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TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY**

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**A SUBNATIONAL ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S ACTIVISM IN
REGIONAL COOPERATION ALONG THE BORDERS**

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S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

2023

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REGIONAL COOPERATION ALONG THE BORDERS**

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**A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

2023

Statement of Originality

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, is free of plagiarised materials, and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

January 3, 2023

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LI Xirui

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Doing a Ph.D. is like finding my own way to walk across a huge desert. I knew the crossing would be lonely, painful, and stressful when I made the decision to begin. I thought I was prepared to handle all of these unfavorable emotions, but reality hit me square in the face. I felt for the majority of this journey that I was awkwardly standing in the middle of a desert, with no way to quit and no way to start over. I dared not to be happy even if I made some progress because I was so afraid it would soon vanish into the sand. Fortunately, I had support of many professors, friends, and family during this long and lonely journey. I could not have accomplished all of this without their company.

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Xirui LI, Sheray

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Abstract

Subnational governments at international land borders are at an advantage to participate in regional cooperation, due to geographical convenience. However, although such subnational governments belonging to the same country may have been empowered and encouraged by their respective national governments to engage in regional cooperation, their levels of activism vary. Some subnational governments view promoting regional cooperation as their guiding development philosophy and invest resources into nearly every aspect of such cooperation, whereas others view it as merely one of their development strategies and spare efforts or resources in only a few select aspects. First, in contrast to previous research that relies on a single indicator for comparison, I propose a composite index in this dissertation to comprehensively compare the participation of subnational governments in regional cooperation. Second, based on local liberalism and the role of subnational governments' perceptions in their decision-making, I develop a new analytical framework, Embedded Local Liberalism, to explain the variation among subnational governments. It argues that economic benefits from globalization motivate subnational governments to engage in regional cooperation, but that this economic motivation is moderated by subnational governments' perceptions of the geopolitical environment where their state is situated in the region. This overcomes the limitation of previous research that overemphasized domestic political factors while ignoring international political factors. To apply the framework, I compare and analyze the activism of three Chinese provincial governments with inland international borders in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019. This dissertation thus contributes to a previously under-explored subnational perspective of China's increasing activism in regional and international engagement. The findings indicate that the engagement of subnational governments in regional/international cooperation and regional/world order are mutually reinforcing; subnational governments'

participation can strengthen the existing order, but the extent to which they are willing to participate is also contingent on the existing order. In addition, my research suggests that decentralization and support from the national government may not be sufficient to mobilize subnational governments to conduct regional and international cooperation. Before subnational governments become willing and able to play a larger role in regional and international cooperation, the state and its cooperative partners must first shape subnational governments' positive perceptions of their state's geopolitical environment by establishing robust and resilient bilateral and multilateral relationships.

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADMM	Association of Southeast Asian Nations Defense Ministers Meeting
AIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARCM	Altay Regional Cooperation Mechanism
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCIM	Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Cooperation Forum
BECZ	Border Economic Cooperation Zone
BFA	Bo'ao Forum for Asia
B/MDM	Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanism
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BZ	Bonded Zone
CABIS	China-ASEAN Business Investment Summit
CAEXPO	China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations Expo
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia
CAEXPO-GLG	China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations Expo Guangxi Leadership Group
CAFTA	China-ASEAN Free Trade Area
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CBECZ	Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zone
CBZ	Comprehensive Bonded Zone
CCPIT	China Council for the Promotion of International Trade
CEE	China-Eurasia Expo
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CI	Confucius Institute
CIETCZ	China-Indonesia Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone
CJSFTA	China-Japan-South Korea Free Trade Agreement
CMR	China-Mongolia-Russia
CNEAEXPO	China-Northeast Asia Expo
CNKI	China's National Knowledge Infrastructure
CPC	Communist Party of China
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership
CSFTA	China-South Korea Free Trade Agreement
DEPA	Digital Economy Partnership Agreement
DOPZ	Developing and Opening-up Pilot Zone
EACT EXPO	Eurasia Commodity and Trade Expo
EN	Exports to Neighboring Region
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FIP	Foreign Industrial Park
FTA	Free Trade Agreement

GBGIPG	Guangxi Beibu Gulf International Port Group
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIEAB	Guangxi International Expo Affairs Bureau
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
Guangxi	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
GSM	Guangxi Shenglong Metallurgical Co., Ltd.
GTI	Greater Tumen Initiative
GX EN	Guangxi's Exports to Ten Southeast Asian Countries
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
Inner Mongolia	Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
IR	International Relations
JEAB	Jilin Expo Affairs Bureau
Jilin Expo	China Jilin Northeast Asia Investment and Trade Expo
JL EN	Jilin's Exports to Northeast Asia
JWC	Joint Working Committee
LIO	Liberal International Order
LMC	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
MCKIP	Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park
MCKIPSB	Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park Sdn.Bhd.
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NF	Neo-Functionalism
PBGC	Pan-Beibu Gulf Cooperation
PBGCEF	Pan-Beibu Gulf Economic Cooperation Forum
PFTZ	Pilot Free Trade Zone
PI-Mex	Mexico Paradiplomacy Index
POE	Port of Entry
QIC	Qinzhou Investment Company
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SCCA	Special Customs Control Area
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEA	Single European Act
SEM	Single European Market
SCS	South China Sea
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
Tibet	Tibet Autonomous Region
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
U.S.	The United States of America
WLG	Working Leading Group
WTO	World Trade Organization
XIEA	Xinjiang International Expo Administrative
Xinjiang	Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region
XJ EN	Xinjiang's Exports to its Neighboring region
XJMPLG	Xinjiang Mandarin International Promotion Leading Group

I. Introduction

1. Research Question

Since the reform and opening-up era, the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as "China") has placed a significant emphasis in its foreign policy on fostering good relations with neighboring countries. With the launch of the Development of China's Vast Western Regions (*xibu dakaiifa*) (hereinafter referred to as the "West Policy"), the Revitalization of Old Industrial Bases in Northeast China (*zhenxing dongbei laogongye jidi*) (hereinafter referred to as the "Northeast Policy") and, most recently, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the central government¹ has increasingly authorized, encouraged, and mobilized its inland border provincial governments² to deepen their cooperation with adjacent countries in order to accelerate their respective provincial economic development—a key criterion for evaluating all provincial governments' performance. However, not all of these inland border provincial governments actively pursue economic growth through regional cooperation to the same extent, despite the fact that the central government has set the tone. Some of these provincial governments are extremely active; regional cooperation is of great importance to them, and they invest enormous resources to expedite it. For instance, in their respective five-year development plans, the Guangxi and Yunnan governments have incorporated cooperation with neighboring countries as a guiding development philosophy.

¹ In the following chapters, the terms “national government” and “central government” are used interchangeably. Furthermore, because China is a party-state, for both the central/national government and provincial governments, I do not differentiate between the administrative apparatus and the organs of the Communist Party of China (CPC). When I say "government," I refer to the People's Government and Party Committee.

² Because subnational government is the focus of this research, I treat each provincial government as a unitary actor. In other words, I make no distinction between the provincial people's government and the provincial party committee, nor between governing bodies at the provincial level and those below it.

However, some others are less active; the Inner Mongolia and Jilin governments, for instance, list regional cooperation as but one of their development strategies. Although they do cooperate with neighboring regions, they expend less effort and fewer resources in doing so. This variation seems to go against assumptions that China's provincial governments have conducted international affairs in a monolithic manner under the leadership of China's central government, as well as that China's political economy is highly centralized, with the central government having enough capability to mobilize provincial governments to develop their local economies through designated means. Given that all inland border provincial governments are empowered and encouraged by the central government to conduct regional cooperation for economic development, the following research question arises: Why are some inland border provincial governments more active in regional cooperation than others? Since domestic politics is insufficient to explain the puzzle, do any international political factors play a role? If they do, how do they operate and shape provincial governments' decision making? In the section that follows, I will describe in greater detail how my research question is formulated.

Neighboring states have been given top priority in China's foreign policy since its opening-up in 1978. It has developed the "Good Neighbor" (*muling youhao*) policy, aiming at developing good relations with "periphery" countries (*zhoubian guojia*) (Chung 2009). To deepen reform and opening-up, since the 1990s, China has played an increasingly active role in regional cooperation³ by participating in and even establishing regional multilateral institutions in Asia (see Table 1.1). With the launch of the BRI in 2013 to establish a new model of regional cooperation, China's activism in regional cooperation has entered a new phase (Y. Huang 2016c).

³ In this dissertation, the term "regional cooperation" refers to a cross-country phenomenon, such as European integration and US–Mexico cooperation, rather than a domestic phenomenon, such as cooperation between provinces within China. The term "region" refers to an area comprising two or more countries, as opposed to localities within a single country. The specifics can be found in Section 5.1. of this chapter.

Table 1.1 China's Participation in Major Multilateral Institutions in Asia

Join Year	Multilateral Institutions in Asia	China's Role in the Institutions
1986	Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Participant
1991	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)	Participant
1992	Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)	Participant
1992	Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)	Participant
1995	Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI)	Participant
1997	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)	Participant
2001	Bo'ao Forum for Asia (BFA)	Participant and initiator
2001	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	Participant and initiator
2002	China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA)	Participant and initiator
2015	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)	Participant and initiator
2016	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC)	Participant and initiator
2020	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)	Participant
2021	Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)	Application under consideration
2021	Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA)	Application under consideration

Source: Author.

Far more interesting is that, in the process of promoting regional cooperation and integrating with Asian economies, the central government of China has not only encouraged coastal provincial governments but has also increasingly incentivized inland border provincial governments to build friendships and cooperation with their respective neighboring countries. In contrast to coastal provinces, which have been encouraged to open up since 1978, inland provinces, especially those along international borders, remained closed until the 1980s due to national security concerns (Kuah 2000, 76–78). Consequently, they were economically backward and under-developed compared to their coastal counterparts. Until the West Policy was implemented in 2000 and the Northeast Policy was introduced in 2003, the central government did not begin encouraging the inland provinces to integrate into the regional and global economy in an effort to

accelerate economic development and address the widening gap between inland and coastal provinces. In order to maximize their geographical proximity and cultural and social similarity with neighboring countries, the central government designated inland border provinces as the primary target for opening-up. Therefore, the West Policy encouraged the governments of Guangxi, Yunnan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Gansu and Inner Mongolia (see the highlighted areas in Map 1.1)⁴ to open up markets and develop economic and technical cooperation with their respective adjacent countries/regions (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2000). Similarly, one of the most important objectives outlined in the Northeast Policy was the opening of all inland border provinces in northeastern China. These provinces include Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning (see the highlighted areas in Map 1.1). These provincial governments were also urged by the central government to strengthen cooperation with their neighboring countries, namely Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, and Japan (Central Committee of the CPC and State Council of the People's Republic of China 2003).

⁴ On the map, Tibet is labeled as "*Xizang Zizhiqu*" while Inner Mongolia is labeled as "*Nei Mongol Zizhiqu*."

中国地图



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自然资源部 监制

Map 1.1 Map of China. Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (2019c, yellow added).

With the launch of the BRI, the role of provincial governments, especially those of inland border provinces, has been given greater recognition. In 2015, the BRI blueprint, *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road* (hereinafter referred to as *Vision and Actions*), was released. In the *Vision and Actions*, the central government of China officially mobilized eighteen province-level governments to implement its flagship regional cooperation and integration project.⁵ The document states that in order to

⁵ I do not claim that the BRI is limited to regional cooperation alone. Clearly, China's ambitions extend far beyond its immediate neighborhood (Ho 2021; S. Zhao 2020; Tekdal 2018). Nevertheless, the BRI represents China's advancement in regional cooperation (Ye 2015). Moreover, Asian neighbors (and, thus, the neighboring regions, particularly Central Asia and Southeast Asia) are China's top priorities when implementing the BRI (Gong 2019; Laruelle 2018).

advance the BRI, China “will fully leverage the comparative advantages of its various regions,⁶ adopt a proactive strategy of further opening-up, strengthen interaction and cooperation among the eastern, western and central regions, and comprehensively improve the openness of the Chinese economy” (National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China 2015).

The BRI pays considerable attention to borderlands (Kong 2015). Following the West Policy and the Northeast Policy, the BRI is viewed as another important stimulus for the development of provinces along China’s western and northeastern borders (Gill, Lall, and Lebrand 2019; Prasad 2018). The roles of all China's nine inland border provinces are specified in this blueprint. In contrast, developed coastal provinces such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang are not even mentioned in the document, and only a handful of node cities in other inland provinces (such as Xi’an in Shaanxi and Xining in Qinghai) are highlighted. The specific function of each inland border province is addressed in the *Vision and Actions* (see Table 1.2). The governments of these inland border provinces are required to fulfill these responsibilities.

⁶ In this quotation, “region” corresponds to “province,” which differs from the meaning of “region” in this dissertation. In this dissertation, “region” refers to a geographical area comprising two or more countries. The definition is provided in Section 5.1 of this chapter.

Table 1.2 The Roles of Inland Border Provinces in Vision and Actions

Inland Border Provinces	Roles in <i>Vision and Actions</i>	
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as “Xinjiang”)	1) A window of westward opening-up to deepen communication and cooperation with Central, South, and West Asian countries. 2) A key transportation, trade, logistics, culture, science and education center, and a core area on the Silk Road Economic Belt.	
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as “Inner Mongolia”)	Use its proximity to connect with Mongolia and Russia.	
Heilongjiang	Improve the railway links connected to Russia and the regional railway network.	1) Strengthen cooperation with Russia's Far East region on sea-land multi-modal transportation. 2) Advance the construction of a Eurasian high-speed transport corridor linking Beijing and Moscow with the goal of building key windows opening to the north.
Jilin		
Liaoning		
Gansu	Give full scope to the economic and cultural strengths.	
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as “Guangxi”)	1) Build an international corridor opening to the ASEAN region. 2) Form an important gateway connecting the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.	
Yunnan	1) Advance the construction of an international transport corridor connecting China with neighboring countries. 2) Develop a new highlight of economic cooperation in the Greater Mekong sub-region. 3) Make the region a pivot of China's opening-up to South and Southeast Asia.	
Tibet Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as “Tibet”)	Promote border trade and tourism and culture cooperation with neighboring countries such as Nepal.	

Source: National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China (2015).

It is anticipated that inland border provincial governments will actively participate in regional cooperation due to their shared pursuit of provincial economic development, the central government’s strong financial and policy support, geographical proximity, and social and cultural similarities with neighboring countries. In fact, they have expressed interest in promoting regional

cooperation and taken actions in this regard, but their levels of activism vary. Since the *Vision and Actions* was released just prior to the publication of provinces' 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020), these provincial plans reflect the relative importance of regional cooperation to various provincial governments.

The five-year plans are one of China's fundamental governance strategies (A. Hu 2013). Important for strategic policy coordination, resource mobilization, and macroeconomic control, their impact can be found across the central government and provincial governments (Heilmann and Melton 2013). In other words, these plans serve as blueprints for both the central government and provincial governments' governance every five years. Although provincial governments independently develop their own five-year plans, they align their policy objectives and indicators with those of the central government (A. Hu 2013). Moreover, similar to the five-year plan of the central government, provincial governments' five-year plans include common topics such as development environment (*fazhan huanjing*), guiding philosophy (*zhidao sixiang*), development ideas (*fazhan linian*), development goals (*fazhan mubiao*), as well as detailed implementations and actions.

Two examples are provided to illustrate the significance of the five-year plan in relation to the varying levels of interest in regional cooperation among inland border provincial governments. In Guangxi's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020),⁷ two strategies—"building an international corridor opening to the ASEAN region" and "forming an important gateway connecting the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road"—were listed as the "Guiding Philosophy" of the whole plan. In other words, these two principles were at the core of the entire development agenda of the Guangxi government. The 13th Five-Year Plan necessitates not only

⁷ In this paragraph, sources are from the respective 13th Five-Year Plans released by the Guangxi government (2016), the Jilin government (2016a), the Inner Mongolia government (2016), and the Yunnan government (2016).

that Guangxi's opening-up should be led by cooperation with Southeast Asia, but also that a majority of domestic development goals should be dependent on cooperation with Southeast Asian states. For instance, the 13th Five-Year Plan indicated that the construction of the China–ASEAN Information Harbor was crucial for Guangxi's digital development, while the advancement of the China–ASEAN Science and Technology Partnership Program was essential for enhancing provincial innovation and economic competitiveness. Similar to the Guangxi government, the Yunnan government also prioritized cooperation with its neighboring region (i.e., South and Southeast Asia) in its 13th Five-Year Plan. However, in contrast to the Guangxi and Yunnan governments, the governments of neither Inner Mongolia nor Jilin made the advancement of their cooperation with neighboring countries the “Guiding Philosophy” of their five-year plans. Instead, they merely regarded regional cooperation as one of the measures, as opposed to the most important measure, to deepen their opening-up. They also did not incorporate regional cooperation into their domestic development agenda. All of these observations suggest that the governments of Inner Mongolia and Jilin were less active in regional cooperation than those of Guangxi and Yunnan.

In a highly centralized political economy like China, where the central government makes deepening regional cooperation as its foreign policy priority and provides strong support and incentives for subnational governments to pursue economic development—a significant performance evaluation for all subnational governments (Hongbin Li and Zhou 2005; Montinola, Qian, and Weingast 1995)—through regional cooperation, subnational governments are presumably interested in mobilizing all kinds of resources to strengthen their cooperation with neighboring countries. However, by comparing the governments of Guangxi/Yunnan and Inner Mongolia/Jilin, we can identify significant variations in their levels of activism in participating in

regional cooperation. The variations seem to oppose assumptions that Chinese provincial governments have conducted foreign affairs in a monolithic manner under the leadership of the central government and that China's central government possesses enough capability to mobilize its political subordinates to develop their local economies with designated measures. Against this backdrop, in this dissertation, I pose a question: "Why do inland border provincial governments in China evince varying levels of activism for regional cooperation, despite being authorized and encouraged to do so by the central government?" Given that central-local relations cannot explain the variation, this dissertation attempts to answer the question by examining how international relations affect provincial governments' decision making. Therefore, two sub-questions are also posed in order to answer the main question: "What international political factors encourage provincial governments to engage in regional cooperation?" And "what conditions resulting from international relations constrain their activism?"

