hold of large quantities of *Yuan* is to be involved in the jade or timber industries or in cross-border trade. As a relatively “hard” currency the *Yuan* is more stable, and considerably more desirable, than the *Kyat*.⁶⁶

So members of northern Burma’s *Sutdu* development elite rely, for reasons of geographical limitation as much as for reasons of commercial preference, on engaging in trade with partners near and far. Such trade in the borderlands region has occurred “since time immemorial” (Mibang, 2002: 43; Sebastian K.O., 2002: 81; and Dutta and Jha, 2002: 61) and some groups, but not traditionally the Jinghpaw, are recognised as “expert traders” (Kumar, 2002: 50). Over the past decade economic conditions have necessitated an even more sustained trading engagement, particularly with the very accessible commercial entities that have prospered on the Chinese side of the border. These businesses have sought to consolidate links with well-connected commercial partners. The big jade miners in Burma all have substantial links to Chinese companies (People's Daily, 2004).

Part of the Chinese approach to the borderlands is to find partners like the *Sutdu* who offer connections and a degree of protection against local political problems. The domestic market inside Burma is so small that export-oriented activities have become the dominant source of income. The timber and jade that are extracted from the Kachin State are sold predominately to Chinese companies. For the timber trade, in particular, export markets beyond China have

⁶⁶ The Myanmar government also seeks to limit opportunities for its citizens to hold foreign currency. For many years, restrictions were supported by enforcing the use of government issued “Foreign Exchange Certificates” rather than United States dollars. Even today, opportunities to purchase international currency are eagerly embraced by small businesspeople without ready or legal access to foreign exchange.

proven particularly vital (see for details Global Witness, 2009). China's recent prosperity has also created vast markets for both commodities; *Sutdu* in the borderlands entertain a steady stream of Chinese visitors and potential business partners. The ability to speak Chinese is highly regarded and major companies in northern Burma have retained Chinese-speaking staff to deal with these Chinese links. Most of the added value in this trade occurs outside northern Burma, even though local production costs are relatively modest (for extravagant details see Dews, 1993: 47).

But the local skills deficit is more than compensated by the equipment, expertise and labour from China. These Chinese inputs support large-scale commercial and construction activities in northern Burma. The dam that is being constructed at Myitsone, at the confluence where the Ayeyarwady River officially begins, is a case in point. Thousands of Chinese workers, perhaps as many as 15,000, have been relocated to the construction site. Skilled labour is difficult to find in Burma and so it is sensible to look across the border to China for willing and disciplined workers. Many of the road construction projects which have preoccupied members of the Jinghpaw development elite have also benefited from large numbers of Chinese labourers. The reason for their employment is, according to a young man in Myitkyina, quite simple: "they work hard and they don't complain".

Chinese entrepreneurs in the borderlands enjoy a similarly pragmatic reputation. While I never managed to understand the full extent of their savvy and effectiveness, during my periods of field research and then in the years that I have spent reading about this region two inter-locking approaches became apparent. First, members of the local elite in China

capitalise on their position next to Burma by invoking the Chinese system and its authority. From the perspective of northern Burma the Chinese economy, and its multilayered political system, are dauntingly complex. The official language of China is one barrier for many trading aspirants; but there are other regulatory, cultural and political hurdles that must also be negotiated. So opportunities to partner with Chinese firms that are positioned to generate business and provide protection are considered attractive. Chinese entrepreneurs can cultivate ties that provide them with the raw materials, particularly jade and timber, which they can then sell to the sophisticated markets in eastern China. Second, they seek to provide the assistance and advice that the Kachin State needs to foster its “development”. Chinese engineering and other technical expertise is regularly on show. Road, dam, bridge and port construction activities are usually supported by at least some Chinese technical expertise.

When explaining the role of elites from the Chinese side of the border it is important to consider just how strong their economy is in comparison to Burma, or to northeast India. Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Yunnan is around \$2000, this makes it one of the poorest parts of China. While economic data for Burma is notoriously unreliable, the United States government estimates that Burma’s per capita GDP is \$469 (State Department, 2010).⁶⁷ The Indian Government generates more reliable estimates for areas of its own country. In 2008, GDP per capita in Arunachal Pradesh was \$454 and in Assam it was \$476 (Government of India, 2008). The economic influence of China across the borderlands is best explained in this context. Chinese ambitions to extract natural resources from northern Burma serve its own purposes but they also help to support the work of northern Burma’s

⁶⁷ Based on my experience asking workers in Burma about their daily and monthly incomes this figure is realistic. Many ordinary labourers and workers are paid from 1000 to 3000 *Kyat* per day. At current prices this is roughly \$1-3 per day.

Sutdu. Even a relatively poor part of China is very wealthy by the standards of the borderlands.

Jade mine politics

Because of the income to be earned from the Chinese export market, achieving the rank of *Sutdu* generally requires some exposure to the jade industry.⁶⁸ The world's largest jade reserves are in the western part of the Kachin State, near Hpakant,⁶⁹ 159 kilometres northwest of Myitkyina, and "[t]oday, virtually all top-quality jadeite is produced from these mines" (Hughes, n.d.). Jade is sometimes described as "the world's most precious stone" and the highest quality examples of the finest "Imperial Green Jade" all come from northern Burma. Reliable figures on the quantity of jade mined in northern Burma, the share of revenue between the Myanmar government and other miners, and the total profit are unavailable, but there is no question that jade mining is a lucrative component of the Kachin State economy. Whatever their final share of the profits there is a strong indication that the wealth produced by the mines is a significant earner for most *Sutdu*.

Indeed, the local development elites have become comfortable funding their diverse activities based on the profits from the jade mines. Some history helps to clarify how this has occurred. According to Seekins (2006: 235) "[a]fter the cease-fire, the State Peace and Development Council gained control of the lucrative jadeite mines at Hpakant, leaving the KIA/KIO short

⁶⁸ The gems mined in northern Burma are jadeite which should not be confused with what is sometimes called "Chinese jade" or nephrite. Jadeite is a significantly more valuable commodity.

⁶⁹ "The world's largest jadeite jade boulder" was recovered in this area. It reputedly weighs approximately 3 tons. It is at the Myanmar Gems Museum in Yangon. The Museum also claims the "[w]orld's largest rough ruby" and "world's largest star sapphire".

of revenues”. But the KIO/A remains a key player in the jade market even as it has lost sole control of the jade mines. There is an official KIO/A presence at Hpakant and many of the most important jade miners have strong links to it. Hpakant has a reputation as a dangerous town and in conversations with well-informed Jinghpaw sources it is common to hear horror stories about drugs, death and violence. Estimates for the number of miners range up to half a million, drawn from all corners of Burma, and the region beyond. Lintner (2002: 268) describes how the mines have been appropriated by the Myanmar military under the ceasefire:

...in 1993-94, the government took over the jade mines...mining rights in the region are subcontracted to private entrepreneurs by the military-controlled Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings, which collects duties on the trade.

Seekins (2006: 208) describes the conditions:

Few foreigners have seen the mine; gemstones are a state monopoly, and access is tightly controlled by the Tatmadaw [Myanmar Defence Forces]. As many as half a million desperately poor miners work there under harsh conditions, drawn by the hope of making their fortune. Described by one journalist as “Burma's black heart,” Hpakant's mostly male population suffers high rates of heroin addiction and AIDS.

There are no easy ways to understand how a place like Hpakant works in practice. It is like much in Burma, hidden away from public view, behind checkpoints and armed guards, and difficult for even the most intrepid researcher to access.

Two outsiders who have seen the mine up close are journalists Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark. Their study of the mine showed how jadeite profits supported the Myanmar Army and the KIO/A (2001: 271). In their (2001: 281) narrative:

Within nineteen months of procuring a cease-fire from the KIA, the SLORC⁷⁰ overran its territory, transforming Myitkyina, Kamaing, Mogaung and Bhamo into garrison towns for tens of thousands of troops, trampling the terms of the 1994 cease-fire. The generals in Rangoon were clearly intent on becoming Burma's new Lords of the Mines. On the regime's tourist map of Burma, the Kachin Hills were now covered by a big, black blot. The mines of Hpakant, it was rumoured, were encircled by thousands of soldiers, located into a high-security zone, where troops had been issued orders to shoot on sight.

As Levy and Scott-Clark found, travelling to Hpakant is difficult. It is distant from the comparative comforts of Myitkyina (Lasi Bawk Wa, 2001: 42, 99). Others (such as Tin Maung Than, 2003) are more poetic:

... the Jade Land is blessed with enchanting landscape and the rich natural resources. Like all the brethren of the Union, [the Kachin] do love the nation, and have always joined forces in driving out the enemies of the State and in safeguarding the nation in times of emergency. Snow-capped mountains stand as a symbolic feature of their land which is called Kachin State.

In more blunt terms, one jade catalogue describes the area as the “world's most significant jadeite tract...among some of the most inaccessible forested terrain” (Holmes, 2005: 26).

⁷⁰ The initial name of the military junta that ruled Myanmar from 1988 was the State Law and Order Restoration Council. In 1997 that name was abolished and a new body, the State Peace and Development Council, was formed.

Even though the control of the mines has become more heavily contested since the ceasefires, members of the Jinghpaw development elite retain major stakes at Hpakant. The jade that is mined has helped to sustain their economic ambitions through many difficult years (Kachin Post, 2004a; Zaw Win Naing, 1999). Even today they are one of the only means, apart from the timber trade, through which *Sutdu* in the Kachin State can make money. As one example of the wealth that can come from mining jade it is worth highlighting how Sutdu Bawmwang La Raw, a politically active former jade trader who is a British resident, keeps residences in northern Thailand's Chiang Mai province and near London. With his jade fortune, "Bawmwang La Raw...claims to have bankrolled the KIO to the tune of \$US3.6 million" (Naw Seng, 2004a). In one other donation he built a new church in Chiang Mai, the Wunpawng Kachin Christian Church, with more than \$US75,000 of his own money (Network Media Group, 2004).

The complexities of local development

The various ways of making *sut* are part of a complex set of economic activities. In the borderlands the forests of northern Burma are another attractive commercial proposition. They are, just like the jade mines, controlled by an overlapping set of Jinghpaw *Sutdu* and Myanmar government interests. Seeking legitimacy is crucial to the survival of both the nation-states and the elite societies on which I focus. Rizvi (1995: 84) has outlined the way this happens:

Since authoritarian regimes lack popular legitimacy, they seek to compensate for their vulnerability and insecurity (domestic and external) through external alliances and assistance...Rapid and prestigious development...is crucial to their acquiring popular

acquiescence, to creating a network of collaborators and clients through the dispensation of patronage, to buying off the potential opposition...

In northern Burma the result has shocked environmental non-government organisations. One report calls it “forest plunder” (Talbot and Brown, 1998). After being shown hundreds of thousands of dollars of teak Levy and Scott-Clark reflect: “[t]rees, jadeite, people. Everything in Burma was a commodity” (2001: 338). In another report, titled “War on Kachin Forests,” John S. Moncreif and Htun Myat (2001) describe a multi-party project, exemplary of the way that development is negotiated, to build roads in Kachin State that was agreed with Yup Zau Hkawng in exchange for logging concessions.⁷¹ Such deals are common but can lead to complications when the Chinese companies demand steep returns on their investments (Pan Kachin Development Society and Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, 2004: 15). In that agreement, which went sour, the two major ceasefire groups (Burmese: *apyit ahkat yat se yei ahpwe*), the KIO/A and the NDA-K, had signed a deal with the Myanmar government and a Chinese construction company.

According to the report, “the middleman in the deal is the Kachin Jadeland company, owned by Kachin businessmen Yup Zau Hkawng.” The roads from Myitkyina to the northern Kachin State, and from Myitkyina to Bhamo are both currently under construction and I have driven and walked sections of them. One report (Global Witness, 2003: 110) describes how this road construction has been made possible and dwells on the “mutually beneficial” relationships that Yup Zau Hkawng has forged. In exchange for the roads, the Myanmar

⁷¹ In northern Burma logging remains largely unregulated. Across the border in northeast India logging was banned by a 1996 Supreme Court verdict which “has greatly checked deforestation” (Choudhury, 2001: 96). However, according to one critical commentator, “the ban and its continuing operation have generated untold miseries” for poor communities in the region that rely on forest products for their livelihoods (Nongbri, 2001: 1893).

government granted Jadeland Myanmar Company logging concessions between the Mali Hka and the N'mai Hka rivers, the headwaters of the Ayeyarwady River. The Global Witness report speculates that the resulting project “is the most massive logging effort ever undertaken in Burma.” This report’s efforts to place the blame for “forest destruction” on Yup Zau Hkawng’s Jadeland Myanmar Company overlook a much more complex political dynamic.

Building roads facilitates further timber extraction but also provides the basic infrastructure for more widespread economic development in the Kachin State. Transport infrastructure has been late to arrive and even in Myitkyina the condition of most roads is poor. Private investment in road construction, like that supported by Yup Zau Hkawng, is a way of rapidly improving the linkages between the various Jinghpaw groups and the Singpho and Jingpo across the borders in India and China. So while timber and jade are the most common ways of making money it is road construction that has emerged as a key way of spending it, particularly in association with large timber extraction projects. A report by the Pan Kachin Development Society and Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (2004: 13) on the timber trade notes that “[a]s well as Laiza there are a number of other border crossing points where the timber is taken across to China: the Pangwa gate (check-point), Kambaiti gate, Hpimaw gate, Sa Ji gate, Sampai gate, Lrang Fang, Htaw Lang, Shi Chyang, Pa Wa Hku, La Kaing gate, Loi Ying Hai gate (Mai Ja Yang), and via the Hka Shang road and Lai Ying road (Mai Ja Yang and Loiye).” All of these export opportunities require transport infrastructure.

Across the borderlands discussed in this dissertation there are many trading points along the national frontiers. These are, of course, just the official conduits that exist between the three countries. Along the border between India and Burma there are currently few trade points. Between China and Burma there are many more, although the most substantial places where trade occurs are in the Shan State, further to the south, and not in the more northerly Kachin areas. There are, however, a number of points where the Kachin State ceasefire groups—the KIO/A and the NDA - K—have created trade points. At these frontiers uniformed soldiers, wearing their sub-national army uniforms on one side of the border, are watched, but not in any aggressive way, by Chinese People’s Liberation Army troops on the other. The mandate of the Myanmar government only stretches so far and, in places, it almost completely evaporates.⁷² A crucial way that the various national governments influence trade in the borderlands is through their acquiescence or resistance to local plans for infrastructure construction. From a trading perspective the most important infrastructure is transport-related. Without adequate roads, bridges, ports, railways and airports any efforts to establish stronger commercial links across the borderlands would falter. It is not coincidental that the infrastructure required for improving commercial opportunities maps closely to the governments’ nodes of control.

Even though there is strong government support for increased trade it would be a mistake to imply that commercial activity has only ever expanded. While trade was permitted in the post-Independence era until 1984 the opportunity for Burmese citizens to trade in India was

⁷² Nonetheless some ceasefire areas do retain a government presence. In 2003 I travelled across the southern Shan State to Special Region No. 4 which is controlled by the Eastern Shan State Army. Once I arrived in the capital of the region, Mong La, I was expected to report to the local Myanmar Immigration Office where all of my documents were checked. It was one indication that the Myanmar government keeps a close eye on activities in all Special Regions, even when their explicit control is, in other ways, quite limited.

then curtailed “following an upswing in the insurgent movement in the region whereby ultra outfits [such as the United Liberation Front of Asom] used this corridor as an escape route to Myanmar and China for training and arms purchase” (Sebastian K.O., 2002: 85). Trade at the India-Burma border was only “unofficially” resumed in 1999. This reopening marked the start of a tentative era of cross-border trade in this region. Sebastian K.O. continues by noting that:

According to the agreement reached by the local people the trade is to take place bi-monthly on every 15th and 30th of every month. If the dates fall on a Sunday it is to be anticipated by a day. Sunday is the day of religious obligation since most of the people in the region are Christians. Any person other than the indigenous people visiting the market is expected to get prior permission from the security personnel at the gate at Nampong. An average of 400 people visit the market from 10 villages.

Apparently the relations at the market are not as straightforward as may appear and there are complaints that “the Burmese have an advantage over Indian currency, as they have fixed their currency value higher than what it should be” (Sebastian K.O., 2002: 87). What other advantages can be cultivated under such systems of spatial control in the borderlands?

Sutdu at the nodes of control

The initial foundation of Yup Zau Hkawng’s wealth and influence is his close relationship with the KIO/A. From relatively modest beginnings—it is often repeated that he was born in a poor rural village, raised by a single mother and only schooled for four years—he has built the Kachin State’s most successful “development-oriented” business. In his youth, Yup Zau Hkawng apprenticed himself to some of the Kachin State’s most important businessmen but

has, according to one well-connected source, “now overtaken all of them.” Together the “Army and the Organisation”—a conglomerate often described in Jinghpaw as *Jinghpaw Wunpawng Shanglawt Hpyendap hte Hpung* (Naw Seng, 2002: 2)—provide backing for his activities in the Kachin State. Originally devoted to mining jade, his commercial interests have expanded under the ceasefire agreements to include logging, agriculture, tourism, jewellery and manufacturing. Jadeland Myanmar Company now even supports a “Hugawng Region Fish Breeding and Preservation Project”.⁷³ Under these conditions many of the development activities that are most desired by the KIO/A (new roads, property development and logging) are partially left to versatile *Sutdu* like Yup Zau Hkawng. Yup Zau Hkawng, and the few others like him, position themselves as brokers and collaborators for both sides of the conflict between the Myanmar government and the various local Jinghpaw groups.

According to one report “Jadeland...is the most prominent of the Kachin-owned companies involved in natural resource extraction in Kachin State” (Global Witness, 2005: 69). The biggest Myanmar government logging and mining concessions in recent years have been granted to Jadeland (Kachin Post, 2004b). Its subsidiary companies now include Jadeland Jewellery Co., Ltd, Jadeland Timber Group, Jadeland Heavy Machinery Group and Jadeland Travel & Tours. Jadeland is now “taking charge of regional development” by harnessing Chinese goodwill and using financial and technical resources from across the border to strengthen its position (2004b). According to another report “Chinese entrepreneurs are given individual attention by the chairman of Jadeland Company, Yup Zau Hkawng” (KNG, 2006). Yup Zau Hkawng, and others like him, rely heavily on Chinese support and the main exports

⁷³ The Hugawng Valley is in the northeast of the Kachin State and is one of the traditional heartland areas for Jinghpaw culture.

from his companies—jade and timber—go directly to Chinese markets.⁷⁴ Many Jadeland publications including business cards have Chinese and English text but usually no Burmese or Jinghpaw.

Yup Zau Hkawng is the most prolific road builder and development pioneer in the Kachin State. According to Taungdwin Bo Thein (2003: 7), a prominent Burmese language writer, “Sut Du Yup Zau Hkawng...is...taking part in the regional development tasks in a spirit of goodwill.” This work complements the other government and non-government organisations working at the “grass-roots” (Smith, 2006: 58) some of which he heavily patronises. Yup Zau Hkawng’s road building relies on “his own money and strength, with the result that he has been honoured [by Senior General Than Shwe] for his outstanding performance in the social field” (Taungdwin Bo Thein, 2003: 7). His activities undermine the assertion that “[a]lmost every infrastructure project in Myanmar is in the hands of Chinese commandos [sic]” (Nepram, 2002: 145).

Through harnessing Jadeland’s machinery and engineering knowledge, Yup Zau Hkawng has fostered a partnership with the KIO to build infrastructure across the Kachin State. They collaborate to build and protect “road and bridge construction projects” in Jinghpaw areas and the signboards marking their construction projects are ubiquitous outside Myitkyina. In 2007 there was a report of substantial government interference on one road built by Jadeland

⁷⁴ Close connections to China have other advantages; one example is communications technology. For the Jinghpaw elite Chinese mobile phones provide unregulated communications (the Myanmar system is expensive, unreliable and insecure). The personal staffs of Jinghpaw businessmen all carry both Chinese and Myanmar mobile phones. After the popular uprising of September and October 2007 the Myanmar authorities in the Kachin State made an effort to curtail the use of these Chinese phones. My understanding is that after a short-lived campaign which targeted some prominent families in Myitkyina and Bhamo little further action has been taken.

(Zunwa, 2007). I can confirm from personal experience of negotiating with intransigent Myanmar officials on the road in question that there can, as the report notes, be “very strong irritations.” So while Yup Zau Hkawng can build roads across the Kachin State, his investments then become part of the shifting political and economic configuration that the Myanmar authorities attempt to dominate.

Instead of waiting for outsiders to facilitate change Yup Zau Hkawng and his collaborators are fulfilling their “ethnic responsibilities,” as they see them, by providing benefits to their Jinghpaw ethnic kin through a complex negotiation that involves the Myanmar government, the KIO/A and Chinese businessmen (who the Jinghpaw call “*Miwa lauban*”, Chinese bosses: see KNG, 2006; 2007c).⁷⁵ Yup Zau Hkawng often says “roads are good for everyone” and he is not alone in this sentiment. Government pronouncements, from India (Gokhale, 2001), China (Maitra, 2003) and Myanmar (Jagan, 2002) have long proclaimed plans for new Trans-Asia roads, bridges and railway lines. On the ground in northern Burma these plans are a well-meaning fantasy. Such plans are decided so far from the realities of the local politics of the area that nobody I have ever talked to in the Kachin State, including road-building development elites, has ever even heard of these “foreign plans”.

Nonetheless, roads crisscrossing the Kachin State are currently under construction, or have been recently completed, under the auspices of the joint KIO and Jadeland venture.⁷⁶ In total,

⁷⁵ It is worth noting that the commercial acumen of the Chinese is a topic of standard conversation in northern Burma. It follows, in broad terms, the “spectacular flowering of culturalist explanation” (Yao, 2003: 52) that has been identified in other contexts. However, in India there seems to be less awareness of how important Chinese capital has become for many of the other countries around China’s long borders.

⁷⁶ Sometimes these deals do, however, fall through. The Myanmar junta-aligned Yuzana Company usurped a Jadeland contract to re-build parts of the Ledo Road in the far western part of the Kachin State. The reasons for

more than 500 kilometres of new and refurbished roads are under construction. Using imported Chinese machinery, Chinese labourers and the unique social gravitas of *ethnic* leadership, these roads and bridges are part of an unprecedented effort to use Jinghpaw development nous for the benefit of the Kachin State. They are funded by a triangular trade with China where jade and teak are sold for machinery, engineering know-how and, ultimately, infrastructure in return.

Another dimension of the *Sutdu* phenomenon is best illustrated by an example from my field research. On the new road funded by Yup Zau Hkawng between Myitkyina and Myitsone, at the confluence where the Ayeyarwady River officially begins, wet season travel can be hazardous. During a catastrophic flood in June 2006 part of the road was washed away. At the same time many village dwellings were destroyed by torrents flowing down the mountains. The impact of the disaster was compounded by the difficulty of accessing the site in the immediate aftermath. The major aid to the villagers came not from the Myanmar authorities or any international agency but instead it was Yup Zau Hkawng who sped to the affected areas to offer his assistance. Development in Burma is a contentious issue and there are some risks to this sort of initiative. According to the Karen Human Rights Group (2007: 3) “...the military regime holding power in Burma has sought to justify its continued control by appealing to the dual needs of security and prosperity”. Those dual needs are often captured in the “shibboleths” of “law” and “order”, “peace” and “development” (Lambrecht, 2004: 170). And according to the Karen Human Rights Group (2007: 6), “[w]hether initiated by the ruling SPDC or by external agencies, development programmes are inescapably

that failed construction contract are unclear. Some news reporting on that deal has been undertaken by the Kachin News Group (KNG, 2007d; 2007e).

political acts”. Any analysis of Yup Zau Hkawng’s efforts after this devastating flood should take this into account.

In response to the devastation, Yup Zau Hkawng sent Jadeland’s labourers, machinery and engineers to rebuild the road which was the villagers’ only link to the outside world. He also paid to rebuild the destroyed houses, reconstructed the crucial village bridge, mobilised and fed a large group of Myitkyina University students for the re-building effort, and ensured that villagers were compensated for their losses. The Myanmar government, for its part, provided a few bags of rice. Poignantly it is likely that the Kachin State’s Myanmar authorities *could* actually do very little as the machinery and expertise for such a large reconstruction effort was not at their immediate command. The village was too far from Myitkyina, their node of control. It was Yup Zau Hkawng who had access to earth moving equipment and to the social prestige that can facilitate a rapid response to such a calamity. The villagers later honoured Yup Zau Hkawng in a three hour ecumenical Christian service for his contribution to their village in its time of need. Villagers came from the surrounding area to meet him and receive further donations. No Myanmar government officials attended this event.

Aid-giving is, however, only a part of Yup Zau Hkawng’s *Sutdu* strategy. As a nationalist who believes in the strength of Jinghpaw culture and society, his activities also seek to build up group identity and pride, in contrast to the “Union Spirit” and “Myanmarisation” espoused by the central government authorities. But Yup Zau Hkawng has also demonstrated his ability to provide support to Myanmar government projects more directly. In the aftermath of May 2008’s Cyclone Nargis he donated “[a]bout 138 million Kyat (est.

\$US123,214)” to the “victims of the killer Cyclone Nargis in Irrawaddy River Delta in Southern Burma through the Burmese ruling junta”(KNG, 2008c). For the Myanmar authorities a relationship with the Jinghpaw elites serves many purposes.

For all of the elite figures discussed in this chapter, and particularly Yup Zau Hkawng, their personal activities cannot be removed from their key role in cultural life. These are matters discussed more fully in Chapters 5 and 6 but they deserve some attention here. Promoting the unity of the Jingpho, Singpho and Jinghpaw groups gives the elites both a high-standing among their own people and access to social and political resources that are best mobilised in cultural contexts. But simply promoting cultural life and investing in the pride of the community is not sufficient to become a *Sutdu*. In the following section I will outline the trajectories of two other elite figures, one who is a *Sutdu* and one who is not. This discussion will hopefully shed more light on the way that the category of *Sutdu* has been constructed and reaffirmed in the borderlands. It is quite clearly not enough to have access to substantial economic resources and to use them for social purposes.

Working outside nodes of control

While Yup Zau Hkawng collaborates with all sides of the Kachin State’s post-ceasefire politics, exiled *Sutdu* Bawmwang La Raw, the most important member of the Jinghpaw elite who lives outside northern Burma, is in a position to publicly oppose Myanmar rule. His regular public statements are eloquent and targeted at a system which he understands from bitter personal experience. Bawmwang La Raw has, after a career as a jade trader and political fixer, created a new life in exile where he is the President of the Kachin National

Organisation (*Jinghpaw Wunpawng Amyu Sha Hpung*) and agitates against the Myanmar military government.⁷⁷ He left Burma after a difficult period where he was detained and tortured by Myanmar government forces. Bawmwang La Raw's exposure to the deadliest parts of local political life means that he is well aware of the stakes involved. His Kachin National Organisation provides support to pro-democracy Jinghpaw causes. Over the years it has maintained an ambiguous stance towards the ceasefire that the KIO/A has endorsed. Regardless of the official policy, many rank-and-file members of the Kachin National Organisation voice their frustration with the ceasefire stalemate. Bawmwang La Raw has sometimes spoken critically about the need for the Jinghpaw to continue their struggle, with arms if necessary, to defeat their Myanmar government oppressors. Furthermore, to help maintain his revolutionary posture within the Jinghpaw cultural rubric, his role, wealth and position are all shrouded in mystique. He is, if nothing else, a polarising figure. As the founder and President of the Kachin National Organisation, Bawmwang La Raw supports the struggle for Jinghpaw rights and independence. He currently lives just outside London and is a British permanent resident, but has reportedly yet to obtain British citizenship.

