

Like a Picasso's Painting:

China's Center-Border Relations on Yanbian's Opening-up toward Democratic People's Republic of Korea

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Abstract

In 2009, the Chinese State Council approved a regional development plan for Jilin province in the northeast. Within the scheme, Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture was designated as a pioneer zone for “opening-up” by enhancing transport infrastructures and alluring trade and investment from overseas. In 2011, China and DPRK agreed to jointly develop the Rason Special Economic and Trade Zone in DPRK, and China was granted with the right to use Rajin port in Rason.

The author of this thesis employed the State-in-society model to disaggregate Chinese actors in the “opening-up” and explored how these actors collaborate, compete, and co-opt each other. At different administrative levels, some engage in mutually cooperative relations whereas others compete for dominance.

Overall, the central government has achieved integrated domination among the actors engaged in the opening-up efforts under the Changjitu. When deliberating local development, the Chinese system of decentralized governance also works in Yanbian. However, because of the Changjitu’s foreign policy and ethnic implications, the center still retains an exclusive authority to tighten its grip on the border. Yet, multidirectional political influence at the sub-national level as well as complementary role of non-state actors counters to the state-centric model and proves the effectiveness of Migdal’s model.

Keywords: Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Rason Special Economic and Trade zone, Opening up, Tumen River Development, Center-border relations, Ethnic Minority, State-in-society

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List of Abbreviations

CCP:	Chinese Communist Party
CCPY:	Chinese Communist Party for Yanbian Prefecture
Changjitu:	Tumen River Area Development Plan with Changchun-Jilin-Yanbian as a Pioneering Zone for Development and Opening-up
CPPCC:	Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
DPRK:	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
GTI:	Greater Tumen Initiative
JSC:	Joint Supervisory Committee on Developing Rason and Hwanggumphyong and Wihwado Economic Zones
MOC:	Ministry of Commerce
NDRC:	National Development and Reform Commission
PRC:	People's Republic of China
RPC:	Rason People's Committee
ROK:	Republic of Korea
TRADP:	Tumen River Area Development Programme
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme

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1. Introduction

Border is for both control and contact. As the outermost boundary of territorial sovereignty, the border is where movements of people, ideas and goods are controlled. Simultaneously, it is the entry point for people, ideas and goods to gather, interact and travel across (Chen, 2009: 8). Which function of the border is dominant is not pre-determined but dependent on its surrounding geopolitical situation, resource endowment, historical factors, etc.

People's Republic of China (from now on PRC or China) shares its border with 14 countries, among which is Democratic Republic of Korea (from now on DPRK or North Korea). In the past several years, their bilateral economic cooperation has experienced an extraordinary growth with soaring volumes of cross-border trade. This came hand in hand with new roads, railways, industrial zones and other signs of development in Jilin province - China's northeastern region bordering DPRK - under the regional development plan entitled *The Tumen River Area Development Plan with Changchun-Jilin-Yanbian as a Pioneering Zone for Development and Opening-up* (Changjitu) approved by the Chinese State Council in 2009.

The case of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in Jilin, PRC



<Figure 1> Locations of Jilin and Yanbian in the map of PRC
Yanbian is marked in red. It belongs to Jilin province in orange color.
(Source: Wikipedia)



<Figure 2> Location of the Changjitu area
(Source: Global Times)

At the forefront of this rejuvenation stands Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (Yanbian), an autonomous prefecture for ethnic Korean Chinese, which is located in Jilin province. For its geographical and linguistic proximities to DPRK, it has historically been an inland gateway. In the 2009 Changjitu plan, Yanbian was designated as a pioneer zone for “opening-up” part of the plan by enhancing transportation linkages and promoting trade and tourism to neighboring countries, etc. In 2011, central government representatives from PRC and DPRK



<Figure 3> Location of Rason
(Source: Global Times)

agreed to jointly develop the Rason Special Economic Zone in the city of Rason, which furthermore enhances Yanbian’s locational advantage within China as a shipping transit to Rason. Consequently, more generous policy and financial supports from Beijing are expected in the coming years.

Being a border region next to DPRK - a politically and economically fragile neighbor - presents Yanbian mixed opportunities. On the one hand, Yanbian may encounter a strong pull from the central government to ensure its territorial sovereignty and security against ethnic nationalism, refugee influx, and other unwanted influences from DPRK. On the other hand, Yanbian is given with a chance to lead the opening-up and can substantially benefit from cross-border trade, shipping via Rason, and brokering economic opportunities in DPRK.

1.1. Research Objectives

While the confluence of oppositional forces on Yanbian exists, what does that signify about China’s center-border relations? Does the case of Yanbian reveal general features of the center-border relations as viewed in opening-up experiences of other border regions or stand as an outlier? Inspired by these questions, this thesis looks at the Yanbian’s pursuit of opening-up strategies under the Changjitu and uses it as a case to understand dialectic relations between China’s center and its borders.

This research also has a theoretical ambition. When scholars and journalists discuss issues regarding the PRC-DPRK border, PRC and DPRK are taken for granted as coherent, single-

minded political entities. The author of this thesis, however, critically revisits this state-centric view and seeks a more realistic and contextualized analysis by using Joel Migdal's State-in-Society model. Using a theoretical framework based on the State-in-Society model, the author of this thesis identifies the actors and their practices in deliberating the opening-up strategies. By doing so, she can test the applicability of this model, and in her knowledge this would be the first time to apply Migdal's model in analyzing a PRC-DPRK border issue.

1.2. Research Questions

This research aims to understand the political interaction between PRC's center and a border region when the border tries to develop its local economy via closer interaction with its neighboring state that is politically and economically unstable. To guide her research and analysis, the author of this thesis has identified three questions:

1. Which actors were involved in undertaking the opening-up strategies under the Changjitu?
2. How do the actors comply, challenge, or violate the rules of the game, and how do they cooperate, co-opt, and/or compete to strive for their gains?
3. What do the empirical findings from the study of Yanbian case suggest about the China's center-border relations? Is the case of Yanbian representative or exceptional?

The author of this thesis hereby acknowledges that she assumed an ontological viewpoint of critical realism of which aim is to understand fundamental mechanisms that generate an observable reality (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009: 40). She understands that her research outcome is not an objective depiction of these underlying mechanisms because her way of seeing and telling has been influenced by her prior opinions on the concerned issue, education, gender, cultural background, and any other attribute (and so do the writers of her referenced works and interviewees).

Aware of this gap between what really exists independently of her senses and what she can know by research, her research ambition is to formulate a balanced understanding on the concerned issue by means of qualitative research (Silverman, 2007: 39). She will use Joel Migdal's State-in-society model as a theoretical lens to approach and conceptualize her inquiry. Then, she uses the case study of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture to proceed with the inquiry and to attempt an analytical generalization to understand the China's center-

border relations. In doing so, extensive secondary sources and interviews will be triangulated to ensure validity of her evidence and claims supported by it. Toward the end of the thesis, she presents her description and interpretation of empirical findings in relation to her research questions and then critically revisits the applicability of the State-in-society model in her conclusion.

2. Previous Studies

In this chapter, similar opening-up initiatives in other border regions (mainly Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, Xinjiang, Tibet, and coastal South such as Shanghai) and their relations with the central government are studied. This review is expected to highlight issues of further inquiry for this thesis. Moreover, it will provide the parallel examples to which the case of Yanbian can be comparatively analyzed to draw a fuller picture of China's center-border relations. Among numerous academic approaches to study China's borders, the author of this thesis focuses on relevant literatures of regional development, foreign policy, and domestic and cross-border ethnic relations.¹

In the discussion about regional development, Southern coastal regions such as Guangdong and Shanghai are classical examples. They are the first beneficiaries of Deng Xiaoping's economic reform started in 1978, a landmark decision to open China to the world and decentralize power to provincial governments so that they could govern and develop with their own master plans (that accord to the central government's national development plans) (Chen, 2005: 192).² Soon after the reform launched, Guangdong leaders obtained approval from the central government to go ahead with setting up export-oriented processing zones in the region. This province-led initiative yielded a remarkable economic success and was later replicated by other regions (196). Reflecting on this successful opening-up case, Chen argues the province can act as an "agent and partner to the central government"; design and execute specific steps for opening-up; and based on its own experiences, influence the center's agendas on economic and diplomatic agendas regarding neighbors across the borders as long as doing these does not challenge the mandate and authority of the central government (187).

¹ Numerous conferences were held and books were published to shed light on various aspects of China's borders. Studies in the last few years tend to highlight the transnational and cosmopolitan nature of residents and areas of China's border and clash between the domestic policies and foreign policies in which the borders matter. To introduce a few, *the Art of Neighboring* – an international workshop held in National University of Singapore in March, 2012 – explores how China and its border neighbors have utilized mutual bordering from mainly socio-anthropological perspectives (<http://www.neighbouringchina.net/conference/>). *China's Policies on Its Borderlands and International Implications*, a book published in 2010 and edited by Yufan Hao and Bill K.P. Chou, examines the junctures between China's borderland policies and foreign policy toward bordering neighbors and argues that more emphasis on the center's control has happened at the cost of support from ethnic minorities in the borders, time-tested trust of neighboring countries, and China's international image.

² In the Chapter 2, the author of this thesis uses the term *central government* to refer to the central leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the State Council (which represents an ultimate decision-making agency of the government) unless mentioned otherwise.

This constructive yet distanced partnership between the center and the border has been evidenced in other border provinces and at the sub-provincial level. Such interaction is visible in Yunnan and Inner Mongolia (Freeman and Thompson, 2011); especially, Yunnan has enjoyed a time-tested partnership with Vietnamese and Myanmar authorities and international donors in tackling social problems of regional scale such as HIV/AIDS, poppy cultivation, and human trafficking (2011: 65 & 71). Kuah tells the account of Dehong county in Yunnan province where the county government has actively sought economic opening-up and done so by collaborating with the Yunnan provincial government (2000: 72-97).

Xinjiang and Tibet, two remote western regions, are no exception to this rave of regional development via opening-up, but it has been a slow, unpromising process. In fact, border communities of these two regions have traditionally conducted small-scale trading with their neighbors in Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Nepal, etc (Weimar, 2004: 181; Nyíri, 2012). However, staggering economies of some neighbors and uncoordinated border customs on both sides have obstructed the growth and stabilization of cross-border trades (Weimar: 172). Meanwhile, Xinjiang and Tibet came to rely more on the central government's development assistance under the *Develop the West* and saw an increase in fixed-asset investment, roads and railways, exploration of energy resources, etc (Weimar, 2004: Ma & Summers, 2009: 4). Nevertheless, more and newer infrastructures came at the cost of greater economic influence of the central government; the proportion of state's (by which means the central government's) finance in total fixed investment is about 63% for Tibet and 30% for Xinjiang while the national average is about 20% (Chinese Statistical Yearbook, 2011).³

Opening-up efforts have not always worked but continued without long impasse or major backlash. This persistence has to do with China's increasing self-awareness as a regional power and to be in line with its diplomatic mission, Good Neighbor Policy, which aims to build amicable relationship with neighboring countries and pursue regional cooperation (Ye, 2010: 5). Chinese watchers comment that domestic development goals of border regions and the country's foreign policy objectives toward neighboring countries are inevitably linked (Freeman & Thompson, 2011: 84). One such example is Yunnan's "Bridgehead Strategy" announced in July 2009; Wade explains that economic measures taken under this strategy

³ The author of this thesis calculated the proportion by dividing 'subtotal of sources of funds' with the sum of 'state budget' and 'domestic loans.' Other sources of funds are: foreign investment and self-raising funds.

such as the building of transportation corridors and foreign trade and production bases meant to increase China's political influence in Southeast Asian states via Yunnan (2010: 3).