2. Argument

I argue that two factors determine the degree of activism in regional cooperation among China's inland border provincial governments. First, these governments are motivated to participate in regional cooperation by the benefits derived from economic exchanges with their respective neighboring regions. Second, these governments' responses to such incentives are influenced by their perceptions of the geopolitical environment where China is situated in these regions. If provincial governments perceive that the geopolitical environment is favorable for regional cooperation, the motivating effects will be enhanced, and they will be more likely to engage in regional cooperation. However, if they perceive an unfavorable geopolitical environment, they

will be less likely to participate in regional cooperation, regardless of the strength of their economic motivations. In a nutshell, variations among China's inland border provincial governments are the result of various combinations of these two factors.

3. Alternative Explanations

In addition to the argument I have presented, there are a number of other factors derived from common sense and previous research that may provide an answer to the research question posed in this dissertation. However, as discussed in this section, none of them can adequately comprehend the differences among Chinese inland border provincial governments.

3.1. Distinct Geographical Characteristics

All provincial governments along China's inland borders enjoy distinct geographical advantages when cooperating with their respective neighbors. Guangxi, for instance, is the only inland border province in China with direct access to the sea. Xinjiang is the province with the longest border line and the most neighboring countries with direct land access (a total of eight). Jilin is the only province that is at the intersection of three countries, namely China, North Korea, and Russia. If unique geographical features of individual inland border provinces play a role in determining the activism displayed by their provincial governments, then these features should have enabled provincial governments to be active in various aspects of regional cooperation. In other words, since different inland border provincial governments can utilize the distinct geographical advantages of their provinces to conduct regional cooperation, they should have been equally active overall. For instance, the governments of provinces A and B are equally active, with the government of province A being more active in area X and less active in area Y, and the

government of province B being more active in area Y and less active in area X. However, empirical observations (see Appendix Table 1) indicate that the Guangxi government was more active than others in almost every aspect of regional cooperation.

3.2. Cross-Border Ethnic Minorities

All inland border provinces are home to sizeable populations of ethnic minorities. The majority of them are transnational and have close cultural ties with the people of neighboring countries. Regarding cross-border ethnic minorities, there are two potential arguments. First, the greater the proportion of cross-border ethnic minorities within an inland border province, the more people-to-people ties can be utilized to promote regional cooperation, and the more active the provincial government will be in the cooperation. This is not the case. For instance, 86.01% of the population in Tibet are Tibetans (Statistics Bureau of Tibet Autonomous Region 2021), whereas only 31.36% of the population in Guangxi are Zhuang (Statistics Bureau of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region 2021). However, the government of Guangxi was more active than the Tibet government in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019 (see Appendix Table 1). The second possible argument is that, the greater the proportion of cross-border ethnic minorities within an inland border province, the greater the need to strengthen their identity as Chinese nationals and restrict their ties with inhabitants of neighboring countries, and the more reluctant the provincial government will be to conduct regional cooperation. This appears to explain the comparison between the governments of Guangxi and Tibet. However, it fails to comprehend why the Guangxi government was more active than the Inner Mongolia government (see Appendix Table 1), given that the proportion of Zhuang in Guangxi's population (31.36%) (Statistics Bureau of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region 2021) was higher than that of Mongolians in Inner Mongolia's population (17.66%) (Statistics Bureau of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region 2021).

3.3. Vertical Relationships with the Central government

Existing research suggests that central-local relations, such as provincial governments' different degrees of autonomy granted by the central government and their varying levels of dependence on the central government when conducting regional cooperation, may determine provincial governments' levels of involvement in regional cooperation (Mierzejewski 2021, 55–112). In other words, provincial governments will be more active in regional cooperation when they enjoy greater autonomy and/or less dependence on the central government in conducting regional cooperation. However, this hypothesis is invalid as research shows that these factors explain why the Yunnan and Heilongjiang governments took different actions to conduct cross-border cooperation following the announcement of the BRI (Mierzejewski 2021, 55–112), but not their different levels of activism. Moreover, they are unable to explain why the government of Guangxi was more active than the Yunnan government, given that the Yunnan government was authorized by the central government to attend the GMS much earlier than the Guangxi government, which indicates that the Yunnan government was granted greater support in dealing with its neighboring countries than its Guangxi counterpart.

3.4. Horizontal Competitions Among Neighboring Provincial Governments

The fact that neighboring inland border provincial governments compete with one another in regional cooperation has also been identified as a critical motivating factor for these governments to engage in regional cooperation (Lee 2020; Mierzejewski 2021; Summers 2013). Consequently, it is hypothesized that provincial governments will be more active in regional cooperation if they face horizontal competition from peers who face similar groups of neighboring countries (D.L. Yang 1997). This factor may explain why the Tibet government was less active in regional cooperation than the governments of Guangxi and Yunnan, given that it did not need to

compete with any neighboring provincial governments. However, it is less effective to explain why the Guangxi government was significantly more active than the Jilin government (see Appendix Table 1), considering that the former faced only one competitor, namely the Yunnan government, while the latter faced three, namely the governments of Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning.

4. Significance and Contribution

My research in this dissertation presents substantial empirical implications. Since the opening-up policy has internationalized China's provincial governments (Jones and Hameiri 2021), the inherent tensions in the central-local relationship have heightened because provincial governments now can hesitate or even shirk from fulfilling the central government's wishes, even in the realm of foreign affairs, where the central government is supposed to have ultimate authority (Y. Zheng 2006, 66). By highlighting how international relations may encourage and discourage provincial governments to align with the central government, my research will help readers comprehend the increasingly complicated principal-agent dilemma in Chinese politics in the era of opening-up (i.e., why subnational governments may not behave as the central government requests).

Many scholars and commentators concur that the regional order in Asia has undergone tremendous transformations due to China's rise (Callahan 2016; Shambaugh 2004). The fact that China is no longer the passive receiver but rather the proactive supplier in the regional cooperation and integration process is one of the most significant indicators of this transformation. Ba (2014) and Wang (2011a) have even opined that China has replaced Japan as the leading force in the government-led regional integration process. Therefore, research on China's approach to regional

cooperation and integration is crucial for understanding: (a) the evolutionary development and future direction of regional integration in Asia, and (b) the resulting shifts in the regional order. As it faces mounting pressure from Western countries, China is very likely to accelerate its integration and cooperation with its Asian neighbors. My research on Chinese provincial governments' behaviors in regional cooperation is of great value because provincial governments' policy choices are not only influenced by state-level international relations, but can also empower or impede the national government's ability to achieve its goals in regional affairs. My findings thus shed light on both the central government of China and the governments of neighboring countries in Asia. On the one hand, even though Chinese provincial governments will not directly oppose their central government, their flexibility and discretion allow them to quietly downplay the importance of the central government's mandates. The resulting reluctance to even shirk from regional cooperation by provincial governments will leave the central government as a leader without followers and severely limit the effectiveness of its regional strategies. On the other hand, China's neighbors may gain a better understanding of the motives and impacts of China's regional integration and cooperation projects, especially those of provincial governments.

This research contributes to a broader discussion of the current international order, specifically the Liberal International Order (LIO). The LIO is multifaceted and multilayered, with liberal democratic polities and economies, open markets (free movement of goods and capital), human equality (freedom, the rule of law, and human rights), multilateralism, and collective security (Ikenberry 2018; Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021). First, my research complements the multilayered nature of LIO, in which states cede authority not only to supranational institutions but also to subnational governments (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Ikenberry 2009). Second, my research contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding whether China is a revisionist state that

challenges the existing LIO (Johnston 2019; Owen 2021). Even though China's provincial governments' pursuit of economic growth may promote economic openness, this does not imply that they support the current LIO. Since Chinese provincial governments only advocate for greater economic openness when it can stimulate economic growth in their provinces, they view open markets as a means, not an end, which is essentially different from the existing LIO. Moreover, as a part of China's whole-of-government approach, provincial governments' strong pursuit of provincial economic development also challenges the principle of less government intervention, which is upheld by the existing LIO. Given that provincial governments can limit or expand state power by actively or passively engaging in international cooperation, China's ability to establish an alternative global order is contingent on the international engagements by the provincial governments and its central government's capacity to effectively mobilize its political subordinates to cooperate with other countries.

Concerning its academic contribution, the current research joins the debate of three groups of literature. The first comprises theories on regional integration and cooperation, which primarily focus on Europe; the second is the study of paradiplomacy; and the third is China's cooperation and integration with Asia.⁸ The current study challenges two arguments often made in the existing scholarly literature. First, most scholars either assume there are no differences among subnational governments of the same country when conducting international activities, or else they oversimplify their international engagement by employing only one measurement (Criekemans 2010b; Greenwood 2011; Hans J. Michelmann and Soldatos 1991; Hans J. Michelmann 2009b; Keating 2000b, 1999a; Marks et al. 1996; Schiavon 2019). I challenge these viewpoints by developing a composite index to measure the levels of subnational governments' activism in

⁸ A detailed summary and critique of these previous studies is provided in Chapter II.

regional cooperation and integration. Based on prior academic literature and empirical observations, I select fourteen indicators for the index to show that how subnational governments conduct international cooperation is a complex phenomenon. These indicators encompass the political, economic and socio-cultural aspects.

Second, in addition to economic incentives resulting from globalization, most scholars suggest that domestic political variables, especially central–local relations, are the most influential factors in determining the extent to which subnational governments participate in international activities, while ignoring the impacts of international political variables, namely state-to-state relations (Hans J. Michelmann and Soldatos 1991; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Kuznetsov 2015b; M. Li 2014b). Indeed, decentralization and/or the central government’s support enable subnational governments to directly participate in international affairs in the first place. The levels of devolution explain why subnational governments of different countries present different levels of activism in international engagement (Greenwood 2011; Marks et al. 1996; Kuznetsov 2015b; Schiavon 2019). However, this explanation is unable to comprehend why there are varying degrees of activism among subnational governments within the same country, when all of them are mobilized and supported by the national government to do so—a puzzling phenomenon identified in this dissertation but not adequately addressed in previous research.

In a world of increasing globalization and interdependence, this question requires an examination of the role of international relations because the state is no longer an effective gatekeeper (Gourevitch 1978). In other words, due to their involvement in international activities, subnational governments are actors not only in domestic politics but also in world politics (Hocking 1999). Focusing on domestic politics—but ignoring the impacts of state-to-state relations when analyzing subnational governments’ policy choices in regional and international

cooperation—will render the analysis incapable of capturing the dynamics of globalization and, thus, less adaptable to the current world. This dissertation develops one of the first generalizable analytical frameworks, Embedded Local Liberalism, to address the neglect of international relations' impacts by existing analytical frameworks and their inability to explain variations among subnational governments of the same country. Assuming that all subnational governments are mobilized and supported by their national government, Embedded Local Liberalism contends that the extent to which subnational governments are economically motivated by globalization to engage in international cooperation is conditional upon their perceptions of their state's relations with other states on issues with geopolitical implications.

5. Embedded Local Liberalism: An Analytical Framework

In this section, I propose a new analytical framework—Embedded Local Liberalism—to explain variations in subnational governments' level of participation in international cooperation. This new framework is mainly built upon local liberalism (M. Li 2014b), one of the most recent and relevant analytical frameworks that is conceptualized from the practices of China's provincial governments. More importantly, Embedded Local Liberalism addresses the limitations of local liberalism by introducing the role of subnational governments' perceptions of an international environment in their decision making (Most and Starr 2015; Siverson and Starr 1990; Sprout and Sprout 1957, 1965, 2015; Starr 1978, 2013a, 2013b).

Following a general understanding of liberalism, whereby open exchanges of goods and services promote international cooperation (Keohane 2002, 40), local liberalism takes subnational governments as study subjects; it conceptualizes that subnational governments, within the

parameters of national foreign policy, strive for transnational collaboration and cooperation in various respects for the pursuit of economic development (M. Li 2014b). Embedded Local Liberalism concurs with local liberalism in that globalization and the national government's support are required to motivate and enable subnational governments to participate in regional and international cooperation; however, these two factors are insufficient to determine the extent to which subnational governments invest in the cooperation. Furthermore, local liberalism ignores the fact that international politics has penetrated domestic politics (Gourevitch 1978). In other words, subnational governments are not only embedded in domestic central-local relations but also international relations. Therefore, to highlight the embeddedness of subnational governments in the international political environment, which is ignored by the existing literature, Embedded Local Liberalism introduces the role of international politics into the framework by highlighting how decision-makers' perceptions of the international political environment affect their decision-making (Most and Starr 2015; Siverson and Starr 1990; Sprout and Sprout 1957, 1965, 2015; Starr 1978, 2013a, 2013b).

Inspired by the "embedded" feature of liberalism, namely that states are embedded in domestic social contexts, which decisively constrains their international behaviors (Moravcsik 1992a; Ruggie 1982), Embedded Local Liberalism borrows the term "embedded" but uses it differently. While liberalism uses "embedded" to highlight the impact of domestic society on the international actions of states, Embedded Local Liberalism uses it to emphasize how international politics shape subnational governments' decisions regarding transnational cooperation. Embedded Local Liberalism argues that subnational governments are embedded in an international context that is primarily shaped by their states. More importantly, how subnational governments perceive this context affects their international cooperation decisions.

After assuming that there are decentralization and the national government’s support (Hans J. Michelmann and Soldatos 1991; Hooghe and Marks 2001; Kuznetsov 2015b; M. Li 2014b), the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism contends that the degree to which a subnational economy is integrated with the global economy and how subnational governments perceive the geopolitical environment in which their state is situated together determine to what extent subnational governments invest in international cooperation.

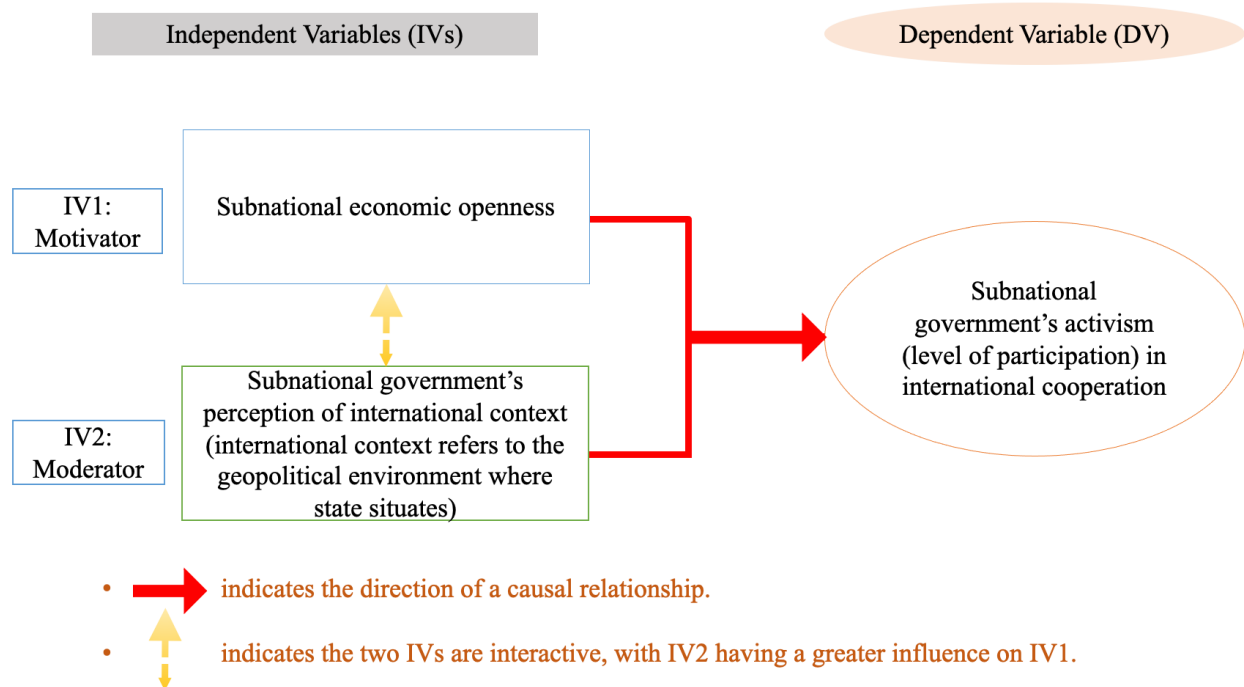


Figure 1.1 Embedded Local Liberalism: An Analytical Framework. Source: Author.

The causal mechanism of the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism is depicted in Figure 1.1. As presented in this arrow diagram, a subnational government’s activism (or level of participation) in international cooperation is jointly determined by two factors (see the red line with an arrow). One is subnational economic openness, representing the economic motivating effects of globalization. This is referred to as a “motivator” in Figure 1.1 because it

drives subnational governments to cooperate with their foreign counterparts. The second factor concerns subnational governments' perceptions of the geopolitical environment in which their state is situated. It is called a "moderator" in Figure 1.1. In contrast to an intervening variable, which is a hypothetical variable that is caused by an independent variable and causes the dependent variable (MacKinnon et al. 2002), a moderating variable is an independent variable that can strengthen, diminish, or negate the effects of other independent variables (Hefner 2017). In the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, the "motivator" does not cause the "moderator". Instead, the "motivator" and the "moderator" interact, with the latter affecting the strength of the relationship between the former and the dependent variable (see the arrowed yellow line in Figure 1.1). In a word, the essence of the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism is that, although globalization provides economic incentives for subnational governments to engage in international cooperation, the motivating effects of globalization on determining subnational governments' activism and participation are made contingent upon their perceptions of their state's geopolitical environment within the world.