Bawmwang La Raw joined the Kachin Independence Organisation in 1972 when he was 16 years old. His wealth was initially consolidated in the 1980s and early 1990s when he rose to become arguably the most important jade dealer in the history of the Kachin State. As a result of his dealings and, in particular, his close ties to some of the KIO/A's most senior leadership he amassed a substantial fortune. Whether he controls tens of millions or hundreds of millions in assets and jade is a point of speculation. Like Yup Zau Hkawng, he does not

⁷⁷ It also has an online store where Kachin National Organisation-branded merchandise—such as t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, mugs, magnets, clocks and teddy bears— is available. The outlet enthuses that “[t]he product you buy here will help to promote freedom, self-determination and democracy of the Kachin people”.

reveal the full extent of his assets even to close colleagues. I have, however, heard the possibility that he could become the first *Sutdu* billionaire discussed by a number of well-informed sources. Regardless of his actual worth, it is clear that Bawmwang La Raw has established himself as a major contributor to Jinghpaw political and economic life.

And whatever his personal wealth it is indisputable that he has spent a proportion of his fortune on efforts to undermine the Myanmar military government. He is, for a start, widely reported to have spent millions of his own funds on new weapons for the KIA (Naw Seng, 2004b). As a result of the ceasefire between the Myanmar generals and his colleagues in the KIA he has used these contributions to style himself as a representative of Jinghpaw interests in the wider world. And, just to muddy the waters, in 2004 he was accused of masterminding a failed coup against the then KIA leadership. The details of that incident are still not entirely clear but it was apparently generated by deep-seated resentment against the Myanmar government and its success in coopting parts of the KIA. Bawmwang La Raw continues on his mission irrespective of criticism or the disillusionment of others. In a rare interview (Mizzima, 2008a) he stated:

We want to say we should fire our guns again when the situation compels us to do so. The main thing is our policy. We can achieve our goal without fighting. We won't be in a passive position if the junta confronts us without listening to us. It is up to them (KIO), whether to fire their guns or not. The main thing is to resolve the crisis in our country.

He is an energetic individual who has played a major role in instigating increased anti-government activism both inside and outside the Kachin State. But away from politics,

his accumulative prowess puts him at the top of the *Sutdu* hierarchy and only Yup Zau Hkawng currently challenges him for supremacy. Even in exile Bawmwang La Raw is an influential part of the elite in the China, India and Burma borderlands.

He does not, however, have the type of political connections that allow him to operate in the nodes of control, such as Myitkyina, where Yup Zau Hkawng is at home. Bawmwang La Raw cannot preside over Manau festivals in the Kachin State and can, instead, only seek to patronise much less substantial events in neighbouring countries, such as India. He keeps Jinghpaw culture and pride alive but cannot claim to have the same conversations with the elites inside Burma who have ultimately determined his exiled fate. However, his capacity to create economic opportunities in a very difficult context ensures that, among the *Sutdu*, and even in comparison to Yup Zau Hkawng, he is a development heavyweight.

Non-Sutdu among the local elites

In contrast, the most senior figure in the Singpho elite, C.C. Singpho, is not recognised as a business leader. Like many other Singpho he takes his “tribal” surname into wider society. And, also like many others, it is this “official name” rather than his Singpho name (with a clan affiliation) that is used for all government business. It is an immediate and obvious marker of tribal affiliation. But that is where his similarity to almost all other Singpho ends. C.C. Singpho was until recently the Arunachal Pradesh government’s Minister for Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Health and Family Welfare. He is the chief patron of Singpho cultural outputs in the borderlands of Arunachal Pradesh and the Chief Advisor of

the Singpho Development Society (the most important non-government organisation in Singpho areas). During the research for this dissertation he was the most active political figure in the Arunachal Pradesh borderlands where the Singpho live. Because of the importance of government links his high status among the Singpho is largely undisputed. He is a major figure: sometimes called *Salang* (meaning “Mister”), sometimes called *Duwa* (“Chief”) and sometimes called *Shri* (“the honourable”). He is, however, never called *Sutdu*.

At a recent Singpho festival in Arunachal Pradesh C.C. Singpho gave a major speech that appealed to all Singpho to seize control of their lives:

Again now we started taking these drugs, the white powder. This too is spoiling us: mentally, physically, financially, from all sides. So on this special occasion I would request all the Singphos—Singpho chiefs...public leaders and youths—they should realise it. Because of this, today, we are far behind. If you compare with the other brothers and sisters of Arunachal Pradesh we have a very beautiful land, tremendously we have opportunities: horticulture, agriculture, everything. So we have to be very hard-working, we have to be very disciplined, then only, you know, we can compete with others. So this is my sincere request, prayer, to all my Singphos today present here. Though it is late on this special occasion I would like to convey sincere greetings and a happy and prosperous new year 2008 and also a happy Shapawng Yawng.⁷⁸

C.C. Singpho is imploring his Singpho “brothers and sisters” to become more hard-working, disciplined and competitive. These are the characteristics that, in northern Burma’s Kachin

⁷⁸ “Shapawng Yawng” is the name of the biggest Singpho Manau festival in north-east India, usually held in February. It is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

State, are publicly associated with the *Sutdu*. These are the sentiments of ambition and wealth generation that are very familiar to somebody like Yup Zau Hkawng. Obviously C.C. Singpho is also picking up on an anti-drugs discourse that is common to almost all parts of the borderlands (Batt, 2008; Chouduri, 2007; Pisi, 2008; Renard, 1996).

But even though his substantial personal wealth and government networks allow him a prominent role as a patron and patriarch, C.C. Singpho has not taken on a pre-eminent position through his own commercial endeavours. In his endorsement of a recent festival “souvenir” C.C. Singpho (2008) writes:

Festivals are an essential part of the socio-cultural life of the people. The Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh possess advanced culture in comparison with other tribal cultures of the State. The festival is being celebrated with ritualistic gaiety and true spirit of traditional values. Such celebrations not only assume significant importance for the up-coming generation with regard to age-old traditions of our Society but also provide an opportunity to uphold the cultural identity and spread peace and harmony among the communities.⁷⁹

Like the other very wealthy members of the Singpho in India he has, instead, risen to prominence by his proximity to and manipulation of government monies and influence. His capacity to make the appropriate statements about communal politics protects his status far more than any economic role. Although as Kantidas explains (2004: 19):

It is necessary here to sound a word of caution. In the present context, political symbolization seems to be the main issue. Symbolization at the political level can

⁷⁹ Curiously, C.C. Singpho follows, in this written extract, the conventions of some in the academic “State-Society” literature who capitalise both words.

create and maintain a sense of unity among the members of a community, but its benefits can create only a temporary group-cohesion. There is likelihood that it will crumble under the pressure of economically motivated self-interest. This more or less applies to almost all the tribal groups of North-East India.

This fits into a pattern of power politics in northeast India which sees “a few of such group aspire to have a better position, recognition, prestige and power in their own communities. To achieve this goal they have adopted different ways, of which canvassing to safeguard the traditional culture from the merger of the larger society is most common” (Sarkar, 1987: 205). C.C. Singpho’s performance of that role as a custodian of tradition is discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

Most importantly, the wealth of the jade and timber *Sutdu* who are so prominent on the Burmese side of the border does not exist in the Indian context. Bawmwang La Raw may pass through the area, and may even have some business interests in northeast India, but he is alone in his high development status. Political conditions have not created a *Sutdu* category on Indian soil. It is, instead, access to government contracts, and to government budgets, which provides the greatest opportunity to become a figure of economic and political influence. In Burma there are few, if any, Jinghpaw who can amass such fortunes from government succour alone. Senior commanders in the KIO/A probably come closest. All the same, for individuals and for the wider Singpho society it remains government access that ultimately determines economic success in northeast India.

For this reason government contracts are integral to wealth creation, and elite status. One example of a construction contractor made good is Sri Dorjee Khandu, the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. After a seven year career in military intelligence with the Indian Army he “became registered contractor of Military Engineering Services and Border Road Organization” (Danggen, 2008: 119). According to the hagiography by the Arunachal Pradesh Information Commissioner, he is a “great man” and “he has earned quite a good sum of money from his contract business. His money plus his hard labour, sincerity and honesty helped him in his political career” (Danggen, 2008: 120). It is, however, common to hear more critical impressions of his wealth creation in contexts where corruption is widely discussed. This is in a context where many companies are branded as “A Government of India Enterprise” and where, recently, it was still possible to assert that “[m]oney plays a minor role; used primarily by the elite class for acquiring luxuries of life” (Dutta and Karottupuram, 2004: 62). The extra regulation and government control that results is a key influence on the shape of elite negotiations. Such regulation also helps to ensure that *Sutdu* style economic development has not yet become a key part of the management of northeast India’s nodes of control.

One of those regulations is usually described as the “Inner Line”. For many years the entire region of northeast India was “protected” from outside influences by a remnant of colonial-era legislation (Sikdar, 1982: 31). This system restricted access, and the right to reside, to those with claim to be local residents. It was abolished in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, and Nagaland, but the system continues in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram. These three states see ongoing violence and communal strife in certain areas. The system of permits

(Inner Line Permits for Indians and Protected Area Permits for non-Indians) has a number of purposes. Most immediately it should restrict population movements from elsewhere in India. Up to a point it is successful in this ambition. Nonetheless many areas beyond the inner line do have “unauthorised” populations—like the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh and the many Chin from Burma in Mizoram. Sometimes their presence is tolerated but on occasions they are subjected to the types of discrimination that emerge in contexts where popular stigma follows official classifications.

Arunachal Pradesh society is still largely shaped by the implementation of the Inner Line system. It effectively restricts the access of non-Arunachali visitors to the region and is, as such, unpopular with some sections of Indian society which see it as a “discriminatory law” (Balwally, 2003: 280). I have travelled to Arunachal Pradesh on both officially secured permission (with a Restricted Area Permit) and with permission but without the Permit. In the case when I attempted to cross the border without the appropriate paperwork, even though “permission” had apparently been granted, a long wait in “no man’s land” along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh frontier resulted. My ambiguous status was only resolved, finally, by a series of phone calls that culminated with the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. He was reportedly the only person able to make a late-night, arbitrary decision to grant access. A lowlier Minister in the Arunachal Pradesh state government did not, apparently, have the ability. Local officials, soldiers and businessmen were certainly not able to make the decision themselves. Such regulatory inflexibilities inhibit understanding of the areas along the border between India and Burma. During colonial times some of the problems of developing an administrative presence in these areas were assuaged by “Singpho Dobhasi (interpreter)”

who would act as a middleman between the colonial officials, who usually spoke only Assamese or Bengali and the Singpho who needed to be managed if full-scale war was to be avoided (Dutta, 2007: 5). There were, in these cases, many reasons for cultural and political misunderstandings and it is hardly surprising that “interpretation” was sometimes required.

One outcome of the Inner Line, and other regulations of this type, is that the category of *Sutdu*—with its notions of personal initiative, creativity and productivity—has not been transferred to the Singpho scene. As far as I am aware there is no Singpho who is considered to have yet achieved anything like *Sutdu* status. They do not make “*Sut*” in the same way and their claims to be “*Du*”, other than through chiefly lineages, are therefore not given equivalence. Wealth that comes from the manipulation of an official status (much like the wealth accumulated by Myanmar Army officers, or senior Chinese officials) is not considered in the same way to *Sutdu* development productivity. On the other hand there are no Jinghpaw ministers in the Myanmar government system. Official roles are not the sole preserve of the Burmese ethnic group, but any Jinghpaw in government service are usually of relatively low ranks. Without elected positions to which they can aspire Jinghpaw political influence in Burma is largely exercised through economic claims.

By contrast, in the Indian portion of the borderlands it is not private enterprise that determines the shape of the economy. Instead it is the way that those individuals who have become, say, government ministers (and who may, as a result, use an Indian honorific such as *Shri*) have used their positions to direct largesse towards their constituents. Managing a vote bank in the raucous politics of Arunachal Pradesh clearly requires great skill. In the

2004 Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly election C.C Singpho received 40.63% of the vote in his Bordumsa-Diyum constituency. His nearest rival, Mayong Maio, was less than 6% behind. It is worth mentioning that C.C. Singpho is a member of the Indian Congress Party, which is the government in Arunachal Pradesh, and his close rival is an independent. Marshalling Congress Party prestige and resources is fundamental to his electoral success. But there is an acknowledgement that this is not the same as running a major business to amass a personal fortune, like Yup Zau Hkawng or Bawmwang La Raw, which can then be spent on public and private activities.⁸⁰ Making *Sut* through production and creativity gives the *Sutdu* a different social position in the local politics of these borderlands.

Conclusion

The local elites of the borderlands are a diverse group; this is unremarkable given the multitude of ways that different central government political structures interact with the borderlands. Indeed, no single pattern of interaction emerges. A *Sutdu* like Yup Zau Hkawng is motivated to explore opportunities for profit and prestige that come from aligning with *various* government and non-government systems. These alignments are not always robust and there are instances discussed in this chapter where *Sutdu* have moved in and out of official favour. I have, however, remained cautious about the comparative dimension of the *Sutdu*. “Big-Man” categories are prevalent in many societies, most famously in Melanesia, but they become awkward when the specific elite categories are transposed to different social contexts (see van Bakel, Hageteijn and van de Velde, 1986).

⁸⁰ This is an acknowledgement that was brought to my attention in a conversation with an emerging member of the Singpho elite. One of his ambitions was to generate a Singpho *Sutdu* class that could compete for local commercial opportunities with other, arguably better organised, ethnic groups in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

The high status and comparative economic clout of the local elites in the borderlands makes them targets in the ongoing renegotiation of power. Their major advantage is that through their businesses they have access to wealth and social capital available through the nodes of control that is rarely matched by non-*Sutdu*. C.C. Singpho is one of the few counter-examples. At some time in the future a new group of *Sutdu* could emerge on the Indian side of the border to take advantage of emerging opportunities for trade, tourism and infrastructure construction. The formation of that *Sutdu* class will, no doubt, be most influenced by the political conditions under which it is forced to operate. In Burma's Kachin State the *Sutdu* like Yup Zau Hkawng and Bawmwang La Raw exhibit alternative engagements with nation-state authority. Their role in local political and economic life cannot be divorced from their relationships with the central government, its opportunities and restrictions. Subsequent chapters will describe the interactions of local elites in more detail, starting with the symbolic politics of a festival held to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Kachin State, and then some festivals in adjacent parts of the borderlands.

Chapter 5: Contest and control at the Myitkyina Manau

Manau explained

Manau festivals provide opportunities for understanding how the governments of the borderlands are received by those they govern. As sites for symbolic politics, and for the performance of the mechanics that help to define nodes of control, they also offer evidence for analysing how other groups in society interact.⁸¹ In the case of northern Burma, Manau festivals are sites for the interaction of a range of different developmental, governmental and military groups. The specific relationships between the Jinghpaw elite and their Myanmar government collaborators are on show at Manau festivals. By understanding the public performance of these festivities I clarify the role of symbolic politics at the nodes of control.

To begin, the preparations for major Manau festivals (Jinghpaw: *Manau poi*; Burmese: *Manau pwe*) follow a standard pattern. Months before the event, the Manau is advertised widely: official announcements are followed by word-of-mouth that a festival is to be held. Formal invitations are issued but organisers—who are always members of the local elite, including the relevant *Sutdu*—assume that many participants will attend of their own accord. Officials, up to the most senior local representatives of the central government, will already have provided their endorsement of the event, even if there are ongoing negotiations about certain details. Delegations from neighbouring towns, and from more distant corners of the borderlands, are also mustered to attend. In the weeks before the festival, there is time for the preparation of clothes, musical instruments, facilities and equipment. It is convenient that

⁸¹ The photographs in Appendix 5 provide illustrations of some of the Manau-related arguments and points made in parts of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

major Manau festivals are usually held in the cool/dry season (December-March) when agricultural activity in the borderlands is least pressing.

For the local elites, who have responsibility for the overall management of the Manau festival, there are countless logistical tasks: food, drink, toilets, sleeping arrangements, everything. At the very largest Manau festivals a schedule of nightly entertainment, involving beauty pageants, rock concerts and opportunities for gambling is also required. So it is inevitable that the days immediately before the festival are punctuated by final, rushed efforts to ready facilities for the big event. The permanent structures at the Manau ground are augmented by temporary constructions—sometimes made of local timber but more often from tarpaulin and bamboo—that provide extra space for entertaining the thousands of Manau participants. A fleet of vehicles is arranged to support the attendance of elite figures but also to provide comfort to the many non-elite residents of the borderlands who find fun and meaning in the Manau festivities. For these non-elite citizens the Manau can prove a welcome distraction from the tedium of the dry season and the grinding poverty that they face at home. The resources of the *Sutdu*, their commercial and technical capabilities, but also their political and social competence, are marshalled to ensure that the festival can begin on time. After all of this effort some Manau festivals will only last for one or two days, while the longest can go for a week.

The previous discussion of Manau festivals in this dissertation has largely been of an abstract and theoretical nature. Here, the ideas about researching festivals and political rituals introduced in Chapter 2, particularly Kertzner's (1988) concept of "political symbolism" at

festive events, are used to clarify the nature of Manau festivals, drawing most fully on the Myitkyina Manau of January 2008. I am particularly concerned, following Kertzer (1988: 14), with “how political competitors struggle for power through ritual, how ritual is employed in both defusing and inciting political conflict, and how ritual serves revolution and revolutionary regimes”. Manau festivals are the exemplary sites for answering these questions in the borderlands precisely because similar events are held in China, India and Burma and the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw participants share many cultural concepts. Moreover, the spectacle of hundreds, or thousands, of dancing, swaying people, adorned in their finest clothes, and brought together by “traditional” music, song and dance, is difficult to ignore.

Mandy Sadan is one of the few scholars who have critically examined Manau festival performance. Her doctoral dissertation—completed at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 2005—includes an account of Manau festivals as part of her historical treatment of “Kachin” identity. Sadan is most concerned with questions of how Manau festivals illuminate the cultural history of the borderlands, and the forms of adaptation that have marked colonial and now post-colonial life. She notes that “the manau festival”, as a category of performance and feasting, “has long occupied an iconic position as a cultural marker in Kachin society” (2005: 213). Traditionally, it was the chiefs who held Manau festivals who “claimed an exclusive relationship with Madai, a spirit of great wealth who could bestow sut (wealth and fertility)” (2005: 216). The concept of “*sut*” was introduced in Chapter 4 and is, of course, integral to the self- and public-perception of members of the Jinghpaw elites.

Members of those elites have encouraged cultural and political commitments to Manau festivals in a revival that has spread these events across the borderlands. According to Sadan, “[t]he manau and the manau posts are so dominant as symbols of Kachin identity today that Kachin culture appears to be focussed only upon them” (2005: 245). Sadan traces this dominance to the period of British rule in northern Burma after the First World War when the identity now known as “Kachin” was “emerging as a modern political construct”. Some of the most widely invoked Manau from this period occurred immediately after the Allied victory over the Japanese. On 24-26 March 1944 (*Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen*, 2007: 67) there was a “victory Manau” and to celebrate the formal cessation of hostilities there was the historic “*Japan Padang Manau*” in January 1946, at which the colonial Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, presided (Shagawng Oi Lik, 2008: 4). This Manau has since been described as a “national *manau* (a highly ritualized, ceremonial communal dance) to celebrate victory over the Japanese” (Maran La Raw, 2007: 36). It is to that history that the Jinghpaw now explicitly look in an effort to explain their current post-ceasefire predicament (Bunghku, 2007: 67). But in Sadan’s analysis it is a “touristic image of the Kachin peoples and their culture(s) [which] prevails today in Burma”. In her critique of the role of the recent Manau revival Sadan shows how a “pan-Kachin identity” has grown out of the successful re-articulation of ethnicity in the contemporary political context.

Sadan’s account of Manau festival history is the most comprehensive, but it still leaves us without a typology to explain the contemporary manifestations of Manau festivals. Other scholars are similarly silent on the need for descriptions of Manau which encompass their

current and diverse character. Robinne (2007b: 285), however, points to the need to examine how these rituals have “metamorphosed” to account for new social and political dynamics.

For example, he writes that:

The present-day official meaning of ‘Kachin’ is asserted through the union of six ethnic groups, and this union is supposed to be symbolised by the monumental *manau* ceremony...This ritual was traditionally performed around a set of sacrificial posts that have in the contemporary situation metamorphosed into Christian symbols through which the traditional village unity has been extended to a pan-Kachin unity.

Emphasising Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw unity is one of the outcomes of the Manau festival but I do not find it helpful for clarifying the typology of these events. Instead I have constructed a summary of the characteristics of nodes of control and their respective Manau in Appendix 1. That summary demonstrates how the various Manau festivals are shaped by local economic, political and cultural conditions, but also by the differing ways that festival culture has been embraced. The key message of the summary is that the highly organised and logistically challenging week-long Manau in Myitkyina can be usefully compared with the shorter, and less ambitious, events held in China and India.

Over the years that I have been following festival performances it has proven difficult to clarify exactly how they may be changing in all respects. However, the preponderance of official support for Manau is one obvious trend and it is a trend that helps to explain why the nodes of control are now symbolically connected to Manau performance. The characteristics presented in Appendix 1 are therefore a summary of the more interpretative information presented in this Chapter and Chapter 6. In both cases it is clear that the Manau have become

sites for the public display of political and cultural positions that serve to further our understanding of the borderlands as a whole.

It is in this political context that I engage with the Manau festivals and the character of spatial control and symbolic politics. This engagement builds on previous scholarship but inevitably takes analysis of Manau in new directions. For instance, in her dissertation Sadan discusses the role of the Jinghpaw elite in managing Manau festivals but she is more concerned with the religious and cosmological aspects of the performance. The most significant recent Manau in Sadan's analysis is the 2001-2002 Manau. It was distinguished by the fact that it was a "large, eight-day long, locally-initiated, non-state sponsored event" (2005: 212). Since then, "state sponsorship" of Manau festivals has become more prominent and the 2008 Myitkyina Manau is best described as an elite-sponsored, state-endorsed festival. Furthermore, Sadan's 2001-2002 Manau has only been rivalled, in recent memory, by this more state-embracing Manau held in January 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Kachin State. As an opportunity for disparate groups to come together it is unique. Indeed, the Kachin State Day Manau is nominally a Jinghpaw event but its spaces are *neutral enough* that Shan, Burmese, Chinese and others play major roles.⁸² In Jinghpaw this anniversary festival is often referred to as a *Manau Poi Kaba*: a "Grand Manau Festival".

⁸² Hanson (1906: 744-745) offers a linguistic explanation for this neutrality in a comparison of words between various languages: English, Chinese, Tibetan, Kachin, Burmese, Karen, Chin, Shan, Atsi, and YawYin ("Lishaw"). One of the words that he compares is "festival". As an indicator of "Zomian" connections it is worth pointing out that "poi" is the word for festival in Kachin (Jinghpaw), Shan, Atsi and YawYin, and it is "m'epoi" in Chin. It is "pwe" in Burmese and Karen.

Grand Manau festival

This grand Myitkyina Manau festival is a particularly attractive site for scholarly reflection and analysis because relationships between the government and the governed in northern Burma are so rarely on public display. The governed, in this sense, are those groups which do not have such immediate access to government power as a result of their ethnic affiliation. They cannot hold senior government positions and in the armed forces of Burma they have experienced restricted career progression.⁸³ Even elite members of the Jinghpaw are part of this category as their access to political authority has tended to be very limited except for through the ethnic sub-nationalist organisations, and particularly the KIO/A. What I have found is that only on rare occasions, such as during Manau festivals, are the interactions between the local elites (who are governed) and the government relatively accessible. On both sides there is contestation; and in Kertzer's phrase a battle for legitimation occurs. For its part, the government uses these cultural events to set out the prevailing political realities in a theatrical form. Myitkyina's largest Manau is held to commemorate the date when the Kachin State was founded: 10 January 1948.⁸⁴ Each year the Jinghpaw elite, and the Myanmar authorities, collaborate for a week-long festival of dancing, socialising and negotiating. It is the highlight of the local cultural calendar and marks an important New Year transition for the predominately Christian Jinghpaw. The significance of this Manau, and the 10 January date, has only increased since ceasefires halted the long wars of Burma's Kachin State.

⁸³ Some of my Jinghpaw informants suggested that a rank of Major (or the civilian equivalent) was the apex of Jinghpaw prospects if they currently opt to pursue a career in Myanmar government service.

⁸⁴ It is also worth recalling that the Union of Burma was declared independent on 4 January 1948. The Kachin State was the first state of the Union to follow.

As in many other nation-state festival contexts, anniversaries that mark large and “round” numbers (50, 60, 75, etc.) are considered especially auspicious. So, in January 2008 the Myanmar government, the Jinghpaw elite, and the region’s ceasefire armies all came together to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Kachin State (Manau Guide, 2008). This was described by organisers as a major milestone for the Kachin State and the celebrations were held on a scale befitting the wealth that now distinguishes the local elite. Especially in response to the difficult year for the Union of Myanmar in 2007, when protests in Yangon and other major towns, including Myitkyina, shook the military government, a huge performance of cultural and political unity in the far-flung Kachin State was important to those who rely on the nodes of control for their status and power. So both the Myanmar government and the local elites planned for an impressive show of their collaboration. In searching for pictures of previous events and talking to those who have observed the recent revival of interest in Manau festivals, it has become clear to me that the 2008 Manau was the biggest Manau in the Kachin State since the Manau that Sadan (2005) describes. That Manau was held to inaugurate the new National Manau Park in December 2001-January 2002.⁸⁵

As a political event the 10 January 2008 Manau offered an intriguing paradox. Certainly, the festival was an expression of Jinghpaw identity and the pride of a sub-national population that has largely resisted co-option by the Myanmar authorities and for whom a distinctive identity retains potent ideological support. In Kertzer’s (1988: 14) framework the Jinghpaw are part of a “struggle for power through ritual” in a situation where such “ritual is employed

⁸⁵ In Jinghpaw mythology there is, however, an even grander Manau. A Jinghpaw ancestor “Ningkong Wa, to celebrate his marriage, gives a Manau to the whole world” (Gilhodes, 1933: 49).

in both defusing and inciting political conflict”, and where “ritual [can potentially] serve revolution and revolutionary regimes”. A festival on the scale of the 2008 Myitkyina Manau carries latent potential for legitimising the Myanmar government but also for subverting its claims of spatial control. With many of those attending the Manau displaying their open sympathies for the KIO/A it was a potentially explosive situation. The Manau is held, after all, right at the heart of Myanmar government-controlled northern Burma. However, as I will show, the Manau ultimately served to reinforce government control through the strategic use of Kertzer’s “political safety-valve” that helps to dissipate undue tension in this part of the borderlands. The contrast between the competing expressions of politics and political ambition ensures that the Manau requires careful analysis as a site where the interaction of the government and the governed was on clear display.

Myanmar nodes of control

The government of the Union of Myanmar makes claims on its part of the territory of Zomia through what I have called nodes of control. These nodes are the key sites for managing interactions between the government and those they govern. In northern Burma the principal node in the hierarchy of government control is Myitkyina, the official capital of the Kachin State. The physical make-up of the town ensures its fundamental role in government affairs. As well as hosting the offices of the Kachin State Development Council, which is the pinnacle of Myanmar regional government, it is home to key military, police and intelligence functions. In terms of transportation, Myitkyina is the rail terminus in the north of the country and the final port on the Ayeyarwady River that is accessible to cargo vessels for most of the year. A burgeoning network of refurbished roads is also slowly connecting the

town to the rest of Burma and, even more importantly, to efficient, trans-border transport infrastructure. Myitkyina's strategic riverside location has been augmented by newly constructed infrastructure that surrounds the town. Just to the north, a kilometre-long bridge across the river provides essential transportation links for the Myanmar army battalions, officials and members of the local elites. Further to the north is the construction site for the Myitsone hydro-electric project with the initial work underway for what will be the first dam on the Ayeyarwady River. As described earlier, none of this construction would be possible without the ceasefire between the KIO/A and the Myanmar authorities. It is since that ceasefire that Myitkyina has grown to become the most important node and a symbolic site for interactions between the government and those it expects to govern.