Ethnic relations of the border region with the central government and with neighboring states are another important factor in assessing PRC's center-border relations. A core questions here is: what kind of relationship a border ethnic group makes with the same ethnic group living across the border? As for Yunnan and Guangxi, there has hardly been any allegation of pan-Vietnamese, Burmese or Laotian solidarity across their borders that could have challenged Beijing's primacy. Rather, the ethnic minorities there have been encouraged by policy to utilize their ethnic connections to lead cross-border trade with Southeast Asia (Kuah: 94). In Inner Mongolia, pan-Mongolianism exists due to shared ethnicity and practice of Buddhism, but this has not triggered major ethnic conflicts as in Xinjiang and in Tibet (Freeman and Thompson, 2011: 59 - 61). Although the central government increased its input of money and modern infrastructure, separatist movements in Xinjiang or radical forms of protest in Tibet (such as self-immolation of monks and nuns against the Han Chinese rule in 2008) continued to bother Beijing (Economist, 2011 & 2012). Despite these ethnic unrests, their borders remain open for trade, and the central government stays vigilant on any exchanges that may strengthen ethnic and religious identities of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet (Shichor, 2008: 59).

Then, what about Yanbian? Has Yanbian been investigated from this multifaceted perspective encompassing regional development, foreign policy, and ethnic relations? A number of scholars, mainly South Korean and Chinese, have observed Yanbian's opening-up efforts, but mainly those in the last couple of years. The majority of their studies focus on revealing the intentions of the opening-up – whether it exhibits China's systematic attempt to create DPRK's economic reliance via Yanbian or is mainly driven by Yanbian and Jilin's own regional development needs?⁴ Few studies stand out among these intention-oriented inquiries. Freeman and Thompson explore the role and influence of sub-national governments as well as enterprises in pursuing Yanbian's opening-up (2011: 8 - 21). They view that alike the cases

⁴ Following reports assume the dominance of PRC's central government in directing and operating the Tumen River area development. Yet, they offer different views on whether PRC has a deliberate agenda to increase DPRK's economic reliance (조명철, 2010; 원동욱, 2011; 림금숙, 2011). Following reports assume that PRC is intent on economically subjugating DPRK and happens at the cost of ROC-DPRK economic cooperation potential. (최성근, 2011)

of Inner Mongolia and Yunnan, the central government circumscribes the legitimate capacity within which the Yanbian government and commercial actors can economically engage with DPRK while letting them decide and execute the details of the opening-up. From an ethnicity angle, Outi Louva sheds light on the Yanbian government's endeavors to utilize transnational ethnic linkage; the government encouraged creating and expanding business networks between ethnic Korean residents and ROK entrepreneurs so that more South Korean investors could bring jobs and profits to their region (2009: 428).

To conclude, the previous studies on the opening-up of China's border regions affirm that there is a well-defined division of labor and responsibility between Beijing and the borders, while Beijing stays on top of decision-making. This conceptualization is however not without a question. If it was a mutually-understood and smoothly functioning design, why the borders make use of and benefit from the opening-up differently? Considering the reality of 'one Chinese central government and nine provinces with international land borders,' one can find complexity rather than simplicity a more realistic depiction of the mechanisms that shape China's center-border relations. Furthermore, one should understand non-state actors such enterprises and international organizations in the borders are growingly recognized as policy actors in the margin. Above all, testing whether the case of Yanbian conforms to this conceptualization will provide a chance to enhance or modify the current understanding on the center-border relations. In the next chapter, the author of this thesis begins its search for a tool to explore dialectic power relations between the center and the border.

3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is a useful tool for qualitative researchers to conceptualize key ideas and their study (Silverman, 2007: 39). In this section, the author of this thesis will go over main concepts that are repeatedly cited in the thesis and present Joel Migdal's State-in-society model as a theoretical lens in conducting her research and interpreting the empirical findings.

State-centric approach and state-society dichotomy

The progress on the Changjitu's opening-up efforts coincides with stronger Chinese presence that stretches from Yanbian to Rason; the scale of bilateral economic interaction has become greater, coupled with unprecedented high-level visits between two countries in the past couple years (see *Appendix 1* for the timeline of events). All these have fed into the media hype and academic speculations, and some even argue that the development of China's Northeast mirrors its ambition to create DPRK's irrevocable reliance on PRC (Kim, 22 December 2011). While this paper is not directly intent on validating such claim, it wonders whether the very assumption in it about the state as a single-minded coherent actor is apt for analyzing complex developments of Changjitu in Yanbian.

A dominant belief in the 1970s among political scientists was that the state monopolizes decision-making power and remains autonomous from the society (Mitchell, 1991: 77 & 78). Scholars who subscribe to this approach define the state as:

- a) a differentiated set of institutions and personnel embodying
- b) centrality in the sense that political relations radiate outwards from a centre to cover
- c) a territorially-demarcated area, over which it exercises
- d) a monopoly of authoritative binding rule-making, backed up by a monopoly of the means of physical violence (Mann, 1984: 188).

In this sense-making, the state can conjure up various institutions and personnel to move with a coherent, consistent directionality from its center to peripheries. As the state is understood like a billiard ball, its separation from the society is justified. Then, the state and the society (that represents non-state remainders) form a pyramidal structure where the state's rule-making power is at the apex, and its orders are unilaterally descended to the society (Migdal,

2001: 36). The state-society dichotomy may appear to be particularly applicable to PRC, a single-party authoritative bureaucratic state, where private enterprises and non-governmental civil society groups are left with little independence and unfair competition.

Applicability of the state-centric view on PRC

Nonetheless, a growing number of scholars on PRC have begun to question the state-centric approach and the state-society dichotomy. As early as 1994 in the academic journal *China Quarterly*, Elizabeth Perry criticizes the contemporary scholarship on China for uncritically applying Western definitions of the state and the society (708 & 9).⁵ She further problematizes the state-centric view and the state-society dichotomy, arguing that such aggregated understanding of the state and the society fail to account for “[the] diversity that makes up the Chinese political experience...its tremendous cultural variation, and its complicated bureaucratic arrangements (ibid.: 712).

As topics of China studies have increased in number and variety, having a disaggregated view on the Chinese state has become inevitable. Collective action, neighborhood and village politics, political discussion on internet, and informal political groups such as family clans are few among many examples that highlight on micro-level political actors. For instance, Yong Gui, Weihong Ma and Klaus Mühlhahn investigated the local politics of urban neighborhoods in Shanghai and revealed how local government officials and civil groups differently understood the direct elections of residents’ committees (2009: 400 – 423).

In this respect, there is a value to explore diverse political forces engaged in Yanbian’s opening-up efforts toward DPRK, a both foreign policy and regional development concern. Then what theoretical framework can enable a researcher to explore such diversity within?

3.1. Joel Migdal’s State-in-society model as an alternative conceptualization

Joel Migdal - an American political scientist specialized in the Middle East - developed the “State-in-society” model to facilitate a better understanding of the politics in developing

⁵ For example, the concept of “civil society,” which is often used to study civil disobedience in the social sphere, was initially used by supporters of capitalism in the 17th- and 18th- century Europe to construct its boundary against political forces that discouraged property accumulation. Then, Antonio Gramsci constructed the modern definition of “civil society” as a collection of private entities. As such, the concept of civil society was originated to explain the evolution of European capitalism, but Perry argues that in China such capitalistic social group like bourgeois did never exist.

countries. This model posits that the society is constantly in transformation as different state and non-state groups are competing and collaborating to dominate social control. Like any other social group, different components of the state takes part in this transformative process; the state can transform and control the society but does it from within (Russell, 2005: 2 & 3).⁶

In this model, the state is rejected of its simple, aggregated depiction. Migdal argues that the state should be understood as having two levels:

- The “image” of the state “as if it were a single, centrally motivated actor performing in an integrated manner to rule a clear territory” (such as PRC)
- The “practices” of “a heap of loosely connected parts [within the state]...frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them and other groupings inside and outside...and often promoting conflicting sets of rules with one another” (as exemplified in the study that local officials in rural China are more likely to deliver public goods to villages with active solidary groups than those without.) (Migdal, 2001: 22; Tsai, 2007: 355 - 372).

According to this logic, the state becomes “a field of power” that is depicted like a coherent billiard ball but shaped by messy practices of its multiple components (Migdal, 2001: 15 - 16).

A legacy of this model is then a process-based inquiry. It encourages scholars to dig deeper than “China did this” and enables them to look at micro-level struggles. Altogether, struggles for domination among different state and non-state actors make up the image of “China did this.” Such analytical exercise then necessitates a researcher to adopt “an anthropology of the state,” a viewpoint that sees multiple levels of the state where respective officials encounter pressures from social groups. Migdal’s version suggests a four-tiered disaggregation, which is recreated in the following page and applied to the topic of this thesis.

⁶ Another noteworthy implication of this model is that the society can also constrain the state of which extent and influence are greater than previously imagined in state-centric theories.

<Table 1> Migdal's disaggregation of the state and corresponding actors in the case study

Migdal's classification	Corresponding actor in the case study	What it is about
Trenches	Yanbian prefecture government	Those at the bottom of the state hierarchy who execute state directives and whose pressures come from both supervisors and intended clients.
Dispersed field offices	Jilin provincial government	The regional and local bodies that localize state policies and directives and deliver them to the trenches
Agency's central offices	Relevant ministries (such as Ministry of Commerce)	The places where national policies are designed and resources of implementation are stored
Commanding heights	Executive leadership in the CCP	The top executive leadership such as presidents, juntas, etc

(Source: author's creation based on Migdal, *State in society*, p117 – 124)

Then, what picture can researchers draw from understanding the struggles among disaggregated actors? Migdal presents two patterns. “Integrated domination” holds when specific state or social actors achieve a broad social control over others. If either state or social forces do not achieve countrywide control, that situation constitutes “dispersed domination” (ibid.: 100 & 129). The majority of media and academic observation on a PRC-DPRK border issue assume the case of integrated domination where the Chinese central government has full control over all its state and non-state actors. A task of this thesis is to revisit this assumption, disaggregate Chinese actors, understand their actual practices, and reformulate or confirm the taken-for-granted depiction of integrated domination.

3.2. Analytical framework based on Migdal's Model

Based on the Migdal's State-in-society model, the author of this thesis identified the state and society groups engaged in pursuing Yanbian's opening-up strategies. Actor disaggregation is necessary for her to illustrate a dialectic relationship between the actors on different levels of the government bureaucracy as well as between the state and the non-state spheres. These actors are (1) Yanbian government (2) Scholars in Yanbian (3) Private businesses in Yanbian (4) Jilin government (5) Central government (6) Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI).

Notice that the list above is slightly different from the < Table 1>. The author added the GTI - an intergovernmental economic cooperation mechanism in the Tumen River area (including Yanbian) led by the United Nations Development Programme(UNDP) - as a relevant actor for its unique, long-standing role in the development of China's Northeastern border. Yanbian

category is divided into state and non-state actors because the in-depth case study and major interviewees gathered in Yanbian enabled the author of this thesis to disaggregate further. In contrast, the author combined “Agency’s central offices” and “commanding heights” in the <Table 1> into one actor, “central government,” for lack of first-hand accounts. This list of disaggregated actors guided data collection and analysis in this thesis. Near conclusion, the author will reintroduce the concepts of “integrated or dispersed domination” to describe the dynamics between the actors above.