4.1. Motivator: Subnational Economic Openness

The resurgence of subnational governments' international activities is attributable to globalization and interdependence. Aldecoa and Keating (1999, vii) noted that the direct engagement of subnational governments in international affairs follows a strong functional logic that relates primarily to economic needs. In a world of increasing globalization and interdependence, domestic economic development inevitably becomes increasingly dependent on integration into the global economy. Therefore, economic interests have unquestionably provided the strongest motivations for subnational governments to engage in international relations (Keating 2000a). Such economic incentive prevails in the regional and international outreach of all subnational governments

(Kuznetsov 2015a, 82), whether the political system is centralized or federal. Kossa et al. (2021) investigated, for instance, why the government of Hokkaido Prefecture in Japan was actively involved in Arctic affairs. They found that Hokkaido officials viewed Russia as a lucrative market for their products and technologies, and this recognition led to the Hokkaido-Russia Inter-regional Team, among other initiatives. State governments in the United States have conducted international activities essentially to pursue economic interests (Lecours 2008, 2). Ravenhill (1999, 136) also noted that economic concerns dominated the motivations of Australian states' international activities. In Russia, Stremoukhov (2021) observed that motivations for gubernatorial regional and international outreach included attracting FDI and establishing economic cooperation. Su (2010) and Li (2014b) concurred that the pursuit of economic development was also the fundamental motivation for Chinese local governments' involvement in international affairs.

Indeed, economic motivations resulting from globalization are essential for us to understand subnational governments' increasing activism in conducting international cooperation. However, we should not assume that globalization impacts all subnational governments uniformly (Hans J Michelmann 2009a, 4–7); it is critical to recognize and measure variations because the degree of impact illustrates how much economic benefits a subnational government derives from globalization and interdependence. In turn, these benefits from international economic exchanges determine subnational governments' motivations for cooperation (Keohane 2002, 54). To measure how different subnational governments are differently affected by international economic exchanges, the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism uses subnational economic openness as a measuring and illustrative variable (see “motivator” in Figure 1.1). Comprising financial openness and trade openness, economic openness is broadly defined as the contribution of non-domestic actors to domestic economy (Gräbner et al. 2021). Using trade openness as an

illustration, Schiavon (2019, 199) anticipated and confirmed that subnational governments with a higher percentage of their GDP reliant on international trade would be more incentivized to engage in international activities. Simply put, subnational economic openness determines the degree to which a subnational economy is exposed to globalization and the extent to which a subnational government can reap economic benefits from such exposure. If a subnational economy is more deeply integrated into the world economy, we can anticipate that its government will likely be more proactive in consolidating and further promoting its economic growth by engaging in international cooperation.

4.2. Moderator: Subnational Governments' Perceptions of Geopolitical Environment Where Their State Is Situated

Foreign policy analysis has a long history of examining the perceptions of decision-makers regarding their international context (Jervis 2017; Sprout and Sprout 1957, 1965, 2015; Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin 2002). The Sprouts (1957, 1965, 2015) coined the term “psycho-milieu” for the environment as it is perceived by decision-makers and argued that political actors define their choices and take actions in response to it. Built upon the Sprouts’ concept of psycho-milieu, Starr and his colleagues further developed an opportunity/willingness (O/W) framework to demonstrate precisely how political actors’ perceived environment influences their decision-making (Most and Starr 2015; Siverson and Starr 1990; Starr 1978, 2013a, 2013b). In this O/W framework, “opportunity” refers to the interaction possibility presented by the context/environment, which includes both constraints and opportunities; “willingness” involves utility calculations (Most and Starr 2015, chapter 2; Starr 1978, 2013a, 2013b). In the first step of the decision-making process outlined by the O/W framework, decision-makers identify opportunities—both constraints and opportunities—by analyzing the environment in which they operate. Based on these perceptions,

political actors conduct utility calculations of costs and benefits and/or of advantages and disadvantages in order to estimate the likelihood of achieving their goals within this environment.

Before explaining why to examine subnational governments' perceptions of their state's geopolitical environment and how this "moderator" interacts with the "motivator" within the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, three caveats must be made. First, Embedded Local Liberalism considers the perceptions of decision-makers to be the result of a variety of factors, such as values, memories, experiences, and history (Jervis 2017, chapter 6; Sprout and Sprout 2015, 28). In other words, Embedded Local Liberalism does not investigate how individual factors shape subnational governments' perceptions but focuses on summarizing these perceptions based on subnational governments' interpretations, analyses, and constructions of specific events and behaviors of their state and other states (Herrmann 1985; S.A.W. Brown 2018).

Secondly, Embedded Local Liberalism treats each subnational government as an entity with a shared perception. The congruity among members within each entity or group—which is derived from their common purposes, images, and modes of choosing and deciding—enables them to make policy decisions in unity based on a widely shared perception of the environmental factors external to them (Sprout and Sprout 1957, 311; 1965, 34). Because subnational governments can be conceived of as entities or groups of officials, Embedded Local Liberalism assumes that each subnational government has a shared understanding and evaluation of its state's geopolitical environment. Each consensus can be identified by investigating the prevalent views among officials within each subnational government.

Thirdly, subnational governments' perceptions may be real (relatively accurate), distorted, and/or selective in comparison to reality or the objective world (Most and Starr 2015, 35; Sprout

and Sprout 2015, 119). However, because subnational governments make rational policy decisions based on what they perceive, comparing and differentiating the perceived from the real is not the focus of Embedded Local Liberalism and thus lies beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, Embedded Local Liberalism focuses on summarizing what the perceptions are and identifying how these perceptions influence subnational governments' decision-making regarding international cooperation.

Despite the fact that subnational governments have become international political actors, they can hardly behave outside of the international context established by their state's relations with other states. This is because, first, subnational governments can only participate in international affairs with the autonomy granted by their national government. A state's devolution empowers subnational governments' international "actorness" in the very first place (Duchacek 2001; Lecours 2002). Second, states continue to be the principal actors in the international system (Gilpin 1981, 17–18). Subnational governments enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and discretion in conducting international activities, but, like other non-state actors in international relations, they are still "conditioned and delimited by state decisions and state power" (Krasner 1985, 28). Regardless of whether the political system is centralized or federal, subnational governments can rarely circumvent their respective central or federal governments when engaging in these international activities (Bomberg and Peterson 1998; Jeffery 1996).

More essentially, because the geopolitical factor is an essential component of the environment that surrounds all entities making decisions and acting in world politics (Starr 2013a, 11–12), a state's interactions with other states on issues with geopolitical implications provide the most important international political context for its subnational governments to decide whether to participate in international cooperation. Here, issues with geopolitical implications refer mainly

to those concerning sovereignty (impacts of trans-boundary movements and flows on ethnic and national groups) (Newman 1998), territoriality (delimitation of borders) and modifications of borders through building alliances (Starr 2002, 2013a), the quest for dominance (Black 2016), and the capabilities of a specific nation and regional/global order (Sprout 1963, 192). Because all of these issues are tightly linked to the establishment, security, development, and influence of states in the international system, they have significant geopolitical implications (Flint 2006, chapter 1; Owens 1999, 60; Østerud 1988, 191). Moreover, because environmental factors become relevant to policy decision-making only when they are apperceived and considered by policymakers (Sprout and Sprout 1957, 310), *Embedded Local Liberalism* investigates how subnational governments perceive and define the geopolitical environment in which their state is situated (i.e., how their state's relationships with the others on issues with geopolitical implications are).

By evaluating the geopolitical environment in which their state is situated, subnational governments define whether opportunities exist in that environment for them to develop subnational economies through conducting international cooperation. For instance, institutions established among countries, such as the Single European Market (SEA), reconfigured states' borders and caused the proliferation of cross-border cooperation (O'Dowd 2003). As a result, the establishment of the European Union provided the most important opportunity for subnational governments in Europe to directly participate in European integration (Cornago 2010). Similarly, transnational regimes, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) provide access points for subnational governments in the US, Mexico, and Canada to conduct cross-border collaborations (Keating 1999b). In contrast, due to confrontations between China and Soviet Union from the 1960s to the 1980s, the Hulun Buir government of China was reluctant—even unable—to conduct cross-border cooperation with Mongolia and Russia (K. Zhao 2019). By analyzing their

state's interaction with others on issues with geopolitical implications, subnational governments also assess their states' capabilities and scopes of influence. With these assessments and analyses, subnational governments take their state as a reference point when calculating the costs and benefits of their participation in international cooperation, as well as analyzing and forecasting potential future obstacles and challenges, all with the objective of subnational economic development in mind. Observing and analyzing the geopolitical environment where their state is situated, subnational governments estimate the relative strength and influence of its state vis-à-vis the others, as well as how the other states receive their state's influence and capacity. If subnational governments perceive that their state is rising, and that such ascendancy is accepted by other states, they may conclude that it is easier to persuade—or even coerce—other states to cooperate with them on behalf of their state's influence and capacity (Milner 1992a, 469; Gowa 1986), and that their participation in international cooperation is more likely to accelerate provincial economic growth. By contrast, if subnational governments perceive that their state lacks influence in regional/global issues and that their state's rise is contested by others, they may conclude that it is more difficult for them to persuade others to cooperate with them, let alone aid in provincial economic development.

4.3. Summary

The analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism suggests that two factors jointly determine the degree to which subnational governments engage in international cooperation, namely (i) subnational economic openness, which motivates subnational governments to engage in international cooperation, and (ii) subnational governments' perceptions of the geopolitical environment in which their state is situated, which moderates the impact of subnational economic openness on subnational governments' decisions regarding international cooperation.

6. Research Design

In this section, I introduce how the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism is applied to explain why Chinese inland border provincial governments presented different levels of activism in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019. I begin by defining regional cooperation and neighboring regions of China's inland border provinces. In Section 5.2, I explain why the study period 2004–2019 is chosen. Section 5.3 provides descriptions of variables, including their indicators, measurements and data sources. Section 5.4 presents the hypotheses that I test in the case studies. Research methods used in this research are elaborated in Section 5.5.

5.1. Regional Cooperation: A Working Definition

“Region” means “an area covering two or more countries which share a geographical border or are located in the same continent” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.). In other words, the term “region” refers to 1) an entire continent, such as Asia; 2) two or more countries within a continent, such as China and South Korea, as well as ten member states of ASEAN; or 3) countries that share borders but are not located entirely on the same continent, such as China and Russia. According to Milner (1992b, 468), “cooperation” is defined as “goal-directed behavior that entails mutual policy adjustments so that all sides end up better off than they would otherwise be.” Thus, “regional cooperation” refers to government actors, be they national governments or subnational governments, in the same region adopting mutually beneficial policy adjustments to pursue their respective goals. Based on this definition, I refer to subnational governments’ activism (or participation) in regional cooperation as their unilateral decision-making or policy choices that reflect their efforts expended in regional cooperation.

China's Inland Border Provinces and Their Neighboring Regions

As previously defined, a “region” comprises multiple countries. China has nine inland border provinces: Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning in the northeast; Inner Mongolia in the north; Xinjiang and Gansu in the northwest; and Tibet, Yunnan, and Guangxi in the southwest (see Map 1.1). Due to their distinct geographical locations, inland border provinces have distinct neighboring regions. Each inland border province’s definition of its neighboring region is based on two criteria. First, countries sharing the border are included (for example, because Xinjiang is adjacent to eight countries, these eight countries constitute Xinjiang’s neighboring region). Second, countries that share historical and cultural similarities are also included (for instance, although Xinjiang does not share a border with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, these two countries are commonly considered to be a part of the province’s neighboring region due to their historical, cultural, and social ties). Table 1.3 provides a summary of the neighboring regions of each Chinese inland border province.

Table 1.3 China's Inland Border Provinces and Their Neighboring Regions

Province	Countries Composing the Neighboring Region
Xinjiang	Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India.
Tibet	India, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal.
Inner Mongolia	Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan.
Heilongjiang	Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan.
Jilin	Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan.
Liaoning	Russia, Mongolia, North Korea, South Korea, Japan.
Gansu	Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.
Guangxi	Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.
Yunnan	Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India.

Source: Author.

5.2. Study Period: 2004–2019

The study period covered by this study ranges from 2004 to 2019. The justifications are provided here. On December 11, 2001, after 16 years of negotiation, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO)—one of the most important events for China at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Chow 2003). WTO membership signaled China’s engagement in an international system, and its domestic openness entered a new era (Y. Guo 2008). In addition to China’s WTO membership, the West Policy and the Northeast Policy have been in effect since the end of 2000 and 2003, respectively. The former is interpreted as a national campaign to open up the interior and western inland border provinces (Goodman 2004), whereas the latter prepares the northeastern inland border provinces to expand their foreign markets (L. Dong 2010a). As a result, since 2004, the central government has provided unprecedented support for provincial governments along inland borders to engage in regional cooperation. By selecting 2004 as the starting year of this research, it is possible to better control the effects of domestic central–local relations and concentrate on the effects of international political factors.

A further justification for choosing 2004 is data collection; the earliest data available begins in 2004. Meanwhile, the research stops at 2019 due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Walt (2020, 2) calls the COVID-19 pandemic “the most disruptive global event since the Great Depression and World War II.” He further opines that post-COVID-19 world will be less open and less free. Although the pandemic will accelerate the shift of globalization from US-centric toward China-centric (Mahbubani 2020), China’s zero-COVID policy has had a substantial impact on China’s engagement with the world and on provincial governments’ interaction with their respective regions. For example, the Yunnan government suspended the 2020 South Asia Expo (Xinhua 2020) and the Guangxi government temporarily closed seven out of nine land-border ports

(Yanan Li 2020). Combining the disruptions of COVID-19 with the fact that the available data by 2019 is richer, the latter end of the research scope is 2019. However, to show the continued validity and applicability of Embedded Local Liberalism, the conclusion chapter discusses developments of provincial governments' policy responses towards regional cooperation since the outbreak of the pandemic.

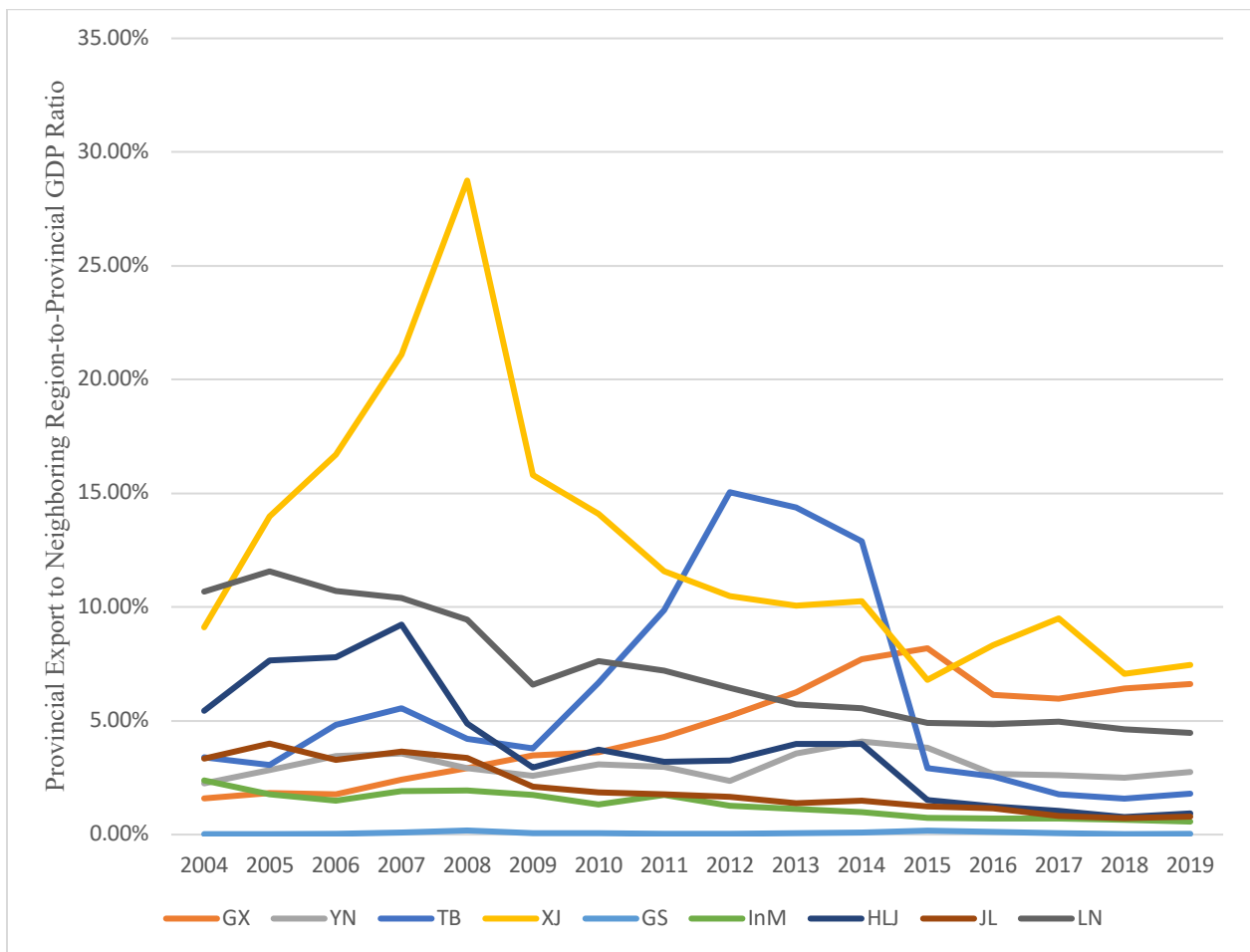
5.3. Variables, Indicators and Measurements

5.3.1. Motivator: Provincial Economic Openness

Economic openness often refers to two categories: trade openness and financial openness. The former is calculated by total imports and/or total exports relative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the latter is measured by Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inward/outward and/or foreign financial assets/liabilities relative to GDP (Gräbner et al. 2021, 89–95). In this dissertation, I measure provincial economic openness by using the export-to-GDP ratio. This is because, firstly, for most states—especially developing countries—exports play a significant role in driving economic growth (Balassa 1985; Ram 1987). Second, although many economists recognize that export (and trade) and FDI are mutually reinforcing (Head and Ries 2004), developing countries benefit more from export because it generates FDI (Nwanna 1986). Third, foreign investment data is usually less available than trade data. Therefore, with China being one of the largest developing economies in the world, due in large part to its huge success in export-led economic development (M.-H. Liu, Margaritis, and Zhang 2019; Tingvall and Ljungwall 2012) (and for the sake of parsimony), I choose to focus mainly on the effects of exports on subnational economy to present a trend on the level of openness of a subnational economy. Using an export-to-neighboring region (hereinafter referred to as “EN”)-to-GDP ratio (hereinafter referred to as “EN-to-GDP ratio”) suggested by economists (Awokuse 2008; Balassa 1978, 1985) and supplementing it with a

comparison of EN growth rate and GDP growth rate, I evaluated provincial economic motivations to participate in regional cooperation.