Maintaining Myitkyina's status as the principal node of control in northern Burma requires that it serves to facilitate collaboration and co-optation. For the Myanmar government the value of Myitkyina and the specific sites within the town where graduated sovereignties are implemented is that it allows the government to defend its core interests—particularly in the symbolic politics of the borderlands—by cooperating with the local development elites. At the Manau those graduated sovereignties were part of the flow of the event. On a daily basis the Myanmar government uses enough control to adequately manage a town that could become rebellious. In Myitkyina, the KIO/A, the other ceasefire armies, the *Sutdu*, and the various intelligence networks all retain significant local presence. There are also substantial investments in the Myitkyina node of control by companies from elsewhere in Burma that are most closely associated with the Myanmar government, such as Te Za's Htoo Trading.

This mix of disparate economic and political forces come together to support the government's efforts to control the node.

Such collaboration requires, moreover, that the government is perceived as robust and competent. To control this strategic area of eastern Zomia requires a strong government presence, premised on an understanding that resistance to the government's rule is part of local society, history and culture. While it persists with official rhetoric about ethnic and political "unity" it is clear that the Myanmar government has become content to allow a certain degree of ambiguity about the loyalties of those it governs. The evidence presented in this Chapter is that the government is prepared to indulge ritual performances that openly subvert the status of the node of control. The success of this approach is that the government can respond to tensions by supporting the occasional deployment of Kertzer's "safety-valve".

Welcome to the 2008 Myitkyina Manau

Flying in to Myitkyina in January 2008 for the Manau I found myself on a plane with businessmen from Yangon, a Thai police officer and his girlfriend, some bodyguards, and a handful of Westerners, some with tour guides, and some unaccompanied. Arriving in the Kachin State the plane trundled in to the run-down Myitkyina airport and deposited its passengers on the concourse. I was one of the foreigners who arrived unaccompanied by a guide. Stepping into the familiar and dilapidated airport arrivals hall to wait for the baggage to be unloaded from the small Air Bagan flight I had already noticed the convoy of jeeps, four wheel drives and "gun trucks" waiting outside. Whose convoy was this? Since I first travelled to Burma in 2003 I have been intrigued by the day-to-day operations of what

Callahan calls “the baffling configuration of state-society relations that place unchecked coercion and repression at the center of modern Burmese politics” (2003: 3).

As I adjusted my eyes to the darkness of the airport arrivals area I noticed that Major General Ohn Myint, the then Northern Commander of the Myanmar Armed Forces and the Chairman of the Kachin State Peace and Development Council, was there to greet visitors arriving for the Manau festival.⁸⁶ With a degree of confidence befitting his rank and power, the Northern Commander welcomed the foreign visitors to Myitkyina, and to “his” Kachin State. He addressed the small crowd in halting English and even, to my bemusement, complimented me on my height. It was, as I saw it, an auspicious beginning to the 2008 Manau festival. I wondered who else I would meet and what else I would see. I had previously attended a Manau festival in February 2007 in China’s Yunnan province (it is one of the Manau discussed in Chapter 6). During that raucous event I had met a number of people who had visited Myitkyina for Manau celebrations in years past and they all encouraged me to seek out opportunities to compare them. But rather than looking to explore the difference in dance (*Manau nau*) and costume that so interested my Chinese Jingpo informants, it was for opportunities to see people like the Northern Commander in action that I had travelled to Myitkyina for the Manau festival.

Since the ceasefires between the Jinghpaw and their Myanmar military opponents, extra space has opened for the public performance of power dynamics in the Kachin State. To be sure, one of the most explicit ways that power is demonstrated is through Manau festivals.

⁸⁶ In English and in Jinghpaw the Northern Commander is sometimes referred to as the “Governor” (*Munggyi*) of the Kachin State.

Recent small-scale Manau in Burma have been held in Putao, Bhamo and Laiza, among other places. Images from these events are regularly used in tourist promotion material for the Kachin State and adjacent parts of the borderlands. These smaller festivals are held throughout the year but the largest and most important of these events is held each January, and peaks on 10 January: Kachin State Day.

In an ordinary year, such as 2007 or 2010, the festivities for marking Kachin State Day are relatively modest, but a special effort is made for major anniversaries. The total numbers of ceasefire army troops who attended are indicative. In 2007, there were 683 attendees from the KIO/A, 17 from the NDA-K, 20 from the Kachin Development Army and 125 from the Lasang Awng Wa Group.⁸⁷ In 2008, informed estimates suggested that at least three times as many troops from the ceasefire armies attended and some groups, such as the NDA-K, brought their largest ever delegations. Commenting on the large numbers of Jinghpaw troops, festival attendees described this as a “moment of pride” and a “time to dance together”. These comments are worth emphasising because under non-Manau conditions the Myitkyina node of control can be difficult for senior KIO/A officers to visit. They often require special permission from the Myanmar authorities, which may not be granted. In the major publication produced during the 2008 Manau, *Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen (Kachin State News)*, there was considerable coverage of the inspection of the Manau grounds undertaken by “KIO Dukaba Nban La”, KIO General Nban La on 7 January (2008a: 5). The social position of the KIO/A is crucial to how we should understand the Manau.

⁸⁷ The first two are usually referred to as ceasefire groups in Burmese. The Lasang Awng Wa Group, in contrast, is usually called a “peace group” (*Nyein chan yei ahpwe*).

This iteration of the Manau festival was a much larger undertaking than usual (see Appendix 5 for some photographic illustrations of the scale).⁸⁸ Assisting Yup Zau Hkawng as the chief organiser were nine Jinghpaw chiefs (who use the traditional *Duwa* honorific). There was also one other *Sutdu*, Sutdu Hka Mai Tang, who was responsible for “guest relations” (*Manam Tau*), and, particularly, the arrangement of hospitality for visiting Chinese delegations. A sprawling official arena was surrounded by more prosaic public spaces for commerce and entertainment. For a week, from 5-11 January 2008, the Kachin National Manau Park in the northern part of Myitkyina—across the road from the Kachin Independence Organisation liaison office and surrounded by the houses of senior Jinghpaw officials and business people—was the site of all local activity and industry. The Kachin National Manau Park has the world’s largest Manau posts. Standing over 40 metres high, the posts were “constructed on the site in concrete [even though] [t]raditionally the wooden posts would have to be dismantled one year after the event” (Sadan, 2005: 238). For the 2008 Manau festival, the commercial, political and cultural life of the whole town, and arguably much of the entire Kachin State, relocated to the Manau ground and surrounding areas. By some estimates, hundreds of thousands of people thronged to this particular Manau (Mizzima, 2008b). It was busy from dawn to well after dark. Eating, drinking and singing, the whole town was transformed by the cultural and economic juggernaut of the Manau.

⁸⁸ The organising committee included many notable local citizens. The Committee for the 2008 Myitkyina Manau (*Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen*, 2008b: 5) was “Sr. Gaidaw Nang Bawk (N/T), Slg. Hkyet Hting Nan (Ningbaw), Majoi Gintwang Yup Zau Hkawng (Ningbaw, Wunpawng Htunghking Hpung Ginja), Slg. Lungjung Tu Raw (Amu Madu), Sr. Kaba Myinmaw Roi Nau (N/T Amu Madu 4), Slg. Lahkri La Awng (Malawm), Slg. Lajawn Ngan Seng (N/T Ningbaw 1), Slg. Myihto Zau Lat (N/T Amu Madu 1), Slg. Nshang Awng San (N/T Amu Madu 3), Slg. Qidnang Ze Lum (N/T Amu Madu 3), Slg. Ah Gu Di Zi (N/T Ningbaw 2)”.

Significant Manau are a crucial way of cultivating and reinforcing certain perspectives on Jinghpaw identity and culture. For instance, *Padang Manau* are designed to mark victories, particularly in battle. Since the ceasefires between the armies of the Kachin State and the Myanmar government there has been no opportunity for such victory dances. Other types of Manau include: *Ju Manau* for funerals and at other times of suffering; *Ningtau Manau* for forging alliances before waging war; *Kumran Manau* for marking times of separation; *Shadip Hpaw Manau* for when Jinghpaw move to a new place of settlement; *Dingshaw Manau* which is danced at house-warming celebrations; and the *Htingrau Manau* which is for creating unity among different tribes. According to one Jinghpaw pamphlet, “[t]he steps of the Manau dance is the same for all occasions, with the dancers in a long line forming several curves around decorated ceremonial poles or totems” (Kachin: Land of the Manau Dances, n.d.). Even though there “are basically ten different kinds of *manau* dance” (Felix Nlam Zau Hkawng, 2008: 3) each is immediately identifiable as part of the same portfolio of cultural performance. Long lines of dancers snake their way around the Manau ground in a formal pattern.

All Manau festivals are centred on a large open arena punctuated by the Manau pillars which have become the totem for mainstream Jinghpaw cultural performance. According to an official festival publication “[t]he *Manau* pillars represent the unique culture of the *Kachin* people” (Felix Nlam Zau Hkawng, 2008: 2). The lines on the pillars accord to a “traditional interpretation—designs with straight lines stand for the symbol of ‘Ninggawn Chyanun’ (the mother of the Universe) and curved lines on the designs stand for the symbol of lines in her finger prints” (Manau, 2001: 3). These pillars, the *Manau shadung*, represent the six major

sub-groups of the “Jinghpaw”. In the standard Myitkyina account of the relationships between the sub-groups (see Mangsang Ying Zung, 2007: 50) the term “Jinghpaw” is described as the “*shingteng mying*” (overall name) while the sub-groups of “Jinghpaw”—“Lawng Wa”, “Lachid”, “Lisu”, “Rawang”, and “Zaiwa” are referred to as “*bawsang mying*” (ethnic names). Manau pillars are usually painted with the crossed swords (*Nhtu*) of Jinghpaw martial culture (which is also the most recognisable symbol of the KIO/A), but they are also sometimes used to depict more peaceful motifs. One artistic sketch of the pillars (*Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen*, 9 January 2008a: 7) has them aligned with a dove.

The current emphasis on Manau festivals has also meant that the National Manau Park in Myitkyina has become a site for other activities during the preamble to the main festivities. For instance in 2008 “[a] special anniversary workshop service was conducted by leaders of the Myitkyina Christian Council (MCC) which is organized by different denominations in Majoi Gawknu [Majoi Hall] in Kachin Traditional Manau Park in Myitkyina Township, capital of Kachin State from 7 a.m. to 12 a.m. local time” (KNG, 2008d). At the Manau, such displays of religion and politics sometimes mix in untidy ways. Buddhist monks mix with Baptist ministers, as traditional shamanic rites are combined with missionary-inspired hymn singing, and kilted “highland” drumming. The overlap of cultures and histories ensures that there are no neat configurations of social or religious authority.

And this is not the only untidiness that is integral to the Manau. Most major components of the program involve leaders from the Myanmar military, the KIO/A, the NDA-K, the Lasang

Awng Wa Group⁸⁹, and parts of the Jinghpaw elites. In fact, during the Manau the pre-eminence of local figures such as Yup Zau Hkawng is on constant display. Asking around at the Manau ground it is apparent that he makes a big impression. According to one middle-aged Manau volunteer, “he is like a king, he is so rich and has so many women. And so many children. He is smart and very tough”. This characterisation overlooks his long marriage and his five children. Some of the young people I questioned about the Manau festivities offered that Yup Zau Hkawng “is the great one”. Some others were less forthcoming but were still certain that “he is the richest Kachin”. Being rich may not, however, be enough for some Kachin who assert that they “have no real leaders—even Yup Zau Hkawng, he is too young”. When it comes to political analysis it is clear to one well-connected informant that “Yup Zau Hkawng is on our side, the Jinghpaw side. The other side have more power, of course. And he is stuck in the middle”.

Sut Manau, like the 2008 Myitkyina Manau, are held to celebrate past, present and future “prosperity”. *Sutdu* seem to gravitate, for the obvious reason, towards Sut Manau in a way that emphasises their material status. On occasion I have heard *Sutdu* referred to, somewhat disparagingly, as “rich men who love Manau”. All Manau festivals are marked by symbols that specify both social cohesion and separateness. Some concrete examples help to clarify this point. Calendars were produced to commemorate the 2008 festival. Such calendars are a fixture of many houses in northern Burma: they often stay pinned to the wall years after their immediate utility has expired as an indication of pride in the Manau and its implications. In this case the calendar had pictures of the KIO/A dancing at a Manau (January-February),

⁸⁹ In Jinghpaw publications this group is usually referred to as the “*Du Kaba Lasang Awng Wa Hpung*” (Jinghpaw for “Commander Lasang Awng Wa group”), although in Burmese it is the *U Lasang Awng Wa nyein chan yei ahpwe* (“Mr Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group”).

Hpakant jade mining region (May-June), the confluence where the Ayeyarwady River begins (September-October), and the victorious “Mr” and “Miss” Manau from the 2007 celebration (November-December).

Another 2008 calendar, this one produced by Jadeland Myanmar Company Ltd (Yup Zau Hkawng’s company described in Chapter 4) gives a good indication of the festival spirit. Its pictures are Yup Zau Hkawng at a Manau (January), a Buddhist temple on Lake Indawgyi (February), a fishing event (March), the road between Myitkyina and Manmaw “built by the KIO and Jadeland Co., Ltd” (April), clearing land for farming (May), mining jade at Hpakant (June), a Jinghpaw performance troupe (July), an excavator on a barge across a major river (August), a Manau dance (September), Yup Zau Hkawng with a Jinghpaw martial arts group (October), a black orchid (November), and snow on a mountain near Putao (December).

In both of these cases the calendars serve to reinforce the geographic, cultural, economic and political logics of Manau festivities. They position the Kachin State, and its various and vibrant cultural outputs, in formulations of cohesion and separateness that are immediately accessible to the target audiences: Jinghpaw and those who are sympathetic to them. Promoting the presentation of a limited number of iconic and symbolic images, such calendars provide local elites such as Yup Zau Hkawng with an opportunity to posit involvement, even ownership, in cultural and political realms that stretch beyond their economic claims. To encompass the entire Kachin State, and to emphasise the unity of its

Jinghpaw people in opposition to peoples from elsewhere in Burma, is one aspiration of these ethnic products.

As I explained in Chapter 4 Yup Zau Hkawng's power comes from economic prowess and reservoirs of ethnic solidarity. But he is not part of the traditional chiefly lineages that would usually give him the right to be a Manau patron. Traditionally in animist Jinghpaw society one of the rights of a chief is the right to hold Manau (Leach, 1954: 155-156).⁹⁰ This fits with the interpretation of feasting and changes in patronage that occurred in von Fürer Haimendorf's Himalayan example (1980: 102). He wrote that:

In the 1940s I had not heard of any *guchi* [commoners] performing [Apa Tani] feasts of merit, and was then under the impression that only patricians engaged in any of the ceremonial activities aimed at raising a man's status. This impression may well have been due to a misunderstanding for in 1978 my informants denied the one-time monopoly of *guth* to the performance of feasts of merit. Nowadays *guchi* are certainly free to hold such rites...All this demonstrates a social mobility hardly imaginable in the old days when status was closely linked with the possession of land and men of *guchi* class had few opportunities to gain wealth and with it the possibility of engaging in activities apt to increase their prestige.

Increasing personal and collective prestige among "commoners" is a component of the Manau festivities. The local elites who hope to shape the next 60 years of Kachin State development attempted to use the event to demonstrate their influence and they are not all

⁹⁰ Leach's interpretations of Manau festivities are somewhat limited by his lack of ready access to large-scale events. As Sadan (2007b: 79) explains, "[t]he chaotic nature of Leach's wartime experience meant that he would rarely if at all have been able to witness large-scale, community-based ritual performances in practice, such as the *manau*".

traditional chiefs. As a major milestone these 2008 celebrations were held on a scale befitting the current elite wealth that flows through the local economy. They stretched over a huge area, an indication of which is given by a Burmese-language map reproduced in one of the festival publications (*Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen*, 6 January 2008a: 8) and by the satellite image reproduced as Map 7. To have an extravagant week-long celebration of this milestone was expected by the Jinghpaw.

Alongside their desire for sub-national pride it should be noted once again that the Manau was held soon after the protests of 2007 which had so dented the credibility and confidence of the Myanmar military government. This confluence of events ensured that a huge performance of benign cultural and political unity in far-flung Myitkyina was important for the government itself (as it was in years past, see NLM, 2001a; 2001b; 2003). As such, the Myitkyina Manau in 2008 was designed to serve a range of competing elite interests. Everyone came together and then used the space they shared to reinforce their own agenda and ambitions. Recently some Manau that were considered politically problematic have experienced a cooler official reception (KNG, 2009b). When a Baptist Church wanted to hold a Manau in a northern part of the Kachin State they were repeatedly denied permission by the local Myanmar military commander, Brigadier General Khin Maung Aye. According to a report a “ceremony was attended by over 1,000 people including Zahkung Ting Ying, leader of the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) with his colleagues but the ‘Manau Dance’ was not allowed by the military” (KNG 2007f). Not every Manau is given the same endorsement (for other examples see KNG, 2009c).

A formerly senior Burmese official once played an instrumental role in this process. The 2001-2002 Manau described by Sadan (2005) was attended by the then ranking Myanmar government sponsor of Jinghpaw, and other ethnic ceasefire group, activities, General Khin Nyunt. He was the head of Myanmar military intelligence and was widely regarded as a “dominant” figure (Leifer, 2001: 151). The pictorial record of that earlier Manau includes many prominent images of General Khin Nyunt. His important role in facilitating the construction of the new Manau ground (“the biggest in the world”) is still noted on plaques around the site. On that day of feasting and dancing General Khin Nyunt was presented with gifts by Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng, including “a traditional sword and a shoulder bag decorated with small silver gongs” (NLM, 2001a). Since that day, traces of his presence have, however, been largely extinguished. In 2004 General Khin Nyunt, and the military intelligence networks that he controlled, were purged (Jagan, 2006: 29-36). He is now reportedly under house arrest in Yangon. Many of his closest aides and members of his family have also been arrested or have been forced to find refuge overseas (on the resulting “disarray”, see Seekins, 2006: 295). They have been replaced by a new intelligence agency, Military Affairs Security, around the country.

While General Khin Nyunt is now gone, Manau festivals have become a favourite event for the personal aggrandisement and endorsement of a new generation of Myanmar military leaders. Preeminent among those who have used the Manau to reinforce their own position is General Ohn Myint, the former Chairman of the Kachin State Peace and Development Council and the former Northern Commander of the Myanmar Army. Ohn Myint was, until recently, head of the Bureau of Special Operations Command No. 1, with political and

military oversight for the entire northern portion of the country. Preparations for his arrival at the 2008 Manau festival were extravagant and his presence in the dancing line during one session caused a commotion. He was dressed as a Rawang (that is, non-Jinghpaw “Kachin”) chief. He also made donations of huge wads of *Kyat* to various Manau cultural troupes.

But not everybody was happy with the preeminence of the Northern Commander. His entourage bustled around the Manau ground without any regard for the convenience of other Manau participants. Some young Jinghpaw voiced their concern that it set the “wrong style” for an event of this kind. There was also a level of unhappiness when the Northern Commander was perceived not to take the Manau festival appropriately seriously. According to one (KNG, 2008e) perspective:

The Burmese military junta has completely ignored the Kachin State Day. The regime’s military commander addressed the inaugural ceremony with inappropriate words in front of audiences at a special ceremony of the 60th anniversary of Kachin State Day...Maj-Gen Ohn Myint, commander of Kachin State (northern command) greeted the inaugural ceremony with romantic words “Ngou (wou) Ai Nii” in Chinese and “Nang hpe ngai tsawra ai” in Kachin, meaning “I love you” in English when he started to deliver his speech of about 15 minutes.

These gripes point to the fact that the Myanmar Army controlled the physical space of the Manau ground; it was their node of control. Soldiers from local battalions were perched in all of the strategic spots. Some soldiers were stationed for the duration, replete with heavy machine guns and sniper rifles in a 10-metre tower overlooking the Manau ground. Other sentries stood at the entrances to the National Manau Park. Some policed access to the

Manau dancing area itself. Elsewhere plain clothes Myanmar security personnel (some from the successor organisation to General Khin Nyunt's intelligence apparatus) sneaked around and took pictures.

Throughout the Manau festival, the *Manau Wang* (the main building for important patrons and cultural leaders) was a centre for receiving and bidding farewell to delegations from across Burma and the world. Shan groups, Yangon-based diplomats, entrepreneurs and officials from China, Jinghpaw groups from far-flung corners, all marched in to make donations, receive gifts and talk business with the senior Jinghpaw patrons. Many of these groups were written up in glowing terms in the daily publications produced to mark the progress of the festival. Senior leaders were often pictured posing alongside young Jinghpaw women. This hospitality matters because the funding of the Manau is obviously an important element of the festivities. The division of the investment in the festival is particularly interesting. A report that I have seen confirmed the budget for the festival was 400 million *Kyat* (\$US313,725). The “three Kachin ceasefire groups have already committed to take care of most of the expenses. *Kyat* 120 million (\$US93,897) will be given by Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and *Kyat* 60 million (\$US46,948) will be paid by the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K), while Lasang Awng Wa ceasefire group will shell out *Kyat* 30 million (\$US23,474)” (KNG, 2007g). Other funding came from Yup Zau Hkawng's Jadeland Myanmar Company and from the other Jinghpaw businessmen who took leading roles in hospitality and the Manau dancing. Delegations arriving from other parts of the Kachin State also brought along donations. As each group was greeted and escorted into the *Manau Wang* a band would play and teenage girls in matching brightly coloured dresses

would stand guard. Hierarchy and precedence was observed at all times. Each group had a leader who was often personally greeted by a senior Jinghpaw figure. The most important delegations were met by Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng. Food and drink were provided in the *Manau Wang*. Chiefs, hostesses and others milled around. After their moments with the senior figures the delegations retired to their campsites scattered around the Manau area. Tens of thousands of people camped out for the week-long festival.

To feed, clothe and entertain these people, there was a large area devoted to commerce surrounding the formal space of the Manau. Petty traders sold everything from barbequed meat to children's clothing. Larger businesses gave away free coffee, noodles or other samples. Some enterprising types had established a stand where they invited passers-by to luxuriate on jade beds and lounge chairs. Jade is, as discussed in Chapter 4, the Kachin State's most lucrative export. The large numbers of people travelling to the Manau ensured that restaurants, usually sleepy places in Myitkyina, opened to large crowds of festival attendees. The "Wunla Myu Sha" restaurant in Shatapru quarter advertised its "Kachin delicacies" and herbal medicines, one reputed to be an "elixir of life" (*Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen*, 6 January 2008a: 6). Apart from all of the outlets selling food and drink there were areas devoted to games and gambling. Hundreds of stalls offered games of chance. Dozens of places provided the opportunity for punters to try their luck on various "wheels of fortune". Card games and other diversions also predominated. In the cold of the evenings there were concerts. The most popular were the concerts by Iron Cross, Burma's most famous and popular rock group. Their peculiar brand of plagiarised foreign ballads and heavier numbers are enduringly popular throughout Burma. Other concert stages saw performances from

cultural troupes from across Burma and China. Huge crowds assembled to watch traditional songs and dances. Later at night the competitions for Mr Muscles and Miss Manau were fiercely contested. The winners of the 2007 instalments of these competitions were featured in the colour magazine produced as a commemorative edition. The measurements of the female contestants were included alongside their statements. Each “gave thanks to God (*Karai Kasang*)” in their personal reflections. In 2008, the rehearsals for these competitions were held during the day. Even those un-costumed day-time events would garner fair-sized crowds. At the Manau they are especially popular because they mark something of a diversion from the pressures and underlying tensions that exist in the more formal parts of the festival. They also provide an opportunity for young people, who are rarely called upon in other formal elements of proceedings, to participate in a public space. On most other occasions young Jinghpaw are prone to watch from the sidelines as the senior figures from their society meet with delegations and dignitaries. They are also understandably cautious about displaying themselves under the watchful eyes of the Myanmar authorities who endeavour to control the Manau for their own purposes.

Government at the Manau

The Myanmar military government keeps control on an everyday level by inculcating an underlying wariness and caution. There is a political edge to most large gatherings in a place like northern Burma, and 2008’s Manau festival was no different. “Why so many guns?”, somebody asked me in a mocking tone. Large gatherings make the government unsure. As reported by the Kachin News Group (KNG, 2008d), “[u]nusually, unlike last year’s Manau Festival, over 100 Burmese soldiers with Rocket-Propelled-Grenade (RPG) and machine

guns are being seen standing guard around the Manau Park”. The numbers of soldiers that provided security at the Manau was boosted by the reinforcement that arrived on the morning of 10 January.

The visit of Major General Ohn Myint, the Northern Commander, called for a much larger armed presence. The full extent of security precautions on that day is hard to quantify. However, there were many hundreds of Myanmar soldiers in and around the Manau Park. Some were part of the Northern Commander’s bodyguard. His convoy included truck-mounted machine guns and the standard procession of four-wheel drives and other vehicles filled with soldiers. In some parts of Burma the soldiers that one sees are largely unarmed and poorly provisioned, wearing rubber footwear and shabby uniforms. They give no impression of battle readiness. The Myanmar government soldiers at the Manau were different. Many were equipped with well-maintained and modern weapons. There were untold automatic rifles and pistols but also some rocket propelled grenade launchers, sniper rifles and heavy machine guns. The Myanmar Army came to the Manau with all of the tools required to put down an insurrection. Within his inner-circle, the bodyguards that trailed the Northern Commander were dominant. Everywhere he went they led the way elbowing people out of his path and following up the rear. This security posture ensured that everyone saw the Northern Commander and his troops at their most fearsome. Their militarisation of the Manau space and their effort to control even the most symbolic Jinghpaw areas of the festival could not be overlooked.

This firepower was augmented by the more covert efforts of the Myanmar security forces to watch local and foreign visitors to the Manau. On Kachin State Day there was a large contingent of Union Solidarity and Development Association members that were deployed as marshals. The Union Solidarity and Development Association is the mass membership wing of the Myanmar government. Many appeared to be armed. They augmented the uniformed and plain clothes security apparatus. There was also a more explicit, but largely ineffective, effort to monitor the activities of foreign visitors. On a number of occasions I was told by Jinghpaw acquaintances that the security agencies were asking about my activities. They wanted to know where particular foreigners were from and made efforts to follow them around the festival. Some of these surveillance personnel carried digital cameras. On at least five occasions I observed that I had my picture taken by them. With their ear-pieces, dark clothes and threatening demeanour they were not hard to pick out in the crowd. As a former diplomat (Sim, 2001: 153) in Burma describes:

...manpower in Myanmar is relatively cheap and readily available. The Military Intelligence (MI), for example, is quite extensive and pervasive. As a result, prominent foreign diplomats and international businessmen in and around Yangon are always escorted by MI officers.

To some extent these efforts to monitor visitors to Myitkyina were important to examine up close precisely because such surveillance is a part of everyday life in the Kachin State. While everyone else at the Manau was trying, as much as possible, to enjoy themselves and celebrate their Kachin State Day, the security personnel were largely humourless. Nonetheless when I stopped and posed for a security agent at the front gate one afternoon as he took my picture he could not help but smile. He needed the photo for his file.