4. Methodology

For the author's critical realist position, the goal of the present study is to go beyond seeking a positivist explanation of observable events but to understand underlying mechanisms that produce such events (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009: 41). Hence, methods of qualitative research are chosen, and this research employs case study (Bryman, 2004: 266). Case study is preferred when a scholar uses multiple sources of information to study a bounded phenomenon (so-called a case) to understand a problem or issue that the case illustrates (Yin, 2003: 5 and 10). In this research, the author relies on multiple information sources such as policy documents, newspaper articles and scholarly publications. She also cites from the interviews of local government officials, scholars, and businessmen from her fieldwork in Beijing, Yanji (the capital of Yanbian prefecture) and Seoul.

4.1. Case study design

In the present thesis, "a case" is defined as the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, a border region close to DPRK, that is expected to the underlying mechanisms of the China's center-border interaction. The units of analysis in this case are the actors and practices in implementing the opening-up strategies under the Changjitu and PRC-DPRK joint development of the Rason Special Economic Zone. Opening-up strategies hereby indicate the ones that foster better linkages with DPRK such as transportation building, trade promotion, joint development of border areas, knowledge exchange, etc.

The selected single-case can be justified for being exemplary in theoretical application (Bryman, 2004: 51; Yin, 2003: 41, 42). Yanbian prefecture is located in a highly contradictory plain of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests. The area has recently seen a surge of opening-up initiatives from which locals hope to revitalize its economy. Meanwhile, it borders the politically and economically unstable neighbor that shares ethnic tie with the Korean minority, which may propel the center to strengthen its control on Yanbian. Such contrast appears to be strong on Yanbian and provides an apt context to seek applicability and implications of the State-in-society model that is suitable to explore micro-level political interactions (Bryman, 2004: 51).

Interestingly, (as evident in the Previous Studies section) Yanbian has rarely been cited as a case to illustrate China's border region development. The prefecture may be less eventful compared to fastly-developed southern coastal provinces and conflict-stricken Tibet and Xinjiang. Moreover, what happens in the Northeastern border has mainly been discussed as a foreign policy concern with DPRK; only recently as the Changjitu gained outside attention, Yanbian's local development needs became part of the discussion and widely known. For Yanbian is an understudied case of border region development as well as of China's center-border relations, the author of this thesis justifies having it as a single-case.

Furthermore, this research looks into Yanbian's opening-up toward DPRK, an issue that has long been investigated in the context of international relations. By attempting to disaggregate the actors and practices overshadowed in the name of Chinese state, it takes an unprecedented attempt to apply the State-in-society model to an issue of which literature is dominantly written in the state-centric perspective. There is also a practical consideration of choosing Yanbian. The author visited this prefecture three times in 2009 as an interpreter for North Korean refugee testimony collection projects. She has some prior knowledge of the region and local contacts whom she asked for research advice.

4.2. Data collection

The present thesis is a qualitative research based on the study of secondary materials – books, policy documents, scholarly articles, newspaper articles, websites, etc – as well as semi-structured interviews of Chinese and South Korean experts, some of whom are directly involved in implementing the opening-up strategies. To enhance the understanding of the concerned issue, data and methodological triangulations are employed.

Data collection for this research has following phases: preliminary research that led to a thesis proposal, fieldwork in PRC, and supplementary research upon return. The author of this thesis has continuously read relevant literatures on the PRC-DPRK economic relations and attended relevant lectures and symposiums for the spring and fall semesters of 2011. A thesis proposal was prepared and sent to Peking University in October, 2011. Then, she conducted fieldwork in PRC from February 8th to April 29th, 2012. She spent first six weeks in Beijing, taking a fieldwork course in Peking University and meeting informants who introduced her key research contacts in Yanji. In Yanji, she stayed at the Yanbian University

of Science and Technology as a visiting student for a month (March 23th – April 26th). During her stay in Yanji, she reviewed paper-back materials unattainable online (such as two volumes of Northeast Asian Journal published by the Yanbian University and three years worth of paper-back Yanbian Daily articles) and conducted most of her interviews. Then, she took two more interviews, one in Beijing (upon returning from Yanji) and one in Seoul (before departing to Sweden). Once back in Sweden, she conducted supplementary desk research to check facts and read materials that were not readily accessible in PRC.

Interviews

Interview provides the main empirical base to fill in information gaps in published materials and sense the local atmosphere in which the studied issue is being discussed (Hopf, 2011: 203). In this research, semi-structured interviews are chosen over structured questionnaires. This type of interviewing allows interviewees to share information in a focused yet relaxed and conversational setting. It also helps an interviewer to flexibly respond to interviewee's prior knowledge, preferences and needs. Before each interview, the author of this research spent time online and studied about an interviewee in advance. Then, based on the overarching research questions (mentioned the chapter 1.2. Research Questions), she formulated interview questions and differentiated them and their wordings based on the interviewee's knowledge, professional association, and other considerations that influence his/her accessibility to information on the studied issue.

She employed purposive sampling to ensure that the interviewees and informants have relevant knowledge and represent each category of actors. During her stay in Beijing, she met with key informants (journalists, scholars, and NGO personnel) and asked them to introduce her to potential interviewees. Once in Yanji, getting interviewees was a snowballing process. Each time, she asked her interviewee to recommend and/ introduce her to other experts, and most times one led to another. Her host university also arranged a couple of interviews. She tried random phone calls and emailing only to find that they were hardly fruitful. In total, she conducted 9 interviews in Korean herself. All Chinese interviewees are ethnically Korean although such homogeneity was unintended.⁷ Those who either declined or dismissed interview requests have both ethnic Korean Chinese as well as Han Chinese. See *Appendix 3* for detailed information on interviewees.

⁷ The author of this thesis had a Chinese-Korean interpreter ready, but no interview in Chinese occurred.

4.3. Evaluation of research design

This thesis adopts relevant parts of the evaluation criteria suggested by Robert Yin (2003: 34). First evaluative criteria deal with construct validity, a concern about whether objects of academic inquiry as well as instruments to study these objects are carefully selected to demonstrate the reality of the studied issue (*ibid.*, 35). The author took construct validity seriously and thus remained flexible on redefining the scope and focus of this case study. Being in PRC and interacting with Chinese scholars helped her understand which topic is reasonable and feasible to study.⁸ She also employed data triangulation by analyzing different sources – policy documents, news articles, secondary sources and interviews – like putting together puzzle pieces.

A single case study is often perceived as lacking in external validity – a question about whether findings are generalizable - than a multiple case study. Critics of single-case study would argue that looking at Yanbian only is insufficient to understand a Chinese center-border relation. To cope with this shortcoming, the author extensively studied other cases of border development and included them in the chapter 2 Previous Studies. Another aim of this study is to test the applicability of Migdal's state-in-society theory of which authority has empirical bases that explore the diversity of political forces. That said, focusing only on Yanbian's experience can still yield elements for analytical generation, which can confirm, modify and challenge Migdal's theory (Yin, 2003: 37).

Reliability or dependability is another criterion to ensure that errors and biases are minimal for other researchers to replicate the same findings if they follow the same research process. It is a difficult test especially when who you are matters to the accessibility to information. In PRC, being a young, South Korean, female master student means that her research experience would be quite different from being a Chinese male professor whose age is about the same or older than interviewees. Hence, the author was intent on focusing on “how” questions rather than “why questions” and studied about actors and their practices of opening-up policies. Such analytical angle was driven from her belief that the process-based inquiry would yield more standardized outcome than the intention-oriented speculation.⁹

⁸ She initially defined her case to be Jilin province and focused on studying the overall Changjitu plan. However, during the fieldwork, she decided the research scope has to be narrower to better reflect and be reflected from her findings that are mainly gathered from Yanbian.

⁹ Of course, the author acknowledges that “how things are done” and “why things are done as such” are

4.4. Challenges and reflections

Data collection in PRC has many limitations as information is not openly and readily available even to Chinese scholars. In such challenging environment, a researcher has to make deviations from ideal methodological standards while not entirely compromising research integrity (Heimer & Thøgersen, 2006: 2). Access to information is further limited if the studied issue is deemed politically sensitive, and Yanbian's opening-up strategies toward DPRK is surely a case. One interviewee told me that "in the present atmosphere, scholars like us are advised to work a lot but speak little about on any North Korean matter" (ACM#1, 2012). Furthermore April 2012 was not the most ideal season to fish information because of heavy media attention on the PRC-DPRK border that was following its controversial rocket launch on April 12th and the Day of Sun on April 15th in honor of the late leader Kim Il-sung's 100th birthday. Aware of such events, local informants and interviewees (especially government officials) were cautious in giving information and introducing new contacts.¹⁰

The author's South Korean nationality worked as a double-edged sword. Shared Korean culture between South Koreans and Yanbian ethnic Korean Chinese as well as her mother tongue fluency in Korean allowed her to easily connect with and build rapport with locals. However, revealing her South Korean nationality sparks initial hesitation or caution from Chinese informants and interviewees because they concerned whether the author of the thesis strongly subscribes to the South Korean bias and views any event on Yanbian as an indication of PRC's attempt to subjugate DPRK. Some of the interviewees told that they became cautious about sharing their views after South Korean journalists they met wrote about off-the-record discussions and misrepresented what they actually said.

As coping strategies, she held her ethical considerations high and put utmost priority on respecting interviewees' needs and keeping sensitive information (names and specific details of their work) anonymous (see *Ethical Consideration* in the next page for more information). Because the concerned issue is deemed politically sensitive, meeting interviewees through common acquaintances was not only most effective but also inevitable. These common acquaintances and so-called gate keepers are journalists and NGO

mutually-dependent questions. That said, she does not artificially opt out her suggestive findings on the intentions behind the opening-up strategies based on her document sources and interviews.

¹⁰ The author of this research was close to get two more government official interviews but was told from her intermediaries that they did not want to meet as the political provocation in DPRK was ongoing in April.

professionals she met when she worked for a Seoul-based human rights NGO before graduate school and from the North Korean-related events she attended during the first couple of semesters.

Some challenges were out of the author's control and necessitated her to be highly flexible and patient. Lack of Mandarin fluency did not prevent her from collecting data yet constrained the scope of research and building rapport with Han Chinese sources on her own. Getting interviews was a lengthy process, and most of the fruitful ones happened in the second-half of April in Yanji. Until then, she had to consistently identify and meet informants and wait until her requested interviewees could make time. For a novice researcher, telling difference between what did the Chinese government pledge and what it actually completed was another challenge and an important skill to refine for future research.

4.5. Ethical consideration

The author of this thesis was careful about taking interviews because the studied issue is deemed politically sensitive in the region. She ensured that each interview experience accommodated interviewee's needs and was conducted within their comfort zones. First of all, she clearly stated her association at Lund University as master student and educational purpose of her research before any interview. She also promised her interviewees that their names and detailed professional associations remain anonymous in her paper. She did not use any recording device but rely on note-taking during interview because the presence of tape recorder may increase their anxiety. As soon as each interview was done, she found a quiet place and transcribe it based on scribbles, bullet points, and memories. To ensure that interviewee's points were clearly conveyed and precisely understood, the author took several moments to briefly summarize what the interviewee had said before asking further questions. When the interview did not want to give further detail, the author respected his/her stance and did not probe further.

