

Mona Chettri and Michael Eilenberg (eds.), *Development Zones in Asian Borderlands*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 284 pp, with illustrations. ISBN 9789463726238

This edited volume by Michael Eilenberg and Mona Chettri brings together articles on border development zones (BDZ) in different Asian borderlands – Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Cambodia and India. The increasing focus on BDZs reflects the shift in scholarly perspectives from perceiving borders as remote, out-of-the way places to seeing them as productive spaces. Global political compulsions as well as local aspirations have enabled the neoliberal transformations of borderlands, and BDZs, which the authors term ‘enclave economies’, point to an intensification of this idea and ideal.

Yet, what is actually set into motion when borders are developed as BDZs? What political and social processes emerge or are cast into relief through this kind of neoliberal expansion into border zones? What new forms of vulnerabilities, inequalities and power struggles do BDZs produce? These are the questions that this book seeks to explore through empirical data from across various Asian borderlands. The originality of this volume lies in its expanded conceptualisation of development zones to include airspace and casinos that may or may not be located physically in border regions but are important to show how border logics permeate development dynamics.

The chapters in the book highlight three interrelated themes in the study of the BDZs: the making of the development zone, disciplining the development zone and the BDZs as zones of ruination and abandonment. The making of the development zone looks at what kind of territorialisation is characteristic of development zones – how some become economic backwaters for manufacturing companies or sites of resource extraction and others become ports of supply for resources and infrastructure for the wealthier neighbouring regions. The second theme, disciplining the development zone, looks at the disciplining of BDZs through various legal, infrastructural, social and political regulatory mechanisms, and how these often construct the borderlands as spaces of exception and exclusion. This theme overlaps with the third,

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which looks at BDZs as the 'other' spaces of the nation within which different or exclusive modes of governmentality can be exercised and experimented upon, leading to the former's relegation as sites of aborted or suspended development schemes.

Galen Murton's chapter on post-disaster development in Nepal after the 2015 earthquake, dominated by Chinese humanitarian efforts, effectively shows how development aid both makes and disciplines border regions, fashioning not just spaces but also subjectivities in a new geopolitical regime.

Tina Harris's conception of aerial zones – airports, airspace and aerial routes as border developments zones – is both original and challenging. She pushes the frontier of border studies leading us to consider the three-dimensionality of the space within which border controls and contests operate by paying attention to Nepal's aerial zones in-between Chinese and Indian air and ground space.

Casinos rebranded as 'integrated resorts' function as gaming and entertainment zones in Asian borderlands, promoted by international, largely Chinese, private capital. As author Juan Zhang argues, despite their ambiguous moral and legal standing, these integrated resorts compel a vision of local economic development through a positivist rhetoric of progress and improvement.

Jason Cons's intriguing coinage of border development zones as 'heterodystopias' borrows from, yet goes beyond, Foucault's (1986) concept of 'heterotopia'. Adding a dystopian element to Foucault's notion, Cons introduces heterodystopia to highlight how climate management works in Bangladesh through anticipated governance, that is, creating spaces in anticipation of a future crisis. He demonstrates how the representational technologies instituted for climate management serve only an experimental and spectacular function, with dystopian effect. When reading this chapter along with Camelia Dewan's (2021) book on Bangladesh, *Misreading the Bengal Delta*, which shows how development and climate change complexities are simplified and even misrepresented by climate reductive translations on the ground, one can perceive the troublingly empty and performative character of political responses to climate change in the global south.

Sikkim in Northeast India is not an officially recognised BDZ, but Mona Chettri in this volume convincingly argues that it is being fashioned into a de facto BDZ through the entry of big pharmaceutical companies. Consequently, this has spawned a rent economy, as people scramble to grab, often illegally, land that they may convert

into real-estate returns. An interesting fact is that in April 2016, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) organised a meeting in Shillong in the Northeast India-Bangladesh borderland to discuss the development of Border Special Development Zones and accompanying policies to facilitate regional trade liberalisation, investments in connectivity infrastructure and industrial development in border areas in eastern South Asia. These developments portend a movement towards *de jure* BDZs in the Northeast Indian borderlands in the near future.