This data was collected and compiled from yearbooks of the nine inland border provinces from 2005–2020, China Customs, and the Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China. Figure 1.2 provides a summary of all nine inland border provinces’ economic openness to their respective neighboring regions. During 2004–2019, Xinjiang’s economic openness to its neighboring region was the highest, while Guangxi’s economic openness to its neighboring region saw the greatest increase (see Figure 1.2).



*Figure 1.2 China's Inland Border Provincial Economic Openness to Neighboring Region: 2004–2019*⁹ Source: Author's compilation and calculation based on data collected from yearbooks of the nine inland border provinces from 2005–2020, China Customs, and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China. *Note:* GX stands for Guangxi, YN for Yunnan, TB for Tibet, XJ for Xinjiang, GS for Gansu, InM for Inner Mongolia, HLJ for Heilongjiang, JL for Jilin, LN for Liaoning.

5.3.2. Moderator: Subnational Government's Perception of State's Relationship with Neighboring Region

According to the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, the second independent variable “moderator” is how subnational governments perceive and interpret their state's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions. More specifically, in this dissertation, I measured this variable by examining how China's inland border provincial governments analyzed a number of issues with great geopolitical implications between 2004 and 2019.

The first issue is on territoriality and sovereignty. I studied how inland border provincial governments perceived security and sovereignty concerns/disputes between China and countries in their respective neighboring regions and how these territory/sovereignty-related concerns and/or disputes were managed.

Second, I also examined inland border provincial governments' perceptions of regional order and China's influence in the region. I investigated how provincial governments viewed bilateral/multilateral institutions between China and neighboring countries as well as bilateral/multilateral institutions between other major powers and countries in their respective neighboring regions, if any. For provincial governments, did these institutions facilitate cooperation or impose additional restrictions?

⁹ See Appendix Table 20 in Appendix III for all raw data.

Third, I also assessed, from the perspective of provincial governments, how respective neighboring regions viewed and treated China and other regional powers.

As presented by the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, these views shape the provincial governments' utility calculations of their participation in regional cooperation by informing them about China's influence and capacity in the region and the prospects of their participation in regional cooperation.

The best method for obtaining the perceptions of provincial governments is to interview officials from those governments. However, this is extremely difficult to do¹⁰; I was able to interview only two government officials. Alternatively, I searched for articles and speeches by major officials from provincial governments. Moreover, because the important roles of think tanks in China's policy-making are widely acknowledged and described (Abb 2014; Menegazzi 2018),¹¹ I mainly relied on local scholars in various inland border provinces to measure respective provincial governments' perceptions. I carefully examined how major scholars described and discussed the behaviors of their states and the other relevant states in respective neighboring regions on the issues of territory, sphere of influence, and level of engagements. The written works of these academics were retrieved from the China's National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) online database and numerous provincial libraries. In addition, I conducted interviews with twenty-five scholars.¹² Eight of the scholars I interviewed were located in Guangxi, seven in Yunnan, three in Xinjiang, and five in Jilin. Two more scholars were located in Singapore. Although they

¹⁰ On the one hand, this is due to the current political climate in China. On the other hand, as pointed out by scholars whom I interviewed, it is due to the fact that I am a student at an overseas university despite being a Chinese national.

¹¹ My working experience at a major university in one of the inland border provinces also revealed that Chinese governments, from the central government to provincial governments, frequently consult with think-tank scholars on all policy matters.

¹² The criteria for selecting important local scholars involve looking at their working institutes, titles, and whether they undertake any research grants from provincial governments.

were not affiliated with any major think tanks in China's inland border provinces, they maintained extensive relationships and close contacts with local academics in those provinces.

5.3.3. Outcome: Provincial Governments' Activism in Regional Cooperation

The dependent variable (or the outcome variable) of this research is the degree to which provincial governments are active in regional cooperation. It is measured by a composite index that describes the observable efforts of the inland border provincial governments to promote regional cooperation. The index comprises fourteen indicators covering politics, economics, and socio-cultural aspects. These fourteen indicators were selected based on academic literature, China's practices, and data availability.

According to Duchacek (2001, 14–15), subnational leaders' foreign visits, participation as non-central government representatives in international conferences/organizations, and the establishment of foreign free trade zones are the primary methods and strategies used by subnational governments to promote and defend their interests abroad. Based on this, and also taking into account China's practices, nine indicators were selected. The first is provincial leaders' visits to neighboring regions, and the second is participation/initiation of bilateral/multilateral dialogue mechanisms (B/MDMs) involving authorities from neighboring regions (e.g., meetings and forums).

The rest seven indicators concern the establishment of seven functional areas for foreign economic exchanges. These seven functional areas are: 1) developing and opening-up pilot zones (DOPZs), 2) special customs control areas (SCCAs), 3) foreign industrial parks (FIPs), 4) border economic cooperation zones (BECZs), 5) cross-border economic cooperation zones (CBECZs), 6) pilot free trade zones (PFTZs), and 7) ports of entry (POEs). All of these functional areas are designed to strengthen economic ties between inland border provinces and their adjacent regions.

Although these functional areas must be approved by the central government, provincial governments are responsible for their initiation, planning, construction, and management. For instance, one of my interviewees described POEs as “*jiao yaoshi gongcheng*” (turnkey projects) (Interview Nanning-220210 2022), indicating that the central government needs only to authorize these ports, whereas provincial governments are the de facto constructors and operators. The approval of six new PFTZs in 2019 was titled “Official Reply of the State Council” (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2019a), also suggesting that provincial governments are the initiators of these functional areas. In addition, the central government underscores the need to maximize provincial governments’ activism (*jijixing*) in order to “ensure the implementation of all tasks for trial reforms and build a high-standards and high-quality PFTZ” (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2019b). It further demonstrates the key role of provincial governments in developing and operating these functional areas.

Meanwhile, as paradiplomacy scholars have noted, the institutional structures that subnational governments establish to conduct foreign affairs is also a valuable measure of their activism in international activities (Hans J. Michelmann 2009b; Schiavon 2019; Vengroff and Rich 2006). Therefore, based on China’s practices and the analyses of paradiplomacy scholars, in addition to the number of B/MDMs and establishments in the above functional areas, the administrative rank¹³ of leading officials in the B/MDMs and the person in charge of these seven functional areas is an additional important indicator of how much effort provincial governments are putting into developing these regional cooperation platforms (Interview Singapore-211119

¹³ In China, below national-leader level, from the highest to the lowest, levels of administrative rank are: provincial leadership/ministerial, vice-provincial leadership/ministerial, prefectural leadership/bureau head, vice-prefectural leadership/bureau head, county leadership/division head, and vice county leadership/division head (Heilmann 2017, 117).

2021; Interview Urumqi-211217 2021). The higher the administrative rank of these officials, the greater the importance provincial governments attach to regional cooperation.

“Friendship cities” (also known as “sister cities”) are another important indicator when assessing the international activities and influence of subnational governments (Pietrasiak et al. 2018; Tidwell 2021). Consequently, a consideration of the number of city-to-city friendships established with neighboring regions and the frequency of the communications and exchanges with these friendship cities is also a criterion for evaluating provincial governments’ involvement in regional cooperation.

Provincial governments’ involvement in regional cooperation is also reflected in official media coverage. Specifically, two types of official media were analyzed: provincial dailies (*shengji Ribao*) and the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*). Each province has its own provincial daily; for example, Guangxi has the *Guangxi Daily* (*Guangxi Ribao*) and Xinjiang has the *Xinjiang Daily* (*Xinjiang Ribao*). Provincial governments closely supervise and regulate their respective provincial dailies. Therefore, the number of articles on particular subjects in these provincial government-supervised newspapers is a valuable window into how each provincial government promotes these topics (Shih 2008, 1181). In addition, China’s leading national newspaper, the *People’s Daily*, is essential for understanding China’s politics (G. Wu 1994). The number of regional cooperation-related articles written by provincial leaders and published in the *People’s Daily* is also indicative of provincial governments’ activism in regional cooperation.

Furthermore, scholarships provided by inland border provincial governments to international students from neighboring regions and the number of Confucius Institutes¹⁴

¹⁴ The Confucius Institute program began in 2004. It is initiated and supported by the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (previously known as the Office of the Chinese Language Council International (*Hanban*)), which is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. The program is committed to providing Chinese language and

established in neighboring regions by universities located in the provinces are also typical indicators of provincial governments’ activism in socio-cultural regional cooperation (Interview Nanning-211126 2021; X. Yang 2021b, 73–80).

Table 1.4 summarizes all fourteen indicators and their respective measurements. The data used to describe this composite index was collected from provincial and national yearbooks, various news websites and newspapers, governments’ official portals, and applications for “government affairs consulting” (*zhengwu zixun*) through the online system of each respective inland border provincial government.

Table 1.4 A Composite Index of Inland Border Provincial Governments’ Activism in Regional Cooperation

Categories	No.	Indicators	Measurements
Political Indicators	1	Provincial leaders’ visits to the neighboring region	The number of visits to neighboring regions led by governors of the provincial people’s government and/or party secretaries of the provincial CPC.
	2	Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanisms (B/MDMs)	The number of major B/MDMs; the frequency of participation in these major B/MDMs.
	3	Media coverage of regional cooperation	The number of articles on regional cooperation in provincial official media; the number of articles on regional cooperation written by provincial leaders and published in national media.
	4	Friendship cities in the neighboring region	The number of friendship-city agreements signed with neighboring regions; the number of activities held and the frequency of communications with friendship cities.

cultural teaching resources and services worldwide. As cooperative partners of the program, provincial governments and universities located in provinces collaborate to establish Confucius Institutes in foreign countries.

Economic Indicators	5	Exhibitions targeted at neighboring region	The number of exhibitions/trade affairs focusing on neighboring regions held by provincial governments; the frequency of exhibitions/trade affairs; the number and variety of activities held at each exhibition/trade affair; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for these exhibitions/trade affairs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).
	6	Developing and Opening-up Pilot Zones (DOPZs)	The number of DOPZs; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for DOPZs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).
	7	Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs) ¹⁵	The number of SCCAs; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for SCCAs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).
	8	Ports of Entry (POEs)	The number of POEs being set up and/or upgraded; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for POEs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).
	9	Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs) established in the neighboring region ¹⁶	The number of FIPs established by the provincial government; the amount of capital allocated to these FIPs.
	10	Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs) ¹⁷	The number of BECZs; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for BECZs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).
	11	Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs)	The number of CBECZs; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for CBECZs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).
	12	Pilot Free Trade Zones (PFTZs) ¹⁸	The number of PFTZs; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for PFTZs (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).

¹⁵ The General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China provides a list of SCCAs at <http://www.customs.gov.cn/zms/hgtsjgqy0/hgtsjgqyndqk/3141957/index.html>.

¹⁶ The Investment Promotion Office of China Overseas Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone provides a list of FIPs at <https://oip.ccpit.org/ent/parkNew/138>.

¹⁷ The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China provides a list of BECZs at <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/xglj/kaifaqu.shtml>.

¹⁸ The General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China provides a list of PFTZs at <http://www.customs.gov.cn/zms/zmsyq/zmsyqgk/index.html>.

Socio-Cultural Indicators	13	Scholarship for overseas students from neighboring region	The number and size of scholarship for international students from neighboring regions.
	14	Confucius Institutes (CI) established in neighboring region ¹⁹	The number of CI; whether a specialized government institution is responsible for developing these CI (and if so, its bureaucratic rank).

Source: Author.

For each of these fourteen indicators, I ranked nine Chinese inland border provincial governments from highest to lowest. I gave the most active provincial government a score of 9 and the least active one a score of 1. After examining each indicator individually, I tallied the scores obtained by each provincial government for each indicator. The sum of an inland border provincial government's scores on all fourteen indicators reflects its activism, or level of participation, in regional cooperation.²⁰ During 2004–2019, the Guangxi government was the most active in regional cooperation, while the Tibetan government was the least active. Between these two were, in order of decreasing activism, the provincial governments of Yunnan, Heilongjiang, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, and Liaoning.

5.4. Hypotheses

The remainder of this dissertation will test a Primary Hypothesis (H_P) derived from Embedded Local Liberalism.

Primary Hypothesis (H_P):

An inland border provincial government's activism in regional cooperation is determined jointly by 1) the province's economic openness to the neighboring region

¹⁹ The list of Confucius Institutes is available at <https://www.ci.cn/#/site/ConfuciusUnion> on the Confucius Institute website.

²⁰ Please refer to Appendix I for a breakdown of the scores received by each of these provincial governments for each indicator from 2004 to 2019.

and 2) the provincial government's perception of the geopolitical environment in the region where its state is situated.

Because the causality between economic openness and international cooperation has been well established by previous scholars, my primary objective is to demonstrate how subnational governments' perceptions of the geopolitical environment in which their state is located influence this international liberalist logic by testing the following two sub-hypotheses derived from Embedded Local Liberalism.

Sub-Hypothesis 1 (H_{S1}):

When an inland border provincial government perceives that its state's geopolitical environment is favorable in its neighboring region, provincial economic openness to that region is more likely to result in regional cooperation.

Sub-Hypothesis 2 (H_{S2}):

When an inland border provincial government perceives that its state's geopolitical environment is unfavorable in its neighboring region, provincial economic openness to that region is less likely to result in regional cooperation.

5.5. Research Methods

This qualitative research study consists of a comparative case study of three selected Chinese inland border provincial governments. In addition to semi-structured interviews, the research examines the writings of local scholars and government officials through desk research.

5.5.1. Cross-Case Comparison Within a Single Country

This dissertation chose cross-case comparison as the main research method for several reasons. First, the comparative strategy improves subnational case analyses (Lijphart 1975, 167). Second, the case study method was chosen because the research aims to examine contemporary events and

the researcher has no control over the research subject. Third, the method of case study could incorporate a full variety of evidence, including documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations; such a wide variety of sources strengthens the validity of the inference. Finally, the embedded logic of replication in the multiple-case design contributes to the research's overall reliability (Yin 2009, 10–11, 53). In addition, the purpose of cross-case comparison within a single country is to control for the influence of domestic politics—especially intergovernmental relations between the central/federal government and subnational governments—on the decision-making of subnational governments in foreign affairs. By selecting cases from the same country, I am able to concentrate on the role of international political factors, which is absent from existing works of scholarship. Furthermore, each case was selected from China—not only because the research question derives from China-related observations, but also because a subnational analysis of China (the world's largest centralized developing economy) can enhance our understanding of the significance of subnational governments in regional integration beyond Europe.

Case Selection within China

Several considerations motivated my selection of the Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin provincial governments for a comparative analysis. First, the locations of these three provinces are distinct; Guangxi is situated on the southwestern border, Xinjiang on the northwestern border, and Jilin on the northeastern border. Due to their diverse geographical locations, these three cases effectively represent all Chinese inland border provinces. This geographical distribution helps overcome the limitation inherent in previous studies that have focused on inland provinces along the southwestern border (see Section 3 of Chapter II).

Second, the availability of data and the use of a diverse-case method further justify this choice (Evera 1997, 79; Gerring 2008, 650–652). On the one hand, in comparison to the remaining

six inland border provincial governments, the data for these three provincial governments is more abundant and readily accessible. On the other hand, the three cases demonstrate a spectrum of levels of activism in regional cooperation, which makes them more representative of all China's inland border provincial governments. Thus, the research as a whole is more exhaustive and persuasive. During 2004–2019, the Guangxi government was the most active in regional cooperation, followed by the Xinjiang government and the Jilin government (recall Section 5.3 in this chapter and also see Appendix I). A comparison of these three provincial governments illustrates how the “moderator” intervenes in the international liberalist’s logic (that is, the effects of the “motivator”) and determines the levels of provincial governments’ activism in regional cooperation.