5. Empirical findings from the case study

As early as in the beginning of the 90s, Jilin attempted to develop the Tumen River area to revitalize its economy and gain sea access via Rason in DPRK (see *Appendix 4* for more information on these previous development efforts). Those efforts did not receive much policy support from the central government until the inception of the Northeast Revitalization Plan, a grand development scheme supervised by the executives of the State Council and the National Development and Reform Commission. Under the Plan, Jilin province came up with its province-specific plan, the Changjitu, in which Yanbian prefecture is designated as the window of opening-up. Now with stronger policy bases and more funding pledges from the center, Jilin and Yanbian have begun infrastructure building as a start.

5.1. Microcosm of Chinese actors in Yanbian's opening-up endeavors

The following chapter dedicates to the first research question: which actors were involved in undertaking Yanbian's actualization of opening-up strategies? By this point, it is timely to recall the theoretical framework based on Migdal's State-in-society model, which disaggregates the PRC into: (1) Yanbian government (2) Scholars in Yanbian (3) Private businesses in Yanbian (4) Jilin government (5) Central government, with the addition of (6) GTI.

Local governments in Yanbian

Yanbian prefecture is divided into six county-level cities and two counties. Governments of these cities and counties are administratively subject to the Yanbian Prefectural Government located in Yanji, the capital of Yanbian. In realizing the Changjitu for prefecture's advantage, *the Leading Group on Implementing the Leading Zone Plan for Yanbian* (Leading Group) was formulated in January 2010, shortly after the State Council's approval of the Changjitu. Its members are executive officials in the Prefecture Government and Chinese Communist Party for Yanbian Prefecture (CCPY) (Yanbian Daily, 4 January 2010)¹¹. These executives are not always in their offices and simultaneously serve other positions. Hence, the Leading Group established an office of the same title (Leading Group Office) in which the director of the Office of Trade & Economic Zones in the Yanbian Prefecture Government serves

¹¹ Members of the leading group are: the party secretary of CCPY; Yanbian governor (who is the vice party of CCPY); two vice governors and the secretary of Chinese Communist Party for Yanji-Longjing-Tumen Cities (three are members of the Standing Committee of CCPY).

directorship and manages daily operation and communication.¹² The main responsibility for the Leading Group is to draw a big picture of how Yanbian should benefit from and implement the Changjitu for local advantage (GOV interview, 2012).

Once the leading group approves the overall plan of the Yanbian's strategies to implement the Changjitu, various departments and ministries within the Yanbian Prefecture Government - such as Ministry of Commerce, Office of Trade & Economic Zones, etc. - are assigned to take charge of and implement relevant projects.¹³ If necessary, the local government establishes new offices or agencies upon approval of its superior government (for Yanbian, it is Jilin); the Organic Law of Local People's Congresses and Local People's Governments grants such mandate to all levels of local governments (GOV interview, 2012).

Private enterprises in Yanbian

The Changjitu plan states that “financing for basic transportation infrastructure and trade zone constructions should be prioritized to support...companies in the [Tumen River] area” (Changjitu, 2009). Of course, the generic role of local companies is to build and get things done accordingly to their contracts with local governments. However, the quoted text goes further and advocates that engaging local enterprises is a means for local development. That said, it is likely that local enterprises will become more visible in deliberating the opening-up.

The concept of an enterprise in PRC however deserves a contextualized understanding. Chinese companies can be divided into government-owned and private. Traditionally, private ones have had fewer policy supports and limited financing sources. They tend to be small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and have the average life span of 2.9 years (KIEP, 2008: 1; Yonhap News, 29 November 2011).¹⁴ Only recently the central and local governments have

¹² According to local newspaper reports, Leading Group members met twice - one in January and another in September in 2010. Because their meetings happen infrequently, the author speculates that while decision-making requires approval from the leading group members, the office becomes a main platform for inter-departmental dialogue and driving policies.

¹³ For instance, Yanbian Haihwa Trading Company is responsible for constructing a PRC-DPRK border trade zone in Tumen city as one of the 100 construction projects in Yanbian under the Changjitu; the Ministry of Commerce and the Office of External Relations in the Prefecture Government are designated as government partners. (Yanbian Daily, 31 December 2009).

¹⁴ The KIEP(Korea Institute of International Economic Policy) report summarizes key points from a report on financing Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises(SMEs), jointly published by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Shenzhen Developing Bank in 2007. The report argues that Chinese SMEs rely heavily on loans from banks for investment financing, which still hold high barriers for various reasons. Therefore, the SMEs pursues private capital market and often rely on borrowing from families and business partners.

enacted legislations and policies aimed specifically for SMEs.

This government-owned/private division is even more an important variable in understanding the situation of private sector participation in the development of Rason. Anecdotal accounts offer various reasons that Chinese investors have remained cautious about investing in Rason. First is the shortage of business infrastructure (such as a well-functioning recruitment mechanism, phone connection, etc) that raises entry costs (BSN#2 interview, 2012). Another problem stems from the difficulty in “being at the same eye level,” a metaphor to express the challenge in working with North Korean counterparts who are unfamiliar with “the software” of the market economy (GOV interview, 2012). In addition, the business community of Yanbian is well-aware that many Chinese businesses have lost their profits from investing in DPRK in the past (ACM#2 interview, 2012). Due to these challenges and uncertainty of guaranteed profit in the foreseeable future, the majority of Chinese enterprises in Rason are privately-run, small and medium-scale ones (in national scale) concentrated on building port facilities, shipping and tourism (BSN#1 & BSN #2 interviews, 2012). When risk runs high, government-owned enterprises retract from taking ventures because their poor performance can negatively affect local balance sheets (Thompson, 2011: 72). Although there were few articles on the investment deals that involve sizable local government-owned firms, these are rather exceptional cases.¹⁵

Yet, interviewees cautiously present hope and potential for greater investment in Rason and thus more participation of government-owned firms. They cite increasing efforts by Jilin and sub-provincial governments to provide institutionalized supports in facilitating and protecting Chinese investments in Rason such as having Jilin government officials stationed in Rason to represent Chinese companies and coordinate with the Rason People’s Committee(RPC)¹⁶ (BSN#2 interview, 2012). Rason Joint Investment Committee, when it was on promotion tour in PRC, also stated that they would protect the Chinese investment in Rason if companies register their investments with them (ACM#1 interview, 2012). That said, more government-owned enterprises will take interest if business prospect in Rason is more optimistic.

¹⁵ For instance, the Yatai Group of which original company was Jilin government-owned (and thus currently maintain a close relationship with the Jilin government) began construction of a cement factory over the area of 200,000 square meters in Rason in June 2011. This news was quickly spread through South Korean and other foreign media outlets, which fed into the speculation that government-own enterprises will dominate development of Rason. (Kim, June 24 2011)

¹⁶ Rason People’s Committee is equivalent of the Rason government.

Scholars in Yanbian

Policy makers alone are limited to grasp the scale and complexity of issues for which they deliberate policies. Hence, they consult researchers, leading intellectuals and experienced journalists for their opinions through various channels (Jakobson & Knox, 2010: 34). For example, government projects that have foreign policy implications are outsourced to universities. An outgoing president of Yanbian University said in an interview that his university has held joint conferences and researches on the Rason Special Economic Zone with scholars from the North Korean Academy of Social Science and the Kim Il-sung University in DPRK. He also added that his university professors also lecture at a training program in Changchun, which is for North Korean officials working in economy-related departments (Jung, 1 Feb 2012). Not surprisingly, scholars also get insider's information from their graduated students who are now working in the public sector (Lee, 2012: 2). Interviewed professors also said in an informal setting they have given criticisms and progressive ideas to government officials who are their acquaintances (ACM#1 & ACM#2 interviews, 2012). Their roles largely remain in an advisory capacity, but by means of consulting, the community of scholars can vicariously perform as a policy actor.

Jilin Provincial Government

Being a provincial-level government, Jilin is superior authority to the Yanbian government. Jilin like any other sub-national government determines resource allocations among sub-provincial governments and provides general development guidelines for them to locally actualize. The functional relationship between Jilin and Yanbian on regional development does not seem vastly different from that between Yanbian and sub-prefectural governments.

However, what distinguishes Jilin from other sub-provincial governments is its administrative status that is on par with Rason that has a Special City status in DPRK. Jilin provincial government can directly communicate with the Rason People's Committee (RPC) to jointly make, modify and deliberate policy decisions (GOV interview, 2012). In other words, Yanbian actors have to rely on Jilin government for policy breakthroughs on Rason even though the opening-up projects physically take place in Yanbian.

An institutional example of Jilin's provincial power is the Economic Cooperation Agency set up in 2009. It is a provincial-level government organization of which responsibilities include

promotion of domestic and overseas investment within Jilin; management of industrial zones; and supervision of the Changjitu projects (Heilongjiang News, 13 August 2009). Within this agency, several officials work full-time and represent the Chinese side of Joint Supervisory Committee on Rason. Since 2011, they organized three trainings for Rason managerial officials, each for a month for three times until April of this year (ACM#1 & GOV interviews, 2012). Jilin government also sent its officials to provide assistance to Chinese investments and help their voices be heard to the RPC (BSN#2 interview, 2012).

Central Government in Beijing

Although termed as central government, it encompasses (1) the political center within the Chinese CCP and the State Council and (2) relevant central government ministries such as the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Railways, etc. Learning about their structures and decision-making procedures presents a methodological challenge because their internal discussions are not readily available even to Chinese scholars (ACM#1 interview, 2012). Although the author tried to be in contact with central government officials via informants, it was not fruitful either. Hence, this section relies on secondary sources and the accounts of interviewees who meet central government officials.

Yanbian's opening-up strategies are part of the regional development plan but contain issues for foreign policy arrangement. For instance, building roads that connect with roads in DPRK as well as sending Chinese government officials to the Rason Special Economic Zone require communication with DPRK counterparts. In this respect, one can have a fuller picture of central government actors by searching them in two camps: those involved in foreign policy on DPRK and regional development.

The Office of Korean Peninsula within the International Department of Chinese Communist Party is known to play an instrumental role in formulating DPRK policies; Chinese Foreign Ministry plays a very minimal role on this issue (BSN#3 interview, 2012; Jakobson & Knox, 2010: 7). Information on DPRK-related policy discussion is highly securitized, of which extent is well-exemplified in the cases of espionage charges imposed upon advisors to the central government on Korean Peninsula issues.¹⁷

¹⁷ Former Chief of the Office of Korean Peninsula Zhang Liuchung(章榴成) was executed for leaking classified information on the 2005 PRC-DPRK summit to South Korean intelligence; he was a translator for Hu Jintao in

On regional development and other economic policies, however, the Standing Committee of the State Council is on top of the policy approval ladder. While each ministry under the State Council carries out ministry-specific tasks, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has a comprehensive authority by being in charge of macroeconomic policies (Ahn, 2011: 66-67). NDRC is therefore most relevant organ regarding regional development plans (ACM#1 interview, 2012).

The Ministry of Commerce (MOC) has also come to media spotlight as Chen Deming, MOC minister, attended the launching ceremony of Rason Special Economic Zone in 2011 (Kim, 8 June 2011). The agency's overall responsibility falls into trade, foreign investment in PRC, Chinese investment overseas, and aid.¹⁸ Within MOC is the Asia Department that has researchers on the Korean Peninsula. A former vice-chief of the Asian Department of the MOC moved to work as vice-secretary of CCP in Yanbian, but it is unclear whether such transfer is an institutionalized practice or independent from strategic consideration to connect his expertise with field experience in the PRC-DPRK border (BSN#3 interview, 2012).¹⁹

Other than the aforementioned, there are other ministries whose generic tasks take place in Yanbian for being an ethnic minority region (such as the State Ethnic Affairs Commission) or in the context of sector-specific projects within the Changjitu plan (such as Ministry of Railways). In this abundance of central government-level actors but with very little verified information, the author of this thesis has to risk agglomerating them into "the central government actor" for explanatory reason. However, she remains keen on explaining actions of certain organization that stands out.