Jinghpaw at the Manau

The Myanmar Army's effort to control the Manau space ended up being somewhat futile because the weight of numbers assembled by the Jinghpaw side ultimately overwhelmed them. While there were hundreds of armed Myanmar government soldiers there were thousands of Jinghpaw troops. Each of the three main "ceasefire groups" in the Kachin State had come down from their bases. The KIO/A brought the largest contingent, as announced by the *Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen (Kachin State News)* that was published on each day of the festival.⁹¹ As the premier Jinghpaw armed group they retain the force of numbers and popular support. The next largest Kachin group was the NDA-K. Both of these groups have their main bases along the Sino-Burmese border. The other Jinghpaw armed group is a "splinter group" that was formed after an attempted coup within the KIO/A. It is called, simply, the Lasang Awng Wa Group, named after a former KIA Colonel who was once head of its military intelligence unit. His group have not been formally recognised as a ceasefire group by the government but they have agreed a non-aggression pact.

To illustrate how these groups function, it is worth describing the security precautions taken by Zahkung Ting Ying, the leader of the NDA-K (he is described in Jinghpaw as "*Ningbaw Kaba*": Grand Chairman). He has good reason to worry about his safety. On 10 December 2004 a vehicle in which he often travelled was spectacularly bombed. The KIO/A denied

⁹¹ Ordinarily there is no regular Jinghpaw language news published in the Kachin State, nor is there an equivalent publication in northeast India or southwest China. However, during the Manau festival the Myanmar government authorities grant permission for a daily newspaper of between 8 and 12 pages. At the end of festivities these daily editions are consolidated into a glossy magazine-style commemorative volume. Most of the content in this magazine, and the daily editions is, in Jinghpaw but there are portions that are also written in Burmese.

responsibility for the attack and insisted that dissatisfied elements within Zahkung Ting Ying's circle were behind it. He now travels, when he can, in a Humvee sports utility. At the Myitkyina Manau his arrival and departure was signaled by a convoy of impressive four-wheel drive vehicles and trucks filled with his personal bodyguard, all wearing distinctive red scarves. His personal vehicle, the Humvee, is of the type popularised by rap moguls and tennis players, and is out of place around the dusty, potholed streets of a town like Myitkyina. Its number plate KSR1 7777 is a special homage to its owner's place as the leader of Kachin State Special Region 1, the semi-sovereign territory his army was granted after their ceasefire. Immediately after signing the first Kachin State ceasefire in 1989, he probably could not imagine a time when such an ostentatious motor car would drive the roads of the Kachin State. Beyond an expression of power it is also an effort to keep him safe from enemies old and new.

Because of its size and historical role, the KIO/A was the dominant Jinghpaw armed force at the festival. They came in large numbers from their headquarters in Laiza to seize the initiative in the biggest and best attended of all the dances, in the middle of the day on 10 January 2008. With senior KIO and KIA officers leading the way they danced in the midday sun. Sweat pouring down faces and huge roars of approval from the crowd all contributed to an electric atmosphere. While most of the KIA troops were unarmed, the bodyguards who protected their leaders were taking all precautions. As the KIO and KIA leadership danced their personal bodyguards stood close, with pistols tucked into their trousers, and holsters under their shoulders. With their earpieces and deliberate movements they looked well-trained and proficient. Assassination has, for many decades, been a brutal and consistent part

of Kachin State politics. In the heart of the Myanmar Army controlled Kachin State they were taking no chances.

During that dance the Myanmar government forces made a symbolic effort to surrender the node of control to the Jinghpaw side, at least temporarily. As the KIA and KIO leadership danced, followed by long lines of their troops, families and supporters, the Myanmar Army presence disappeared. The soldiers who had stood guard for the rest of the week left their posts around the Manau ground. The presence of the plain clothes surveillance personnel also diminished. Was this an effort by the Myanmar government to give the Jinghpaw elite some consolation in their ceasefire stalemate? After more than a decade as “partners” in a ceasefire the Kachin State has remained relatively peaceful. However the dancing of the KIA soldiers and their claim to the central space of Jinghpaw culture was a clear statement of a political alternative. A tactical retreat had occurred as the Myanmar side, aware of the strong nationalist sentiments that the dominant KIA dancing performance would generate, had moved out of the central area. They did not reappear in any numbers until the next day.

Fragmentation at the Manau

The other ceasefire armed groups, the NDA-K and the Lasang Awng Wa group, also performed dances. These were not nearly as well-attended as the huge KIO/A performance. Nor was there anything like the same level of vocal support from the crowd. There are historical reasons for this. As breakaway groups, the NDA-K and the Lasang Awng Wa group, cannot claim the revolutionary mantle that belongs to the KIO/A alone. They do not have the long history of an independence struggle cloaked in sub-nationalist authenticity.

Both groups are tarred with a feeling that they are merely expedient and elite formations that serve the interests of particular former KIO/A officers. They are not considered true representatives of a Jinghpaw political future.

The fragmentation that results is key to understanding politics among the local development elite. While Martin Smith (1994: 22) has queried “the wisdom, or indeed the relevance, of interpreting Burma's history too literally in racial or nationalist terms”, as part of the show of unity that is a requisite part of contemporary Manau festivals, long histories of ethno-nationalist politics are given precedence. For Smith it is clear that around the country many local societies have, throughout history, maintained a multi-ethnic character. He suggests “that there are many important precedents for inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding which could be drawn upon to reach a new consensus today”. Nonetheless, the fragmentation on display at the Manau shows just how much feeling sub-nationalism still generates. At the festival, the Jinghpaw troops are fed and their leaders feted. Each of the minor ceasefire groups is listed alongside the KIO/A as sponsors of the Manau and their leaders are warmly welcomed at the *Manau Wang*. Importantly, the various groups do not dance together. Each has a designated slot in the schedule. As mentioned above so does the Myanmar military’s Northern Commander.

What is less clear during the bustle of the Manau is that the fragmentation of the Jinghpaw military and political forces is part of a strategy that the Myanmar government has instituted across the country. In Mon, Karen, Karenni, Shan, Chin and Rakhine areas of Burma there have been concerted efforts to “splinter” existing rebel movements. The Jinghpaw, from all

parts of society, who once supported the united KIO/A, are now forced to make compromises because there are three armed groups in the Kachin State. Another Kachin militia operates across the border in the Shan State and in the northern Kachin State a new group, the Rawang Rebellion Resistance Force, operated by a businessman named Ahdang, also known as Tangu Dang, has been recently formed. Each new group causes further difficulties for Kachin State leaders who hope to see their people unite against the common enemy, the Myanmar military government.

Taking these fragments and then putting them on show as separate parts at the Manau festival only serves to reinforce the differences between the groups and supports the political agenda of the Myanmar government. Most people are aware that plots within and between the various armed factions are ongoing. The bodyguards that the leaders surround themselves with are not just to stop attacks from the Myanmar government. They are also to stop intra-Jinghpaw attacks. To fell a senior leader at the Manau festival would have been incredibly unsettling for the Jinghpaw. Nobody, as I was told a number of times, wanted to take that chance.

It is perhaps only through their shared business interests that the various Jinghpaw groups come together in shared purpose. When N'ban La Awng, Vice-President of the KIO, gave a speech before the start of the 2008 Manau to a group of Jinghpaw university students he was flanked by Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng (KNG, 2008e). Later in the festival both of these senior figures had substantial opportunities to meet with business people from across the border in China and with the leaders of other ceasefire groups. These leaders also met with

Tetsuro Amano the Minister-Counsellor/Deputy Chief of Mission of the Japanese Embassy on 8 January 2008 (Gumsha and Lahkang, 2008b: 11). Over the week of Jinghpaw celebrations there were nightly “state dinners” held in a large, formal building on one edge of the Manau ground. Military officers, local dignitaries, *Sutdu*, and small groups of foreign tourists dined together. Various gradations of seniority were recognised in the table-placements and, more generally, in the name tags that guests were invited to wear. On the reverse of these “VIP” badges was space, in Chinese and English, for a code number, name, post and unit. The most consistent socialising and networking was performed by the Chinese. These cross-border visitors and business people hoping to make deals with local Jinghpaw development elites were highly visible.

Creative ambiguity

The 2008 Myitkyina Manau festival, held so soon after the crackdown on protests in Burma in September and October 2007, provided a space of creative ambiguity for elite groups of many types to interact at a major node of government control. I met several people at the festival who attended not because of their interest in “Jinghpaw culture” but because the festival provided an excuse to travel to Myitkyina and make contacts. At the elite level those excuses are crucial for getting things done. Under the ceasefires the available space for commerce, culture and development is continually expanding and contracting. The unpredictability of the Kachin State context ensures that individuals and groups are perpetually seeking opportunities to manipulate and maximise the creative ambiguities that open up. The Manau is symbolic of the way that nodes of control are managed on a day-to-day basis.

As such, the space of creative ambiguity at the Manau festival has a number of layers. First, there is the prominent role of the Myanmar military in what is a “Jinghpaw” celebration. Why is this tolerated? How is it undermined? Second, there is the role of the *Sutdu* and other local development elites. Why do they support the Manau? What do they hope to receive in return? Third, there is the position of the competing ceasefire armed groups. How do they fit together? Does the often remarked “unity” of the Manau actually bring them closer? Clearly, the Myanmar military is an important social, political and economic institution. Its presence at the Manau festival is crucial to its role in the wider Kachin State for the rest of the year and beyond. Moreover, its contracting and expanding presence (dominant at times, and non-existent at others) means that the Myanmar military, and its leaders, can ease in and out of control. When it suited their interests they would show their authority and bristle with firepower. At other times they would step back and allow local leaders, and particularly the KIO/A, to take centre stage.

This led to a certain ambiguity about the festival and its purpose. On one level it was a show of explicit support for the Myanmar government, its seven step roadmap to democracy and the constitutional reforms it has sought to implement. It was also a public signal that the ceasefires have held and that amicable ties between the Burmese and the Jinghpaw are possible. No doubt General Ohn Myint and his officers hoped that the benevolence, generosity and good management of the Myanmar military were all on show. In others ways, however, the festival showed how fearful and paranoid the Myanmar military government remains. The concern of the senior officers for their personal safety seemingly displaces all

other concerns. In front of thousands of children and visitors to Myitkyina the Northern Commander was shameless in his display of military force. Putting heavy weapons of war in a tower overlooking the Manau ground is a symptomatic decision. In his Kachin State Day speech he said that the Myanmar army want to be loved but, clearly, they also fear the repercussions of dissent.

This ambiguity surrounding the Myanmar presence at the Manau festival was encapsulated in the person of the Northern Commander. On the one hand he paraded around with his bodyguards and wore a Rawang chief's outfit, which is arguably the most impressive-looking of all local costumes, during his dominating performance in one of the dances. On the other hand he was a gracious and generous patron. He handed out signed calendars commemorating the birth of his grandson and made large impromptu donations whenever he had a chance. His presence was self-referentially regal. Posing with groups of elite Jinghpaw women, along with his wife and adult daughter also dressed in Jinghpaw outfits, and giving an awkward speech that failed to mention Kachin State Day, all marked his ambiguous presence at the Manau.

Other senior Myanmar military officers, particularly those headquartered at the new capital Naypyidaw, are often credited with a regal mentality about their role in national life. Even the name of the new capital, translated as "royal city; abode of kings" (King, 2008: 171), orientates the self-image of the national leadership. In his actions at the 2008 Manau, General Ohn Myint positioned himself as something like an old-fashioned Burmese "Prince of the Kachin State". This was a deliberate move on his part. His pre-eminence is supposed to be

unchallenged. Undoubtedly, the role and influence of the Jinghpaw elite undermines some of the certainty that Ohn Myint might assume about his “regal” position. *Sutdu* such as Yup Zau Hkawng are clearly a major and growing part of the economic landscape in the Kachin State. Manau festivals, by virtue of their cost and logistical difficulties, are the perfect way for *Sutdu* to increase their status and prestige. They do not simply compete with the status of the Northern Commander and other senior Myanmar officials; they cooperate, they acquiesce and they sponsor. In the middle ground that exists under the Kachin State’s ceasefires, business people provide untold incentives for ongoing collaboration. This is how the nodes of control are maintained.

Maintaining the nodes of control explains why close ties between the Jinghpaw *Sutdu* and the Myanmar leadership were on constant show at the Manau. The local elites hope to leverage their prominent positions into both more business success and greater profile within the Jinghpaw community. As I described in Chapter 4, Yup Zau Hkawng is the most visible *Sutdu*. At the Manau, in fact, I also heard him described as a “lord” by those Jinghpaw who resent some of his wealth and status, but admire his success. Some of these same people also voiced concerns about his close relations to the Myanmar military and, in particular, General Ohn Myint. Do both men seek to cultivate a feudal or regal status? The nature of power and control in the Kachin State over the long-term suggests that their own visions can be, at least partially, represented by such a model.

Authoritarian, centralised, feudal systems of control in the Kachin State have a long history. Today, access to development opportunities is one of the major ways that such feudal

patterns can be replicated. As mentioned previously, in early 2008 it was reported that the Northern Commander's timber-trading son was making preparations to build an international standard airport in Myitkyina (KNG, 2008b). The family unit is, unsurprisingly, a crucial way that control is exercised and replenished. On the other side, for the Jinghpaw elites, the basic outline of life cannot be removed from their key role in Jinghpaw cultural performance. Promoting the unity of all of the Jinghpaw groups gives them a high standing among the community and allows them to use all of the conciliatory phrases beloved of Myanmar's military rulers. Whether they actually hope to see an independent Kachin State, or whether they are intent on preserving the place of the Jinghpaw within the Union of Myanmar, is a point of quiet contention.

One reason for this quiet is that there are very few opportunities for mass KIO/A troop movements in the Kachin State today. Under the ceasefires their movements are closely monitored by the Myanmar government. A small KIO liaison office was opened in Myitkyina in 1998 but its few staff are, as far as I am aware, usually unarmed. In Myitkyina it is the Myanmar Army that has the weapons and the weight of numbers. However, at the Manau festival this all changed as the contingent of KIA soldiers arrived from Laiza. Controlled by the KIO/A as part of its ceasefire agreement, Laiza makes up part of Kachin State Special Region No. 2. In the Kachin State, Special Region No. 2 is controlled by the KIO/A. Its "capital", the modest border town called Laiza, is the closest the Jinghpaw have to their own independent node of control. It is, however, so beholden to China for access, and to Chinese gamblers for much of its local economic activity, that it has a long way to go before it rivals nodes like Myitkyina, Bhamo or even Putao. That space, in the Special

Region, is a space where the balance of creative ambiguity falls to the Jinghpaw side. Under normal circumstances Myitkyina falls to the Myanmar military and is unquestionably its most important node of control. The crackdown on monastic protests there in October 2007 marks that stark difference. For the 60th anniversary festival, the KIO/A officially brought well over a thousand members to Myitkyina (KNG, 2007g). At the actual event it is likely that many more KIO/A members were unofficially in attendance.

Whatever their normal limitations, during the Manau, the KIO/A, and the other armed groups, used the ambiguity provided by the cultural zone of the Manau ground to re-position their claims and to assert their continuing relevance. That relevance is, as the Manau made clear, one that spreads well beyond the limits of Laiza and Kachin State Special Region No. 2. The reception they received in Myitkyina was heartfelt, with regular displays of unsolicited kindness and generosity on the part of the townsfolk. The most obvious manifestation of these feelings emerged during the mass farewell of the assembled KIO/A soldiers. Hundreds of Jinghpaw, from the richest *Sutdu*, right down to ordinary traders, farmers and school children, lined up to shake hand with *their* soldiers. This momentous occasion was the only time during the crowded Manau week when I was pushed out of the way. Apparently, nobody wanted to miss out on an opportunity to share their best wishes with the KIO/A.

Even though the other armed groups do not appear to command the widespread appreciation of the average Jinghpaw, they still had major mobilisations at the Manau. That all three armed groups brought contingents demonstrates just how important the symbolic space of the Manau festival has become. To peacefully attend a Manau, to lead a dance, and to be

welcomed as part of the wider Jinghpaw family, is one path to legitimacy. The differences between the various armed groups *could* be marked by uniforms. However, the KIA and the most recent “splinter group” commanded by Lasang Awng Wa, share a standard outfit. NDA-K troops wear a different uniform but until one picks out their distinctive chest patch it can still be hard to tell them apart. On numerous occasions when I asked local Jinghpaw which group I was looking at (from a distance) they would guess incorrectly. Of course, each group knows the history behind the others, and KIO/A members, in particular, recall the schisms that led to the breakaways.

But in the ambiguity of the Manau, in the darkness that falls early in northern Burma’s January, or in the squinting sunshine of the midday sun, the groups can blur together completely. Some of the ambiguity of the Manau festival means that each distinct group can be wedded to the others. They are still obviously different, with separate commanders, headquarters and areas of control and influence. Nonetheless, there is a creative ambiguity that is opened by the Manau festival. The Myanmar government and the Jinghpaw elites help to shape that space. But the presence of the ceasefire armed groups is, ultimately, the clearest marker of ongoing uncertainty. The armed groups may worry about each other, and fear the possibility of attack or assassination, but they come together for the dancing at the Manau.

Resistance and hopes for the future

Not every Manau is held on terrain that can be so directly attributed to the central government or its mandate to rule. In other parts of northern Burma there are enclaves, often enjoying a sizeable exception to the national norms of sovereignty, where Manau are held

under different conditions. There are the regular Manau festivals held to mark the anniversary of the Kachin (that is, KIO/A) Revolution. It falls on 5 February each year and is signalled by a KIO/A sponsored event in Laiza. After the much bigger celebrations that occur in Myitkyina, these are often low-key affairs that will usually involve only some of the armed strength of the KIO/A. In most years they celebrate in a restrained fashion. However in 2008, for the 47th anniversary, there was a major celebration called the *Sinpraw Majoi Nau Gup Manau Poi*. Some speculated that it would be the last major Revolution Day Manau.

In response, delegates from all Jinghpaw areas, and from further afield, travelled to the Laiza headquarters of the KIO/A right on the border with China. Some of the Jinghpaw leaders who were present included: Lt. General Nban La Awng, Vice President of the Kachin Independence Council, Commander, Col. Kum Htat Gam, of the KIO Relationship Office in Myitkyina, and Dr Manam Tu Ja, Vice-Chairman-II of the KIO. The Myanmar military government's Northern Commander did not attend but sent, instead, Brigadier General San Tun, his Deputy Commander. Brigadier San Tun is married to Tin Sein. Both are named on the United States, British, Australian and European Union lists of sanctioned individuals associated with the "Burmese regime". The Brigadier was accompanied by a substantial security detail. Travelling to Laiza means, quite explicitly, leaving behind the protection that the Myanmar government's nodes of control can offer. In Laiza there are arguably the beginnings of a Jinghpaw node of control that could, in future, become a more active site of resistance to the government and its priorities.

Such resistance is, in one sense, ongoing. Immediately before the 2008 Myitkyina Manau festival commenced a secretive anti-government poster campaign, which had been simmering in Myitkyina, launched another wave. Posters denouncing the government, and its perceived control of economic development in the Kachin State, appeared overnight. This was not an isolated event. Similar efforts to post guerrilla slogans against the government have been a regular feature of life in Myitkyina over the past four years. Dam construction has, particularly, motivated a backlash from some young Jinghpaw who see their future natural inheritance being pillaged by unaccountable, external interests. The alliance between the *Sutdu*, Chinese capitalists and the Myanmar military government is considered undesirable in these quarters. There are those who risk imprisonment to draw attention to these issues. At the Manau festival there were certainly murmurs, away from likely trouble, about the dire state of the local economic and political situation. There is dissent from many unexpected corners and the basic structure of life, dominated by elite interactions, is hardly accepted by all. Some among the Jinghpaw elite no doubt hold their own concerns. Some do wonder, though, whether they have any alternative. Is it a choice between elite development domination or a return to war with the Burmese? What is the middle ground?

The KIO/A's decision to hold a large Manau to mark the 47th anniversary of the beginning of the Kachin revolt led to some extra concerns about the direction of local politics. Was this the KIO/A's final farewell? The Kachin revolutionary organisations were accused (Zai Dai, 2008) of being:

...allured to be granted the position of vice president II in the new government body [of Myanmar] soon to be formed by means of a single party process though multi-

party democratic nation is being declared [sic]. Meanwhile there is no impression or rather any encouragement to the KIO's politics that always centers on the regime's worthless democratic principle and its politics rather than the Kachin people's politics. The basic argument against the Myanmar government in the Kachin State is the same as it has been for generations: the Jinghpaw deserve a say in their destiny and should have control of the wealth and resources that belong to them. It is an argument that has been tied to independence, to revolution and, nowadays, to democracy.

Young people at the Manau were very clear about their frustrations with these and other issues. Many have grown up under the ceasefires and do not have clear memories of the KIO/A's war with the government. They do, however, remember the difficulties of studying in Burmese-medium schools, the ongoing discrimination and suspicion they face, and the basic injustices of life in a militarised system. Many pronounce affection for the KIO/A, even if they have no intention to join its ranks. Many are heartbroken by the failure of the leadership to better position the full mass of the Jinghpaw. Many even support a resumption of hostilities. Their resistance is the result of more than a decade of stagnation in the Jinghpaw political process.

While the elites on both sides have protected and maintained their interests many other Jinghpaw are left vulnerable. They hope for some alternative; many still pine for genuine independence. Surviving years of military rule has led some to a point of exasperation. At the same time, there are some non-government organisations, church groups and others who are trying to carve out new spheres for action and improvement. Myitkyina's local YMCA is

particularly active in this regard. Some of the churches, and especially the dominant Baptist and Catholic congregations, support a range of activities that fall into the category of civil society. They offer some alternatives to the elite negotiations that are otherwise overwhelming. They see their battle, under the post-ceasefire dynamics of the modern day, as a battle for survival. As one critical Kachin essayist (Shagan, 2007) posits:

According to the UN declaration of Human Rights that fight for one basic survival is a right and must. It is not politics yet it is the responsibility for the entire citizens who have been alienated for their survival. Therefore dear Kachins from both inside and outside of our mother land now is the time to stand for our survival.

Like the local elites, Jinghpaw from non-elite backgrounds can capitalise on the creative ambiguity that is offered by the Manau celebration. They can meet, quite openly, with foreigners. Many have taken the time to learn good English, against all odds. Over my time in Myitkyina during the Manau festival I talked with a number of Jinghpaw who had never spoken one-on-one with a foreigner. Their curiosity was one marker of their predicament.

Conclusion

The space of creative ambiguity offered by the Manau festival is symbolic of the interactions between the Jinghpaw elites and the Myanmar military leadership that go on throughout the year. Economic, political and cultural life is dominated by elites on all sides, who can take most advantage of the nodes of control. The Manau is no different. The more interesting indication of social processes that emerges from the Manau is not, however, simply that elites have assumed preeminent roles. It is, far more importantly, that these roles are part of a conversation and negotiation that sees various groups jostling for control under

circumstances where subtlety and “safety” are paramount. The “safety-valve” shows that no one group has a complete mandate or the capacity to exercise full control. As a consequence of their respective strengths and weaknesses the symbolic politics of northern Burma relies on the ambiguities of spaces that are considered appropriately neutral.

The 2008 Myitkyina Manau was a public forum for elite politics and those politics are dominated, at least under the current ceasefires, by the spaces of ambiguity that exist on an everyday level. In the absence of total control of a material or symbolic kind there are opportunities to make use of that space in a multitude of complementary and contradictory ways. The Myanmar military leadership takes what advantages it can from events like the 2008 Myitkyina Manau. At the same time the Jinghpaw development elite, and its partners in more explicitly political and military positions, takes its own piece of the available advantages. The symbolism of the Manau endures because of how well it encapsulates the political dynamics of the borderlands that persist at other, less festive, times of the year.

Chapter 6: Dominating Manau, controlling the nodes

The symbolic politics of Manau

Manau festivals are not only celebrated in Myitkyina, although northern Burma's major node of control hosts the largest events. The Myitkyina Manau demonstrates the power of the "safety-valve" in festival contexts and how it helps to ultimately consolidate the control of the central government. While the Myitkyina Manau is the main festival discussed in this dissertation, in this chapter I show symbolic politics influence other Manau in China and India. In these much more populous nation-states, where the Jingpo and Singpho are even more marginal than the Jinghpaw in Burma, it is to be expected that there will be different political dynamics. Fundamentally, the Jingpo and Singpho do not have the same history of openly opposing central government control. This should not be taken to imply that the nodes of control in China and India are not sites of contestation but that the political significance of the contests is comparatively less. In China the Manau festival is celebrated, and defined, in terms of its robust commercial and entertainment character. This is emblematic of a political and economic situation where optimism and grand plans have become prominent. In India the basic assertion that infuses the Manau is that the Singpho deserve a special status as one of the country's "Scheduled Tribes". Their festival is a declaration of their eligibility for government attention and resources.

These general observations are relevant to a situation where Manau festivals have now been held throughout the borderlands: in almost every town where there are Jingpo, Singpho or Jinghpaw there has been at least one recent Manau. Some of these are very low-key affairs,

held without undue fanfare and limited in scale and grandeur by local economic austerities. Without economically successful local elites to finance, support and protect Manau festivities there are major hurdles to hosting a large-scale event. Nonetheless, in the smaller Manau festivals there are elements of local political culture that are brought into sharp focus. Examining the symbolic politics of these festivals and the ways that contemporary political purposes are manifested requires the consideration of their comparative dimensions.

Again, it is Kertzer's model of "symbolic politics" in festival contexts that I use to bolster my comparative arguments. Kertzer pointedly suggests an approach to the study of ritual in modern politics that examines "how political competitors struggle for power through ritual, how ritual is employed in both defusing and inciting political conflict, and how ritual serves revolution and revolutionary regimes" (1988: 14). In the Myitkyina Manau it is the "safety-valve" component of his model that helps to explain how notionally subversive performances are allowed in a context where there is ongoing contestation between revolutionary and counter-revolutionary political forces. The challenge of continuing to maintain a ceasefire stalemate under conditions where more open resistance is entirely foreseeable encouraged the Myanmar government to allow revolutionary ritual while seeking to neuter the appeal of revolution itself. The KIO/A's spectacular show of defiance when it inverted the standard character of the Myitkyina node of control was tolerated by the Myanmar authorities prepared to allow extra space for a temporary, and spatially limited, show of Jinghpaw solidarity. In both China and India there is no similar show of armed force; instead their Manau festivals serve to reinforce government nodular control by highlighting the significant cooptation of the local elites in these contexts.

Obviously, the spectacular celebrations in Myitkyina in January 2008 are only one indication of the political significance of Manau festivals for more general statements about nodes of control. In this chapter I explore what distinguishes Manau in the three different contexts and, in particular, the ways that local elites are forced to embrace their central governments. The two other Manau under discussion in this chapter emerge from the politics of the borderlands in China and India respectively. In China, the Manau provides an opportunity for feasting in ways that re-endorse the power of the Chinese government and its control over the parts of the borderlands that it claims. For the Singpho Manau in northeast India the involvement of the government and government representatives in every component of the festivities highlights the way that a local elite without access to the material resources of the *Sutdu* uses its political and electoral advantages in ritual politics. In both cases the festivals occur at the outer fringe of the nation-states in areas where the Jingpo and Singpho are important local populations but where their local strength has no broader political ramifications for the nation-state. In both cases it is only a relatively short walk, or an even shorter drive, to the international border with northern Burma. Proximity to Burma has important implications in both cases because the largest population among the categories of Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw is, by a large margin, in northern Burma.

That marginal position ensures that these parts of China and India are both pulled towards the disturbed politics of Burma. The ceasefire armies described in Chapter 5 are a concern for security forces in both of these adjacent territories too. As demonstrations of local negotiations they highlight the continuous interplay between elite groups for the creation and

maintenance of nodes of control. The strong links between the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw across the national frontiers ensure that their major Manau festivals see contingents arrive from across the borders. These contingents endorse the pan-Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw character of the events. Relative to the size of the Manau the most significant trans-border visitors travel to India. The relatively small number of Singpho means that even a few dozen Jinghpaw have a significant impact on the festival as a whole.