Third and finally, a number of important similarities among these three provinces render their respective governments comparable. None of them, for instance, faced severe traditional security threats from 2004 to 2019; land border disputes have either been resolved or are well managed. All of them, however, faced similar non-traditional security issues that are closely related to their respective neighboring regions, such as terrorism, narcotrafficking, and human smuggling. Furthermore, all three provinces are home to a substantial number of ethnic minorities, most of which are transborder ethnic groups.

Although only three inland border provincial governments were chosen for in-depth comparative analysis, the conclusion chapter discusses the remaining six inland border provincial governments in China to demonstrate the external validity of the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism.

5.5.2. Desk Research

I analyzed books, articles, research reports, and commentary by each province's government officials as well as scholars. Due to my limited direct access to provincial government officials or even their consultants, this method of secondary data collection is crucial. All of these publications were available via the CNKI online database or provincial libraries. Publications were identified by the affiliations, titles, and research grant sources of their author(s).

5.5.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as an essential supplement to help verify the validity and accuracy of the data gathered through desk research. From October 2021 to May 2022, I conducted twenty-seven interviews with government officials and academics. Ten interviewees were in Guangxi, seven in Yunnan, three in Xinjiang, five in Jilin, and two in Singapore. All interviewees were coded with their city of residence and the date of the interview (for example, "Nanning-211016"). Appendix II provides a list of open-ended questions used for every interview. Due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, but the majority were conducted online. Each interview was conducted in Mandarin and lasted at least one hour.

7. Limitations and Future Research Agendas

International relations are no longer the exclusive realm of state actors; today, important roles are also played by non-state actors, among which subnational governments are unique and worthy of analysis. Although subnational governments are essentially political actors and must be subordinate to their state government, they can focus on certain key objectives—particularly economic development—in international engagement, while their state is responsible for broader,

more general interests (Keating 2000a). This dissertation is one of the first attempts to systematically compare and study how economic globalization and state-level international relations influence the growing activism of subnational governments in regional and international cooperation. Despite the contributions made herein, this research still has some limitations.

Due to data availability and parsimony, I use EN-to-GDP ratio as the sole measure of the significance of economic exchanges between each province and their neighboring regions for a province's economic development. In fact, to be more comprehensive and persuasive, export, import and FDI (both outbound and inbound) should be all included in the future research. In addition, a quantitative model can be used to more precisely illustrate the contributions of such economic exchanges to provincial economic growth. With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the removal of the resultant travel restrictions, more face-to-face interviews can be conducted to improve the measurement of the perceptions of subnational governments and strengthen the argument. Lastly, although I have deductively developed the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism and applied it to all of China's inland border provincial governments, the framework's applicability to subnational governments of other countries remains to be determined. Future research can work on applying Embedded Local Liberalism to more countries.

8. Structure of the Dissertation

Excluding the first, introductory chapter—which we are now concluding—the remaining body of this dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter II provides a literature review on three major groups of analyses related to my research topic: 1) regional integration and cooperation, 2)

paradiplomacy, and 3) China's participation in regional cooperation. By surveying these studies, I explain in detail how my research fits into the academic world and what it contributes.

Each of the three subsequent chapters focuses on the respective provincial governments of three Chinese inland border provinces: Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin (in that order). Based on Embedded Local Liberalism, each chapter explains how the provincial government's activism in regional cooperation was determined by economic incentives resulting from globalization and by that government's perception of the geopolitical environment in which China was situated in its neighboring region. A qualitative description of each provincial government's activism in regional cooperation is also provided in each chapter.

Chapter III concerns Guangxi, a southwestern inland border province. The chapter demonstrates that the high level of activism displayed by the Guangxi government in its cooperation with neighboring Southeast Asia from 2004 to 2019 can be attributed to two factors. On the one hand, the provincial government was highly motivated by economic incentives, given the province's significant economic openness to its neighboring region. On the other hand, the Guangxi government's positive view of China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia helped translate the economic incentives generated by globalization into concrete efforts to promote regional cooperation, because Guangxi's provincial government perceived that China-ASEAN relations were robust and that China maintained dominance over the South China Sea and regional affairs.

Chapter IV concerns Xinjiang, located on China's northwestern border and which neighbors Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India. Between 2004 and 2019, the activism of the Xinjiang government in cooperating with its neighboring region was mixed; it was active in some aspects of regional

cooperation but indifferent in others. Even though the Xinjiang government had strong economic incentives to engage in regional cooperation, the effect of this incentive was weakened by the provincial government's perception of China's geopolitical environment in the neighboring region. Despite the fact that the Xinjiang government understood that bilateral/multilateral institutions between China and its neighboring countries provided opportunities for regional cooperation, it was discouraged from actively participating in regional cooperation due to its negative perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region, such as the lackluster future of those institutions, China's lack of influence in the region, and persistent concerns about China's sovereignty.

Chapter V concerns Jilin, a province located along China's northeastern border and which neighbors Northeast Asia. From 2004 to 2019, the Jilin provincial government did not actively cooperate with Northeast Asian countries. First, due to its low degree of economic openness to the region, the provincial government lacked sufficient economic incentives to participate in regional cooperation. Second, the provincial government found that the relations between China and Northeast Asian states were heavily concentrated on security, that China lacked influence in regional affairs, and that it faced intense competition and skepticism in the region. As a result, the overwhelmingly negative perception of the Jilin government concerning China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia did not amplify the motivating effects of economic openness, but rather diminished them.

Chapter VI concludes this dissertation. This chapter first compares and summarizes the three cases. During 2004–2019, although the Xinjiang government received more economic incentives from its neighboring region than the Guangxi government, the Xinjiang government was less willing to participate in regional cooperation due to its mixed perception that China's

geopolitical environment in its neighboring region was less favorable. Meanwhile, compared to the governments of Guangxi and Xinjiang, the Jilin government's economic incentive was the weakest, and its perception of China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia was the most negative. Therefore, due to different levels of economic incentives and perceptions of China's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions, the Guangxi provincial government was the most active in participating in regional cooperation during the study period, followed by the Xinjiang government and the Jilin government. In addition, Embedded Local Liberalism is applied to study the activism of the remaining six inland border provincial governments of China in regional cooperation. By showing how these provincial governments were incentivized by varying degrees of provincial economic openness to their respective neighboring regions, and by examining how they understood and defined China's geopolitical environment in these regions, I explain why the levels of their activism in regional cooperation varied from 2004 to 2019. The concluding chapter also discusses the implications of all findings and developments during the pandemic era. Finally, a summary of the dissertation is provided to end the chapter.

II. Literature Review

My research contributes to three streams of literature: 1) regional integration and cooperation, 2) paradiplomacy studies, and 3) China's participation in regional integration and cooperation. After providing a summary of the main arguments presented for each of these topics, I elaborate how my research builds upon the extant literature and fills the gaps found within it.

1. Regional Integration and Cooperation

Existing studies on regional integration and cooperation can be divided into three schools: Neo-Functionalism (NF), Intergovernmentalism, and Multi-Level Governance (MLG). Each of these schools pays special attention to different actors in their respective approaches to analyzing the process of regional integration and cooperation.

1.1. Summary of Arguments

NF was initially developed in the 1960s by Ernst B. Haas (1961, 2004, 2008), Leon N. Lindberg (1962) and Philippe C. Schmitter (1969, 1970), and was recently revived by Wayne Sandholtz and Alec Stone Sweet (1997; 2012). Scholars of the NF school argue that nation-states are retreating from their leading roles in the process of regional integration and cooperation, instead being replaced by supranational institutions, which—in conjunction with domestic non-state actors within individual member states (such as political parties, labor organizations, and industries)—have accelerated the regional integration process.

Intergovernmentalism, which is in direct opposition to NF, underscores the importance of nation-states in the process of regional integration and cooperation. The foundation of Intergovernmentalism was laid down by Stanley Hoffmann (1966, 1982) and Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (2001), and was further developed by Andrew Moravcsik (1991, 1992b, 1993, 1995, 1998). These scholars insisted that the nation-state should be the basic unit of analysis when examining regional integration and cooperation. Within the framework of Intergovernmentalism, national governments aggregate diverse domestic interests and preferences and act purposefully within the international arena in accordance with domestically defined objectives.

MLG emerged in the 1990s with a focus on the role of subnational governments in European integration. MLG refers to “a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local” (Marks 1993, 392). Both NF and Intergovernmentalism have made significant contributions to the conceptualization of regional integration and cooperation, but both ignore the role of subnational governments. In the following, I focus more on providing a critical analysis of MLG works. This is because the study of MLF highlights the role of subnational governments, which is more relevant to my research.

Following the launch of the Single European Market (SEM)—begun with the signing of the Single European Act (SEA)—and the internal market program, which increased subnational governments’ activism in European integration and cooperation (Hooghe 1995), especially subnational governments’ direct approach to—and alliance with—EU institutions (George 2004), the study of MLG surged. MLG scholars have cited external and internal factors to explain why subnational governments circumvent their national governments and directly participate in regional affairs. Externally, due to the EU’s policy—especially the structural fund and the cohesion

policy—more actors have been brought into the integration and cooperation process (Hooghe and Keating 1994). The role of subnational authorities has been empowered by formulating, financing, implementing, and monitoring relevant EU directives and programs (Hooghe and Marks 1996; Marks 1992, 1993). Meanwhile, internally, decentralization within individual member states and the failure of Keynesian economic policy (Hooghe and Marks 1999) have also been proposed to explain why subnational governments directly engage with regional affairs.

In addition to the above causes, MLG scholars have been eager to summarize the mobilization channels that subnational governments can use during the process of regional integration and cross-border cooperation. They identify six main extra-state channels for subnational governments to pursue their interests at the European regional level: 1) sit at the Committee of the Regions; represent their interests in the 2) Council of Ministers, 3) Commission, and 4) European Parliament; 5) set up representative offices in Brussels; and 6) create European-wide networks and associations (Hooghe 1995; Tatham 2008).

Recently, some MLG scholars have become increasingly aware of variations in the extent of European subnational governments' participation in European integration. These variations are primarily measured by the number of representative offices established by various subnational governments in Brussels, the city where the European Union locates. Domestic politics and local political leaders have cited as the main reasons of this variation (Greenwood 2011; Marks et al. 1996). Focusing on cross-country variation, Greenwood (2011) argued that the degree of subnational government representation in Brussels depends on the level of devolution within each EU member state. With multiple logistic regression models and empirical qualitative analysis, Marks et al. (1996) analyzed variations across and within countries; they found that cross-country variance resulted from different domestic central–local relationships, whereas within-country

variation was a result of whether subnational localities were politically and culturally different from their respective national societies.

1.2. Criticism

There is no doubt that the aforementioned studies have greatly assisted us in recognizing the rising activism of subnational governments in regional affairs, but they are not without their limitations. First, the majority of MLG examples come from European subnational governments, which raises a number of questions. Do subnational governments in other regions also participate directly in regional affairs? If so, are they engaged in regional cooperation and integration to varying degrees, similar to their European counterparts? The applicability of MLG remains to be tested.

Second, likely due to its focus on Europe, MLG tends to assume that subnational governments' activism in regional cooperation and integration is attributable to the existence of supranational institutions. In other words, MLG implies that subnational governments can form coalitions with the EU supranational institutions, which "simply presents a special case within one aspect of the neofunctionalist analysis" (George 2004, 112). Such implications may affect the generalizability of the framework because other regions have no regional supranational institution comparable to that of Europe.

Third, despite the fact that the level of participation in regional affairs varies among subnational governments, the measurement of such variation is overly simplified. Because subnational governments' interest in regional affairs is a multifaceted phenomenon, measuring this simply by counting the number of representative offices may result in bias. In other words, if we want to see the whole picture, we must select more indicators.

1.3. Contributions

The research presented in this dissertation addresses the aforementioned limitations. First, my research on the activism of China's inland border provincial governments in regional cooperation illustrates that the phenomena described by MLG scholars is universal, even though there is no supranational institution in Asia equivalent in to the EU. Second, built upon the study of paradiplomacy (see the following section) and empirical observations, I propose a composite index to comprehensively measure the different levels of importance that subnational governments place on regional cooperation.

2. Paradiplomacy

In addition to the literature on regional cooperation and integration, this dissertation examines the study of paradiplomacy. "Paradiplomacy" is an umbrella term referring to direct international activities by subnational governments (Kuznetsov 2015b, 25–31).²¹ Although the phenomenon itself is not new, the study of paradiplomacy did not emerge until the 1980s and has since proliferated.

2.1. Summary of Arguments

To understand the phenomenon of paradiplomacy, scholars have analyzed three aspects. First is the causes of paradiplomacy. Externally, almost all of the scholars in an edited volume, *States and Provinces in the International Economy* (D.M. Brown and Fry 1993), noted that subnational

²¹ Many scholars have debated the use of the term "paradiplomacy." Instead, they propose terms that are similar but with nuances, including "sub-state diplomacy" (Royles 2017), "constituent diplomacy" (Kincaid 2010), and "multilayered diplomacy" (Hocking 1993). Kuznetsov (2015b, 15–31) provides a detail discussion of this terminology debate. This dissertation adopts Kuznetsov's view that "paradiplomacy" is an umbrella term encompassing the connotations of these other terms.

governments have become international actors in world politics due to increasing globalization and interdependence. Aldecoa and Keating (1999) wrote that the effects of globalization and the rise of regional trading regimes, such as the EU and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), had helped to dismantle the border between domestic and international affairs. Keating (1999a) went deeper by positing that the complex, fragmented, and unstructured nature of the universe of international affairs as well as the establishments of transnational regimes provide subnational governments with a point of direct access to international relations. Scholars who were interested in case studies also found evidence of globalization's role in paradiplomacy. Examples include Schiavon's (2019) study on subnational governments of Mexico (and later, his cross-country study on ten federal countries), Kuznetsov's (2015b) empirical study on the provincial government of Alberta in Canada, and an edited volume presenting case studies of eleven federal countries spanning all continents (Hans J. Michelmann 2009b).

Numerous internal factors have contributed to the resurgence of paradiplomacy. These factors include federalization and decentralization, problems with nation-building, insufficient effectiveness of the central government in foreign relations, and asymmetry of constituent units (Kuznetsov 2015b). Using the example of Spain before and after the collapse of Francisco Franco's authoritarian regime in 1975, Kincaid (2010) underscored how federalization and decentralization contribute to the resurgence of paradiplomacy in Spain. Albina (2010) and Lecours (2009) wrote about how the respective governments of the Republic of Tatarstan in Russia and the province of Quebec in Canada were motivated to become international actors due to their nationalist sentiments. Brown and Fry's (1993) volume illustrated how the widespread perception of federal government's inefficiency in trade and investment promotion prompted state governments in the US as well as provincial governments in Canada to take direct actions in international politics. By

examining ten federal countries, Schiavon (2019) argues that vast differences in size, resources, activities, and levels of consolidation in paradiplomacy among subnational governments in these countries are a result of the different relationships between each center and its respective subnational governments.

The second aspect that scholars focus on is the instruments and strategies used by subnational governments to conduct foreign affairs. One of the founding fathers of the study of paradiplomacy, Ivo D. Duchacek (1991), summarized six principal ways and formulas for subnational governments to promote and defend their interests and assert their international competence abroad, namely: 1) establishment of permanent offices in foreign capitals or centers of commerce and industry to represent non-central governments abroad; 2) trips abroad undertaken by the leaders of non-central governments; 3) short-term, professional fact-finding missions dispatched abroad by state and provincial governments; 4) trade and investment shows; 5) establishment of foreign trade zones; and 6) participation of the representatives of non-central governments in the work of international conferences or organizations or even in the formal diplomatic representation of their national government in foreign capitals. Later, scholars added elements to the picture painted by Duchacek, such as the number of sisterhood relationship/international treaties/memorandum of understanding (MOU) and membership and participation of subnational governments in international organizations/conferences/associations (Pietrasiak et al. 2018; Tidwell 2021). In addition to international manifestations, scholars have recognized that subnational governments' paradiplomatic activities should be assessed based on "domestic manifestations," which refers to the organizational structure of subnational governments and the amount of resources subnational governments allocate to international activities. Indicators of domestic manifestations include the size of staffing and budget allocated

to foreign affairs, the institutional structure of subnational governments' offices or coordination agencies for foreign affairs, and electronic resources to promote the locality internationally (Hans J. Michelmann 2009b; Schiavon 2019; Vengroff and Rich 2006).

Third and finally, paradiplomacy scholars have attempted to comprehend the consequences of paradiplomacy, especially the relationship between paradiplomacy and national foreign policy. Duchacek (1991) noted that paradiplomacy may pose challenges for traditional state-to-state diplomacy but without deeper analysis on why this is so. Soldatos (1991), who helped coin the term "paradiplomacy," suggested that there are two types of relationships between paradiplomacy and diplomacy. The first type is co-operative action between subnational governments and their central government. It happens when the central government coordinates its subnational governments' activities or both orders of governments conduct foreign affairs in a joint fashion. The second type is parallel (substitutive) action. Paradiplomacy will be harmonious with diplomacy if parallel action is taken with the central government playing a monitoring role. However, paradiplomatic actions may conflict with the diplomatic actions of the central government in terms of content or form. In this case, paradiplomacy is posing threats to traditional state-level diplomacy. Kuznetsov (2015b) identified paradiplomacy could have two potential positive effects and one potential risk on state's foreign policy. On the one hand, paradiplomacy can be a manifestation of rationalization and democratization of the decision-making process in foreign policy. On the other hand, the secessionist threat posed by certain paradiplomatic activities may jeopardize the national foreign policy.