Greater Tumen Initiative

Before Greater Tumen Initiative existed Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP) as a regional economic cooperation mechanism to develop areas near

this summit. Jin Xide, former vice-director of Japan Institute in the Chinese Academy of Science, and Li Dunqui, a Korea specialist in the China's State Council Development Research Center, were also accused (Jin for leaking state secrets to Japan and two Koreas and Li to North Korea). (Chung, 25 June 2010)

¹⁸ MOC is a major donor agency of Chinese foreign aid, most of which goes to infrastructure building projects carried out by Chinese companies or grants or concessional loans for resource deals by major Chinese state-owned enterprises (Jakobson & Knox, 2010: 10).

¹⁹ Personnel control, however, is a continuing practice of the CCP to ensure that sub-national authorities are loyal to the central party and in line with domestic development agendas of the center, while giving them de jure autonomy in local governance (Xu, 2011: 1092 - 1093).

the Tumen River. However, the original format of the TRADP did not endure the changing geopolitical climates in the region and in 2005 transformed to the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI). GTI expanded its geographical coverage from the Tumen River Area to an area including PRC's three northeastern provinces, Mongolia's three eastern provinces (aimags) and Eastern ports of ROK and identified five priority sectors for cooperation – energy, environment, investments, transport and tourism – and developed 10 long-term projects (Yacheistova, 2011: 4 & 6) (For more information on TRADP and GTI, see *Appendix 4*).

Despite its inactive past, GTI has been actively reaching out to government officials, scholars and other relevant actors in respective countries. It proves its strength in organizing policy dialogues that bring government officials of different levels through forums and provide them capacity building programs. It also suggests regional development ideas to local governments of member countries (UNREP & GOV interviews, 2012). Its neutral identity as a UNDP-mediated actor and long presence in the region has been positively received by its member countries (UNREP interview, 2012).

The GTI's scope naturally overlaps with the Changjitu and its opening-up efforts. One of the ten GTI projects is the "Road & Harbor Project in the border between China and DPRK" that entails reconstruction of the Hunchun Quanhe - Rajin road; construction of a new bridge between Quanhe and Wonjongri, a gateway to Rajin; and development and utilization of the DPRK Rajin harbor in Rason (Greater Tumen Initiative). However, since the project feasibility study was conducted in 2007, this project halted, and DPRK withdrew its membership in 2009 (UNREP interview, 2012). In fact, this project became a bilateral business between PRC and DPRK. The road is expected for completion in this June (GOV interview). A new bridge between Quanhe and Wonjongri is planned for construction this year (Park, 2 February 2012). Currently, the harbor project is ongoing, in which DPRK invested in terms of real estate like roadbed, land and harbor and PRC in terms of cash; Pier 1 is currently used by Chinese ships to transport coal from Hunchun to the China's coastal south and three piers (Pier 4, 5 & 6) will be constructed by Chinese companies (ibid).²⁰

²⁰ Russia secured the right to develop and monopolize usage of Pier 3. Pier 2 belongs to DPRK, but there is a rumor that Swiss acquired the right to lease (Cho, 14 June 2011).

5.2. Collaboration, competition and compromise between these actors

The previous chapter presents the profiles of disaggregated actors and describes their roles and expected gains in pursuing the opening-up strategies under the Changjitu. The following chapter will encounter with the second research question: how do the actors comply, challenge or violate the rules of the game, and how do they cooperate, co-opt and/or compete to strive for their gains? This part is the highlight of the Migdal's process-based inquiry, which makes this study distinctive from previous state-centric and intention-focused studies on similar topics.

Yanbian scholars – Yanbian government: teamed up to push for local interests

Scholars enjoy more freedom in expressing their “academic” views and feel less constrained than government officials in criticizing ongoing policies and suggesting innovative alternatives. Termed as experts and specialists, they are often sought by government officials for their opinions on certain policies, and there are several avenues through which scholars as advisors influence policy making.

Once the Changjitu plan received the State Council's approval, Yanbian government asked Jilin University to conduct a research on the Yanbian's opening-up strategies and prospects (Yanbian Daily, 18 October 2010). Other intellectual events where the government officials can seek expert advice are annual Tumen River Area International Trade and Investment Forum organized by the Yanbian Prefecture Government (with support from the Jilin MOC and other investment-related agencies in the Jilin government), annual Tumen River Academic Forum organized by Yanbian University, etc. In those forums, academics present their opinions on regional development for the audience comprised of government officials of all levels, individual investors, etc (ACM#4 interview, 2012).

Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at local level is another formal channel for non-state actors to appeal their views as the Conference members. A couple of interviewees argued that suggestions made in the CPPCC are increasingly heard and reflected in policies these days (ACM#1 & ACM#2 interviews, 2012). In this mechanism, scholars can enhance their persuasive power for being friends with government officials. An interviewee and member of the CPPCC said that he often discussed about issues regarding the Changjitu

with his friend who is another member of the CPPCC and executive-level officer at the Development and Reform Commission in the Yanbian government (ACM#2 interview, 2012).

Some executive-level government officials and party members seek specific scholars as their most-trusted advisors. For instance, an interviewee, whose company offers urban planning and management services, told that few professors associated with his company are sought as advisors on urban planning issues by a sub-prefecture level party secretary in Yanbian (BSN#1 interview, 2012).

Then, what have scholars been suggesting to government officials about the Changjitu? Interviewed scholars spoke in unity that Yanbian actors – the government and the non-government together – had to emphasize the importance of “opening-up” as a key for Changjitu’s success (ACM#1 & ACM#2 interviews, 2012).

“Why there is the expression - “opening-up” - in the full title of the Changjitu plan? Initially, Jilin government did not understand the concept of “opening-up” and was not keen on including it. Hence, scholars on border regions like us passionately spoke to Yanbian officials to push for it (ACM#1 interview, 2012)”

They coach the Yanbian government officials to strongly stress the importance of directing more support to the opening-up part of the Changjitu (that Yanbian is responsible for) when discussing with Jilin Provincial government officials who are more familiar with development needs of Changchun and Jilin cities (that emphasize building high-tech industrial zones in their regions.) Yanbian scholars argued that not only Yanbian’s future development relies on the opening-up, but also gaining access to sea via Rason and acquiring wider and better transportation linkages are interdependent with the success of high-tech industrialization in Changchun and Jilin cities.²¹

Yanbian enterprises – Subnational governments: mutually dependent when risk is high

China’s Northeast has grappled with inefficient and change-averse state-owned enterprises in heavy industries. Meanwhile, Yanbian’s economic growth uniquely owed to the fast growth of service sector as well as of foreign investment in manufacture industries (Yoon, 2008: 118

²¹ An interviewed professor spoke passionately: “you can increase and improve production in Changchun and Jilin cities but without developing the route for opening-up (meaning Yanbian), to where can you sell their products?”

& 123).²² This suggests that Yanbian diverges from the industrial development experience of Changchun city and its environ that are home to heavy productions. With this background, Yanbian business actors can be complementary in many ways for their innovative and adventurous experiences for being private.

Experiences and networks of the business actors become more useful for the local government if its target project bears high risk, especially in the case of private sector participation in developing the Rason Special Economic Zone. Currently, Yanbian and Jilin governments are actively promoting Chinese investment into this area, but they find it challenging because of the shortage of government manpower to provide supports to the Chinese enterprises in Rason and a high level of uncertainty in the profit-making prospect. This bleak nature of investing in Rason was however a niche market for an interviewed Chinese company. It has recently begun to consult interested Chinese individuals and companies on investing in Rason; topics of consulting include the economy and laws of Rason and feasibility assessment of client's intended projects in Rason (BSN#2 interview, 2012).²³ The company has an agreement with the Hunchun city government to receive and consult interested SMEs and individuals who initially contacted the city government. This firm's consulting ability largely owes to the chairman of its mother company. He has had a joint venture in DPRK for about 20 years and developed extensive network in DPRK. He is now the head of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Rason (CCCR), an association of Chinese enterprises in Rason to protect and advance its collective interests. CCCR is established and registered under the Hunchun Chamber of Commerce, an agency that belongs to the official administrative bureaucracy of the Hunchun City (BSN#2 interview, 2012).

(In response to the author's question about how the interviewed company came to offer consulting services) "There have been an increased number of SMEs and individuals who are intent on investing in Rason. Government manpower alone is insufficient. They needed a private company like us." (BSN#2 interview, 2012)

²² Foreign investment in Yanbian started booming in early 90s as Yanbian was designated as TRADP's development zone and thus attracted international attention. Diplomatic normalization between PRC and ROC triggered South Korean investment in the area. However, the flow of investment recessed due to the Asian Economic Crisis in 1997 and subsequently decreased interest and incentive in Yanbian. Entering 2000s, the investment regained momentum since PRC's accession to World Trade Organization. However, Yanbian has lost its appeal as cheap labor source compared to other regions of China such as Chongqing and Xiamen. Still, as of 2006, South Korea tops the number of investors(488 companies) and the volumes of joint investment and actual investment (Yoon, 2008).

²³ Most clients are privately-run and SMEs who seek advice on basic questions because not much is known about investing in Rason.

This chairman also serves as one of two foreign economic advisers to the Rason People's Committee. For the CCCR, he is an informal yet effective channel to address their concerns directly to high-level officials in the RPC. In Rason, there are also Chinese officials dispatched by the Jilin government to support Chinese investments and mediate issues with the RPC (Ibid.). It is reasonably expected that these officials will strategically ally with the chairman and seek his *guanxi* (meaning personalized network of influence in Chinese) when having to urgently breakthrough communications with high-level officials in the RPC.

This example is suggestive of the potential of private business actors in working in partnership with its government counterparts in the "opening-up" efforts. For its expertise, this company also has a cooperation agreement with the Jilin government. However, not all Chinese enterprises have such personalized influences, and only few have formed such partnership with North Korean and Chinese government counterparts. Many other firms (such as the company that BSN#1 works for) independently approached to RPC to discuss a tourism project. And his company was not aware of the work of BSN#2's company. Despite different operational and bargaining capabilities, the private entrepreneurs commonly wish to see more government involvement in the form of investment protection and setting an example investment by engaging more government-owned enterprises.

Yanbian Government – Jilin Government: where development visions conflict

By the very design of China's local administration and lack of a formal, regularized system of expenditure allocation, each provincial government holds discretion in dividing budget shares between itself and below (Donaldson, 2010: 30). Unless a sub-provincial government has own source of prosperity to pursue its own development that is approved by the provincial government, it does not have other choice but to rely on provincial supports.

Among its eight competitors (Changchun, one provincial-level city, and seven prefecture-level cities), how could Yanbian assure enough support from the Jilin government to pursue its opening-up strategies? Did waiting calmly help? As earlier illustrated in the grievances from Yanbian scholars, what Yanbian needed was the mentality of "squeaky wheel gets the oil" (GOV Interview, 2012) Yanbian has to compete with especially Changchun and Jilin cities that pursue technological innovation and high-tech industrialization as the "core of the zone." First relative disadvantage of Yanbian is the distance from Changchun, the home of

Jilin Provincial Government. Yanbian is 5.5 hours away by bus, and Yanbian scholars complained that they were not always timely updated about activities of the Jilin government (ACM#1 interview, 2012).