Thomas Mikkelsen and Michael Eilenberg similarly look at another *de facto* BDZ in Tarakan, Indonesia. They examine how government plans to take control over a sensitive, resource-rich borderland have been forestalled by existing local strongmen and patron-client relationships that have steered the region's economy for decades into various, oftentimes lucrative and sometimes failed, development and income opportunities.

Patrick Meehan, Sai Aung Ha and Sai Kham Phu show how in Myanmar's conflict-affected borderland, state police, civilian departments, local elites, ethnic armed groups and Myanmar army-backed counter-insurgency militias co-fashion the development landscape. The case of the border town Muse highlights what is equally present but less evident in other contexts, which is the blurred boundaries between state and non-state, legal and illegal and formal and informal in development assemblages.

Nadine Plachta analyses changing development and livelihood activities in Tsum Valley of Nepal, with the pouring in of Chinese aid. She directs our attention to the generative properties of private capital investment in marginal border areas resulting in construction-oriented development and real estate boom. At the same time, she sensitively portrays the shifting affective states of border denizens - of loss, exclusion, uncertainty, even fear - as they navigate changing geopolitical and economic transformations.

Duncan McDui-Ra's chapter focuses on yet another conflict-affected borderland - Manipur, a troubled Northeast Indian frontier where there has been contestations over sovereignty and citizenship and a routinisation of state violence for many years. Imphal in Manipur has become an unlikely candidate for smart city status in the central government's urban renewal proposal. McDui-Ra argues that the extension of the national plan of Smart Cities Mission to Imphal, which aims to harness technology to drive economic growth,

is done with the aim of cooptation and conciliation of a rebellious frontier.

Sindhunata Hagoyno deftly deploys concepts of waiting to show how promises of a development zone persist even when development is suspended. In her analysis, Kenyah elites in the Indonesian border village of Long Nawang village are both the agent and medium of development discourse as well as development subjects themselves. As development agents, they manufacture local consent by convincing villagers to give up their customary landholdings. Yet, they too remain subject to the narrative of development by holding on to the hope of an urbanised future for their village, in spite of suspended development activities.

The trope of waiting is discussed further in Alessandro Rippa's creative analysis of boom and bust as entangled temporalities in the Boten Special Economic Zone at the China-Laos borderlands. Mapping the transformations in Boten since 2007, Rippa's ethnographic visuals lend conviction to his argument about the different cycles of development manifesting a temporality of affect - of a forever suspended desire for growth.

This volume clearly shows how BDZs build on global ideologies of neoliberalism where development has trickle-down effects, most often visible in the form of infrastructural effects, such as the development of roads, bridges, mobile phone towers, etc. Across the Asian borderlands, neoliberal governments act as land-broker states (Levien 2018) transferring land from poor peasants to rich capitalists in these rural landscapes, facilitating the rapacious frontier settlement through private capital. The various chapters in this volume bring to the fore a number of interesting issues. First, they interrogate the vision of 'borders as doors' (Van Houtum and Ver 2002) which promote an idea of BDZs as gateways of globalisation. The empirical work presented in this volume complicate this idea, since, according to the editors of the volume, BDZs are characterised by porosity of ideas, people, technology, material - both spatial and temporal unboundedness - and the quite visible complicity of informal actors and illicit networks. Second, local aspirations may align with the visions of development sold by bureaucrats, planners and international capital. Yet, the transformation that people hope for and anticipate is rarely realised (Anand 2006), as these development visions work to produce BDZs in heterotopic fashion, offering an inverted and unattainable image of development only to leave them stranded or in ruins in the wake of capital's onward

march. Third, development zones move through cycles of ‘bust and boom’, with each downward spiral appearing to hold a promise of regeneration and new possibilities. But in reality, as this volume illustrates, such succession of cycles creates a trail of environmental ruin, as rivers and ponds are exploited, forests cleared, the earth mined and biodiverse habitats plundered for profit. One can easily extend the ethnographic and theoretical insights advanced by the authors here to other world areas, which makes this volume an essential reading for scholars working on borders and states and critical development studies.

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