In the recent years, many scholars have paid attention to China's provincial governments. Like other countries, decentralization and economic globalization are generally regarded as the two most important factors behind the emergence of paradiplomacy and internationalization of

China's provincial governments (Su 2010; Z. Chen 2005; Y.N. Zheng 1994). Moreover, provincial governments have been strongly motivated to engage in paradiplomacy by the central government's encouragement of "going global," particularly through the BRI (Mierzejewski 2020; Summers 2021; T. Liu and Song 2020), which embodies Xi Jinping's ambitions and visions to position China as a leader in global development and achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Clarke 2017; Haenle 2017). Major instruments and strategies for China's provincial governments to conduct paradiplomacy include organizing trade fairs, conducting overseas visits, establishing commercial chambers in foreign countries, hosting foreign consulates in the provinces, establishing international sister-city relationships, and developing infrastructures, such as cross-border railways and ports, attending international conferences, and cooperating with international organizations (Cheung and Tang 2001; Mierzejewski 2020, 2021; T. Liu and Song 2020; Z. Chen 2005). Although China's provincial governments have been increasingly involved in international activities, their autonomy in promoting subnational multilateralism is limited (Mierzejewski 2020). Moreover, they continue to play a supporting role in China's national foreign policy (M. Li 2017).

2.2. Criticism

Although these analyses have greatly helped us understand the qualities inherent in subnational governments as actors in world politics (Hocking 1999), gaps remain in the relevant literature. First, in terms of the causes of paradiplomacy, globalization is seen as the main driving force for paradiplomacy; however, scholars have not fully recognized the fact that international relations may also limit subnational governments' paradiplomatic activities—and, consequently, their decision-making in international activities. Most existing analyses adopt an eclectic approach. On the one hand, from the perspective of international liberalism, existing studies emphasize that increasing globalization and pluralist complex interdependence grants points of access to

subnational governments. On the other hand, with a perspective of comparative politics, existing studies analyze how constitutional setting and territorial division of power enable and restrain the participation of subnational governments in international activities. Indeed, the phenomenon of paradiplomacy is so multifaceted and interconnected that it is difficult to study from a single theoretical perspective (Criekemans 2010a, 5). It is possible, however, if we control for a few variables through careful selection of case and study period. Moreover, the development and application of an analytical framework based on a single theoretical perspective can significantly address the criticism that the existing literature is more descriptive than explanatory (Bursens and Deforche 2010, 153–157; Cornago 2010, 12). Furthermore, an IR perspective will significantly enrich the study of paradiplomacy by highlighting the fact that developments in world politics will not only make it possible for subnational governments to go abroad, but will also limit their activism in international engagement—a reality that scholars have not yet fully recognized.

Second, most of the existing academic works on paradiplomacy attempt to explain why subnational governments in different countries participate in international activities at varying levels, but such works ignore the differences among subnational governments within a country. Scholars adopt the perspective of comparative politics and attribute cross-country variations in subnational governments' direct international involvement to differences in domestic political system, specifically constitutional and legal provisions as well as intergovernmental relations between central and local governments (Criekemans 2010b; Hans J. Michelmann 2009b; Hans J. Michelmann and Soldatos 1991; Keating 1999a, 2000b). However, these factors fail to explain the variations among subnational governments within a country because all subnational governments in the same country are under the same federal or centralized political system. Although a limited number of studies are devoted to measuring and explaining the variations among subnational

governments within a country (Jain 2005; Vengroff and Rich 2006; Schiavon 2019), the study of within-country variation is still in its infancy.

On the one hand, within-country variations have been neither exhaustively nor persuasively measured. Although Jain (2005)'s book on Japan's subnational governments in international affairs highlighted variations in Japanese subnational governments' levels of interest, motivations, and strategies in international affairs, he failed to develop the research. Vengroff and Rich (2006), who observed that Canadian provincial governments engaged in varying levels of paradiplomatic activities, concluded that, as of 2006, the governments of Alberta, Ontario, and Québec were the most active in international activities. Unfortunately, they provided no further explanations as to why this was the case. Schiavon's (2019) study on Mexico is likely the first systematic attempt to measure and explain variations in the degree of paradiplomatic involvement by different constituent units within the same country. He created a composite index—the Mexico Paradiplomacy Index (PI-Mex)—to measure the degree of involvement of Mexican federal units in paradiplomacy. This index was constructed using instruments and strategies summarized in prior research. It comprised twelve indicators that spanned institutional, political and economic dimensions. With this index, the author categorized all Mexican federal units into four levels—very high, high, medium, and low—but without sufficient justifications. In addition, it remains to be seen whether the index can be generalized to other countries.

On the other hand, although scholars identify—both explicitly and implicitly—a number of factors that contribute to the within-country variation, they focus primarily on domestic factors while ignoring the reality that subnational governments are also affected by international political factors.

The first factor is the income of a subnational government. In simple terms, compared to constituent units with lower levels of economic development, wealthier subnational governments will engage in more paradiplomacy because wealthy constituent units tend to be more thoroughly integrated into the global economy—and therefore more active in conducting foreign affairs (Hans J. Michelmann 2009b; Schiavon 2010, 2019). The second factor is political juxtaposition. In the case of Mexico, “political juxtaposition” refers to whether the governing party of the constituent unit and the federal government are the same (Schiavon 2010, 2019). Although the impacts of this variable may not be as significant as subnational income, Schiavon (2010, 2019) nevertheless suggest that it may be a triggering variable that provides an incentive to initiate and increase paradiplomacy. The third factor is the location of a subnational government (Kuznetsov 2015b; Schiavon 2010, 2019; Tavares 2016). Federal units sitting at the international border are more active in conducting paradiplomacy, compared to those which do not locate at the international border. The fourth factor is local leaders’ preferences (Schiavon 2010, 2019). The fifth and final factor is nationalism. For instance, compared to other provincial governments in Canada, that of Québec is more active in international cooperation due to the province’s strong nationalist (or even separatist) sentiment (Lecours 2009).

Overall, although a few scholars have recognized these within-country variations, so far they have failed to consider the role of international politics in explaining the variations. The five factors have not been conceptualized into a theoretical framework, either. Moreover, these factors fail to explain the within-country variations found in centralized countries—such as China, where all local and central governments are ruled by the CPC, all provincial leaders are mobilized and incentivized to conduct regional and international cooperation, and there is no public expression of nationalist sentiment among provincial governments.

2.3. Contributions

Existing analyses have provided rich insights into the causes of the emergence of paradiplomacy, the instruments and strategies used by subnational governments in conducting foreign affairs, and the effects of paradiplomatic activities on diplomacy and national foreign policy. Nevertheless, there are still gaps in the existing research that can be filled by my arguments and findings regarding the activism of China's inland border provincial governments in regional cooperation.

First of all, my composite index shows how the PI-Mex can be adapted and applied to study subnational governments in other countries. Second, I present a generalizable analytical framework: Embedded Local Liberalism. With this framework, on the one hand, I further explain why border location, a factor mentioned by previous scholars, is important to understand within-country variation. On the other hand, developing and utilizing an analytical framework from the perspective of international relations, I study when and how world politics motivate and constrain subnational governments' conduct of international affairs—a subject that has not yet been adequately addressed.

3. China's Cooperation with Asia

3.1. Summary of Arguments

Scholars on China's integration and cooperation with Asia can be categorized into two main groups. The first main group takes a statist approach and views China as a unitary actor. Their perspectives can be sub-categorized as follows: constructivist, realist, liberalist, and domestic. Constructivist scholars argue that China's activism in Asia integration is due to the effects of socialization (Acharya 2004, 2011; A.D. Ba 2006; Johnston and Evans 1999; Johnston 2003).

Realist scholars emphasize that China's motivations originate from strategic and national interests by citing the China–ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRI (Callahan 2016; Chin and Stubbs 2011; Emmers 2001; Gong 2019; Hongying Wang 2000; Jianwei Wang 2005c; Jiangyu Wang 2005b; Sheng 2003; V.W.-c. Wang 2005d). Liberalist scholars, noting that China has regarded growing interdependence as a fundamental condition of international relations, contend that China has embraced institutionalized forms of cooperation to pursue its own interests (Ali, Khan, and Aftab 2021; Hempson-Jones 2005; Moore 2007). Finally, “domestic” is the name given to the fourth perspective, for lack of a better term. Scholars who adhered to this perspective often start and quote what Deng Xiaoping has reiterated: to pursue economic development, China would need a peaceful environment (Finkelstein 2000). China's interests and activism toward regional cooperation and integration are driven by its consideration of internal stability and domestic development—for example, to address overcapacity in production, to seek energy resources for growth, and to address uneven development between inland provinces and coastal provinces (Calder and Ye 2010; H. Yu 2016; Ye 2020; Yunling Zhang and Tang 2005; Y. Wang 2016; Zhiqun Zhu 2010).

The other main group of scholars studying China's integration and cooperation with Asia takes a subnational approach, conceiving of China as a fragmented and decentralized entity. Some pay attention to horizontal decentralization in China's administration. They attribute China's approach to regional cooperation mostly to bargaining among different government ministries (Pearson 2010; Y. Jiang 2010, 2013). Others examine vertical decentralization, specifically the regional cooperation and integration activities of provincial governments. A handful of studies from the 1990s briefly discuss the role of inland border provincial governments in China's economic relations with its neighbors. Christoffersen (1993, 142–144) described how the Xinjiang

government unfolded its open-door policy toward the Great Islamic Circle (the opening-up to neighboring countries in the northwest and the Middle East). For example, Xinjiang's provincial government signed a protocol with Turkmenistan and launched projects with Kazakhstan. Ferdinand (1994, 280) also noticed the activism of the Xinjiang government in the 1980s–1990s, further adding that cooperation with former Soviet states was the Xinjiang government's top priority at that time. Cotton (1996, 1094–1096) traced the role of the Jilin government in the promotion of the concept of Tumen regional cooperation. Christoffersen (1996) focused on the role of the Heilongjiang government in promoting the Sino-Russian border regime, the Jilin government's activism in the Tumen development project, and the Liaoning government's commitment to the Sea of Japan Rim Project. D'Hooghe (1994, 302–314) documented how the Yunnan government initiated cooperation with Thailand, Myanmar, and Vietnam in the Mekong subregion.

Nevertheless, it was not until the 2010s that provincial governments' activism in regional cooperation garnered particular attention. Summers (2013) provided an in-depth analysis of the integration and cooperation of the Yunnan government with South Asia and Southeast Asia. He noted that before then-President Hu Jintao announced in 2009 that Yunnan would become a “bridgehead” (*qiaotoubao*) for opening China up to Southeast Asia and South Asia, this idea had been cultivated in Yunnan province for more than a decade. Summers traced the origins of the ideas and the policies adopted by the Yunnan government since the 1990s, including the reopening of the “Southwest Silk Road,” the “great international transit route,” and the “bridgehead” to South Asia and Southeast Asia. First, Summers argued that the Yunnan government's activism stemmed from its geographical proximity and historical ties to the region. Second, by repositioning itself as the bridgehead between China and South and Southeast Asia, the provincial government of

Yunnan hoped to resolve the fluctuating GDP growth, severe inflation, and problematic production—while also catching up with the economic development of the coastal provinces. For all these motivations, the Yunnan government’s activism in regional integration was seen in its active engagement with multiple regional institutions, including GMS, CAFTA, and the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar economic cooperation forum (BCIM). In order to strengthen ties with South Asian and Southeast Asian economies, the Yunnan government enhanced cross-border transport infrastructure and increased trade and investment. In his discussion, Summers also addressed how the activism of the Yunnan government in regional integration has been constrained by national belonging and state-to-state relations. For instance, the central government’s concern over the transborder challenges related to HIV/AIDS was identified one of the constraints. Additionally, border and territorial disputes with India hampered the achievements of the Yunnan-led BCIM.

Li (2014b) coined the term “local liberalism” to describe the activism of local governments in pushing for transnational collaboration and cooperation in the economic, social, cultural, and non-traditional security arenas. Li provided evidence of the important and positive roles played by the governments of Yunnan and Guangxi in cementing China–Southeast Asia cooperation and integration (M. Li 2014b) as well as the role of the Xinjiang government in China–Central Asia cooperation (M. Li 2016). His analyses show not only that the provincial governments of Yunnan, Guangxi and Xinjiang serve as policy implementers for the central government, but also how these provincial governments actively contribute to national initiatives. Li’s research echoes two points made by Summers. First, every initiative proposed by provincial governments falls within the parameters of national foreign policy. Second, he underscored that the Yunnan government’s

activism could be attributed to the belief that the province's internal economic development would heavily depend on its opening up to the neighboring region.

Later, both Li (2019a) and Summers (2021) addressed how the BRI was shaped by the governments of Guangxi and Yunnan, respectively. These two studies are a continuation of the two scholars' previous work. Li's study on the Guangxi government's role in the BRI indicated that the provincial government was "a policy propeller, implementer, booster, and, to some extent, competitor of the central government in the BRI and China–ASEAN relations in general" (M. Li 2019a, 274–275). This argument parallels He's (2019) analysis of the domestic politics of the BRI. In addition, both Summers and Li reiterated that, first and foremost, provincial governments were motivated by economic interest. Second, the central government's decision to open up the borderlands was necessary for local liberalism to occur. Moreover, prior to playing a significant role in promoting China–Southeast Asia cooperation, the two provincial governments must first ensure that their policy preferences and initiatives align with the central government's strategic goals.

Mierzejewski's (2021) research on provincial governments' responses to the BRI concurs with Li and Summers' findings. In addition to the pursuit of economic development, Mierzejewski's comparison of the governments of Heilongjiang and Yunnan revealed that central-local relations are the most important factor in determining provincial governments' involvement in regional cooperation. In his study, Mierzejewski analyzed why the governments of Heilongjiang and Yunnan took different actions in cross-border cooperation despite being designated "bridgeheads" in China's foreign policy and stimulated by the BRI. He argued that their differences stemmed from their varying degrees of autonomy granted by the central government, their different levels of dependence on the central government when cooperating with their

respective neighboring countries, and their different provincial historical pasts, which were associated with a sense of nationhood and ethnic identity.

3.2. Criticism

State-centric views are certainly not wrong. They all shed critical light on China's activism in regional cooperation and integration over the past few decades. Moreover, they complement one another and together provide a holistic overview of China's behaviors in Asian integration. However, the greatest flaw of these statist analyses is their assumption that China must be a unitary actor in the regional and international affairs. They completely disregard the increasing role of domestic actors, especially provincial governments, in China's foreign policymaking and policy implementation (Cheung and Tang 2001; Jones 2019; Lampton 1988; Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Lieberthal and Lampton 1992; Ye 2020, 2021; Y.N. Zheng 1994). More importantly, such views cannot account for China's provincial governments' direct participation in regional affairs and their increasing significance, as evidenced by existing studies such as Li's (2019b) study on the Guangxi government and Wong's (2018) study on the Hainan government in the South China Sea, as well as Mierzejewski's (2020, 2021), He's (2019) and Jones and Zeng's (2019) research on the role of provincial governments in the BRI.

Some efforts have been made to address the flaw of the statist analyses, as evidenced by scholars who take a subnational approach, but it is far from sufficient. Although a few scholars have acknowledged that some regional initiatives of the central government originate from provincial governments, fewer still pay attention to provincial governments per se and use them as their units of analysis. Summers, Li and Mierzejewski have offered one of the most seminal and up-to-date works on the activism of Chinese subnational governments in regional cooperation and

integration; however, the field remains largely unexplored. Not only is the number of studies extremely limited, but several important issues have also not been properly addressed.

First, previous studies have focused only on inland border provincial governments in western China (mostly Yunnan and Guangxi, with only one study focusing on Xinjiang and one on Heilongjiang), ignoring subnational governments in other borderlands. This limitation may mislead readers into assuming that no other border provincial governments participate in regional integration. However, according to Li (2019a, 280), it is a universal phenomenon for all inland border provincial governments in China to be active in pushing for regional cooperation and integration. Unfortunately, Li provided no further details.

Second, Mierzejewski, Li and Summers examined only the most active provincial governments, leaving the less active ones unexplored. Even among those most active provincial governments, neither scholar noted their different levels of activism. Although Li and Summers mentioned the governments of Yunnan and Guangxi in their analyses, they did not make comparisons. To demonstrate the validity of the analytical framework, Li (2014b) simply treated the Guangxi and Yunnan governments as two separate cases. Summers, who was primarily concerned with the Yunnan government (2013, 2021), mentioned the Guangxi government in order to show how the Yunnan government's role in regional integration was challenged by their counterparts in Guangxi—not to determine which provincial government was more active. The comparison made by Mierzejewski's (2021) between the governments of Heilongjiang and Yunnan is perhaps the most pioneer in this regard. However, instead of identifying which provincial government was more active, he focused on comparing different actions taken by the two provincial governments in cross-border cooperation and governance. In other words, the findings of these three scholars implied that the governments of Guangxi, Yunnan and

Heilongjiang were equally active. Even if this holds true for these three provincial governments, what about other Chinese inland provincial governments along the borders? Simply describing the activism of these provincial governments is not enough. In order to better decipher the “black box” of China, a comparative analysis of the activism generated by various Chinese inland border provincial governments is required.

Third, all three scholars were preoccupied with domestic political variables while omitting the constraints that discourage provincial governments’ activism, particularly those arising from international relations. Mierzejewski (2021) underscored that the horizontal competitions among provincial governments and central-local relations affected provincial governments’ participation. Li (2014b) stated that the central government set the parameters of the autonomy of provincial governments. Summers (2013) briefly mentioned that the central government’s focus on traditional and non-traditional border security concerns reduced the Yunnan government’s activism at the beginning of the 21st century. However, two questions remain: First, are these concerns specific to the Yunnan government, or are they shared by all Chinese inland border provincial governments? Second, since all of these provincial governments are encouraged by the central government to participate in regional cooperation, what accounts for their varying levels of participation?