More fundamentally, Jilin government has seen a different path of regional development than Yanbian's. The province was the birthplace of China's automobile industry, and still many heavy industry and chemical plants operate.

“I can understand why it is hard for Jilin government to understand and become equally passionate about the ‘opening-up.’ They have production-oriented mindset. That Hunchun tries to become a hub of economic cooperation in the Northeast Asia would also be difficult to imagine.” (GOV interview, 2012)

With no successful precedent, Jilin government may find a series of outward-looking opening-up initiatives bit too progressive and experimental. In fact, before the Changjitu, Jilin Provincial Government tried the State Council approval on a regional development plan focusing solely on high-tech industrialization in Changchun and Jilin cities but failed (ACM#1 interview, 2012). Once Yanbian's suggestion for “opening-up” was integrated into the proposal of Changjitu, it passed the test (why Jilin government sought the State Council approval will be explained in the section on *Jilin Government – Central Government*).

To conclude, since the inception of TRADP, Yanbian's pursuit to put its “opening-up” agenda in the greater scheme of regional development is older than the life of Changjitu that is only a couple of years old. In the perspective of Yanbian actors, engraving the element of “opening-up” in Changjitu is a hard-won reward but keeping Jilin government interested in it would be a never-ending task.

Sub-national Governments – GTI: spreading words and concept-building

It is important to revisit the legacy of Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) in conjunction with Yanbian's opening-up efforts.²⁴ Prior to the Changjitu, Jilin province worked with the predecessor of GTI, TRADP, since the early 90s in order to seek coastal access via DRPK's Rason and to revitalize its local economy through increased economic exchanges with

²⁴ As the GTI is an inter-governmental mechanism, while acknowledging that non-governmental individuals like scholars deeply engage in GTI's activities as trainers and participants, this section will focus on its interactions with government actors because they are main audience.

Northeast Asian neighbors. The vision of Yanbian in being the focal point of opening-up was nearly realized when Yanbian was designated as part of the Tumen River Development area where a joint special economic zone would be launched but did not. Since then, neither TRADP nor GTI attempted any hardware project, and people in Yanbian came to question its contribution to the economies of Yanbian and Jilin.

Both TRADP and GTI have institutional constraints. As UN-mediated intergovernmental mechanisms, they cannot interfere with national affairs including development strategies and are therefore limited in influencing decision-makers of the central government (UNREP interview, 2012). They can introduce local governments to funding sources but themselves are not donors like Asian Development Bank. If Jilin government wanted to pursue its own development within this UN framework, it had to either mainly use its own funding or seek the central government's support. Interviewed Yanbian actors agree that Jilin provincial government alone does not have sufficient resources to afford the projects being pursued within the Changjitu. Moreover, during the TRADP period, the central government was not as prosperous or interested in the region as it is now to support the Changjitu (GOV interview, 2012).

Some also evaluated that this mechanism could not make an effective linkage between local and central governments. GTI Secretariat serves as a liaison to the NDRC in Beijing, and the office of Tumen River Area Development was set up under the State Council. Nonetheless, the liaison does not automatically guarantee making deals, and the office was told to have weak influence within the State Council (ACM#1 interview, 2012).

Nonetheless, most interviewees agreed and credited the GTI for developing the concept (or terminology at least) of Tumen River Area development, which had its revival because of the Changjitu.²⁵ The grievances of Yanbian actors suggest that conceptualizing a new vision of regional development other than planting more factories has been a challenging task. However, for two decades, this intergovernmental mechanism has popularized the concept of Tumen River Area development via various avenues such as policy dialogues between central and local-level governments.

²⁵ To remind, the full name of the Changjitu goes *Tumen River Area Development Plan with Changchun-Jilin-Yanbian as a Pioneering Zone for Development and Opening-up*.

“As for a government official like me who works so far away from Beijing, I find it helpful for GTI to arrange opportunities for me to meet with central-government officials.” (GOV interview, 2012)

As of 2012, project-wide linkage between GTI and the Changjitu is non-existent. However, as GTI wishes for DPRK’s return and continues to look at Rason for its multi-destination tourism project, this actor may continue to remain relevant.

Jilin Government – Central Government: vying for center’s attention

In examining the relationship between Jilin and Beijing, a fundamental question is why Jilin and sub-provincial governments were eager to seek the State Council’s approval on their regional development plan while the province has much authority to develop concrete steps and allocate resources for it? A closer look reveals that the Changjitu was approved by the State Council as a “national-level” development strategy. This recognition offered Jilin Provincial Government following policy incentives. (1) The plan came under the supervision of central-level NDRC, thus forging a closer linkage with the country’s overall development strategy (ACM#1 interview, 2012). (2) When the province allocated budget for the China’s 12th Five Year Plan (2011 - 2015), the Changjitu areas prioritized (ibid.; Kim, 2011: 25). (3) Being a national-level strategy made borrowing money from national banks easier and expedited decisions from central-level ministries.²⁶ (ACM#1 interview, 2012).

Although the central government is not micromanaging on Jilin’s affairs, it is still influential because it can constrain Jilin’s actions and choices through procedural and organizational maneuvers that increase the center’s bargaining power (Donaldson, 2010: 33). However, this does not necessitate the game to be zero-sum because eventually, the capacity of the central government is mutually dependent on successes of regional developments on the basis of decentralization and encouragement of local development experiments (ibid., 34).

Non-Yanbian based watchers raised a different question: does the central government have interest in supporting and substantiating the Changjitu as much as Jilin and Yanbian wish?

²⁶ The interviewed professor said soon after the state council approval of the Changjitu, the Ministry of Railways quickly approved Jilin government’s suggestions to build speed-train railways. They were much quickly constructed than what it could have been without the State Council approval.

“I sense that there’s a difference of water temperature between the center and the border. The center has not been heated up like Jilin and Yanbian yet” (BSN#3 interview, 2012)

Although they agreed that the central support to the Changjitu was bound to increase, they thought that the Western Development Program would still be the highest priority. Target regions including Tibet and Xinjiang are poorer, more deprived in infrastructures, and more socially unstable than the northeast (BSN#3 & ACM#5 interviews, 2012). The only project in the Changjitu that the central government would be keenly interested is gaining sea access because it allows time- and cost-efficient shipping of coals and food produced in Northeast to the Southern coastal regions which account for 61% of China’s secondary sector and 89% of China’s exports (Zhang, 2010: 30 & 31).²⁷ While acknowledging this nation-wide economic implications of developing Rajin port, Yanbian interviewees however saw sea access as only one part of what the center expects from the Changjitu; they emphasized that more central supports would be expected, especially in making Hunchun city a hub of transnational trade and investment in Northeast Asia (ACM#1 & GOV interviews, 2012).

Yanbian Actors – Central Government: the center’s support on the edge

On regional development, the Yanbian government communicates to the Jilin government, not the central. However, because Yanbian is an ethnic minority region, the central government remains vigilant on its activities. In this respect, one may wonder whether Yanbian’s opening-up and increased contacts between local ethnic Korean Chinese (*chaoxianju*) and non-Chinese Koreans may raise the center’s concern.

Yanbian-based interviewees expressed that such concern was overrated as (1) the Yanbian Prefecture has been consistently cooperative with the CCP and (2) despite its naming as “autonomous prefecture,” more than half in Yanbian are now Han Chinese (ACM#2 & BSN#1 interviews, 2012). It is also in the center’s interest to help ethnic minority border regions develop and economically prosper, which is in line with the State Council’s approval in 2008 on the regional development plan covering part of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region located on the way to Southeast Asian countries (Li & Fung Research Center, 2011: 61; ACM#4 interview, 2012).

27 Two referenced interviewees (BSN#3 & ACM#5) hesitated their optimism about the success of Hunchun to be next Xiamen (although the city received the State Council approval as “International Cooperative Demonstration Zone” in March, 2012) They argue that political tension in surrounding region of Hunchun is still high that economic cooperation and its growth will be limited in attracting Russian traders.

Meanwhile, a Beijing-based interviewee argues that the ethnic minority element in the Changjitu is still a relevant concern. He said his company (South Korean) is reserved from investing in Yanbian, aside from cost-benefit analysis, because he thinks the central government would not welcome such move (BSN#3 interview, 2012). Others also view that the center's vigilance on Yanbian is inevitable because of potentials of ethnic nationalism (based on shared Korean ethnic identity between *chaoxianju* and North and South Koreans) and cross-border security (concerning smuggling, drug-trafficking and other negative cross-border flows from DPRK) (Lee & Koo, 2011: 380, 381).²⁸ An expected outcome is then while *chaoxianju* will economically benefit from shared ethnic ties, language and other advantages, transfer of this economic power to the political power will remain sensitive.

DPRK, an exogenous factor that strengthens the government actors

Commonly shared by all observers on the Yanbian's opening-up is that there is a limit to what PRC can do to achieve its success. Eventually, situations and conditions of DPRK will be important considerations for DPRK-bound opening-up efforts. An empirical example: a quantitative study based on the 2007 survey of more than 300 Chinese enterprises with investment experiences in DPRK affirms that the Chinese businesses muddled through in the absence of formal institution that can facilitate, monitor, and protect their investments (Haggard, Noland and Lee, 2011).

The DPRK factor constrains what sub-national governments or private individual Chinese actors can do, which gives more discretion and power to the Chinese central government to breakthrough a deal for its sub-national actors. A Yanbian scholar said that Jilin Provincial Government expected DPRK's interest and reaction when Yanbian was announced as the window of opening-up, especially regarding the need to get DPRK's permission for Chinese actors to use Rajin port in Rason. Therefore, Jilin was anxious when DPRK was quiet despite the State Council approval of the Changjitu; some local scholars even suggested that Zarubino port in Russia should be alternatively pursued (ACM#1 interview, 2012). It is in this context that Wen Jiabao visited Pyongyang in October 2009, and those who monitor PRC-DPRK relations widely believed that a number of government-led bilateral economic cooperation deals (that overlap with Yanbian's opening-up strategies in transport, shipping,

²⁸ However, in this case, the authors argue that these concerns are not Yanbian-specific but general in regard to ethnic minority regions.

etc) must have been negotiated (Cho, 2010). In the same vein, that central-level NDRC and MOC officials as well as Jilin Provincial Party Secretary and Governor were included in the high-level Chinese delegations to DPRK in 2010 and 2011 is one suggestive example of the center's intervention to reduce risk of uncertainty and seek North Korean cooperation on the implementation of the Changjitu (Chang, 10 July 2011).

Since the provincial-level Joint Supervisory Committee was established in June, 2011, Jilin government has been taking charge of promoting and supporting Chinese investment in Rason. Interviewed scholars and Chinese businesses said private SMEs in Rason would like to see investments made by sizeable local government-owned enterprises as an assurance. In response, the Jilin government established "Overall Plan on DPRK Rason Economic Trade Zone" and "Detailed Plan on Core zones in Rajin Port and Sunbong-Baekhak in the PRC-DPRK Rason Economic Trade Area" and has been pursuing various projects one of which is the construction of a cement factory by the Yatai Group, a major cement producer that ranks within top 500 companies in PRC (Kim, 24 June 2012). This company, while private on the outset, closely works with the Jilin government. A cautious but likely speculation goes that engaging Yatai was a political deal to show reliability of Rason as business destination (BSN#2 interview, 2012).