A Jingpo Manau

Since the demise of the Soviet Union, China has been the world's foremost Communist society. Notwithstanding its professed ideological commitment, the Chinese government has embarked since the 1980s on an ambitious nation-wide program of economic reform and market liberalisation (Naughton, 1995). New wealth and unprecedented opportunities for the Chinese masses have come with this official effort. The old command economy strictures on migration, employment and lifestyle have largely dissipated. China has very rapidly become an economic superpower. These reforms to the economic system have not generally been matched by concomitant changes to the political structure. The Chinese Communist Party remains the ruling force in the country (Nathan and Gilley, 2003: 3). Its political clout is unmatched by the small parties that provide a flavour of "multi-party democracy". Regardless of its apparent strength, the Chinese government rules over an empire that stretches well beyond its nominal cultural and linguistic sphere. While the borders of China are assumed, by Huntington at least, to mark the extent of Han Chinese "civilisation", in places like Yunnan other cultures are locally dominant.

One far-flung area that remains questionably within the Chinese cultural orbit, but unequivocally in the political one, is the western borderland of Yunnan. To assert that the Chinese government's management of this region is the same as its management of central areas is to miss the many subtle, and not so subtle, aspects of local control.⁹² The area under discussion here is what the Chinese call an "Autonomous Prefecture" (Chinese: *Zizhizhou*). In this case the "autonomy" is ascribed to the local Dai (Shan) and Jingpo peoples (so it is the "*Dehong Daizu Jingpozu Zizhizhou*" in Chinese). As such, this discussion of Manau in China must take up the challenge of understanding how the Chinese government uses its nodes of control in the borderlands. The focus here, as in the previous Chapter, is a Manau festival.

In previous decades Manau (usually called *Manao Zunggo* in China) were outlawed by the Chinese government because they were seen as bourgeois and capitalist in orientation. According to Wang Zhusheng, "[t]hese great rituals became infrequent after 1958, and finally disappeared during the Cultural Revolution" (1997: 195). Festivals of any type, and in fact any public events without an overtly political agenda, have only been allowed in China during the period of relative tolerance that has marked the country's recent economic transformation. Wang (1997: 196) tells us that "[a]fter the Cultural Revolution, the festival was officially declared the nationality holiday of the Jingpo and fixed on New Year's Day of the traditional Chinese calendar". Over the past 30 years, the formal recognition of these celebrations means that they can be held openly in major towns. Some towns, such as Ruili-Jiego and Longchuan, both very close to the border with northern Burma, even have a

⁹² In these border areas, the Chinese government has benefited from the decades-long growth of its national economy. As pointed out earlier in the dissertation this changes the political and economic context in which the Longchuan Manau is held.

number of large and permanent Manau grounds. Some are only slightly smaller than the National Manau Park in Myitkyina. These Manau grounds may, as in the case of the landscaped space just outside Ruili on the Sino-Burmese frontier, be shared with the Dai as “cultural parks”. In other cases they are only associated with the Jingpo and their Manau festivities. These grand, concreted spaces mark a new period for the Jingpo in China. It is usually made evident on the plaques and other writings at Chinese Manau grounds that it is only recently that Manau have been allowed on Chinese soil. As Manau festivals have returned to the borderlands more generally, they have increasingly served to tie the Jingpo of China into networks that include the Jinghpaw of northern Burma and the Singpho of northeast India (Htoi Man, 2001). This festival revival cannot be seen in isolation in any one portion of the borderlands.

This is particularly the case when the trans-border linkages are so publicly and prominently invoked. Around Myitkyina there are, for instance, many references to the Chinese Manau festivals that locals have attended: posters, calendars and other markers of such cross-border cultural connections are common. In China the participation of uniformed members of the Kachin Independence Army serves as a quiet, but hardly discreet, sign of the ways that many Jingpo in China share connections with the political struggles that have occurred in northern Burma. No fanfare is made of these connections but anybody who looks closely will see just how significant the transnational flows have become. In fact, some of the drums used to keep the beat during the Manau dances in China are sourced from the Myitkyina-based “*wunpawng*” advocates who have been so prominent in generating enthusiasm for Manau festivals in northern Burma. For Chinese Manau participants there is an understandable

awareness that it is in Myitkyina where the grandest Manau are held. Many Jingpo that I asked, indicated that they had previously travelled to Myitkyina for a Manau, or would like to do so in the future.

For the purposes of this Chapter, there are a number of major festivals in China that could have proven representative examples for a Chinese case-study. Nonetheless I have chosen to focus on the Longchuan Manau held two weeks after Chinese New Year in March 2007. This festival was smaller than the Myitkyina Manau. Informed estimates were that around 50,000 people attended over three days. Two of those days were devoted to dancing. With the sun beating down and the local liquor flowing there was a force to the audience and its excitement without the underlying tension that exists at Manau held in northern Burma. No guns were on show and nor was there the demonstrations of martial capacity. However, the drum beat, the music and the form of dancing is identical to the Manau in Myitkyina, or, for that matter, to any other Manau that I am aware of. Slight variations in costume serve only to reinforce the powerful consistency of other cultural markers.⁹³ That consistency marks out the Manau as a pan-regional cultural performance that cultivates links across the wider region of eastern Zomia.

Nonetheless in each country there are distinguishing features that see the Manau take on local characteristics. The character of the Manau in Longchuan is partly defined by the way that the local economy has provided opportunities for more sophisticated commercial activities. In this way the Manau reflects a pattern that has been observed in other parts of

⁹³ At Manau in all three countries I have heard discussions about the different ways that Manau are performed. One of the standard assessments of their differences focuses on women's attire. In Jingpo areas of China many suggest there has been a persistent effort to popularise traditional outfits that reflect modern fashions.

Yunnan. Describing a temple rededication in Xishuangbanna in the far south of Yunnan, McCarthy (2004: 41) notes “[t]he slick packaging of...exoticism” that comes with Han Chinese interest in ethnic festivities. Economic opportunities are one of the crucial components of these festivals, and they are usually surrounded by the camps of nomadic traders, artisans and performers who add to the temporary vibrancy. At the Longchuan Manau there was a small circus complete with camels, acrobats and audacious magicians; a tent with bikini-clad dancing women; dozens of gambling outlets; numerous shooting ranges; and a range of dining and drinking options. There were also haphazardly erected stores selling household items and wandering purveyors of Jingpo food and drink. Everywhere there was action, and shouting, banging and exuberance. Young festival participants, many intoxicated by local whiskey, enjoyed the action and excitement of the Manau. Such festivals have a reputation as places where “young people can meet and interact with members of the opposite sex” (Jia, Han and Wang, 2007: 17).

But it is not all fun and games. In McCarthy’s study of festivals in southern Yunnan the role of the government is brought into sharper focus. He argues that “[t]he role of the party-state in such cultural events perhaps suggests that they function as a kind of political theatre, in which relationships and expectations among the state, local elite and ordinary [people] are expressed, solidified and even contested” (2004: 41). In this sense the ambiguities and contestations are not unlike what has been described for the case of northern Burma in Chapter 5. “Political theatre” is not the phrase used by Kertzer but it could capture the range of symbolic political interactions, and ritual conflicts, that he describes. The theatrical elements of Manau festivals are one part of what makes them so interesting for everyone

who is involved. In particular, the government can use such cultural events to set out the prevailing political realities in a theatrical form. In northern Burma, we can reason that this saw the elaborate dances of position and power between, on the one hand, the Jinghpaw ceasefire forces and the people who support them, and, on the other, the Myanmar government authorities. For China, the government allows a showcase of the economic strength and ambiguous ethnic tolerance of their system. McCarthy turns this around and goes on to argue that such ambiguity is “odd” and that in his Xishuangbanna case-study “[s]tate support for events like the temple rededication could be seen as encouraging Dai identification with the Thai nation-state, and with a cross-border, ethno-linguistic Tai collectivity” (2004: 44). At a Manau in China it is only natural that large numbers of Jinghpaw will participate from across the border in northern Burma. So is a similar cross-border, ethno-linguistic collectivity relevant to discussions of the Jingpo? Are they identifying with a nascent Jinghpaw (or Jingpo) nation-state right in front of the Chinese authorities?

It is an intriguing possibility. There is an element of political theatre and symbolic performance that grabs attention at the Longchuan Manau that may not be apparent to the Chinese authorities. They are certainly aware that many more “Kachin” (Jinghpaw, etc.) live across the border in Burma and that some of these people are likely to harbour quiet ambitions for a Jinghpaw government (or merely a node of control) that encompasses, or harvests, the Jingpo of Yunnan. What they may not fully realise is that the politics of Manau festivities are integral to the three different borderlands contexts. In northeast India, for instance, C.C. Singpho, the prominent local politician, wears a padded Chinese “dragon”

jacket from a trip he made to Yunnan to participate in a Manau festival.⁹⁴ Similarly, at the Longchuan Manau there were a number of men openly wearing their Kachin Independence Army uniforms and making contacts with businessmen, political figures and, yes, even the lone Westerner, at the festival. There is probably no reason for them to abuse Chinese hospitality or to undermine the authority asserted by the node of control. Nonetheless we should remain open to the various and ambiguous uses to which Manau spaces are put.

In northern Burma the strength of the KIO/A encouraged the Myanmar authorities to tolerate the “safety-valve” of ritual expression and subversion. There is no such subversion of government authority in China and one of the explanations for this difference is that the local elite in Yunnan have less cause to rebel. They now experience unprecedented wealth and even though many Jingpo remain poor they are all aware that access to the economic and political resources of China’s boom has proven a generally happy experience. The difficulties of the Cultural Revolution, when Manau were temporarily banned, have faded and even some of the more draconian Chinese government policies, such as the so-called “one child policy” are hardly enforced in Jingpo areas. Instead, the ready access of many Jingpo to the lucrative opportunities available in Burma, and their dual reservoirs of trans-border cultural solidarity and Chinese citizenship, has made them comfortable on their side of the border.

In the wider context of eastern Zomia their lack of rebellious sentiment is somewhat exceptional and this seems to be officially acknowledged. No doubt in an effort to clarify the

⁹⁴ From the direction of northern Burma, the commemorative *Kachin State News (Jinghpaw Mungdaw Nsen)* published for the 2007 Kachin State Day Manau included a picture of a Jinghpaw delegation at the Great Wall of China (2007: 62).

reasonable limits of any possible subversion, the Chinese government presence at the Longchuan Manau was obvious but benign. From the Chinese flag flying high above the festivities, to the preponderance of Yunnanese and Mandarin spoken, to the very substantial (but mostly firearm free) security presence put on by the authorities, it was clear throughout the festivities that the Manau was held under Chinese government auspices.

The Longchuan Manau also demonstrated the lengths to which orderly ethnic minority populations can prove their acceptance of government strength. Compared to the Manau in India and Burma the Chinese example demonstrated that uniformity was crucial to acceptance. In contrast to some other Manau, the regimentation of performance at the Jingpo Manau ensured that only appropriately attired and regimented groups of dancers were welcome to join the lines of dancers on the Manau ground. Members of the local elite would take command of their lines of dancers, just as in India and Burma, but they will all be identified by matching (or complementary) outfits to help maintain a consistent image. The result of this effort to specify belonging and coherence is a polished performance that is designed to impress outsiders with its exotic colour and movement (as captured in Appendix 5).

For McCarthy this absorption of ethnic culture by the official government system is made possible because of the “internal orientalism” that punctuates Chinese interactions with borderlands peoples (2004: 51). This is a process of “idealization of certain minority nationalities as exotic others [that] may actually benefit these groups...[a]s they are perceived as cooperative, even docile”. The Jingpo, even while their links with the Jinghpaw

across the border are being displayed, have still managed to define themselves in these docile terms. Cooperation is a requirement of nodes of control and it is no surprise that it was a feature of the Longchuan Manau.

Manau implications in China

Cooperation with the Chinese government and its priorities has clear advantages for the Jingpo. They are, in Chinese terms, a very small ethnic minority, numbering around 120,000 (Dong Yan, 2002: 260). Next to the more than a billion other residents of China they could easily be overlooked. However, at times, the Chinese have shown themselves to be adept managers of a wide and diffuse empire. Their administrative systems have, not without many errors and miscalculations, now come to provide greater prosperity for ordinary people, even in many minority areas. The Jingpo have benefited from recent changes in Chinese society and now find themselves one of the wealthiest and most contented ethnic minorities anywhere in the borderlands of eastern Zomia.

In fact one of the advantages of life on the Chinese side of the border is, to state the obvious, that it is in China. China, the rising global economic behemoth of the early 21st century, is perceived to have a desirable political and economic system by the Jingpo. The nodes of control in China operate with this understanding. In northern Burma, and to some extent in northeast India too, the governments are more fearful of the competition that alternative spatial claims suggest. As a result, they are usually far more inclined to offer strong shows of armed strength. It is striking just how little armed presence one sees in the border counties of China; the Longchuan Manau was an unusual example of an overt security presence, but

even then it was relatively lightly armed. Most of the police on duty were carrying, at most, a long wooden pole to help with crowd control. At the Manau almost all of the guns being carried were of a plastic variety: children's toys. Traders, in this case mostly Muslims from lower Burma, did a roaring trade in plastic pellet guns that hundreds of the children at the festival ran around firing at will.

The presence of these Burmese traders, and others from the Shan State, and even some who had previously made a living in Thailand, demonstrate the pull that China's nodes of control exert. In Burma, politics and military power is far more important for nodular control. In China, by contrast, it is commercial opportunity that marks out the nodes and the opportunities that are consolidated by the Longchuan Manau. In a sense, the Manau was a festival of early 21st century Chinese commercial prospects and the consumerist surge that has accompanied the liberalisation of the country's market system. Strikingly, China's trading interests also stretch far into northern Burma and the opportunity to commune with well-placed local entrepreneurs is one attraction of the festivities.

Furthermore, in my discussions with local businesspeople it became clear that China's economic power makes its nodes of control far more appealing to them than anything that exists across the border in northern Burma. Some of these businesspeople, members of the local Jingpo elite, regularly visit northern Burma for trade and for Manau festivities. As one automobile broker told me "the market in China is so big that we are just happy, I would even say lucky, to be part of it. We are Jingpo, and he is Shan, but we are all Chinese because we live in China. That is important and good for our businesses". The Jingpo cannot

help but see the way that they engage with China as being an advantageous outcome of their position. To be born on the other side of the frontier, in the far less secure conditions of Burma, is not considered desirable at all. They also point out that “Jingpo is not a language we can speak everywhere, but Chinese is”. The economic advantages of their national position are immense. In fact, insofar as political considerations have been pre-eminent in Burma, the Chinese Jingpo devote increasing attention to cultivating economic prosperity. Their good fortune in China translates into a higher standard of living and future opportunities to take advantage of border trade.

Those opportunities interact with the Chinese approach to its nodes of control. The Chinese government has seemingly learned, through many failures, that there is a time for a strong government and a time for a weaker posture. This portfolio of exceptional conditions and graduated sovereignties means that in the borderlands it is a weaker public posture that has become the everyday way that the government positions itself. Its maintenance of control is built on the special character of the borderlands environment. If that means Chinese troops guard a border crossing and Kachin Independence Army soldiers stand on the other side then that is acceptable. The problems of northern Burma need not be the problems of China.⁹⁵ Indeed, over the past decade or so, the Chinese government, and its associated local elites, have shown the opportunities of Burma in all their destructive clarity. Chinese is spoken, Chinese currency is used, and Chinese elites are welcomed with open arms. Have the Chinese learned that being gentle is the best way of doing business?

⁹⁵ This is a position that was tested in 2009 when large numbers of refugees fled their homes in the northern Shan State looking for sanctuary in Yunnan. They were escaping the breakdown in the ceasefire between the Kokang militia and the Myanmar military government. The Chinese government has since made preparations for future refugee intakes if fighting flares up between the Myanmar government and its erstwhile ceasefire partners.

The answer is that the Chinese have managed their interests in the region to fill the amount of space they judge is available for a Chinese government presence. This is the type of management on show at the Manau, an event that benefited from this subtle but undeniably dominant central government posture. The corollary is that the borderlands can, when required, go relatively ungoverned. Ideas about such Chinese flexibility have other implications when it comes to the Indian portion of the borderlands. Those are implications that I will discuss in more detail in the next section. It is, however, true that the basic thrust of the Chinese nation-state-making and developmental agenda in the borderlands is only as robust as it needs to be.

Dancing on Indian soil

The third example of a Manau festival presented in this dissertation comes from northeast India. The Indian portion of the borderlands where China, India and Burma meet is the most difficult to access. These difficulties are not just experienced by foreigners, but even by ordinary Indian citizens. It is not possible for an Indian from, say, Kerala or West Bengal to enter this part of the Indian territory without formal approval; or, more accurately, it is only possible with effective contacts. Arunachal Pradesh is behind the “Inner Line” and everything that follows in this discussion of state and society in this part of the borderlands must reconcile that position.

Being part of the Indian system of bureaucratic, democratic politics is the foundation of Arunachal Pradesh. It is an Indian process of nation-state-formation that has led “Arunachal”

into existence. Across the valleys of this mountainous and genuinely remote region there are few roads that service more than one valley.⁹⁶ According to Ali (2001: 49):

People of Arunachal remained stagnant for centuries for geographical, topographical and historical reasons. At the time they became the citizens of free India, there was hardly any awareness among them about the philosophy of Indian constitution or the institutions of modern governments. In the short span of forty years people have made miraculous progress in every field of modern activity. In this process, [the] role of politics and bureaucracy needs no emphasis.

The high ranges of Arunachal Pradesh, which generally run north to south and separate valleys from each other, have thwarted attempts to build roads or government involvement in just the same way as they thwarted much east-west migration across the mountains. It is only on the flat Brahmaputra valley that easy access to other valleys of Arunachal Pradesh is possible by motorable roads. It was once the case that the valley, and its river, provided the best way of travelling the region.

Today, an official from the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, who wants to travel to one of the easternmost districts, Lohit or Tirap, or Changlang, will find only three options. There is the option of descending to Guwahati where planes fly, a few times a week, to upper Assam where it is possible to drive to the mountains. There is the second option of taking a helicopter to a helipad either in upper Assam or some part of Arunachal Pradesh, or there is

⁹⁶ As von Fürer-Haimendorf (1955: 231) explains: "To build roads and bridges suitable for wheeled traffic would require such enormous resources that it can hardly be considered a practical solution. If even the Ledo Road, built during the war to link Assam with Burma and China, had to be abandoned soon after completion because the cost of maintenance would have vastly exceeded its economic value, there is little likelihood that the limited commerce of small tribal populations would justify the construction of motorable roads in one of the world's most difficult mountain countries".

the third (and perhaps quickest) option of riding or driving the full distance up the Brahmaputra Valley to the final destination. From the plains of Assam every entrance to Arunachal Pradesh is marked by an internal border between India “proper” and the area on the other side of the Inner Line, Arunachal Pradesh.

Miao in Arunachal Pradesh’s Changlang district is a good example of the implications of this territorial demarcation. The only people who officially live in the town have formal permission to be there, either through their “tribal” affiliation and identity documents or, more often, through their government affiliation. In the town of Miao there are a number of areas that are designated as “colonies” for government employees. There is, for example, an “Engineers’ Colony” and a “Teachers’ Colony”. This system serves to structure the residential pattern of the town by occupational category. It reinforces the pre-eminent role played by the government in the life of the town.

One of the ways that Miao’s outpost character is formed is through the Government owned guesthouses. The most habitable of these official residences is the Circuit House provided by the Public Works Department. During the 2008 Shapawng Yawng Manau festival it was used to welcome the official party (who arrived by helicopter at the Public Works Department’s helipad on the edge of town). It was also where senior figures and foreign guests were housed. Circuit Houses were established in India (and in Burma, I might add) during the British colonial period. They have always served as a base for travelling officials whose work has seen them require accommodation in far flung outposts. They have been retained in the post-impence era, and many new ones have been built, to support the functions of the

expanding bureaucracy. In Miao another government guesthouse is run by the Forestry Department in conjunction with a local non-government organisation. Their “eco-lodge” has a wonderful view but does not meet the standards of the Circuit House. Visitors to the festival regarded as important, such as this researcher, were provided with accommodation at the Circuit House.

The official character of the town also includes army, police and intelligence functions. The Central Bureau of Investigation monitors who enters Miao. At the same time the senior local officials, such as the Additional District Commissioner and the Extra District Commissioner, all have substantial influence. Some of these officials hail from within Arunachal Pradesh. Others are Assamese, Bengali or from elsewhere in India. They still deal in thick paper files, bound with red tape, and are direct inheritors of many of the mechanical aspects of the Indian bureaucratic tradition. The most high-profile security presence around the town is provided by the Central Reserve Police Force. They are a paramilitary organisation armed with various machine guns. For practical purposes they are a patrolling military force. They keep an eye on markets, major roads and, of course, festivals. The platoon that I chatted with had members drawn from across India. From places as distant as Tamil Nadu, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar: they had been sent to Miao to keep the peace. This is analogous to the situation described by Foster (1988: 147) who suggests that being of a different ethnicity in certain circumstances can be a “preadaptation...as it establishes social distance that

mitigates...stress and conflict”.⁹⁷ Compared to some postings, Miao is considered quiet. Just after the 2008 Shapawng Yawng Manau festival, for example, Naxalite militants in Orissa killed six Central Reserve Police Force troopers. More recently, in April 2010, 76 Central Reserve Police were killed in Chhattisgarh. The Central Reserve Police Force was established under the *Central Reserve Police Force Act* of 1949, and is organised into 70 battalions. The force is lightly armed, at least compared to the army, and is designed to provide support to State police in difficult situations. Some of the border districts of Arunachal Pradesh that are near Nagaland, and have seen incursions from Naga insurgents, fall into this category. As the Indian government has made it more difficult for some insurgent groups to operate in Assam and in their traditional strongholds, some have sought to exploit the relative safety of movement provided by the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh.

There has been relatively little academic attention focussed on northeast India and, in particular, the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh. It is still possible to claim (Talukdar 2001: 33) that “...Arunachal Pradesh is virtually a virgin area in as far as socio-political researchers are concerned”.⁹⁸ When Bertil Lintner, the prominent reporter of Burmese affairs, was setting out on his walk across northern Burma he departed from northeast India. Lintner (1990: 11) writes that upon meeting with a West Bengali editor of

⁹⁷ There is another interpretation that is worth highlighting in the context of eastern Zomia: discrimination. In the case of Laos, Stuart-Fox (2006: 68), observes that “[a]n important negative impact not often remarked upon, however, is that as the political system has drawn increasingly on ethnic Lao political culture, so the political influence of minorities has steadily decreased. Minority cadres may cultivate political patrons within the Party, but they lack the family links with powerful, predominantly ethnic Lao, senior politicians, and they lack social links with the ethnic Lao economic and commercial elite.” Something similar has occurred in parts of northeast India’s borderlands but it remains an uneven process. It is still possible to find government cadre, and military officers, from otherwise obscure ethnic groups.

⁹⁸ Furthermore, Ali (2001: 46) writes that: “...it may not sound exaggerated to say that Arunachal offers a virgin ground in terms of research possibilities in political science”.

the left wing weekly, *Frontline*, “[t]o our surprise, India's northeast seemed as remote and alien to him as it was to us. Foolishly I had overlooked the racial element”. But it is not merely a racial element that ensures a separation between India and the northeast; there are also institutional barriers to greater understanding of the nodes of control.

These nodes are the spaces through which the Indian government takes control of its share of the borderlands. At the most basic level they are the colonial outposts of the Indian nation-state apparatus that have been implanted in the spaces on the fringes of the nation-state. At a more complex, abstract level these nodes are the places where the nation-state, and local societies, can have interactions. Those interactions are the goal of the nodular structures. They can define the extent of interactions with relatively confined areas and there is diminished requirement for interaction with areas that are far from the nodes of government control and imposition. The exceptions, following Ong’s model, are the few places where the Indian government decides to fuse itself to a local society. In Singpho areas it is mostly the towns that have been inculcated with elements of government influence. These quasi-colonial insertions in places where the nation-state seeks to defend its core interests require that investment from the government sector follows any other efforts to exercise military or legal control. Suzerainty is limited to those places where the Indian government has core interests at stake.

As those interests coalesce around the agendas of local Singpho elites it might be expected that they will work together to further any common goals. The financial, logistical and rhetorical resources available to those who engage with government projects of

territorialisation and control ensure that elites in the borderlands are open to the prospects of better integrating with the government. While this is also true in some instances in China and Burma, I observed it most openly in the Indian portion of the borderlands. The character of those borderlands is, more than anything else, a reflection of the power of the Indian government and, particularly, its security agencies and their perspective on the national territory. The strategy has been to embrace the “scheduled tribes” of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam by making them Indian and then using them as a bulwark against both sub-national insurgent movements and the territorial ambitions of the Chinese government. The co-option of local populations and particularly the creation of the local elites is an ongoing process.

Shapawng Yawng Manau 2008

Co-optation is fundamental for the structure of nodes of control in northeast India. The focus in this section is the Shapawng Yawng Manau festival held in Miao, Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh, in February 2008. Much smaller than the Manau held in southwest China or northern Burma, the 2008 event was attended by around 4,000 people. The official goal of “the festival [was to] bring people of different communities on one platform [and] spread [a] message of unity, harmony and peace in society” (Dwivedi, 2008). According to another perspective “[t]he main objectives of the Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi is the biggest attempt to rescue, to preserve, to extend the art and culture of the Singpho tribe as well as a single platform to unite us” (S.N. Singpho, 2008). The political energy and commercial excitement of the other festivals discussed in this dissertation was largely absent. What replaced it in this Indian context was a very strong sense of the nodular function of small towns in the Indian portion of the borderlands, the importance of elected figures, and the patronage required in

ethno-communalist political contexts. Chakraborty (2004: 9) has written about how “the tribal solidarity movements in north-eastern India grew out of a *crisis* of identity of the emerging tribal intelligentsia”. It is in this context that the solidarity attributed to *all* Manau has taken on a peculiarly northeast Indian flavour.

Compared to the sizeable Manau festivals that are regularly organised in both Burma and China, the Manau in India was small. The smaller population of Singpho is one explanation for its size. Another is the more substantially “invented” nature of the festivities. The festival was supposed to run for three days but, in effect, there were less than two days. The Manau ground, on a patch of grass that at other times of the year would be used as the town cricket pitch, was temporary. The fence around the dancing area as well as the Manau pillars were erected before the festival and promptly removed at its conclusion. Temporary Manau pillars are traditional, of course, in the sense that until the 1980s there were no concrete pillars anywhere in the borderlands. This has now changed in other parts of the borderlands and there are permanent concrete pillars in many places, including in northeast India at Bordumsa. But in Miao the Manau pillars were erected the night before the festival by a group of local men. Digging with spades and hauling with muscle they managed to get the pillars upright without undue problems (see Appendix 5 for photographic details). It is also relevant that the Manau in Miao provided far fewer opportunities for consumption or spending. There was no gambling affiliated with the event and the eating and drinking options were limited. A small and rather lucklustre commercial strip, including some carnival-style amusements, was the only diversion. One stall announced that it sold “Chinese food”. The small attendance and limited local financial resources no doubt ensured that many traders stayed away.