3.3. Contributions

Regarding China’s cooperation and integration with Asia, most academics take a statist viewpoint. They provide us with a great many insights and explain the general reasoning behind China’s shift in regional strategy. However, if we assume that China is a unitary actor in regional affairs, we fail to appreciate the growing role of provincial governments and their contribution to China’s effort to cooperate and integrate with its Asian neighbors. Moreover, given that provincial governments

are the actual implementers—and even the shapers—of their country’s regional integration strategy, China’s role in the regional cooperation and integration process cannot be appropriately addressed without a subnational perspective. Several scholars have begun to address this limitation, but their efforts remain extremely limited. Therefore, by complementing the currently scarce subnational analyses, first, my research constitutes another important effort to highlight the increasing role of China’s provincial governments in China’s activism in regional cooperation and integration. Second, in addition to recognizing the importance of provincial governments in regional cooperation, I differentiate their levels of activism from less active to more active using a composite index. Third, the research investigates Chinese inland border provincial governments situated in various locations. More importantly, both the more and less active provincial governments in regional cooperation are analyzed. Fourth, I develop a generalizable analytical framework—Embedded Local Liberalism—to systematically study why provincial governments exhibit varying degrees of activism in regional cooperation.

4. Summary

In this chapter, three groups of relevant literature are reviewed and examined. The first encompasses theories on regional integration and cooperation, which are mainly distilled from Europe; the second is the study of paradiplomacy; and the third is China’s cooperation and integration with Asia. In all, my dissertation makes three contributions to these literature streams.

First, the important role of subnational governments in regional integration and international affairs in general is not limited to Europe. To study China’s cooperation and integration with Asia, the current research takes a subnational approach, which has rarely been

employed by previous research. Moreover, my study focuses on Chinese provincial governments situated in a variety of locations and facing distinct regions, thereby enriching the existing academic literature.

Second, my dissertation not only acknowledges the significance of subnational governments, but also goes one step further by creating a composite index to measure the different levels of subnational governments' activism in regional cooperation using fourteen indicators spanning political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects.

Third, to understand why there are variations between subnational governments within a single country, this research further conceptualizes the factors identified by scholars of paradiplomacy and constructs one of the very first generalizable analytical frameworks from the perspective of international relations. Unlike previous research that emphasizes on the role of domestic politics, this framework demonstrates that international politics also creates both opportunities and constraints for the participation of subnational governments in regional cooperation.

III. The Government of Guangxi

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (abbreviated as Guangxi), situated in southwestern China, is adjacent to Guangdong province in the east, the Beibu Gulf to the south, and Hainan province across the water. It also shares borders with Yunnan province in the west, Hunan province in the northeast, Guizhou province in the northwest, and four Vietnamese provinces in the southwest: Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lang Son, and Quang Ninh (see Map 3.1). As of 2020, Guangxi has a total area of 237,600 square kilometers and a population of approximately 50.13 million people (Guangxi government 2021b; Office of the Leading Group of the State Council for the Seventh National Population Census 2021). The provincial capital of Guangxi is Nanning, which is located in the province's southern part (see Map 3.2). Due to their strategic locations between China and Southeast Asia, Baise, Chongzuo, and Fangchenggang merit special consideration in relation to Vietnam and the whole Southeast Asian region (Asian Development Bank 2021) (see Map 3.2).

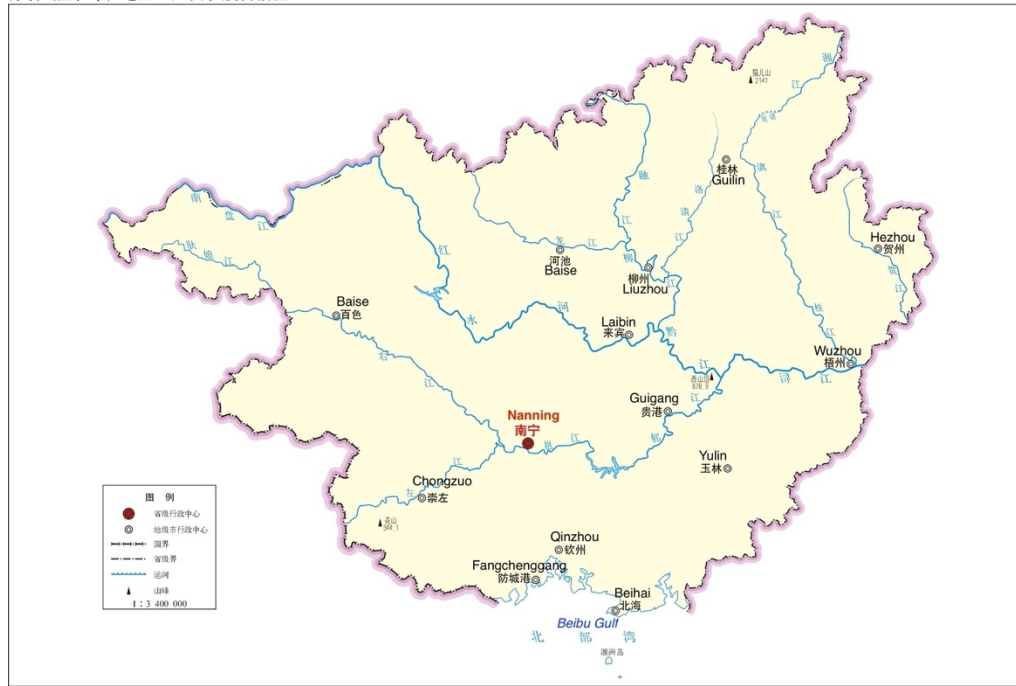


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Map 3.1 Guangxi's Geographic Location. Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (2019a, my translation).

分省(区、市)地图—广西壮族自治区



Map 3.2 Major Cities in Guangxi. Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (2019a, my translation).

Since the early 2000s, with the permission and encouragement of the central government, the Guangxi government²² has increased its efforts to develop its relationships with Southeast Asian countries. Throughout the past decades, national leaders have personally urged the Guangxi government to deepen its cooperation with ASEAN countries. In 2007, for instance, then-President Hu Jintao instructed Guangxi's leaders to increase their cooperation with ASEAN countries (S. Chen, Zhao, and Liao 2007). President Xi Jinping emphasized in a 2015 meeting with Guangxi's National People's Congress representatives that Guangxi is positioned to be an international corridor opening to the ASEAN region and a key gateway connecting the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (CRI Online 2018). These requirements for Guangxi

²² As stated in the research design, I make no distinction between the People's Government of Guangxi and the Guangxi Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China. Furthermore, I make no distinction between provincial and sub-provincial governments, such as city and county governments, nor between different provincial and sub-provincial departments. Instead, I view them all as components of the Guangxi government.

were emphasized again and incorporated into the *Vision and Actions*. Considering this background, using the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, in this chapter I will show how the Guangxi government was motivated between 2004 and 2019 to promote regional cooperation by provincial economic openness and its positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia.

The following chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the “motivator,” namely the effect that economic exchanges with Southeast Asia had on Guangxi's economic development. The second section analyzes how the Guangxi government perceived the geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia where China was situated and, more importantly, how this perception facilitated the effects of economic motivations. As a result of the “motivator” and “moderator” proposed by Embedded Local Liberalism, the third section describes the level of activism of the Guangxi government in regional cooperation. The concluding section provides a summary of all findings.

1. Motivator: Guangxi's Economic Openness to Southeast Asia

Since the mid-1980s, when the province was allowed to open up, exports have significantly boosted Guangxi's economic growth. Between 2004 and 2019, ten member states of ASEAN constituted Guangxi's largest trading partner, and the sum of Guangxi's exports to ten Southeast Asian countries (hereinafter “GX EN”) increased dramatically. GX EN increased from USD 6.36 million in 2004 to USD 203.37 million in 2019 at an average annual growth rate of 28.12% (see Figure 3.1). Vietnam and Malaysia were prioritized as cooperation partners by the Guangxi

government because they were the province’s two largest trading partners among the ten ASEAN nations (Hao Li, Wang, and Liu 2018; Y. Liang 2015).

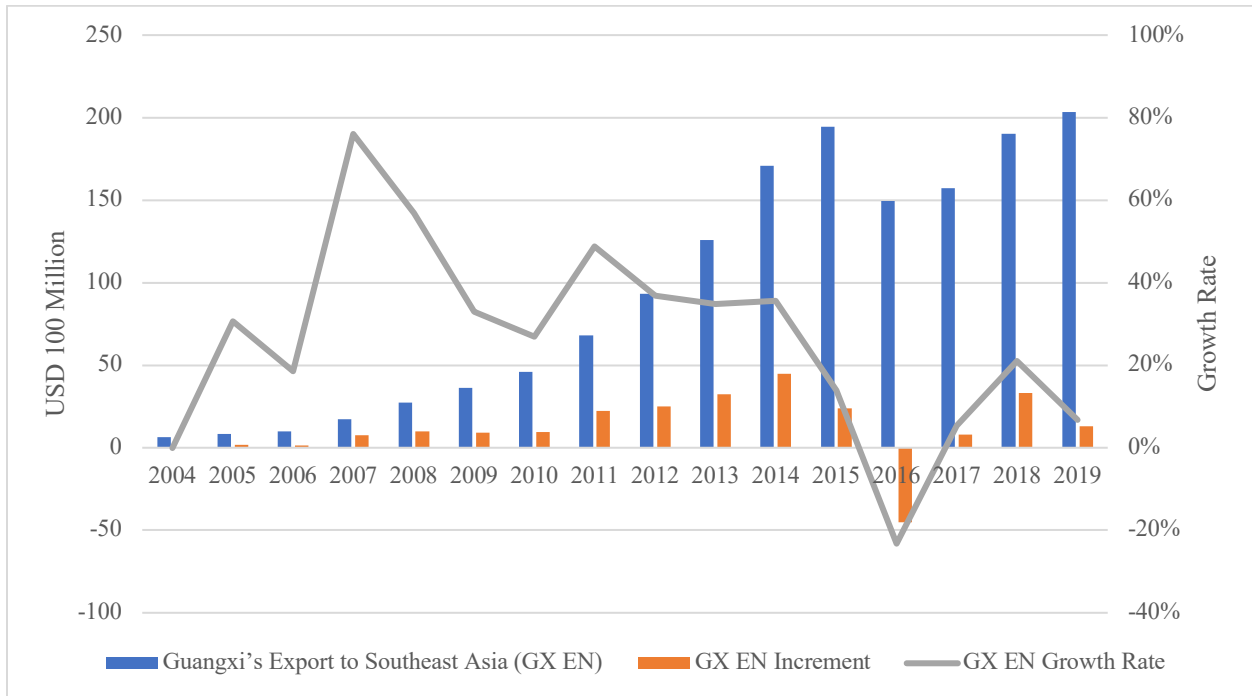


Figure 3.1 *Guangxi's Exports to Southeast Asia (GX EN): 2004–2019.*²³ Source: Author's compilation and calculations based on 2005–2020 Guangxi Statistics Yearbooks and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

Although scholars in Guangxi disagreed on the exact percentage of GDP that exports contributed, they did agree that there was a significant causal relationship between exports and GDP (B. Liu 2004; T. Xie 2009; W. Wang and Li 2016). Officials from the Guangxi Department of Commerce also acknowledged the significance of exports to Guangxi's economic development (Interview Nanning-211012 2021; Interview Nanning-211017 2021; Lai 2014). The importance of GX EN to Guangxi's economy—namely, the role of “motivator” in Embedded Local Liberalism—is further demonstrated by the province's rising exports to the region-to-GDP ratio

²³ See Appendix Table 21 in Appendix III for all raw data.

(hereinafter referred to as the “GX EN-to-GDP ratio”) (see Figure 3.2). The ratio of GX EN-to-GDP ratio was 6.61% in 2019, up from 1.59% in 2004.

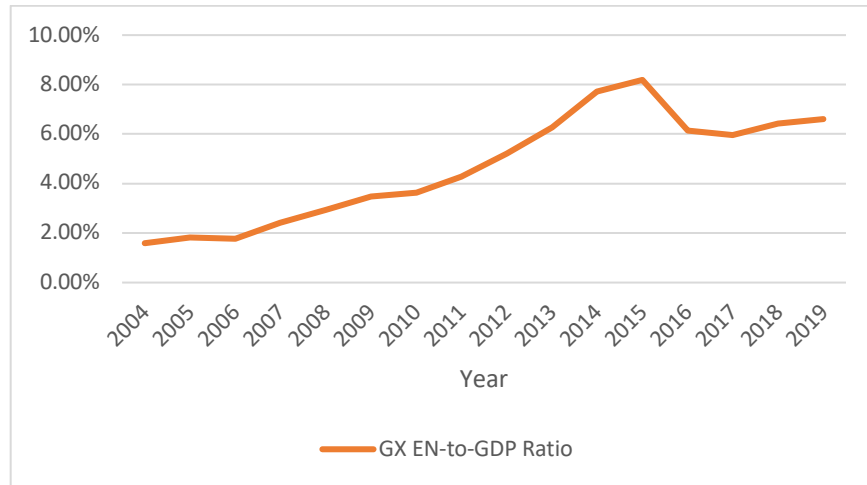


Figure 3.2 Guangxi's Exports to Southeast Asia-to-GDP Ratio (GX EN-to-GDP Ratio): 2004–2019. Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on 2005–2020 Guangxi Statistics Yearbooks and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

Moreover, the expansion of Guangxi’s exports to the ten ASEAN countries also significantly contributed to the province’s GDP growth. From 2004 to 2019, the average annual growth rate for GX EN exceeds 28%—nearly double the average annual growth rate of Guangxi’s GDP (14.89%) (see Figure 3.3 for a year-by-year comparison).

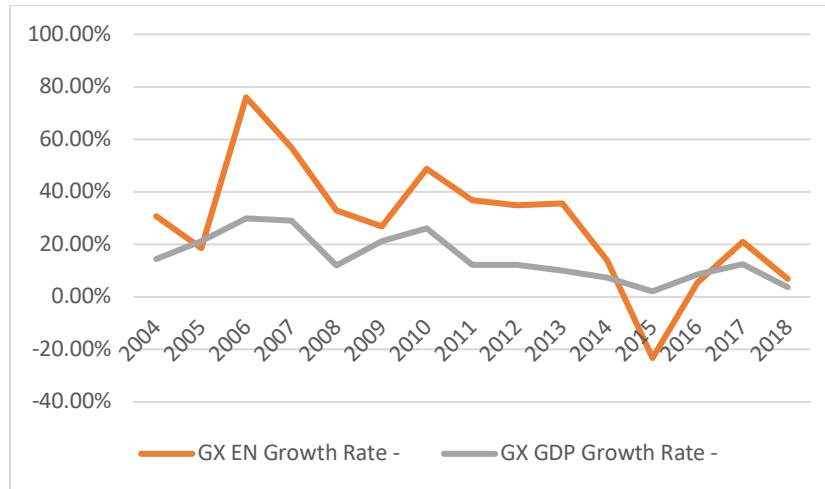


Figure 3.3 The Growth Rate of Guangxi’s Exports to Southeast Asia (GX EN) and the Growth Rate of Guangxi GDP: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on 2005–2020 Guangxi Statistics Yearbooks and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

As argued by Embedded Local Liberalism, Guangxi’s scholars and officials recognized the importance of economic exchanges with Southeast Asia to the province’s economy and proposed massive measures to expand cooperation with ASEAN countries in all aspects and to establish the province as a core area in China–ASEAN economic cooperation (Xihang Huang 2016b). In particular, among all the ASEAN states, Vietnam—as one of Guangxi’s largest export destinations—had been among the province’s most important regional cooperation partners (Jianzhong Zhang 2007). Similarly, an interviewee stated that the current level of exports to ASEAN reflected the province’s needs, while the increase in exports was the impetus for the Guangxi government’s participation in regional cooperation (Interview Nanning-211016 2021). Another interviewee confirmed that the Guangxi government acknowledged Southeast Asia’s importance to Guangxi’s economic development. Therefore, the Guangxi government hoped to continue utilizing and maximizing the role of Southeast Asia by strengthening regional cooperation (Interview Nanning-220210 2022).

2. Moderator: The Guangxi Government's Perception of China's Geopolitical Environment in Southeast Asia

As illustrated and discussed previously, the Guangxi government was well aware that economic exchanges with Southeast Asia were crucial to the province's economic development. However, the strong economic incentive was insufficient to determine the Guangxi government's activism in regional cooperation. From 2004 to 2019, the data demonstrates that the Guangxi government and its policy consultants had a favorable view of the geopolitical environment of Southeast Asia where China was situated. On the one hand, they recognized that China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia offered the Guangxi government numerous opportunities for regional cooperation. On the other hand, they believed that China's dominance in Southeast Asia regional affairs could assist and even accelerate regional cooperation. According to Embedded Local Liberalism, this perception at least facilitated—if not amplified—the impact of economic motivation on the Guangxi government's activism in regional cooperation.

Noting the signing and upgrade of the CAFTA in 2004 and 2014, respectively, and the central government's decision to include Guangxi in its geographic participation in the GMS in 2005, the Guangxi government believed that the China–ASEAN relationship had been positive and progressing steadily. As a result, not only did it have great opportunities to develop the province's economy through regional cooperation, but it also had a promising future.

In 2004, China and ASEAN members signed the Trade in Goods of the China–ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). Prior to the signing of the Regional Economic Cooperation Partnership (RCEP), this was the first and largest FTA negotiated by China with foreign countries.