In summary, the unpredictability and instability of DPRK as a neighbor country has created an environment that strengthens the legitimacy of Chinese government actors as deal-breaker and protector. Especially because the border with DPRK contains both economic opportunities (trade, sea access, etc) and threats (refugees, shared ethnicity, suspicions from the international community for working too closely with DPRK, etc), the central government is likely to retain the power to initiate and refine terms of cooperation with North Korean counterparts, also including a final say on whether to start or stop the opening-up.

6. Conclusion: Implications on the China's Center-Border Relation

In the previous chapter, various junctures of the engaged actors were evaluated to explore how they compete, compromise or co-opt each other. A notable pattern is that sub-national governments are given with broad development guidelines, and within these boundaries, they enjoy the substantial autonomy in deciding how to make them work on the ground. The idea of designating Yanbian as “the window of opening-up” in the Changjitu was not new either. It was not unilaterally imposed from the center but has been fostered and tried for many years within the capacity of Jilin and Yanbian governments. Nonetheless, there are disagreements between Jilin government and Yanbian actors about how much priority should be given to support the opening-up efforts. Overall, the process of the border development in Yanbian is clearly more dynamic than what the state-centric analysis would have portrayed. The non-state actors such as scholars and private businesses also weigh significantly in designing and implementing the opening-up strategies.

Such dynamism between Yanbian and Beijing owes to the tradition of China's regional development, which is characterized as a decentralized system and division of labor between the center and the sub-national. And the case of Yanbian conforms to the cases of other border regions studied in the chapter 2 Previous Studies. In this respect, borrowing Migdal's term, post-Mao China's regional development and its use of opening-up resemble the pattern of “integrated domination” because sub-national state actors and non-state actors so far play safely within the boundary set by the central government. Following are the considerations that speak in favor of the central government's primacy that enables dominance in the existence of multiple actors.

Being an “ethnic minority” “border” region matters

How much Yanbian's status as ethnic minority region matter? Yanbian-based interviewees argued that the ethnic minority status does not matter much because (1) less than half of the population in the prefecture are ethnic Koreans, and (2) there has hardly been ethnic tension or hostility toward Han Chinese (ACM#1 & ACM#2 interviews, 2012). They suggested that being an ethnic minority prefecture matters only enough to make Yanbian eligible for affirmative benefits and development opportunities available for ethnic minorities (ACM#4 interview, 2012). In fact, in addition to the funding from the Northeastern Revitalization Plan,

the prefecture benefits from the Prosperous Border Wealthy Minorities Programme and the Western Development Programme, two central government funding schemes that target impoverished ethnic minority communities (Freeman & Thompson, 2011: 34).

However, fiscal ties can be also understood as one way for the center to exert control. Yanbian used to have its own source of prosperity from attracting South Korean investments in the region. Nowadays such ethnically-linked capital transfer is considered more politically sensitive (BSN#3 interview, 2012).²⁹ Without an independent source of wealth, Yanbian has to constantly look up to receive major funding from its superior that originates from the central government.³⁰

Comparatively speaking, how appealing or urgent Changjitu is?

Beijing-based commentators are more cautious about the optimism of development in Yanbian via opening-up. One interviewee viewed that in fact, the Changjitu as a regional development plan is not as prioritized as those under the Western Development Programme. Western regions struggle with severer poverty and ethnic tensions. From the business perspective, the West offers more incentives because of cheap and abundant labor and easier access to production materials than Jilin, a province that falls short on optimal high ways and railways (BSN#3 interview, 2012; Zhang, 2010: 176).

Besides the Changjitu, there are many other regional plans. Changjitu is part of Changchun-Harbin Key Development Region, and there are 17 other Key Development Regions in addition to three Optimized Development Zones (Li & Fung, 2010: 6). In other words, the central government eventually holds the key to prioritize and thus legitimize which regional development is urgent and yields most economic and social goods. This legitimizing power is by far the sole possession of the central government; not having enough of this in the 90s was one of the reasons to explain the demise of TRADP.

²⁹ The increased sensitivity resulted from the enhanced ties with South Korean communities based on shared ethnicity and signs of ethnic nationalism exhibited by South Koreans coming to the region. When Yanbian tourism by South Koreans was in its heyday, there were incidents where tourists would put South Korean flags at historic sites of ethnic Korean Chinese. For instance, the tourists put their national flags around the pine tree that is famous for its symbolization of independence movement against Japan. In the end, a local government cut the tree (ACM#5 interview, 2012).

³⁰ Although Yanbian hosts South Korean investments, they are mostly by small and medium-scale enterprises (Yoon, 2008: 122). Hence, their effect to substitute the central funding appears minimal.

No one can break a deal like the center

Central government actors are viewed as deal breakers especially when the deals have foreign policy implications. If Yanbian wants to increase its economy of scale by a joint development project like the case of Rason, a central government-level negotiation should precede. Business actors are well aware that without the backing of Chinese government, their investments in DPRK cannot be ensured.

The current picture of Yanbian's opening-up is mainly paving roads and building port facilities so that coal and food shopping via Rason to the coastal South can continue. Interviewees disagreed on whether the center's support was due to the potential of Changchun-Jilin-Yanbian area as a whole or the long-awaited chance to gain sea access via Rajin. However, they could commonly acknowledge that the sea access was in the interest of both the central and local governments. This discrepancy of outlooks is however telling in itself. In other words, for any development prospect to become realized with confidence from all engaged stakeholders, it requires the backing of the central government.

Still integrated domination with more dynamism at the local level

China's center-border relations involve various actors – state and non-state – that engage in their own initiatives; this picture may appear to be dispersed domination. However, the central government maintains substantially integrated domination over other sub-national actors when it comes to the power of keeping ethnic minorities under constraint; diplomatic power; and power to legitimize which regional development deserves national-level strategy treatment. This array of dynamic forces between the center and the border is therefore hard to depict. The best visual representation the author of this thesis can think of is a cubist painting by Picasso: jumbles of different shapes viewed from different angles make up a figure, but it is hardly pretty.

If there is any potential to transform this picture, it may come from two stimuli. Firstly, if the opening-up encourages ethnicity-based solidarity or surge of negative influences from DPRK, the central government will tighten its grip on Yanbian, and the scale and visibility of the opening-up projects will subside. Another stimulus can come from the non-state actors. When there is a limit to what Yanbian government can do, these non-state actors can play bigger roles and complement. Distinctive private enterprises can supplement the work of the

Yanbian and Jilin governments as is the case of BSN#2's company. A prominent work of a scholar can travel beyond his/her locality and reach to the officials in Beijing through the mechanism such as GTI. Since these actors are not within the official bureaucracy, it will take a long time for them to provoke a change within. However, their influences are bound to grow than to decline as the art of governing a border region in China is dynamic and complex.

7. Theoretical reflection

The State-in-society model offers a useful tool for data collection and analytical framework. It allows the author of this thesis to bring an in-depth analysis on the power struggles underneath the simplified depiction of the China's border-center relation. However, the application of this model also exhibits limitations, and from these, the author would like to draw lessons to modify or enhance the theoretical model.

A balanced exercise of actor disaggregation is possible in the researcher's realm of thoughts, but in reality, it is bound to overestimate or underestimate dominating potentials of the groups that are hard to interview and seek direct answers. The author found it very difficult to have first-hand accounts from central government officials. Thick secrecy and relative lack of data around them might lead to overestimate on their control capabilities. Then, does this difficulty mean that the State-in-society model can be applied better in places where information access is guaranteed? But, this model is nurtured from and for the studies of politics in the developing world where information access is often controlled. If the State-in-society model will be revised, this methodological constrain should be taken seriously.

Lastly, the case study illustrates that in figuring out the pattern of domination among different levels of state and society actors, an exogenous factor (DPRK in this case) is an important consideration as it adds weight to or challenges certain actors. Especially on border issues where domestic and foreign policies overlap, such externality is inevitable. Actors are influenced differently. For instance, flow of South Korean capital in Yanbian can be seen as a potential concern by the central government, whereas Yanbian government find it an opportunity for economic take-off and enhances its entrepreneurial legitimacy. That said, such external factor deserves more attention when assessing each actor's dominating capability and power relations among the actors.

<Appendix 1> **Timeline of events relating to Northeastern border development and PRC-DPRK relations**

1988	Coastal Development Strategy became a CCP's policy
September 1992	Hunchun, a county-level city in Jilin province, was approved by the State Council to be a Border Economic Cooperation Zone - This allowed to Hunchun to become an entry point for cross-border shipping and trade, leading to increased foreign investment (mostly from ROK).
1993	UN Development Programme coordinated an initiative that engaged DPRK, PRC and Russia to build a joint special economic zone on the area covering the Rajin-Sonbong Economic and Trade Zone (DPRK), Primorsky Territory (Russia), and Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture including Hunchun (PRC) - implementation did not happen
December 1995	The focus of initiative above - called Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP) - was shifted to pursue regional development (instead of building a special economic zone), and Mongolia and ROK became Consultative Committee members
2000	Hunchun was approved by the State Council to establish an export processing zone and Sino-Russian trade district
August 2003	"Plan of The Revitalization of the Traditional Industrial Bases in the Northeast (Northeast Revitalization Plan)" was approved by the State Council
September 2005	In Changchun (of Jilin province), the TRADP Consultative Committee decided to transform itself to Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) and extended its work until 2015
June 2008	National Development and Reform Commission, under the State Council, referred the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture government to draft the "Outline of China's Tumen River Area Development Plan – Considering Changchun-Jilin-Tumen as Pilot Area (Changjitu)"
September 2009	"Changjitu" was approved by the State Council
September 2009	"Additional Comment on Northeast Revitalization Plan" was approved by the State Council - It signals that the plan's focus will shift from renovating state-owned enterprises to revitalizing local economies
October 2009	Wen Jiabao, the Premier Minister of PRC State Council, visited DPRK
December 2009	DPRK withdrew from GTI (reasons not announced)
January 2010	Rason was promoted to the Special city by Supreme People's Assembly of DPRK
May & August 2010	Kim Jong-il visited China twice during this period
September 2010	"Cooperation Agreement on Building a Cooperative Mechanism between Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture and Rason People's Committee" was signed
October 2010	A market to sell DPRK products was open nearby Tumen city in PRC
December 2010	Delegation of the Joint Venture and Investment Committee (DPRK) and the Ministry of Commerce (PRC) signed: - "Agreement on Joint Development and Management of Rason Economic and Trade Zone and Hwanggumphyong and Wihwado Economic Zones" - "Outline on Joint Development Plan of DPRK-PRC Rason Economic Trade Zone and

	Hwanggumphyong Economic Zone” DPRK-PRC Joint Supervisory Committee on Development Cooperation of Two Islands and One Zone was established
May & August 2011	Kim Jong-il visited China twice during this period
June 2011	The Joint Supervisory Committee had the second meeting in Liaoning and Jilin Rason, Hwanggumphyong and Wihwado had opening ceremonies
June 2011	A delegation from CPC visited DPRK (purpose of visit unannounced)
July 2011	A PRC delegation visited DPRK to celebrate the 50th year anniversary of DPRK-PRC Friendship Treaty Jilin province and Rason city established the “Agreement on the Structure of Joint Sino-DPRK Rason Economic Trade Zone Plan for 2011 - 2020” and the provincial-level “Joint Supervisory Committee”
September 2011	Yong-rim Choi, the Prime Minister of DPRK Supreme People’s Assembly, visited PRC
October 2011	Li Keqiang, a Vice-Premier of the State Council and member of the Politburo Standing Committee of the CPC, visited Pyongyang
April 2012	The State Council approved Hunchun to become an International Economic Cooperation Demonstration Zone, allowing more experimentation.