The Shapawng Yawng Manau in northeast India has been held annually since 1985. It has been hosted by Singpho areas in Arunachal Pradesh 19 times and in Assam six times. The towns that have hosted the festival are Miao (five times, including 1985 and 2008), Bordumsa (10 times, including the 25th jubilee celebrations in 2009), N-hpum (twice, but not since 1990), Payong (twice), N-naw, N-them (twice), Bisa, Margherita, Lekhapani, Keteting and Innao. Of the eighteen “Presidents” of the Manau festivities eight have been “*Duwa*” (chiefs). The others have been “*Salang*” (Misters). Since 2004, as a new generation of Singpho leaders have come to prominence, two Presidents and three Secretaries of the festivities have carried the surname “Singpho”. Before 2004 none of the Manau leadership carried that surname. They had their old family names or other chiefly names associated with localities (Bisa, Miao, Pisi, etc.).

These prominent local families have become among the most successful at harnessing electoral politics, and other mechanisms for capturing government resources, in their areas of the borderlands. While their hereditary, chiefly power may not be formally recognised by the Indian government they are usually best positioned to run for election and to ally themselves with political partners at the Arunachal Pradesh level. The higher grades of education represented in these families (I met a number of such elite figures with University degrees) and the inherited wealth that they control means that in the Indian system they are well-placed for advancement. Many of the younger generation have travelled widely in India and some have studied and worked in New Delhi or Bangalore. Some have even travelled abroad to pursue their professions. This is quite different to the situation in other parts of the

borderlands and indicates how traditional chiefly statuses have transformed in ways that are still very beneficial.

One of the people who has benefited the most from Singpho politics is Arunachal Pradesh politician C.C. Singpho. At the 2008 Shapawng Yawng Manau festival, as at other recent events, he was the Chief Patron. He is sometimes described as the “King of the Singpho”. His recent ministerial position in the Arunachal Pradesh government has allowed him to cultivate a large role in the future of the Singpho. He is not, however, ever called *Sutdu*. In his introduction to the festival C.C. Singpho was introduced as the “Honourable Minister C.C. Singpho who is also the Chief Patron of this festival, and also the Chief Advisor of the Singpho Development Society”. In his remarks he described the Shapawng Yawng Manau as the “important festival of the Singphos”. He then went on to introduce all of the officials by their positions and thanked “delegates coming from abroad” (from Burma, China and the United Kingdom). He also thanked the Chief Minister for allowing these foreign guests to visit Arunachal Pradesh. He then took the “liberty of delivering [his] speech in Assamese” for the benefit of the assembled journalists. He talked about drugs and the requirement for Singpho youth to become more industrious. In the Indian manner he finished these remarks with “*Jai Shapawng Yawng, Jai Hind*” (Hindi for “Love live Shapawng Yawng, long live India”).⁹⁹ In response to this speech, the Secretary General of the Singpho Development Society submitted a memorandum to the “Honourable Minister”. This was described as a “list of Singpho grievances...for compassionate consideration and favour”. In justifying this list the Singpho were described as a “bonafide indigenous tribe of Arunachal Pradesh”.

⁹⁹ A speech by Chowna Mien, another Arunachal Pradesh government minister in attendance, made an even more flamboyant use of the “*Joi Hind*” invocation. In one part he said, “Thank you, *Joi Hind*, and I would like to donate from my side a sum of rupees one *lakh* for this festival”. One lakh is equal to one hundred thousand.

This element of the Shapawng Yawng Manau festival fits into a scheme of cultural performance that is fundamental to life in northern India. In a book titled *Agricultural festivals of Arunachal Pradesh*, Mangphai (1995: 5) describes some of the many different ways that the yearly cycle is marked in different parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The publication of this monograph was “sponsored by Institute for Preservation of Art, Culture and Literature (IPACL), Itanagar”. Its account of festivals provides an image that emphasises the exotic character of local life. It reports, for instance, that during one particular festival “the people are abstained from killing or harming of living beings including plucking of any kind of plants, intoxicating drinks, manual labours and business etc, etc” (Mangphai, 1995: 63). It also showcases the value of cultivating eligibility and acceptability in government eyes.

This is one reason that beyond the Shapawng Yawng Manau, India’s northeast has seen a boom of festivals in recent decades (see Singh 2008, for illustrative details). In response, some writers have focused specifically on issues of dance and physical performance in festival contexts. Sarkar (1990: 107) writes that “[a]nother facet of the art of dance in Arunachal Pradesh, which is currently engaging the attention of dancers, is the dancing costumes. It is undergoing a lot of improvisation and enrichment and thus adding more colour to the dances”. Sarkar (1990: 108) has suggestions for improvement including prizes for innovative aspects of a festival, such as dance movements, dance costumes, music or songs. There is also a feeling (Sarkar, 1990: 108) that dances lead to solidarity:

In Arunachal everybody is a dancer and all, irrespective of sex and age, join the dance...The convention in Arunachal that all those present, whether hailing from

within or outside, must join the performance of recreational dances should be strictly adhered to in letter and spirit.

Nowadays the region's calendar is punctuated by celebrations that draw on ethnic, religious or state projects (Festivals of North-east India, 2009).

With this festival fever some festivals are very new such as the Pangsau Pass Festival (Longphong, 2008; Simai, 2008). It is now common in written commentaries on life in this region to highlight the role of ritual, performance, song and dance in the calendar of the local populations. Writers from around the world, and from the length and breadth of India, have commented on these events. Philip (2004: 82) has this to say about the "Festival of Song and Dance" held by the Singpho:

Although proud to be Buddhists, the Singphos also fear the loss of their cultural identity because they are surrounded by much larger populations of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Each year around 2,000 Singpho gather together to celebrate their ancestors and their culture in the Shapawng Yawng Manau Poi festival. They dance the Thongka Manou [Manau], a Singpho folk dance, and feast on buffalo meat and rice under a huge awning of bamboo poles and palm leaves.

Some accounts of the Singpho festival scene are inaccurate. Grewal (1997: 211) makes the assertion that:

The Singphos do not celebrate any social festival like other tribal people but they perform only one, once a year, which is connected with the Buddhist cult. The festival is called *Chang Kiyen*. They celebrate it in the month of April, which they call *Rata* and that day their new year begins. The festival lasts for three days.

The Singpho do celebrate a Sangken festival (like among other Theravada Buddhists in this part of the world it is often called the “water festival”) but they also hold Manau. Sangken is “celebrated in the fifth month (ONAUN-HA) of [the] Buddhist calendar, corresponding to the months of March-April of [the] English calendar. The festival marks [the] beginning of ‘New year’” (Mangphai, 1995: 61). But what can we take away from the Indian Manau? How does it fit into the broader scheme of symbolic politics that determines social possibilities in the borderlands?

Affiliations and belonging at Manau

One of the most intriguing issues that emerges from this discussion of Manau festivals is that while they occur in three different countries they are all part of a relatively consistent cultural framework. The fact that the Jingpo in China are nominally atheist/animist, that the Jinghpaw in Burma are mostly Christian and that the Singpho in India are, almost universally, described as Buddhist is an intriguing point of comparison for any discussion of symbolic politics and spatial control. On the ground the situation is never as clear as stagnant descriptions of religious affiliation may suggest but there are, nonetheless, good reasons for taking these broad categorisations of religious grouping as indicative of local religious beliefs. Moreover, there are significant ongoing connections that clarify the extent to which cross-cutting affinities matter. Baptist Jinghpaw from Burma who are looking to escape persecution or hardship in their country of citizenship have been known to look to India for opportunities and even for formal changes of identity. New and entirely official documents, proclaiming their Singpho “tribalness”, with their Buddhist religion, can be arranged. Similar

boundary crossing activities are reported to take place between China and Burma. As such, an awareness of ethnic cohesion appears to dominate other considerations.

Explaining this situation it is worth examining how each set of religious beliefs is based in a very specific configuration of historical and cultural contingencies. Lintner (1994: 63), for instance, describes the process of Christianisation after Ola Hanson's 1895 Jinghpaw translation of the Bible in the following terms:

Baptist congregations were soon to be found all over the Kachin-inhabited areas of the northern Shan States as well as in the Kachin hills to the north. Pockets of animism survived only in the remote so-called Triangle area between the Mali Hka and Nmai Hka Rivers, the headwaters of the mighty Irrawaddy.

Lintner does not tell us, however, that in “Kachin-inhabited areas” outside northern Burma this proliferation of Baptist congregations did not happen. In northeast India and in southwest China the conditions of religious interaction were quite different. The long-term interactions between Tai Khamti, who are generally Theravada Buddhists, and the Singpho led to the gradual conversion of most Singpho to Buddhism. Whatever the religious affiliation of the Jingpo in 1949 when the Communist Party of China took power it is clear that they now tend to call themselves animists. The disjunctures that these different religious affiliations imply would clearly be of tremendous interest to Huntington or to others concerned with the potential for politics to be divided at civilisational limits. The compelling issue here is that each different religion is also, nowadays, wedded to a set of understandings about ethnicity and nation-state politics that can be enunciated through Manau performance.

In each country those who are nominally of a certain religious affiliation hold their cultural identity, particularly as represented in the Manau festivals that are held under all three systems, as representative of communal and spiritual unity. That the Jinghpaw adherents of Christianity in northern Burma remain so inclined to embrace a pre-Christian ceremonial context is an indication of their own political vulnerability, and need for symbolic resources of many kinds, but also of the flexibility with which this region has been evangelised. Cultural and religious changes have been partnered with political considerations in a range of different ways. According to local tradition, it was largely Burmese and Shan monks who converted the Singpho in northeast India to Buddhism. These conversions appear to have occurred in the last two hundred years in almost all areas of Singpho settlement. In China it is often said that the “state religion” is “Marxism-Leninism”, and for the Jingpo “animism” has been tolerated. At one level this remains somewhat accurate. However, as the liberalisation of the economy has continued one part of society that has enjoyed greater freedom has been religious life. Officially, there are only five religions in China: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. This system is designed so that the government can maintain control over the various religious communities and, in particular, their leaders. The control of religious affairs has been asserted as a state prerogative.¹⁰⁰

In contrast to this situation, during the years of concerted missionary effort in northern Burma it was socially acceptable to take an uncompromising evangelical tone. In one particularly memorable historical fragment, Purser and Knight (1911: 23) warned that the Jinghpaw are:

¹⁰⁰ This has broader political implications. Falla describes (1991: 28) how “a coup in 1962 brought the Army to power in Burma under a General, Ne Win, who for Baptist Karen became the socialist Antichrist”.

...a warlike people, and now that they have been prevented from invading their neighbours' territory by the British Government, they gratify their warlike instinct by quarrelling amongst themselves. Part of their territory is still not directly under British rule, and the Government prohibits Europeans from traveling these parts lest they should be killed and the expense of a punitive expedition should have to be incurred.

Purser and Knight's comments about other locals are similarly terse. For example of the Shan they note that "their religion is a very degraded form of Buddhism, but it has so strong a hold of them that the Christian missionary finds them even less receptive than the Burmese to his message" (1911: 25). But, for all this backwardness and warlike characteristics, Purser and Knight (1911: 41) acknowledge that "[a]mongst such backward peoples as these hill and mountain dwellers of Burma, Christian Missions have won their most notable victories...If each race and nation as it enters the Church will contribute something towards the fullness of its religious experience, we may believe that the contribution which these hill people will make will be the spirit of reverence and simplicity".

What of the Manau? The Manau festivals—notionally animist and draped in the trappings of "tradition"—have emerged in all three systems but now interact with not only each other but also with certain ideas of history and belonging. The Manau festival of today can be moulded to the local conditions. Sadan (2005: 235) has, for the case of northern Burma, argued that:

[f]or many of these Christian converts there was and still is unease at the manau festival's animist origins. To consume the performance as a purely secular entity was not enough to satisfy their concerns. It thus became important that the production,

circulation and consumption of the performance should engage with new notions of Christian nationalism.

Those local conditions are, in turn, a response to various historical and political realities. It makes sense to be Buddhist in India, Christian in Burma and animist/atheist in China. These are productive strategies for asserting proximity or distance from central government approaches to religious belief. And, in each case, they can be linked to a pre-modern and traditional pan-region realm that speaks, through the Manau, to everyone regardless of their contemporary spiritual affiliation.

As such, the Manau festivals are a major component of the way that various identities of the borderlands are formed but also point to the religious contexts in which people live on a daily basis. The prayers of the Myitkyina Manau are not matched on the Indian side of the border. In India a Theravadan abbot is just as likely to wander in and be offered a prominent role. Such monks are, almost by nature, open to syncretic mixes. In contrast, as Gellner (2001: 322) explains to Western observers: “Buddhism, wherever in Asia it has been practised, in virtually all of its different forms, has been frequently and vehemently condemned by western observers as syncretic”. In China it is more likely still that the figures of religious significance come from the government, and the local chiefly (thus “animist”) elite. Taken together they provide the requisite atheistic and animist elements that any good Jingpo holds to be true. This is perhaps why the Chinese government has, for so long, expressed its wariness, in particular, of Jinghpaw Christians from Burma crossing over into Jingpo areas and completing the evangelising work that has only ever met with sporadic success on the Chinese side of the border. Bibles, in the Jinghpaw language, are reportedly smuggled across

the frontier and are not, I am led to believe, popular among any Chinese officials who happen to find them. This cross border evangelisation is another way that the links between the Jinghpaw and the Jingpo have ongoing implications.

Finally, whether in China, India or Burma the tourist potential of Jingpo, Jinghpaw and Singpho spirituality and lifestyles is often highlighted. In some cases the words about cultural authenticity are tuned into concrete investments. One example is the “Jingpo Tourist Village” near Guangshan Village outside the county seat of Longchuan. According to a report in the *People’s Daily* (2006) this village is “the first of its kind that has lately been completed and opened to Chinese and foreign tourists”. According to the report it “offers an original view of local architectures, life, customs and the primitive religious culture of the Jingpo people and the tropic environment and rain forests of the region”. When I visited this tourist village it was mostly deserted and there was little sense of that “primitive religious culture”. A small Manau ground, and some other tourist items marked the terrain. It is a long way from the Myitkyina Manau and the thousands of people who dance their traditional culture on its grand Manau ground. The grandest Manau has become a Christian celebration, and a site of temporary defiance, because that helps to further define the symbolic politics that matter to its participants.

Conclusion

Ultimately the implications of the Chinese and Indian Manau cultures are less significant for my dissertation than the negotiation between the Myanmar government and the local elites of northern Burma. One explanation for this is the relative marginality of the Jingpo and

Singpho compared to the Jinghpaw in Burma. Their modest populations ensure that even within the local politics of the borderlands their influence is limited. The Singpho are, even by the standards of Arunachal Pradesh, a small “tribal” population. The Jingpo are more numerous, of course, but within the national politics of China, or even in provincial Yunnan, they are a small minority. The Manau festivals described in this chapter demonstrate this marginality but what the festivals also show is that strategic importance is placed on these borderland peoples.

The central governments of China and India are understandably cautious about the borderlands that they share. It was, they have not forgotten, only in 1962 that there was a short border war. Preparations for security contingencies can be made simpler if government control of the disparate populations of the borderlands is formally indicated. The nodes of control provide this indication in everyday life, but it is the symbolic politics of the Manau festivals that show just how important remaining within the purview of the nation-state has become. In each case the central government has allowed gradations of its sovereignty to persist in ways that would be unpalatable, or even impossible, for the Myanmar government. The subversion of the nodes of control in these cases is far more tentative but not because the central governments would not cope with a more provocative local stance.

Instead, what defines the Manau festivals of China and India is the acceptance, on the part of the local elites, that they are complicit in the systems of nodes of control. Their religious affiliations are one marker of their complicity. In each case they share religious beliefs that are, in an almost intrinsic way, palatable to the central governments. Christian Jinghpaw in

northern Burma share no such religious common ground with the Myanmar government. There is little, if any, prospect of open Jingpo or Singpho insurrection in either country and so for the local elites to even mildly provoke the central governments would not further their agendas. They hope that by aligning themselves more closely with the nodes of control, even in spiritual contexts, their position in the borderlands will remain symbolically tied to the governments that keep them safe, and make them, in relative terms, wealthy and content.

SECTION THREE

Chapter 7: Festive spaces and symbolic politics

Festivals of sovereignty

After ranging across the length and breadth of political rituals, Kertzer's general observation in *Ritual, politics and power* is that "[p]olitical rites are important in all societies, because political power relations are everywhere expressed and modified through symbolic means of communication" (1988: 178). The contrarian intention of his argument, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, is to demonstrate that in all human societies, regardless of how "advanced" or "developed" they may appear, there remain symbolic components of political life as expressed through rites and rituals. In this dissertation I have explored the implications of Kertzer's approach to political rites in the context of the contemporary borderlands of China, India and Burma. With evidence from Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw Manau festivals I have made an argument about the relationship between festival symbolism and spatial control.

In Kertzer's approach to political rites there are four purposeful ways that political power can be manifested in ritual contexts. The first, and most obvious, manifestation is the legitimization of political authority; second is the subversion of that authority; third is the unstable revision and contestation of prevailing ideologies; and fourth is an apparent subversive intent that counter-intuitively serves to support status quo political power as a "safety-valve". My argument about the Manau festival in Myitkyina is that it fulfils all four of these manifestations of symbolic politics and, most tellingly of all, serves to support the status quo power of the nodes of control through what may appear to be contests with government

authority. This “safety-valve” is crucial to the success of the nodes of control and to the power of the governments that manage them. However, in southwest China and northeast India the Manau only fulfil the first and the third of Kertzer’s model of ritual politics. Contestation of Manau festivals and their meanings is ongoing to varying degrees but, in all cases, the three central governments remain as potent, or more potent, after weathering the overt sub-nationalism, claims on ethnic solidarity and even direct contestation, like at the Myitkyina Manau, that are all part of the Manau performance. Such symbolic subversion actually leaves the Myanmar government unscathed and well-prepared for any future episodes of open, rather than symbolic, defiance. The reason that even symbolic defiance is far less palatable in China and India is explained by the dominance that their nodes of control currently maintain.

Indeed, the “political safety-valve”—which is linked to the exceptions of the nodes of control and the ways that ambiguous and graduated sovereignties support nation-state agendas—also demonstrates the extent of local elite collaboration with the nodes of control. Symbolic displays of government nodular strength, best explored in terms of armed force, economic clout and ceremonial priority, are only one part of the legitimating narrative. Manau festivals also provide opportunities for displays of resistance and even to inversions of the prevailing political order. In my research the strong example of such inversion occurred on Kachin State Day, 10 January 2008, when the Myitkyina Manau ground was abandoned by Myanmar government troops during the dance performed by the KIO/A. Their absence displayed, at least momentarily, the willingness of the Jinghpaw to support a “subversive” Manau. But rather than fully accepting the subversive value of that performance, I argue that

the nodes of control are strengthened by such displays of government limitation and disinterest, by the type of disinterest that defines Scott (2009a) and van Schendel's (2002) Zomia model. The evidence from the Manau festivals shows that collaboration between the local elites and the nodes of control allows for *potentially* subversive but *ultimately* supportive displays of symbolic politics.

The "safety-valve" also provides for the the expansion and contraction of spatial control in a way that cannot be described by a static model of sovereignty. The contested and contingent form that the nodes of control take may still give some hope to those whose political aspirations lie with alternative nation-state forms. The moments of Jingpo, Singpho or Jinghpaw performance or even dominance at the Manau festivals, when a more emphatic sense of ethnic cohesion and political purpose was displayed, were too brief for any significant attack on the legitimacy of the governments' nodes. Indeed, in the borderlands it is difficult to envisage a time when the China, India or Myanmar governments give up the economically lucrative and politically strategic interests that they have so painstakingly acquired. Each government hopes to harvest greater shares of the spoils as better infrastructure combines with more open borders to create new gradations of sovereignty in these borderlands.

It is, as Scott (2009a) and van Schendel (2002) have shown, a peculiar social and political situation that defines spatial control in the borderlands. And there is potential for an argument that Zomia's exception to the nodes of control is non-nodal space characterised by government disinterest and local strategies of resistance. Does it make sense to pursue this

argument? At this stage my preference is to focus on what we can best understand of eastern Zomia, and that is currently its nodes of control. The long-term field research required to explain how village life in, for instance, the mountains high above Myitkyina is structured with respect to the central government has simply not been undertaken for many decades (basically since Huke, 1954; Leach, 1954; etc). All we can currently explain is that for Zomia in the most general sense—and here I am referring to the Chinese, Indian and Burmese portions, and also to areas of Thailand and Laos, etc.—it is the nodes of government control *alone* that are defended and maintained at any cost. From strategic but rickety bridges in distant valleys to the airports and markets of the major towns, it is obvious wherever a government sees its interests at stake. In areas where there is a lingering perception that local people detest the central governments there is a possibility, arguably of a perpetual nature, that without these impositions the ambitions of the central nation-state systems would collapse. But in non-nodal space, following Scott’s explicitly “anarchist” orientation, the obvious outcome? Whether any categorically different form of the nation-state could rise in place of these systems is a point of speculation. Nonetheless, the system imposed by the KIO/A in its ceasefire Special Region suggests that replicating the central government approach to strategic nodular control would also be their sovereign compromise. In frontier regions where wealth and power mix carelessly with much frustration there is, at least during the current technological and geo-political moment, no other way.

Nodes of control between “geo-bodies” and Zomia

As festivals where sovereignty is legitimated, contested and reinforced, the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw Manau only reconcile one part of my argument. Manau festivals provide

opportunities for the analysis of symbolic politics but to fully clarify the operation of nodes of control it is worth focusing, again, on the more general spatialisation of the borderlands. In Chapter 2 I introduced the ideas of Thongchai Winichakul (1994) as some of the most influential with respect to the key role of modern technologies, particularly mapping, for the integration of disparate peoples and the creation of recognisable national territories. His analysis of polity formation, coloured by a particular position on the hegemonies and counter-hegemonies of modern Southeast Asian political history, leaves us asking further questions about how governments seek to control the “geo-bodies” that have been so thoroughly mapped. Thongchai’s consideration of the Thai government’s efforts to shape the nation-state in a natural and supposedly permanent way has informed part of my concern for the systems of local control exerted by the Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments.

However, instead of relying on any one existing spatial argument I have focussed on the somewhat untheorised and ambiguous space between Thongchai’s “geo-body” ambition and the critical spatialisations suggested by van Schendel (2002) and Scott’s (2009a) Zomia. The Zomian analytical impulse for describing “non-state” or “anti-state” spaces in the borderlands insists that even after “geo-bodies” have been mapped, borders demarcated and nation-state territories defined there are still areas where central governments struggle for control. Scott’s work to clarify the strategies of illegibility and resistance that he argues are the defining feature of Zomia leaves space between these two models for some refinement of how we should understand the relationships between governments and those they govern. Scott’s (2009a) title explicitly defends *The art of not being governed*. It is an “art” that will

make most sense when considered alongside the “art” of the nodes of control.¹⁰¹ My effort to combine, and re-configure, these models has relied on an analysis of the ways that local elites are involved in symbolic contests at nodes of control.

The study of nodes of control outlined in the previous portions of this dissertation focuses on the performance of politics at Manau festivals. These are temporally and spatially delimited occasions at which it is possible to gain insights about some of the underlying political and social pressures that influence the nodes of control at other times. Towns such as Myitkyina, Miao and Longchuan play this nodular role throughout the year. In each case these are the garrison towns where the central government authorities have been most consistent and diligent in defending their power. With many rebellious and potentially rebellious Zomia portions to take care of (in the Shan and Chin states, not to mention Karen and Karenni areas that are still at war) the Myanmar government have sought to impose themselves as firmly as they can, in the places that count. In China the southwestern borderlands of Yunnan have not posed the challenges that the government has faced in places such as Tibet and Xinjiang.¹⁰² Nonetheless the Chinese government has sought to control the key nodes to ensure access to the resources available in northern Burma. Controlling northeast India remains an even more difficult task for the Indian government but one that has become more manageable with the imposition of these nodes. The Indian government continues to battle anti-government forces,

¹⁰¹ Scott uses Chapter 2, “State Space: Zones of Governance and Appropriation”, and Chapter 3, “Concentrating Manpower and Grain: Slavery and Irrigated Rice”, to set out his arguments about state control. The arguments in those chapters, which were discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, provide material of mostly historical rather than contemporary relevance.

¹⁰² While Xinjiang is certainly beyond the scope of Scott and van Schendel’s formulations of “Zomia” there are some maps of the region that do include Tibet, see van Schendel (2002: 653, reproduced as Map 3 in this dissertation). Ethnic Tibetans obviously also live in other parts of the “Zomia” region, including, for instance, in Yunnan, Arunachal Pradesh and the Kachin State.

some of whom emphatically refuse to be governed as part of a unitary nation-state, but does so from a position of considerable strength.

Legitimation in the borderlands

These nodes of control may be strong, but are they, to use Kertzer's formulation, legitimate? The Chinese government has sought to improve its position in its frontier areas by a series of imposing nation-state-building projects. Crucially, it has the most resources to devote to the challenge of incorporating far-flung areas into the national mainstream. This is the key goal of the Chinese government; acutely aware of the precariousness of its "civilisational" claims in some of its furthest reaches. The substantial government efforts to pacify and integrate Xinjiang and Tibet are illustrative. These are "autonomous regions" from the government's perspective. Parts of the borderlands where China abuts Burma carry a similar name. These are "autonomous counties" and, like in their better known counterparts in Central Asia, these areas are given special attention: both positive and negative.

At the Manau in Longchuan the government made its claims known. The Chinese flag that flies so explicitly over important installations and events, such as the Manau festival in Longchuan, is the most overt symbol of these nodes. The ceremony of nodular control is most important in China where government prestige and symbols are tied to a revolutionary past and to a unitary, single-party state. History and politics are more complicated at the Indian and Burmese nodes. This is one explanation for the extra contestation that they regularly experience.

But is complexity the best explanation? In Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, the central government has sponsored the formation of an elected local political elite to defend its main interests in the borderlands. These comparatively wealthy individuals are drawn from a range of ethnic groups and can use their connections and influence to direct the largesse of the nation-state to key constituencies. Ferguson (2006: 23) argues that getting to grips with these social relations should trump an effort to understand transnational flows. He suggests:

...the need for a new framing of discussions of the global: centered less on transnational flows and images of unfettered connection than on the social relations that selectively constitute global society; the statuses and ranks that it comprises; and the relations, rights, and obligations that characterize it.

The efforts of local elites to harness the potential of the nodes of government control, of the national will, are pragmatic. There is recognition among local elites that their futures in the borderlands are beholden to nation-state agendas.

Such conditions are explicated by the way that the control of territory evolved during northern Burma's civil war and since the ceasefires. This pattern of geographic control comes from the fact that, in the Kachin State, the conflict between the government and the rebels "wasn't a guerrilla war" (Thant Myint-U, 2006: 318). According to Thant Myint-U "[a]fter taking control of a vast arc of highlands, but never being able to control the major lowland towns, the Kachins settled into a defensive position, administering their territories and keeping Rangoon's forces at bay". The government forces hoping to defeat them fortified their garrison towns, and improved their capacity to starve out their opposition. And, most crucially, they waited for history to turn against KIO/A-style "independence" movements.

By the end of the Cold War, backing for ethnic rebellions in Asia had already deteriorated to a point where groups like the KIO/A were struggling to fund and arm themselves. Soon after the ceasefire they were described as “[t]he Kachin Independence Army, AK-47 wielding hill people who hadn't seen many white faces since they took to the jungle to fight for an independent state in 1961” (McDonald, 1995: 139). And in the early part of the 21st century prevailing geo-strategic realities—particularly as the War on Terror continued—ensured that Jingshpaw decisions made in the early 1990s to seek a rapprochement with the Myanmar government proved wise. Today support from the West for wars such as the one fought by the KIO/A is flimsy at best.