<Appendix 2> **General structure of the Chinese state**

The Chinese government, which refers to the equivalent of civilian government in a western state, established the legislative, judiciary and executive organs. For effective governing of a vast country, the government is developed into multiple layers: the central government; provincial governments, special municipalities and autonomous regions; prefectures or cities; counties or districts; townships; and villages. In most cases, policies are delivered in a top-down manner (UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2012).

What distinguishes the Chinese system from many others is its co-habitation with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that plays a dominant role in decision-making with no effective check-and-balance from the judiciary and the legislative (ibid.). An ultimate decision-making power lies in the nine-member Standing Committee of Politburo chaired by the General Secretary Hu Jintao. It reportedly gives a final approval to recommendations from government agencies, but details of internal discussions are rarely publicized (Jakobson and Knox, 2010: 4). As the Committee members serve top positions in other government agencies, their views and agendas are reflected in the government. The Communist Party itself also has departments, committees and leading groups, which mirrors the structure of government bureaucracy (UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2012). This dual structure of party-bureaucracy is further replicated in lower administrative levels. In local governance, while the government manages day-to-day affairs, the party is mainly responsible for human resource management, propaganda, and auditing (GOV, 2012).

<Appendix 3> Interviewee profiles

Label	Profession	Ethnic nationality	Date	Location	Duration (approx.)
GOV	Official of the Hunchun city government	Chinese (ethnic Korean)	April 20th	Hunchun, PRC	1.5 hour
BSN#1	Executive of a private, Chinese city planning and building design company	Chinese (ethnic Korean)	April 10th & 21th	Yanji, PRC	Two 1 hour-long interviews
BSN#2	Executive of a private Chinese consulting firm	Chinese (ethnic Korean)	April 20th & 23th	Hunchun, PRC	1 hour and an email interview alter
BSN#3	Businessman whose job in his company includes meeting Chinese government officials at various levels	South Korean	April 27th	Beijing, PRC	1 hour
UNREP	Official of the Greater Tumen Initiative	South Korean	March 19th	Beijing, PRC	1 hour
ACM#1	Economics professor at Yanbian University and member to the Yanbian People's Political Consultative Conference	Chinese (ethnic Korean)	April 11th & 16th	Yanji, PRC	Two 1 hour-long interviews
ACM#2	Political science professor at Yanbian University with expertise in Northeast Asian politics	Chinese (ethnic Korean)	April 6th and 20th	Yanji, PRC	The first for 1 hour and the second for 40 minutes
ACM#3	Business professor at Yanbian University of Science and Technology	Korean American	April 15th	Yanji, PRC	1 hour
ACM#4	Economics professor at Yanbian University with expertise in PRC-DPRK trades	Chinese (ethnic Korean)	April 16th	Yanji, PRC	40 minutes
ACM#5	Senior researcher at a South Korean institute who makes academic visits to Chinese government officials	South Korean	May 3rd	Seoul, ROK	45 minutes

<Appendix 4> **Previous Development Efforts in Yanbian and the Changjitu**

Yanbian has long grappled an economic challenge for being in the periphery of the central government's development support. Yanbian and its host province, Jilin, are altogether late starters in the national race of local economic development. Lack of coastal access is one of Jilin's disadvantages as the central government has preferred developing coastal regions, especially those in the South. Jilin had its glory in the past as a hub of pre-reform heavy industry such as automobile. However, during the economic restructuring that led to closures of many state-owned enterprises, the province saw a quarter of the 30 - 40 million laid-off workers, followed by numerous worker protests (Miller, 2005). As these sectors dominated by state-owned enterprises were deteriorating, the province had to find its new, sustainable growth engines.

Tumen River Area Development Programme

Jilin has long tried to find growth engines in the region. One such effort is its participation in the *Tumen River Area Development Programme* (TRADP, later transformed to Greater Tumen Initiative that is an ongoing mechanism) as main representative of PRC. The mechanism is designed for policy dialogue and cooperative action to realize development of the Tumen River area.³¹ In this framework, the first inter-governmental attempt was to build a joint special economic zone on the area covering the Rajin-Sonbong Economic and Trade Zone (DPRK), Primorsky Territory (Russia), and Yanbian Prefecture including Hunchun (PRC). However, this did not work out for issues of getting land lease from Russia and deeply running doubts on its success among members (UNDP, 2001: 3).

TRADP achieved some success in instituting and popularizing the concept of the Tumen River area development, which allowed Chinese scholars and officials to imagine developing its Northeastern border via regional economic cooperation (ACM#1). However, the program was plagued with low level of country ownership, difficulty in mobilizing resources, mistrust amongst member states, etc (UNDP: 4 & 5; Cho & Kim, 2010: 33). Eventually, TRADP members shifted their focus from seeking a cooperative development in the Tumen River area to pursuing own national development (Cho & Kim, 2010: 30).³² Resultantly, pushing for

³¹ TRADP is the first cooperative scheme in place, from which GTI was originated. TRADP had five consultative members - DPRK, Mongolia, PRC, ROK and Russia.

³² In the late 1990s and early 2000s, ROK prepared to establish Kaesung Industrial Complex in cooperation with DPRK, and PRC focused its investment on developing major Northeastern cities such as Shenyang and

border development and coastal access through the UNDP-mediated channel became more difficult for Jilin. Beijing's attention was still glued to develop its Southern coastal areas.

Meanwhile, the normalization of diplomatic relations between PRC and ROK compelled Yanbian to actively allure South Korean investment. Korean-speaking ethnic Korean Chinese are heavily concentrated in Yanbian, many of whom have family ties in North and South Korea. The diplomatic normalization eased labor migration of ethnic Korean Chinese to ROK, and remittances from ROK to Yanbian quickly surged. For South Korean investors, Yanbian offers Korean-speaking highly-educated workforce. They still followed the rule of profitability and invested mostly in Shanghai, Guangdong and other coastal parts of PRC. Yet, scale of South Korean capital in Yanbian was substantial enough to complement insufficient funding from the center in financing local development (Luova, 2006: 49).

Northeast Revitalization Plan

In August 2003, the State Council approved *The Revitalization of the Traditional Industrial Bases in the Northeast* (from here on, Northeastern Revitalization Plan) as a state policy.³³ While the Western Development Programme, an earlier strategic regional plan for China's West, emphasizes elimination of poverty and urbanization via preferential policies and increased financing from the center, Northeast Revitalization Plan is geared towards restructuring state firms, promoting private sector development, encouraging overseas investment, and optimizing industrial diversification (Dong, 2005: 1, 11).

First five years of implementing the Revitalization Plan centered on restructuring inefficient state firms. Then, its focus shifted to revitalizing local economies as indicated in the *Additional Comment on Northeast Revitalization Plan* in 2009 (ACM#1 interview, 2012). Simultaneously, Jilin provincial government in cooperation with sub-level administrations prepared Jilin-specific regional development plan, which will be explained below.

Changchun.

³³ A province is keen on elevating its local development plan to become a state policy. Being a state policy entails that the plan will receive funding and policy support from the center. Coordination with central government ministries and lending loans from banks also become easier. Being approved by the State Council is not necessarily a procedure but rather an indication that the approved is now treated as a state policy (ACM#1 & ACM#3 interviews, 2012)

Changjitu and joint development of Rason Special Economic Zone in DPRK

In September 2009, State Council gave its approval for Changjitu (its full name goes *Tumen River Area Development Plan with Changchun-Jilin-Yanbian as a Pioneering Zone for Development and Opening-up*). It is the first regional plan that gains a national development strategy status. Its main aim is to construct a pilot zone that connects Changchun city, Jilin city and Yanbian prefecture, covering 110,000 square kilometer land, 11 million people (1/3 of the total population of Jilin) and 1/2 of the province's economic output (Wu, 2010: 2).

The plan stipulates a division of labor and specialization within the zone as following (Yanbian Daily, 3 November 2009):

- Hunchun (a county-level city in Yanbian): responsible for cross-border economic cooperation and attracting foreign investment as “the window of opening-up”
- Yanji, Longjing and Tumen (all county-level cities in Yanbian): responsible for integrating city's individual functions and competencies for synergy in providing services essential for region-wide industrial cooperation and serving a role as the logistical hub of the Tumen River Area as “the forefront of opening-up”
- Changchun (provincial capital) and Jilin (the second largest city after Changchun): responsible for creating actual contents of the Tumen River area cooperation and generating greater economic outputs to support the province as a whole as “the core of the zone”; the contents include technological innovation, creation of high-tech industry zones, human capital development, etc.



<Figure 4> Locations of Hunchun, Tumen, Yanji & Longjing, all in Yanbian Prefecture

(Source: www1.korea-np.co.jp)

According to the role-sharing, Yanbian prefecture that includes Hunchun, Yanji, Longjing and Tumen accounts for the “opening-up” part of the Changjitu. Concrete implementation plans include building and upgrading transport corridors; promoting Chinese businesses to invest in neighboring countries; providing preferential policies to promote cross-border trade and tourism; etc. In the initial stage, building transport infrastructures are pursued to improve

linkages with Northeastern neighbors (DPRK, Mongolia and Russia) and thus facilitate trade, shipping and more integration into the Northeast Asian economies.

Rason, a Special City and integration of two areas: Rajin and Sonbong, is located at one of the receiving ends of Yanbian's opening-up efforts. While this area is explicitly mentioned in the Changjitu plan, locals view that the development of Rason holds a key to the Changjitu's success because the agreement to jointly develop Rason granted PRC the right to use ice-free Rajin port. In the present, coals and food produced in the China's Northeast travel to the southern part of China via crowded railways below Shenyang in 14 days. Shipping via Rajin to Shangji on the sea will greatly reduce cost and time for shipping, which would enable Jilin province to step up a regional hub of shipping (Kim, Chu & Lim: 2010: 81). Achieving this goal requires more than paving roads to Rason. Rason as an economic zone needs basic infrastructures to facilitate shipping and accommodation of industrial zones. Hence, the Joint Venture and Investment Committee (DPRK) and the Ministry of Commerce (PRC) signed an agreement for joint development and management of the Rason Economic & Trade Zone as well as Hwanggumphyong and Wihwado Economic Zones (in Liaoning province). They established the Joint Supervisory Committee on these zones (JSC) in December 2010 and had the second JSC meeting and opening ceremonies of these Special Zones in June 2011.

Relations between Northeast Revitalization Plan, Changjitu and Rason

Implementing a vision of regional development is multi-layered and requires coordination among different government actors. In this case, Northeast Revitalization Plan is a master plan that provides overall guidances and broad development targets for regional development in the Northeast (Kim, 2011: 25). The State Council established a leading group for the Northeast Revitalization Plan with Premier Wen Jiabao as the chair. Its office is under the leadership of Zhang Guobao, the vice-minister of the NDRC, and was elevated to a ministry-level (Dong, 2005). The office and the leading group are therefore in charge of major decisions and changes regarding this Plan.

Under the direction of the Northeast Revitalization, Changjitu was emerged to capitalize on more specified region and its local assets. However, both plans aim for long-term and do not suggest specific development guidelines or quantified targets. Hence, each sub-national level of government from province to county should develop its own Five-year Development

Guideline, and the latest was announced in 2011 for the period of 2011-2015) (Kim, 39: 2011). In doing so, planners will study and reference these two plans to legitimize their requested budgets in their respective government's Five-year guideline.

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