Nonetheless, after 15 years of post-ceasefire rule the Myanmar military cannot claim full control in the Kachin State. Its control of the major lowland towns, places like Bhamo, Myitkyina and Putao, is symptomatic of its other weaknesses. It is weak in a number of ways and as Ingrid Jordt (2003a: 66) explains the military government has only a partial mandate. From her perspective, “the Burmese military regime's quest for legitimate authority continues in a context in which the legitimacy of the nation-state has never been ratified from the perspective of the ethnic minorities”. Some people in the Kachin State continue to question the configuration of authority that exists in northern Burma, particularly when their only claim to an exclusive urban settlement is the modest settlement at Laiza, and radical elements on the Jingshpaw side remain adamant that their independence is the only tolerable long-term outcome. They sometimes speak of creating their own “Switzerland of Asia”—a confederacy of tribes—in the mountains between China and India. Jordt goes on to argue (2003b: 325) that “Burma's military regime is recognized as one of the most brutal and

oppressive governments in the world today” and (2005: 185) that “at present Burma is ruled by one of the world's most repressive regimes”. What I have shown in this dissertation is that ethnic repression in Burma has become part of a conversation where the Myanmar military government, heavily fortified in its nodes of control, continues to engage its ethnic partners.

The situation in Arunachal Pradesh is similar. The territorial prerogatives asserted by the Indian government, and by the Arunachal Pradesh government itself, are fundamental to the way that the whole nation-state operates. With few other substantial local economic opportunities, aligning with the nation-state presents the most profitable strategies for advancement or survival. Compared to China or Burma, it is India where the nation-state most fully informs the choices made by ambitious young people. To pass the civil service examination and join the administrative service, or to join the army, or other parts of the nation-state apparatus is considered a path to advancement. The other path to riches that opens to some people in the borderlands is professional politics. There are a small number of Singpho who find themselves in the Arunachal Pradesh parliament. They are not the only members of the elite but, in many ways, they represent the pinnacle of achievement in Arunachal Pradesh society. Flying around the state in helicopters, jetting to New Delhi, travelling in armed convoys, these politicians are the most influential, if not the wealthiest, individuals in Arunachal Pradesh society.

Their interests are, like elites in China and Burma, therefore tied to the status quo political system. This is not inevitable but, particularly among the wealthiest individuals, it is hard to imagine strident anti-government agitation. The obvious contra-example is Bawmwang La

Raw who has cultivated a maverick image. His wealth and previous influence in the politics of the Kachin State give him a unique position, and his opposition to the Myanmar government is more consistent than any of the other major elite figures who have vast fortunes to protect. Nonetheless even Bawmwang La Raw is forced to accept the terms of the nodes of control that proliferate in the borderlands. These terms include an acknowledgement that Myitkyina is a Myanmar government node of control and thus off-limits to him. In fact, the power of the nation-state in Myitkyina is such that Bawmwang La Raw could surely not travel there safely. In contrast, in both China and India he has the networks and capacity to use the nodes of control to his advantage.

Instability and order

Kertzer is also interested in the ways that symbolic politics interact with instability and efforts to create order. The evidence from northern Burma shows that bringing conflicts under control has been a concern for the implementation of the nodes of control described in this dissertation. After conflicts end, or before they begin, there are special political and social conditions that can be particularly profitable for government systems. In India the central government has sought to reduce the level of conflict so that it does not interfere with the nation-state's agenda. In northern Burma and southwest China the general strategy is the same. While there is, apparently, an acceptance that some social, political and economic conflict is inevitable it does not follow that it is necessarily disruptive or difficult. The low-level insurgencies of northeast India have curtailed economic growth over the decades. And they have cost the Indian government considerable and probably unquantifiable expense. But they have never challenged the Indian nation-state as a whole, and they have provided a

justification for the ongoing militarisation of the northeast. The Indian Army and all of the paramilitary adjuncts have provided a key lever for the Indian government in the borderlands.

The Indian portion of the borderlands provides what is arguably the most striking example of government influence through its nodes of control. The Indian nation-state, working through its regional government in Arunachal Pradesh, has a stranglehold on the spaces for political, social and economic interaction in the borderlands. Again, these spaces have been formed by efforts to institute nodes of central authority in major towns and along strategic routes. Leaving the rest of India's share of Zomia to manage itself, as best it can, the colony-like installations that are supported by the central government help to fill certain spaces of the borderlands. Locals hoping to achieve economic or social advancement are, therefore, encouraged to interact with the networks and resources that remain the prerogative of the nation-state.

In the case of northeast India the nation-state has fortified itself effectively to bolster its case for the control of Arunachal Pradesh. The evolution of control in this region, and here I include adjacent areas of Assam, ensures that the nation-state has grown to fill the spaces left behind by social and economic change. The far northeast, arguably the most peripheral of India's many peripheries, is a long way from Delhi (see, for an example of how this shapes events, Whitehead, 1989). It does not, however, follow that the centre, with the resources of the world's second-most populous country behind it, now ignores Arunachal Pradesh. On the contrary, access to nation-state resources has led to the formation of a class of well-

connected and well-resourced individuals. These individuals are fundamental to the way that the nation-state is allowed to manage affairs on northeast India's fringes.

Those fringes rub against Burma, and, even more crucially, against China. That the territorial integrity of the nation-state has sometimes been challenged (most dramatically in the Chinese military incursions of 1962) is a major factor that influences Indian thinking about the nation-state. To be part of "democratic" India, to reject Chinese designs and rhetoric, and to ensure an essential Indianness across the nation-state are all key planks of the policy matrix. The nodes of control are those areas of Arunachal Pradesh, towns like Itanagar, or Miao, where the major infrastructure is monopolised by the government. Its decision makers in the Indian Administrative Service are integral to the good functioning of the state and offer the clearest examples of these nodes in action.

Still tasked with cutting through traditionally red-tape bound files, and subject to a strict hierarchy, the Arunachal Pradesh state government, and the federal outposts in the state, are a crucial part of the way everything is done. In India's Arunachal Pradesh borderlands the local elite is thus cognisant of, and often reminded of, its own relative weakness within the Indian system. Those weaknesses can be turned to local advantage, especially for anyone who can claim to be part of a Scheduled Tribe and can then tap into the privileges that are available. Nodes of control are never uni-directional; they are collaborative and succeed precisely because benefits flow in many directions.

The “safety-valve”

But what happens under situations of much greater tension such as at the Myitkyina Manau? Throughout northern Burma’s armed rebellion, and in the years since the various ceasefires were signed, the Myanmar government has slowly colonised areas of the Kachin State, and sought to implant its nodes of control. While some have reflected merely on the “peace” that has been achieved (Shenon, 1994), there are other implications of this ceasefire dynamic. As mentioned previously, the most potent example of nodular control in northern Burma is, unquestionably, Myitkyina. Myitkyina is the node of control for the Myanmar authorities and, just as importantly, it is the place where various elite Jinghpaw (such as the *Sutdu*) can coopt themselves to the broad mandate of government control. This is an uneven process and, as the details in Chapter 5 clarified, there are ambiguities and contestations that continue to inform the use of the nodes of control.

Following Kertzer’s impression of the “safety-valve” in festival contexts, and as an example of the ambiguities and contestations that result, it is worth briefly focussing again on the few hours when the KIO/A danced at the 2008 Myitkyina Manau. As discussed in Chapter 5, this huge festival was held to mark the 60th Anniversary of the establishment of the Kachin State and was a key site for the Myanmar government, and its generals, to assert their control. However, when the KIO/A danced in the main arena the very prominent government armed presence at the festival disappeared. Precisely how this was arranged is not known but, without fanfare, the entire Manau ground became a KIO/A zone. This situation clarifies not only the latent force of the Kachin armed group but, more crucially, the way that the middle ground can be tactically surrendered. For the rest of the year the presence of the KIO/A in

Myitkyina is marginal. There is certainly no “show of force” on any regular basis. Whatever its causes, the few hours when the KIO/A were in control of a symbolic part of the Jinghpaw heartland are instructive. They clarify, as an exception, just how much Myanmar government control dominates for the rest of the year, particularly with respect to matters of conflict and security.

Both as an instigator of conflict and in other roles the three governments have taken charge of conflict related issues. In all three systems the government apparatus that is brought to the borderlands is orientated towards an overt security posture. Platoons of soldiers and police, and even volunteer forces, in some cases, can be deployed to ensure the safety of big-name figures. Many travel and work with permanent escorts. It is not uncommon to learn from informants, whether government officials or others, that an area is “dangerous”, or otherwise “forbidden for security reasons”. There is, for example, a widespread belief among many people in Myitkyina that foreigners cannot cross to the eastern side of the Ayeyarwady River without an official permit. I have been told on many occasions that it is officially forbidden. I have, however, travelled to the far bank of the river, and to towns well beyond it, and apart from during one brief visit to the adjacent town of Waing Maw (when I was questioned by the local security forces) I have never experienced access difficulties. It is even possible to take the road all the way to the town of Bhamo, on the other side of the river and some 250-kilometres further south. The checkpoints operate according to their regulations and anyone with the appropriate paperwork can navigate them. But, because for so long these areas were off-limits, there remains a common perception, well after any reason for the ban has evaporated, that the rule stays in force. “Conflict” has a habit of writing itself into the

imagination of those who dealt with it everyday and this small example highlights one way that the “conflicted” Kachin State still figures prominently in many minds.

Dealing with conflict, and plotting the rules for its minimisation or elimination, is a project that all three of the central government systems hope to exert a monopoly on. Taking charge of security is, for these nation-state systems, largely aligned with their efforts to take responsibility for the coherence of sovereignty, and the “safety-valve” plays a role in both. It is, in essence, the supreme responsibility, and duty, of those trusted with national protection. It is also the case that where others have some role in contributing to “security” they are forced to do so on terms that appeal to the perceived role of the government systems. The non-government forces that operate in these areas cannot dictate the terms of security. They operate within a “national security” apparatus and those frameworks, for all their holes, are dominated by the central government systems. Everyone else merely watches their policy implementation and responds accordingly.

Conclusion

The Manau festivals in China, India and Burma help to exemplify a pattern of relationships between governments and those they govern that are best understood in Kertzer’s model of symbolic politics even though it is only in the heavily contested context of northern Burma that a full analysis (including the safety-valve) is possible. At the Manau politics sees ongoing contestation and the potential for conflict, but all with a strong sense that the “safety-valve” of subversive performance will ultimately strengthen the governments and their positions. Nodes of control—as exceptional, graduated and contingent sites of power—

are similarly strengthened when the governments allow their use by those who are potentially subversive. The local elites are, partly because of their economic resources but also because of their ethnic solidarities, liable to confront government control. It is from this elite group that future threats to nation-state sovereignty are probably most likely to emerge. But one explanation for the relative success of the central governments is that through their nodes, and all they entail, it is now the governments that most fully determine who can access developmental resources and garner lucrative or attractive opportunities.

Kertzer's approach to the purposes of political ritual does not include anything explicit about state and non-state spaces, nodes of control and their Zomian inverse. But his approach to studying ritual leaves open more radical interpretations of the ways that governments interact with those they govern. Indeed, the option of governments, or other powerful figures, to allow symbolic attacks is one way of defusing tensions and, once the attacks are completed, restoring the ordinary balance of control. The nodes of control of these governments are, to force this radical interpretation, so strong precisely because they can allow for various ethnic, religious and political subversions. There is no inevitable exclusivity to the spaces except in the sense that the three governments will ultimately determine who can use the nodes of control. Rebels and other potential opponents are to be found right in the heart of the nodes of control. Some of these figures are potentially formidable opponents of the central governments. But they are allowed, even or perhaps *especially* in public, to perform their politics and solidarities.

How can we reconcile this dynamic? First, the sovereign claims of the central governments are far more adaptive than we may initially expect. Second, these are claims that are strengthened by their moments of weakness, and given extra constancy by the fact that they do remain flexible. Third, we can see that the governments are now so comfortable in their nodes of control that performance of subversive politics is not considered an undue threat. Finally, the “safety-valve” of festivals, with all of the risks they potentially entail, shows how the Myanmar government, in particular, was quite prepared to allow their Myitkyina node of control to be used by others. It is the interaction, interplay and exchange that occur at nodes of control that makes them so valuable to the governments, and to the local elites who work with them.

Conclusion: Controlling development in the borderlands

Symbolic control and political spaces

Studies by Kertzer (1988), Guss (2000) and Gellner (2001) show how festivals help to shape political cultures in ways that are public, accessible and contestable. One difference between festivals and other elements of political and governmental action is that festivals are designed, in almost all cases, for popular consumption. Government meetings, negotiations and the other routinised events that punctuate the operations of official machinery are, by-and-large, kept out of public view. It is the public nature of festivals—and what these public displays can explain about the relationships between governments and those they govern—that makes them particularly appealing sites for social scientific enquiry, especially in contexts where other opportunities for understanding governments are limited. Festivals of any type are potential sites for social analysis and there is now a scholarly tradition of examining festival performance as exemplified by Kertzer and Guss, among others, to interpret social meanings.

In this dissertation I examined the political character of festivals in the China, India and Burma borderlands. The justification for this approach has remained simple: in each of the three political contexts Manau festivals are held by the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw peoples with their shared cultural identity. Their shared commitment to these festivals ensures that comparisons between the events held in the three nation-states are based on a common corpus of festival proceedings. In each case the festivals also provide opportunities to explore political interactions in ways that are, quite simply, not possible during most non-festival times. This follows what Migdal described as the “culturalist” approach to

state-society relations. Migdal's observations about orienting scholarly work draws explicit support from social scientific luminaries like Clifford Geertz and E.P. Thompson, but it ends on a critical note. Migdal (2001: 241) suggests that "[w]e know that culture is important, that the state is more than a configuration of roles or an interchangeable structure; we just cannot quite figure out how to study it comparatively, how to make it much more than a giant residual category". This remains a challenge for all social scientists but in the ideas and evidence presented in this dissertation I hope there is a revived awareness of how culture can help us to understand politics from comparative perspectives.

Kertzer argued, in the same culturalist direction, that "[t]he political elite employ ritual to legitimate their authority, but rebels battle back with rites of delegitimation" (1988: 2). This conception allows for the exploration of the diverse character of rituals that may be assumed to merely legitimise prevailing authority. The role of Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw interests at the Manau festivals further clarifies how much variety there is in what Kertzer described as "battle back" politics. At Manau festivals, rebels enjoy opportunities to undermine authority with subversions that can, somewhat counter-intuitively, serve to support government power through a social and political "safety-valve". Simultaneously, and in uneven ways, Manau festivals are defined by this perhaps endless creative process of conflict and collaboration, delegitimation and legitimation. I am persuaded by the argument that, particularly in festival contexts, "no hegemony is ever total" (Guss, 2000: 16). So the nodes of control expand and contract their influence: a dynamic of graduated sovereignty that is more than symbolic. The point here—to expand on Gellner's general ethnographic observation that "even in modern societies religious rituals may sometimes serve political

purposes” (2001: 60)—is that ritual contexts allow for portfolios of contestation and competing meanings. Manau festivals showcase a process of legitimation and delegitimation that serves to support the nodes of control.

My explanation for these symbolic politics is spatial: the three systems of nodes of control that have been discussed exist in peripheral spaces of their respective nation-states. For each of the central government political systems—Chinese, Indian and Myanmar—there are reasons for maximising strategic influence in these areas. For the Chinese and Indian governments, in particular, residual tension about their territorial claims and their potential competition during the 21st century ensures that neither side is willing to make public political compromises. Nonetheless they are forced into a compromised position by the spatial management of the relatively remote terrain. Their nodes are the spaces within Zomia where the three central governments have sought to defend their most valued interests. The most significant nodes of control, which I suggest are those that seek to regulate communications and culture, are based around the major towns of the borderlands. Controlling space serves to provide opportunities for the political control that can follow the adept management of cultural performance. Manau festivals provide insights about the nodes of control because, at most other times, it is difficult to gain access to what might be more poetically described as the “dance” of the local elites. The interaction of governments and those they govern helps to clarify the extent of ambitions and limitations within the contested politics of these borderlands.

Controlling Zomia's nodes

In this dissertation the idea of Zomia has provided a further foundation for exploring the spatial character of the borderlands. After van Schendel (2002) and Scott (2009a) there is a model of Zomia that explains, in a general and schematic way, the connections between the various cultures of this region and, in particular, it shows how peoples in this region have evaded incorporation into central government projects. It is a subversive model that draws much of explanatory strength from history and from showing how the peoples of this region have sought to avoid full integration by the powerful forces of nation-state-making. Beyond its insights about these strategies of evasion, the Zomia model is also an effective one for problematising the arbitrariness of governmental and scholarly border-making projects. The arguments of van Schendel and Scott help clarify the profound challenge for anyone that seeks to control the borderlands.

My exploration of Zomia's contemporary spatialisation, which should be distinguished from Scott's historical model (2009a), has required the introduction of a revised theoretical language around what I call nodes of control. These nodes of control are the limited nodes of power and influence that the three governments have used to govern their distant and culturally distinct peripheries. While such "potential nodes of power" (Scott, 2009a: 36) existed at least temporarily in past centuries, it is today's opportunities that have drawn government influence to the borderlands and to a much more permanent and potent set of nodes. Indeed Scott's earliest example of such nodes, from the Tang dynasty (860 CE),

calculates the distance, in “day-stages”, between various “nodes of imperial control” in the borderlands (2009a: 44).¹⁰³

In the context of Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” and similarly abstract schemes for explaining global politics, nodes of control suggest a strategic compromise in areas that experience potentially fragmenting social, cultural and religious strains. Those social scientists that have now embraced the need to understand exceptions have sought to challenge the consistency of supposedly coherent social and political units. In this sense Scott (2009a) and van Schendel’s (2002) Zomian interventions in the analysis of mainland Southeast Asia have provided opportunities for examining more closely the ways that power is spatialised. Zomia is the space where an exception to the governance of nation-state and lowland civilisations is apparently strongest. This leaves us, particularly for parts of the world where civilisational conflict is significant, with governments looking to best position themselves to manage the sometimes unruly intersections between politics and culture.

To clarify Huntington’s abstractions about the potential for clashes of civilisations to generate conflict this dissertation offers a number of observations about one of the few places on the world map where three civilisations meet. At the intersection of China, India and Burma the Sinic, Hindu/Muslim and Buddhist worlds come together. What is most striking about their “clash”, however, is the way that other cultural and political issues serve to disrupt the macro-social interactions that were so formative for Huntington. Is it relevant that

¹⁰³ Scott, in fact, goes on to illustrate his impression of particular nodes and how the “friction of distance” traditionally limited their political and economic reach in hilly terrain (2009a: Map 3, 46-47). The emergence of relatively inexpensive motorbikes and other nimble vehicles for highland travel challenges his “walking time” equations, but only to the extent that there are motorable tracks for the temporary expansion of nodular control.

the Singpho in India are Buddhist and that the Jinghpaw of Burma are predominately Christian? What about the fact that in each country there are local populations who celebrate the same festival, and whose cross-border affinities and linkages continue to draw them together? The challenge for models of political interaction is often to account for the ways that these local interactions can be usefully incorporated into schemes of analysis which are, almost naturally, preoccupied with forces that cannot be captured at the local level.

Today, the national peripheries of China, India and Burma are strategically and economically valuable and they cannot be controlled by overly cautious commitments of government power. The model suggested by Thongchai (1994) introduces spatial control and territorial demarcation as two fundamental parts of the machinery of governance used in mainland Southeast Asia. His insights remain relevant to all those situations where the frontiers of government control serve to structure national life. While his example is drawn from the history of Thailand he could have written similar accounts of the border-making processes that have occurred in countries like China, India or Burma. However, the potency of ideas about his “geobody” can be usefully tempered by integrating understandings of the particular sites where government control is contested *within* the various national borders. It is these sites that I have chosen to call nodes of control and I hope they help to clarify the strength of Thongchai’s argument while introducing new understandings of political and cultural control in areas that are not necessarily at national frontiers. In my argument it is the nodes of control that serve to deter rebellion because of their carefully fortified and well regulated spatial governance.

The enduring probability of future rebellion and general distrust of the governments among borderlands peoples mean that the central governments dictate the terms of their presence as best they can. At a time when the Chinese, Indian and Myanmar governments are all facing other non-Zomian threats to their territory and their control, further reflections on the exceptional character of Zomia are worth considering. Zomia is clearly not the only state-repelling space or situation that these governments may face. What intrigues me most is that an obvious response to territorial threats is to consolidate control using nodes. Creating nodes of control, especially in the major towns of *any* region, gives the government extra opportunities to assess their own position and to defend themselves against potential threats. This is not altogether dissimilar to the way that national borders were defended and maintained in their early manifestations. What I argue is that the Zomia of “state-repelling” cultures introduced by Scott struggles to compete with the organisational capacities, bureaucratic efficiencies and national legitimacies that accrue to the contemporary nodes of control alone.

After Scott’s model, a contemporary analysis of the nodes of control, in their symbolic manifestations but also in their material capacities, provides new ways of examining the status of eastern Zomia. His analysis of this region is quarantined to the years before nation-states and their central government systems enjoyed the capacity to project force into those areas that had previously rebelled against them. What the governments appear to have discovered is that nodes of control can coexist with non-nodal spaces in Zomia, and beyond. Nodes of control now also dictate the terms of local resistance and, as discussed in Chapter 1, are formed by the bureaucratic, military and administrative logic of exceptions. They bring

national values and processes to the borderlands even when they are mismanaged, corrupt or ill-advised. The nodes also provide for the security of imported or co-opted personnel and offer a sense of national culture in areas that are potentially beyond the ordinary reach of the nation-state. Zomia may always prove ungovernable in the way that the nodes have been governed. The borderlands under discussion in this dissertation are in areas that fall, for better or for worse, outside the immediate and easy range of government control. It is the nodes of control which are thus crucial to a wide-ranging effort to bring these peripheries into the nation-state embrace.

To clarify this argument I introduced the Jinghpaw elite, and examples from the Jingpo and Singpho, as the collaborators through which the nodes of control have the most profound impact on wider spheres of influence. It is worth reinforcing the point that the nodes of control are concentrated spatially and temporally, sometimes to an unwieldy degree, and this serves to attract members of the elite who want access to symbolic and material resources. The node of control that I find most compelling from this perspective is, in fact, one that I have never managed to access directly. For future students of this topic and adjacent issues it will be worth exploring avenues for studying the jade mining area of Hpakant where the material dimensions of nodular control, particularly as they relate to the “extractive enclaves” described by Ferguson (2007), are most apparent. Where such opportunities for wealth accumulation jostle alongside the frustrated ambitions of a dispossessed laboring class the characteristics of control must prove challenging to manage while so many sub-national cohorts and political positions are represented. The exceptions of a place like

Hpakant and its requirement for many different gradations of sovereignty will ensure that it is worth studying closely when the time comes.

Meanwhile, whether at Longchuan, Myitkyina or Miao the impact of the nodes suggests that the control of the entire “geo-body”, as Thongchai describes the national space, is no longer such a priority. Or, on a more practical note, it is just as likely that the geo-body cannot be fully controlled without an unreasonable price paid in blood and treasure. The alternative to that price is a compromise that I call the nodes of control. Nodes of control are, crucially, a strategic intervention in areas where all three of the central governments naturally feel compromised. The maneuverings that have resulted from these efforts to minimise the chances of future insurrection have been managed through the nodes.

Zomia at the intersection of understanding

To formalise this argument about governments and those they govern, Section One introduced general theories of human social organisation as they apply to the China, India and Burma borderlands. The foundation of the discussion was Chapter 1 where I examined the region that van Schendel and Scott call Zomia: a “non-state” space between East, South, Central and Southeast Asia. Their contributions to the social and political analysis of spatialisation have motivated me to develop an explanation of political control that specifically analyses the way that nodes have been implemented in the borderlands. This is an argument that builds, incrementally, on previous studies of civilisation, sovereignty and borders. That argument was justified, in more practical terms, in Chapter 2 where I outlined

the research design and epistemological challenges that have emerged during my efforts to clarify spatial organisation in the borderlands of China, India and Burma.

Section Two of the dissertation covered the core empirical material. In Chapter 3 the politics and peoples of the borderlands were described with an effort to compare approaches to history, territory, nation and ethnicity. This led to Chapter 4's discussion of how various members of the local elites, and particularly the *Sutdu*, have become central to the negotiation of spatial control and political power. In Chapter 5 I described the Myitkyina Manau and its role in the symbolic politics of northern Burma. This was followed, in Chapter 6, by a comparative examination of spatial control and its symbolic dimensions in China and India. These two chapters compared the contradictions and complexities of the regional political context, and showed how under contemporary conditions the nation-state presence in these borderlands has been calibrated to maximise government influence in the nodes of control. In a sense this inverts Scott's argument that social, political and economic life in Zomia has "been calibrated to prevent...incorporation in the state" (2009a: 32).

Section Three, which includes Chapter 7 and this Conclusion, sought to clarify my argument to its fullest extent by weaving together its comparative dimensions. This discussion of the nodes of control explained the evidence that the borderlands of China, India and Burma host nodes of government control where a particular spatial logic effectively delineates political and social possibilities. In these contexts, the local elites of the borderlands have deployed their economic attributes to fashion new forums for local engagement with nation-state power. This is a point that could be easily exaggerated by scholars who hope to dismantle

(discursively, at least) some of the apparatus associated with the nation-state. Re-imagining the perceived hegemony of the central governments in all three countries is a challenge to scholars describing the fringes of these abstract cultural or civilisational units.

Governing with creative ambiguities

Finally, the generally collaborative response of local elites to the implementation of nodes of control is a major reason why they have achieved such success. Across the borderlands elite individuals and groups have been keen to explore opportunities for profit and prestige that come from aligning with the central government nodes. This is understandably an uneven process and one where ambiguities of the type outlined by Kertzer's analysis of rituals and politics are very revealing. It is, as suggested by Kertzer's argument, a process that sees the most significant figures among the local elites aligning themselves with the central governments and, simultaneously, allowing moments of symbolic resistance when that is politically useful. As Kertzer argues, it is in the "symbolic nature" of such performance that we find "one of the sources of power of rites and symbols [which] deflect attention from their contingent nature and give us confidence that we are seeing the world as it really is" (Kertzer, 1988: 184).

What is that reality? Even with their shared Manau celebrations, any pan-Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw polity remains counter-factual. And while so many details about real economics and politics remain shrouded in secrecy or ambiguity it is difficult to judge the respective strengths that are on show at Manau festivals. But this does not imply that the social, cultural and economic conditions of the borderlands could not sustain new nation-

states among the various “nations-in-waiting”. Certain anti-government groups in northern Burma and northeast India assume that such change is inevitable. What is the future of this lingering sense of Zomian revolutionary destiny? Based on their current actions it is difficult to envisage a time when the Chinese, Indian or Myanmar governments meekly relinquish the strategic interests they have painstakingly established. Each government hopes to reap further economic and political power as better infrastructure combines with more open borders to create a new hub of economic growth in the borderlands. In Huntington’s (1998) global civilisational typology this borderlands region is one of the few on his map of the world where a trilateral “clash of civilisations” occurs. Now that the central government systems, and the cultural approaches they represent, have sought to more fully control the borderlands there are ongoing tensions about the appropriate role of their local collaborators. The local elites will, as this dissertation has described, be playing their own roles at the margins of national control. It is they, ultimately, who have given up erstwhile claims to greater sovereignty: their collaboration opens up the space for the operation of the nodes.

What is the future of this system? One obvious alternative to the configuration of central government controlled nodes comes in the form of non-government nodes of control in parts of the borderlands. In the ceasefire areas of northern Burma, there are a small number of low-level, quasi-state systems that have some potential to provide more direct competition to the prevailing government nodes. These ceasefires, and the graduated sovereignty that is implied by the resulting Special Regions, undermine the assertion of universal legitimacy that helps make the nodes of control so strong. What militates against their success is the peripheral nature of these potential competitors and their need to imitate the success of

government controls. At the KIO/A base at Laiza, for instance, such notionally anti-government sentiments remain part of the same scheme of concentrated government influence, even where non-government forces are in-charge. The concentrations of government influence that have become characteristic of these borderlands are not undermined by nascent, non-government nodes.

Instead, the direction of control is clear: over the past six decades of post-colonial government in China, India and Burma there have been regular struggles to mesh together disparate populations. This is not an opportunistic or sporadic effort and, instead, is part of a process of negotiation and interaction which has now generated considerable experience both within the central governments and among the various peoples of the borderlands. Each government has been forced to negotiate with the peoples around their borders who claim, or could claim, the right to a nation-state of their own. For the Jinghpaw in northern Burma this is a more realistic ambition while the claims of the Jingpo and Singpho will remain far more tempered. However, to neuter any such secessionist sentiment and to assert the ongoing relevance of central government control, the three systems have established, and now defend, a range of nodes. As a way of understanding these nodes, and their symbolic politics, I have used this dissertation to explore the mechanics of local control and its symbolic performance.

What I have argued is that in the China, India and Burma borderlands, nation-state cultures and civilisations are vulnerable to potential rebellions from those locals, like some among the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw, who harbour ambitions for different configurations of sovereign authority. The elites among these groups have, however, sought to position

themselves as collaborators with the central governments rather than as outright opponents. Such relative government control in this region is only possible because the central governments have prioritised an unusual, even exceptional, pattern of spatialisation. This spatialisation has seen Zomia colonised by nodes of control that survive as markers of national sovereignty. The resulting relationships between governments and the governed include a symbolic dimension that exemplifies the strategies of the central governments as they maintain control. But these independent nation-states have only temporarily mastered their control of the China, India and Burma borderlands. In the symbolic terms explained by this dissertation spatial control is an ongoing contest where creative ambiguities only partially obscure a range of alternative political spaces.

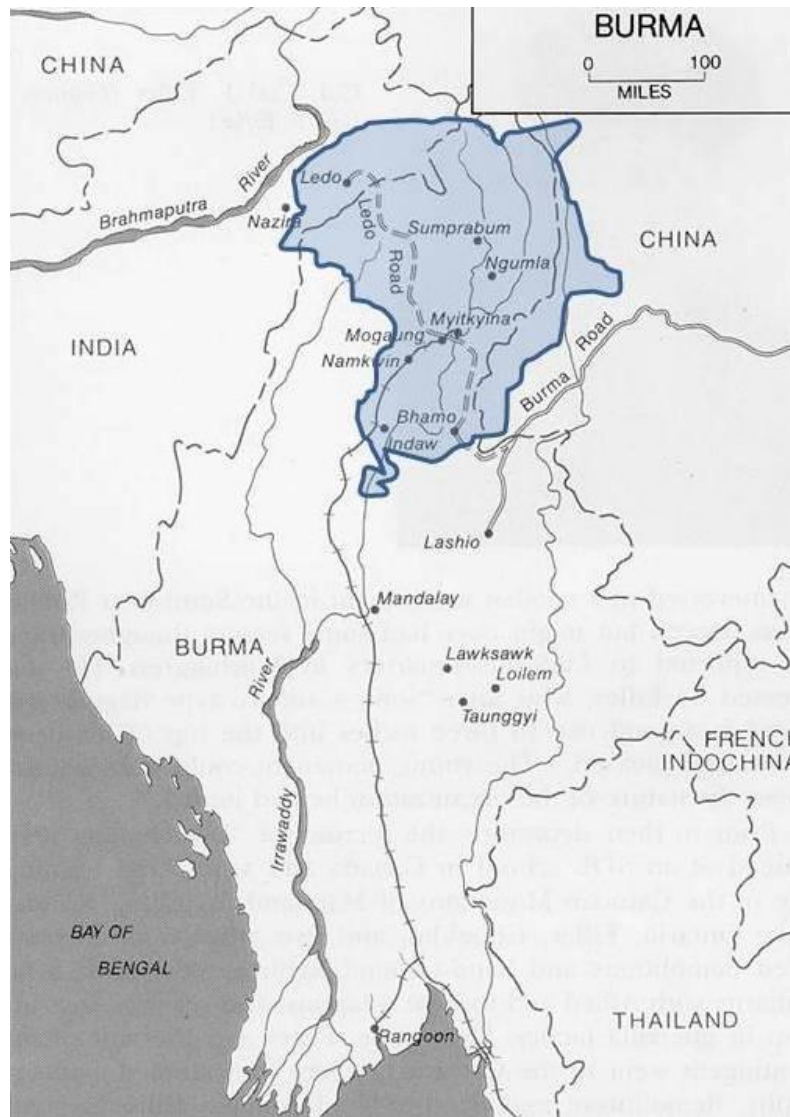
MAPS, APPENDICES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Map 1 – Political map of the borderlands



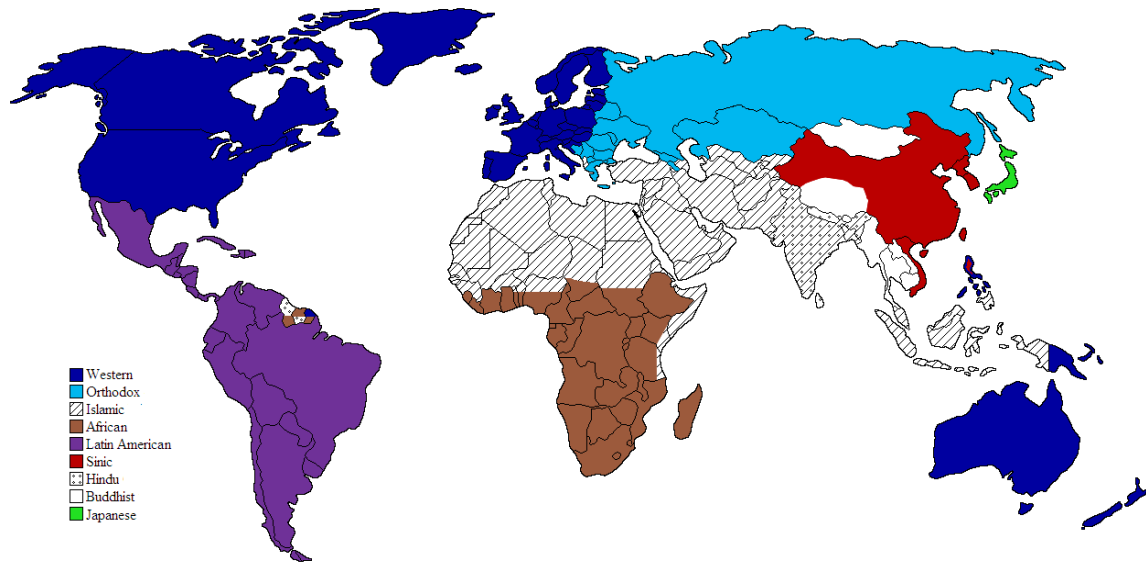
Note: Accurate contemporary maps of the China, India and Burma borderlands are difficult to obtain. This map has been edited to include the main Manau sites discussed in the dissertation. The base map was generated from www.geology.com.

Map 2 – Map of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw cultural area



Note: The shaded area on this map is an approximation of the spread of the Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw populations in southwest China, northeast India and northern Burma. Obviously there are Jingpo, Singpho and Jinghpaw people in other parts of the three countries, but these areas, centered roughly on Myitkyina, can be considered the “heartlands” of their culture, and of Manau festival performance. The base map was generated from www.history.army.mil.

Map 3 – World Map from Huntington (1998)



Note: The original map in Huntington (1998), Map 1.3, reproduces very poorly because it is in grayscale only. This version of Huntington's famous map is freely available from Wikimedia and was produced by Kyle Cronan. It clarifies the key information from Huntington in a more accessible, colour-coded form.

Map 4 – Zomia from van Schendel (2002)

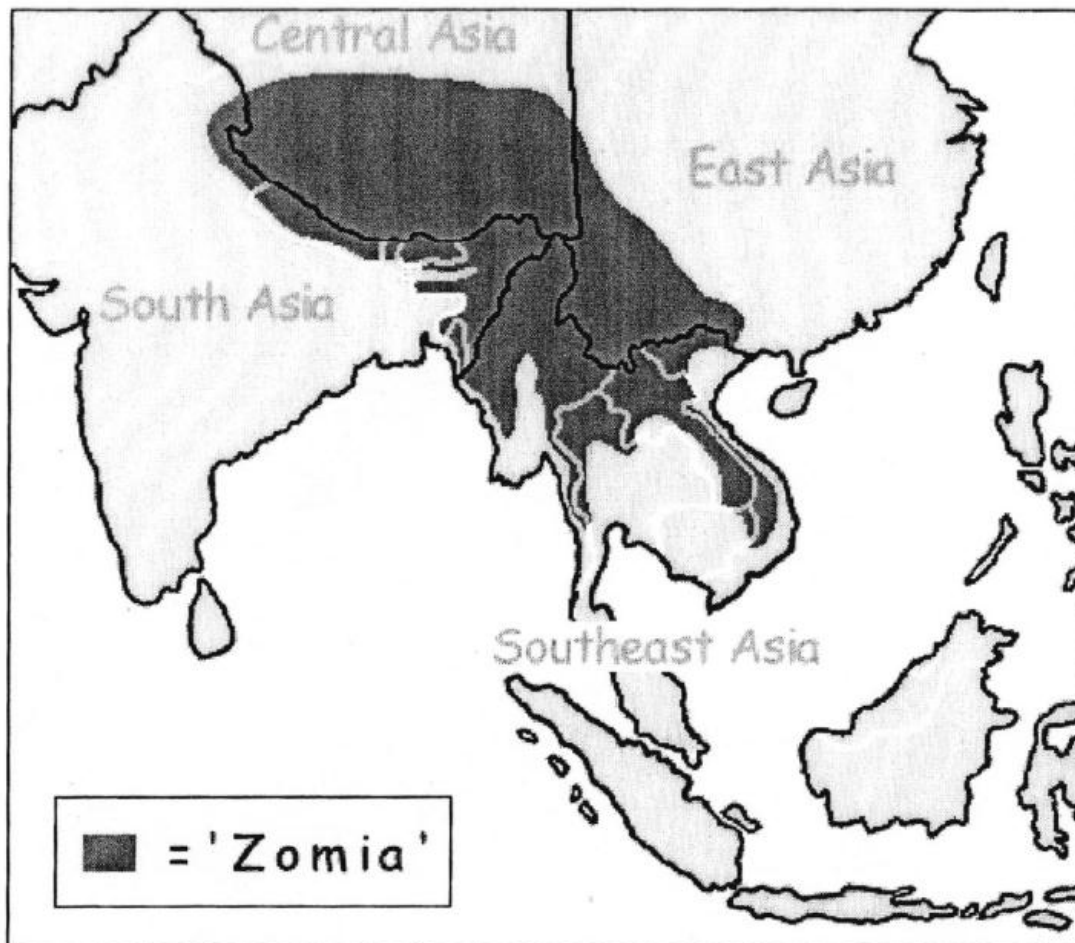
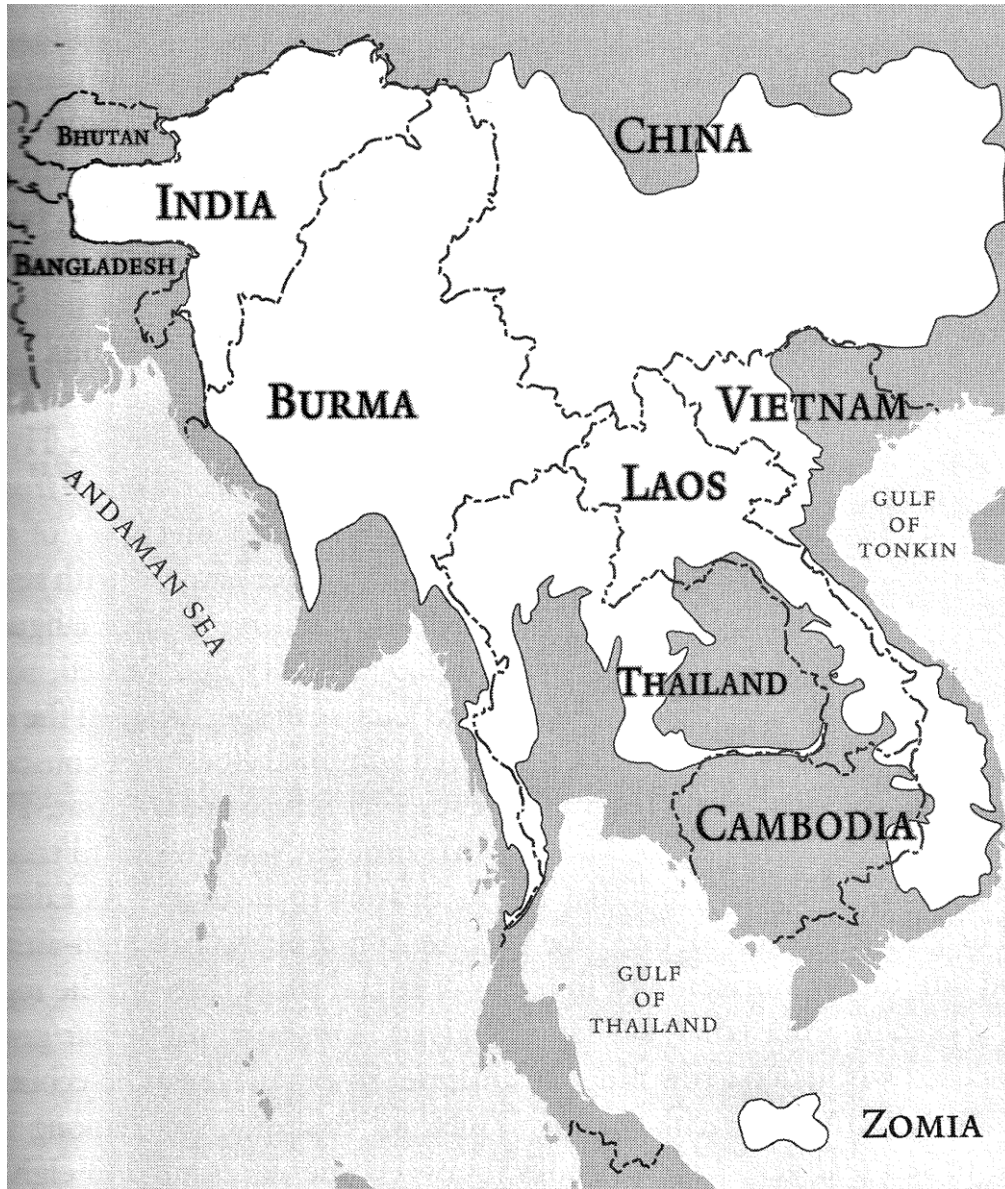


Figure 2. An area of no concern: 'Zomia'.

Note: Reproduced from van Schendel (2002: 653), Figure 2.

Map 5 – Zomia from Scott (2009a)



Note: Reproduced from Scott (2009a: 17), Map 2, described as “‘Zomia,’ on the mainland Southeast Asian massif”.

Map 6 – The borderlands from satellite



Note: This satellite image from www.wikimapia.com conveys the ruggedness of the China, India and Burma borderlands. High mountains and deep valleys punctuate the landscape. In the top left hand corner the Brahmaputra river valley spills from the eastern Himalaya. In the centre of the map the valleys and hills of northern Burma (Shan and Kachin States) see the Ayeyarwady river and the Salween river, and their tributaries, flow from north to south. The right hand side of the map shows the dramatic mountain terrain of Yunnan and the areas where China rubs against northern Burma.

Map 7 – Myitkyina Manau ground from satellite



Note: This image from Google Maps provides a very clear aerial view of the Myitkyina (Shatapru) Manau ground. The river runs to the east of the Manau area. The large building to the south of the Manau pillars is used for hospitality during the Manau and for other Jinghpaw cultural occasions at non-festival times. The collection of small buildings on the northern edge of the Manau ground are the headquarters for the Manau Committee and this is where Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng keeps an office during the event. It is also relevant that nested in trees to the west and directly across the road from the Manau ground is the Myitkyina office of the Kachin Independence Organisation.

Appendix 1 – Summary of politico-cultural characteristics

This summary of the political-cultural characteristics described in this dissertation is designed to provide a handy reference for readers hoping to directly compare various elements of borderlands life. It highlights the contrasts that are present in the borderlands and indicates some of the areas in which the various nodes of control are distinctive. It also summarises the observed characteristics of Manau festivals in the three different countries categories to buttress the tentative typologies of these events suggested in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

	People’s Republic of China	Republic of India	Union of Myanmar
Borderlands region	Southwest China (Yunnan province)	Northeast India (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh)	Northern Burma (Kachin and Shan States)
Specific areas	Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan	Changlang District, Arunachal Pradesh	Throughout northern Burma
Generic ethnic label	Jingpo	Singpho	Jinghpaw
Government type	Communist/market-socialist	Democratic/bureaucratic	Military/authoritarian
Local officials	Communist Party cadres	State government ministers	Regional military command officers

Regular elections	No	Yes	No
Major Manau festivals	Longchuan Manau; Jiegao Manau	Shapawng Yawng Manau	Myitkyina Manau; Laiza Manau
Features of nodes of control	Trade and commerce	Electoral politics and bureaucracy	Military control and trade
Majority religion at Manau	Animism	Theravada Buddhism	Protestant Christianity, particularly Baptist
Manau organisation	Local elite with support from Chinese authorities	Local elite with modest support from government	Local elite along with Myanmar government
Festival preparations	Major involvement from relevant commercial groups	Largely informal involvement of local labour and skills	Highly organised and logistically challenging
Commercial activities	Diverse activities but with an emphasis on fun and games	Very limited and basic commercial space	Week-long business and recreational spaces
Cultural features	Well coordinated dance troupes and music performance	Relatively brief performances, with few dancers	Involvement of competing political and social factions

Response from the media	Major presence and reporting by television and radio	Significant interest from northeast India media (vernacular)	Extensive media presence, including non-government
Government armed posture	Limited to police with wooden poles	Sporadic but uncontested	Extensive and contested

Appendix 2 – Titles in the borderlands

- *Dukaba* General. Jinghpaw.
- *Dumsa* Priest, ritual leader. Jinghpaw.
- *Duwa* Hereditary chief, also simply “*Du*”. Jinghpaw.
- *Khun* Lord/sir. Shan.
- *Majoi Gintawng* Supreme one. Jinghpaw.
- *Salang* Mister. Jinghpaw.
- *Sama Duwa* High chief (a title that tends to be reserved for Sama Duwa Sin Wa Nawng who was Minister of State for the Kachin State from 1947 – 1956 and 1960 – 1962). Jinghpaw.
- *Sara Kaba* Senior (teacher – male). Jinghpaw.
- *Sara* Teacher (male). Jinghpaw.
- *Sarama Kaba* Senior (teacher – female). Jinghpaw.
- *Shri* Honorable. Hindi.
- *Sarama* Teacher (female), also saranum. Jinghpaw.
- *Sutdu* Tycoon. Jinghpaw.
- *Sutdu Kaba* Grand Tycoon. Jinghpaw.
- *Munggyi* Governor. Jinghpaw.

Appendix 3 – List of “ceasefire” groups

Group name	Main ethnicity	Date of ceasefire	State	Estimated personnel	Special region
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance	Kokang (Chinese)	21.3.1989	Shan (North)	2700	Yes
Myanmar National Solidarity Party	Wa	9.5.1989	Shan (North)	10000	Yes
New Democratic Alliance Army	Shan and Akha	30.6.1989	Shan (East)	3300	Yes
Shan State Army*	Shan	2.9.1989	Shan	2130	Yes
New Democratic Army - Kachin	Jinghpaw	15.12.1989	Kachin (East)	1300	Yes
Kachin Defence/ Development Army	Jinghpaw	11.1.1991	Shan (North)	~2000	Yes
Pa-O National Organization	Pa-O	18.2.1991	Shan (South)	~1400	Yes
Palaung State Liberation Party	Palaung	21.4.1991	Shan (South)	1400	Yes
Kayan National Defence Guards	Karenni	27.2.1992	Karenni	80	Yes
Kachin Independence Organization	Jinghpaw	24.2.1994	Kachin	6000	Yes
Kayinni National People’s Liberation Front	Karenni	9.5.1994	Karenni	1600	Yes
Kayan New Land Party	Karenni	26.7.1994	Karenni	1500	Yes
Shan S. Nationalities People’s Liberation Organization	Shan, Akha and others	9.10.1994	Shan	3000	No

Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	Karen	12.1994	Karen	Unknown	No
Kayinni National Progressive Party*	Karenni	21.3.1995	Karenni	7700	No
New Mon State Party	Mon	29.6.1995	Mon	7800	No
Mong Tai Army	Shan	5.1.1996	Shan	14000	No
Rakhine State All National Races Solidarity Party	Burmese and others	6.4.1997	Rakhine	300	No
Mon Mergui Army	Mon	1997	Mon	Unknown	No
Karen National Union Special Region Group	Karen	8.11.1997	Karen	Unknown	No

The Jinghpaw ceasefire groups are shaded grey

*** Ceasefire broken with fighting continuing as of April 2007. Unfortunately there has been no concerted analysis of these broken ceasefires. David Scott Mathieson, an Australian doctoral student, has been examining Shan ceasefires in detail.**

This list was collated from a number of sources (including Wa, 2001: 9; Seng, 2002b: 3) and is improved by the author's own conversations with well-informed sources in Burma and elsewhere. The names of groups change and different names are regularly used for political and military wings of the same groups. I have included the most commonly used names in this list. Approximately 20 other armed groups remain outside the "legal fold" and have never signed ceasefires with the Myanmar government. These groups are predominately small, with the notable exception of the Karen National Union, and occupy remote areas along the Thailand-Burma border and in the far west of the country, along the Bangladesh and Indian borders. In 2010 the Myanmar government's efforts to force the consolidation of ceasefire armies as Border Guard Forces marks a new chapter in their difficult histories.

Appendix 4 – List of ethnic categories in the China, India and Burma borderlands

Burma	India	China
Jinghpaw (Kachin)* - Jinghpaw (with sub-groups such as “Khakhu”)* - Zaiwa* - Lisu* - Laovow* - Lachik* - Rawang*	Assamese* Bengali* Nocte Kongyak Wancho Tutsa Deori Tibetan Chakma Hajong Aiton Ahom Khamti* Khamyang Man Phake Singpho* Turung Lisu* Tangsa*	Jingpo* Wa Lahu* Tibetan Zaiwa* Lisu* Deang Achang Han Chinese*
Wa Shan* Akha Lahu Naga Palaung Yao Burmese (Burman) *		

* The ethnic groups indicated with an asterix are those that have long-term residence in the specific borderlands areas under discussion in this dissertation.

Other ethnic categories listed here are included to highlight some of the diversity of ethnic groups in this region. It is worth reinforcing a point made earlier in the dissertation that these categories are not static and, in fact, there can be occasional switches between various ethnic designations. It is, for instance, possible for somebody who is “Singpho” to become “Khamti” in a process that was already familiar to Leach (1954).

Appendix 5 – Photographs of Manau

Manau in China



Longchuan, Yunnan, China: The distinctive Manau dance follows a standard pattern. With tightly packed and constantly weaving formations it is a spectacular sight. In this picture the colour-coded dancing contingents represent different parts of Jingpo society in the borderlands where China meets Burma.



Longchuan, Yunnan: The Chinese flag flies high above the dancers. Each male dancer is holding a traditional Jingpo sword. This is the final dance of the Manau and the crowd has diminished significantly since the first morning of the festival.



Longchuan, Yunnan: The crossed swords are a distinctive Jingpo symbol. This same symbol is found in northern Burma and northeast India. In each country it has now taken on significance as a pan-regional symbol of ethnic affinity. The crossed swords are also an integral part of the flag and shoulder-patch used by the Kachin Independence Organisation/Army.



Longchuan, Yunnan: Two Manau dancers examine photographs on a digital camera. The comparative wealth of the Jingpo population has ensured that consumer electronic goods are widespread. Photography, both amateur and more professional, was a major preoccupation at the Manau in China.



Longchuan, Yunnan: A drum for keeping the beat of the dance proclaims its origins with the “*Wunpawng* Cultural Committee” of Myitkyina, Burma. The trans-border traffic in performance culture is very striking, particularly at Manau in China. The influence of the larger Jinghpaw population from across the border in Burma is often unmistakable.



Longchuan, Yunnan: Toasting another successful Manau.

Manau in India



Miao, Arunachal Pradesh, India: These temporary Manau pillars are characteristic of a more basic Manau festival. In this case the poles were erected the evening before the major dancing. It was a communal affair, with many people assisting in the engineering of the inter-locking poles.



Miao, Arunachal Pradesh: Young Singpho dance with their “tribal” flag. It has the colours of the Indian flag—saffron, white and dark green—with the crossed Singpho swords in the centre, instead of the “Dharma Chakra” which adorns the national flag.



Miao, Arunachal Pradesh: Central Reserve Police Force troops at Miao Manau ground on the morning before the main dancing in February 2008. These troops are drawn from the length and breadth of India and serve three year postings in “disturbed” areas of the country, including the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh where the Manau festival was held.



Miao, Arunachal Pradesh: At the conclusion of a major dance, Sutdu Bawmwang La Raw poses for a picture with the Manau dance leaders.



Miao, Arunachal Pradesh: The scale of this Manau festival is well captured by this picture of the final dance. By this stage the crowd had dwindled to a few dozen, and only the most committed dancers continued.



Miao, Arunachal Pradesh: A sign that India's national politics have impacts even in distant corners like Miao.

Manau in Burma



Myitkyina, Kachin State, Burma: In contrast to the more modest Indian festivities, the Myitkyina Manau is held on a grand scale. This photograph was taken from a tower overlooking the festival which was commandeered, for the duration of the festival, by Myanmar government troops. I was somewhat surprised to see how much firepower was nestled on the tower's highest platform.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: Nightly entertainments at the Manau included many games of chance. This “wheel of fortune” proved particularly popular.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: A Kachin Independence Army soldier browses a range of local publications produced to commemorate Jinghpaw heroics during the Second World War.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: New Democratic Army – Kachin soldiers dance during their allocated hours of the Manau festival. Their uniforms are augmented, in this case, by ceremonial shoulder bags and long swords.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: These signs all proclaim the presence of various entourages that participated in the Manau festival. Some reflect Jinghpaw sub-categories (such as Lisu or Lachik) while others indicate the presence of Kachin Independence Organisation units or parts of the Kachin Development Army from the northern Shan State.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: A long line of Kachin Independence Army soldiers, including many young women, wait to shake hands with festival attendees. This farewell was a very popular part of the event and Jinghpaw from all parts of society rushed to join the occasion.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: Then Major General (later Lieutenant General) Ohn Myint enjoying an impromptu cultural performance in the Manau hospitality area. The paintings around the walls, many borrowed from the Myanmar government's Kachin State Cultural Museum, offer some insights about local representations of people and place.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: Sutdu Yup Zau Hkawng reads a speech as Major General Ohn Myint presents souvenirs to assembled Jinghpaw leaders. They are standing on a platform in front of the main hospitality building that is used by the festival coordinators. Yup Zau Hkawng's festival office is in the front right-hand corner of the building.



Myitkyina, Kachin State: The long procession of the Manau dance on Kachin State Day, 10 January 2010. The crossed swords that are also evident in China and India are painted on the large concrete Manau pillars. These Manau pillars are reputedly the largest in the world.

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The bibliography is divided into two sections: one for Southeast Asian language material and one for English and French language material. Alphabetisation is complicated by the fact that some Southeast Asian names (particularly Burmese and Thai) are written in full, and without reference to any notional “surname”. This preserves the integrity of these naming traditions but interacts somewhat awkwardly with European conventions.

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