Scholars and officials in Guangxi had long held the view that the provincial government should take advantages of these “historical opportunities (*lishixing jiyu*)” presented by the establishment of CAFTA in order to develop the provincial economy (Wu Chen et al. 2003). On the one hand, policy consultants believed the launch of CAFTA made it easier for the Guangxi government to advance cross-border economic cooperation with Vietnam and the development of free-trade port areas in Guangxi, with Southeast Asia as the primary target (Lv, Gu, and Liu 2009). On the other hand, they suggested that the CAFTA could significantly stimulate the development of Pan-Beibu Gulf Cooperation (PBGC), a comprehensive regional cooperation plan initiated by the Guangxi government. The convenience and access brought by the CAFTA to the Guangxi government and its cooperative partners in Southeast Asia would accelerate and expand the cooperation. In particular, the CAFTA provided reliable institutional support for the Guangxi government to propose more projects with countries sitting along the Beibu Gulf (also known as the Gulf of Tonkin), including Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Brunei (Z. Liang et al. 2006). Even further, it was emphasized that the PBGC could be developed only under the China–ASEAN strategic partnership and the CAFTA (X. Gu et al. 2007; X. Gu 2009). Therefore, “without doubt, the establishment of CAFTA will provide a powerful engine for sustainable development in trade, economic technology and investment cooperation between Guangxi and ASEAN” (R. Xie et al. 2004, 234, my translation).

The upgrade of CAFTA provided the Guangxi government with additional opportunities to engage in regional cooperation. Because an upgraded CAFTA would further liberalize trade and investment and deepen financial cooperation and exchange, it was believed that the Guangxi government should follow the trend and seize the opportunity to advance regional cooperation (F. Huang 2013). With this perception, the Guangxi government had been working to host more

branches of China–ASEAN institutions and institutions of the RCEP in Guangxi, as well as initiating more projects between China and ASEAN within the frameworks of the China–ASEAN connectivity master plan and GMS (F. Huang 2015). A similar argument was made by one of my interviewees, who added that the possibility of CAFTA 3.0 would be an additional impetus for the Guangxi government to play a more active role in regional cooperation (Interview Nanning-211126 2021).

In addition to the CAFTA, Guangxi’s intellectual and policymaking community viewed the inclusion of Guangxi in China’s geographical participation in the GMS as a great opportunity for the provincial government to conduct regional cooperation. The then-governor of Guangxi, Lu Bing, acknowledged during an interview that the GMS provided an important platform for his government to enhance cooperation with five ASEAN member states (Q. Yang 2005b). Moreover, by participating in the GMS, the Guangxi government could reach out to more Southeast Asian partners via land, going beyond the “Nanning-Hanoi-Haiphong” Economic Corridor (Du 2008).

In the opinions of the Guangxi government and its policy advisors, the CAFTA was more than an institution that offered numerous opportunities for regional cooperation. They also concurred that the successful establishment and continued development of the FTA demonstrated China’s rising influence in the region and that China held a dominant position in its interactions with Southeast Asian countries. Chen (2003) argued it was due to China’s growing attractiveness and the decline of the US and Japan in terms of economic development in the eyes of Southeast Asian countries. ASEAN countries realized that “cooperating with neighboring great power, namely China, is the only way to restructure their economies” (Wen Chen 2003, 7, my translation). Zhou (2002) suggested that China’s sacrifice during the Asian Financial Crisis made ASEAN countries realize that China was a “good neighbor and true friend”; during the Asian Financial

Crisis, China not only committed to not devalue the yuan, but also offered financial assistance to ASEAN countries. This led ASEAN countries to see China as a reliable cooperative partner (Z. Zhou 2002). In addition, some policy consultants called for the respect of ASEAN's interest in the implementation of the CAFTA, arguing that China, as a great power in the region, should shoulder the responsibility (Z. Fan 2004, 9). All of these views suggest that policymakers in Guangxi believed that China's influence in Southeast Asia was steadily rising, and that Southeast Asian countries acknowledged China's efforts to stabilize regional development. The perception that China's relative strength vis-à-vis and its increasing attractiveness towards Southeast Asian countries, together with China's willingness to sacrifice due to its responsibility as a great power in the region, led the Guangxi government to conclude that the geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia where China was situated not only offered a bright future for its regional cooperation projects, but also invited it to engage in regional cooperation.

Scholars and officials in Guangxi generally agreed that maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS) were one of the most significant factors influencing the cooperation between the Guangxi government and Southeast Asian countries (Ge 2015b; Jun Yang 2015a; Q. Gu and Lan 2017; Q. Yun 2018; Y. Liang and Huang 2010; Z. Huang 2016d). Nonetheless, policy consultants and decision-makers in Guangxi remained of the opinion that “these disputes were merely one of many issues in China–ASEAN relations, and that China–ASEAN relations had evolved in the direction of a comprehensive strategic partnership, which has shaped a good geopolitical environment” (Interview Nanning-220210 2022, my translation). Moreover, they concluded that “with the involvement of the great powers, China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia had become more complex objectively, but not more uncertain” (Interview Nanning-220210 2022, my translation). Three observations supported this viewpoint. First, scholars in Guangxi argued

that numerous institutions between China and ASEAN, such as the China–ASEAN summit, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), and ADMM Plus, provided platforms and channels for China and Southeast Asian countries to improve communication, manage disputes, and avoid conflicts (Ge 2015a, 2017). In addition to multilateral mechanisms, regular bilateral exchanges were crucial for stabilizing China’s relationship with Southeast Asian countries regarding the SCS. For instance, despite the challenges posed to the bilateral relationship between China and Vietnam during 2011–2014, the two countries were able to quickly defuse the tensions and resume a healthy and stable relationship because their national leaders maintained regular face-to-face contacts and exchanges (Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). Other than these regular and frequent meetings, many bilateral documents signed between China and Vietnam concerning the Beibu Gulf were not only essential for easing the tensions and stabilizing the overall geopolitical environment, but also provided the Guangxi government with legal basis for conducting regional cooperation (Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences 2005, 2011, 2014; Teng 2014; Wei and Chan 2009).

Second, scholars and government officials in Guangxi believed that the involvement of other countries, particularly the US, was primarily responsible for the complication and tension in the region regarding the SCS disputes. Before the Obama administration announced its “Rebalance to Asia” strategy in 2009, tensions between China and ASEAN countries over SCS disputes were relatively minor. However, after the US began implementing its pivot-to-Asia policy, SCS disputes became regional flashpoints, and Sino-Vietnamese and Sino-Philippine relations deteriorated because Vietnam and the Philippines wished to align and cooperate with the US to contain China on the disputes (Jun Yang 2015a; Q. Yun 2018). Nevertheless, even Vietnam, the “niubizi” (the

nose of an ox)²⁴ (Interview Nanning-220210 2022) with regard to the SCS disputes, had been able to maintain its relatively independent and neutral foreign policies, not taking sides with the US. On the one hand, China and the US did not directly confront each other in the SCS (Ge 2017). On the other hand, however, cooperation between Southeast Asian countries and the US/Japan on SCS was limited due to their divergent political ideologies and perceptions of each other's role in regional affairs (Ge 2016; Q. Gu and Zhang 2021). Consequently, the Guangxi government believed that the overall geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia where China was situated remained relatively stable. Moreover, as long as the regional environment remained stable, Southeast Asian countries would be eager to cooperate with China (Guangxi) in order to share in the benefits brought by China's rapid development (Jianzhong Zhang and Xiao 2019).

Third, scholars and government officials in Guangxi observed that China was capable of managing the SCS disputes in accordance with its desires. China responded swiftly to Vietnam's actions on the SCS. For instance, in response to the release of Vietnam's maritime law, China immediately established a prefecture-level city of Sansha on Yongxing Island/Woody Island, a manifestation of China's territorial claims in the SCS (Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences 2013). In addition, China's influence compelled Vietnam in 2017 to abandon a gas-drilling expedition in a disputed area of the SCS (X. Gu 2018). A similar perception was found in China's management of its disputes with the Philippines. Scholars in Guangxi argued that China was able to take a hard stance against the Philippines in regards to Scarborough Shoal/Huangyan Island; this demonstrated China's growing capability in protecting its own sovereignty (Jinglin Yang 2014). The Philippines was unable to compete with China in maritime disputes due to its comparatively weak military and lack of financial support (Jinglin Yang 2016). Some scholars were more explicit about China's

²⁴ This is a Chinese metaphor used to describe the key to certain issues or problems.

influence and strength in managing the SCS disputes and even regional affairs; they suggested that as China's navy was more powerful, it could be able to exert greater control over the SCS. More importantly, China's coercive power became a solid backing for solving the SCS disputes (Liao and Sun 2014). Nevertheless, instead of using military force, it was China's self-control and reaffirmation of peaceful development and non-military pledge that helped defuse tensions and stabilize the region (Liao and Li 2019). More importantly, China's successful maintenance of a stable geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia and its peaceful approach to managing and resolving disputes facilitated the Guangxi government's implementation of pragmatic initiatives in regional cooperation (M. Li 2019a, 289).

During the study period, the role of ASEAN, the regional institution, and its "ASEAN Way" also contributed to the Guangxi government's favorable perception of China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia. On the one hand, ASEAN as an organization—and its emphasis on building consensus and non-intervention—fostered a common identity and strengthened the integrity of Southeast Asian states (F. Jiang 2018). When some ASEAN members hesitated to cooperate with the Guangxi government, the Guangxi government could cooperate with other ASEAN member states first as ASEAN could change their minds and made them join the cooperation later (Interview Nanning-211126 2021). On the other hand, institutions and platforms where ASEAN was in the driver's seat, such as the ASEAN Summit and the China-ASEAN Summit, provided important channels and platforms for Southeast Asian states and China and even other great powers to build mutual trust and to avoid conflicts and frictions (Ge 2015a). In other words, with these bilateral and multilateral institutions built and promoted by the ASEAN, the Guangxi government believed that conflicts and frictions, including those arising from the South China Sea, could be prevented. Therefore, in the views of the Guangxi government, these

institutions provided regional cooperation projects with a stable geopolitical environment and a bright future.

Overall, the Guangxi government had a positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia from 2004 to 2019. As argued by Embedded Local Liberalism, this perceived environment not only provided tremendous opportunities for the provincial government to conduct regional cooperation, but also promised a bright future. First, the Guangxi government realized that China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia from 2004 to 2019 presented it with significant opportunities to conduct regional cooperation. On the one hand, opportunities were provided by institutions established between China and ASEAN, such as the CAFTA and GMS, as well as bilateral documents concerning the joint development of SCS signed between China and individual ASEAN member states, particularly Vietnam. On the other hand, China's non-military approach to resolving SCS disputes gave the Guangxi government opportunities to implement regional cooperation projects. Second, the Guangxi government believed its regional cooperation projects had a bright future because China dominated its interactions with Southeast Asian countries. According to Embedded Local Liberalism, when participating in regional cooperation, the Guangxi government used China as a point of reference. Moreover, the provincial government believed that China had successfully dominated maritime disputes in the SCS, leaving other SCS claimants little choice but to cooperate with China. In the views of scholars and officials in Guangxi, this dominance created a favorable geopolitical environment for the Guangxi government to be more active in responding to the central government's call for participation in regional cooperation.

3. The Guangxi Government's Activism in Regional Cooperation

According to one interviewee, “when perceiving that China’s geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia was more favorable, the Guangxi government was more willing to initiate and participate in regional cooperation because its proposals were more likely to be accepted by China’s central government and cooperation partners in Southeast Asia, and these proposals were more likely to be implemented” (Interview Nanning-211126 2021, my translation). Consequently, as another interviewee concluded, economic benefits received from exchanges with Southeast Asia and a perceived favorable geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia where China was situated “*xiangxiang erxing*” (work together in the same direction) (Interview Nanning-220210 2022). In other words, these two factors reinforced each other and had prompted the Guangxi government to become increasingly active in regional cooperation. This statement supports the primary hypothesis (H_p) and the first sub-hypothesis (H_{S1}) advanced by the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism (recall Chapter I, Section 5.4). The favorable perception of China’s geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia by the Guangxi government at least facilitated—if not amplified—the effects of provincial economic openness to the region and made the provincial government active in nearly all fourteen indicators of regional cooperation. In the following section, I describe all fourteen indicators for measuring and describing the Guangxi government’s activism in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019.

3.1. Political Indicators

3.1.1. Guangxi Leaders’ Visits to Southeast Asia

Guangxi’s leaders, including all governors and party secretaries, made a total of fifty-eight official visits to Southeast Asian countries between 2004 and 2019. With the exception of 2012, either the

governor or the party secretary (or both) made at least one trip to Southeast Asian states every year (see Figure 3.4). Vietnam was the most visited country among all the ten ASEAN member states, having been visited twelve times. During their visits, Guangxi’s leaders typically met with the national leaders of the host countries to discuss cooperation between Guangxi and the host countries. During a visit to Cambodia, for instance, then-governor of Guangxi Chen Wu met with Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Sen to discuss Guangxi–Cambodia cooperation (Press of Cambodia 2018).

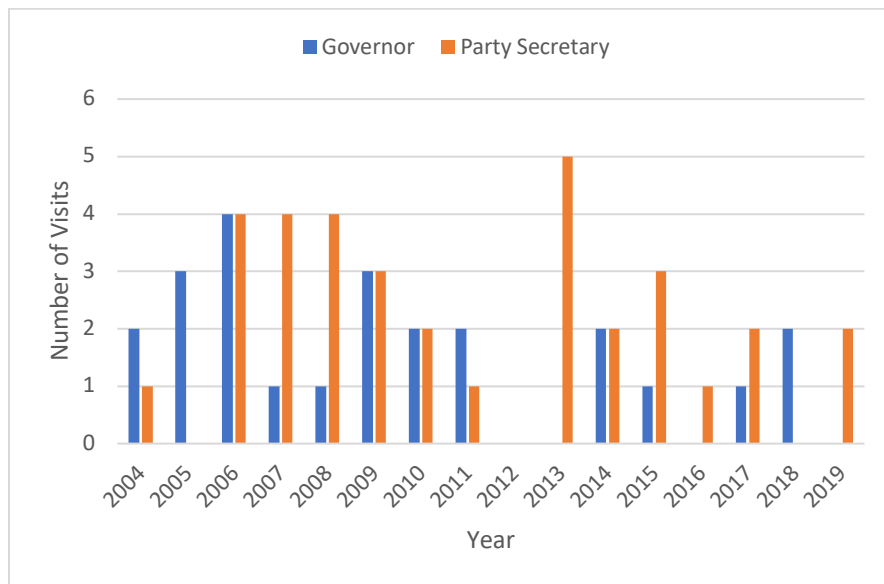


Figure 3.4 The Number of Guangxi Leaders’ Visits to Southeast Asia. Source: Author’s compilation from 2005–2020 Guangxi Yearbooks.

3.1.2. Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanisms (B/MDMs)

Two bilateral dialogue mechanisms existed between the governments of Guangxi and Southeast Asian countries. The first mechanism is the spring meeting between the Secretaries of the Provincial Party Committees of four Vietnamese border provinces and the Secretary of the Party Committee of Guangxi, China. In 2016, the first spring meeting was held. Peng Qinghua, then-

party secretary of the Guangxi government, and his Vietnamese neighbors reviewed and discussed the cooperation between Guangxi and the four Vietnamese provinces. Through this mechanism, party secretaries from Guangxi and four Vietnamese provinces met annually thereafter.

Established in 2007, the Joint Working Committee (JWC) between the Vietnamese provinces of Lang Son, Quang Ninh, Cao Bang, Ha Giang (Vietnam) and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (China) was the second bilateral dialogue mechanism in which the Guangxi government participated. Chen Wu, then-vice governor of Guangxi, led Guangxi's delegation to JWC's inaugural meeting in 2008. Through JWC, government officials from Guangxi and four provinces of Vietnam met annually from 2008 to 2019. At each annual meeting, a vice governor of the Guangxi government led the Guangxi delegation. In addition, multiple provincial departments heads were included in the delegation.

Guangxi placed special emphasis on cooperating with Vietnam not only because it borders Vietnam, but also because Vietnam was Guangxi's largest export destination from 2004 to 2019 and due to the perception that China–Vietnam relations were stable during the same period.

Furthermore, two multilateral dialogue mechanisms in which the Guangxi government played a key role are notable. The first was the China–ASEAN Business Investment Summit (CABIS). The second was the Pan-Beibu Gulf Economic Cooperation Forum (PBGEFCF). Although their titles would suggest an exclusive focus on economics and business, the purviews of CABIS and PBGEFCF extended far beyond that; they were also important platforms for Guangxi's leaders to meet with their Southeast Asian counterparts and enhance political trust and mutual understanding.

From 2004 to 2019, CABIS was held annually in Guangxi concurrently with the China–ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO), which will be described later. The CABIS Secretariat, the permanent

office of the CABIS Organizing Committee, was led by a bureau-level official who served as chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Guangxi Committee (CCPIT Guangxi Committee). The Secretariat was in charge of the overall planning, coordination, and execution of CABIS events (CABIS n.d.-b). Under the leadership of the Guangxi government, the CCPIT Guangxi Committee and the CABIS Secretariat made every effort to organize CABIS events. CABIS hosted at least four vice presidents/prime ministers/premiers from China and Southeast Asia annually between 2004 and 2019 (see Figure 3.5). Meanwhile, the number of events increased while the dialogues became more substantive. In 2004, only three major events were organized: the Opening Ceremony, the Senior Officials Forum, and the Business and Investment Leaders Forum. There were nine major events at the 16th CABIS in 2019, including multiple dialogues, such as Roundtable Dialogue between Head of Delegates of the Republic of Indonesia to the CABIS and CEOs from China, various forums, such as the China–ASEAN Business Leaders Forum, and a networking dinner (CABIS n.d.-a).

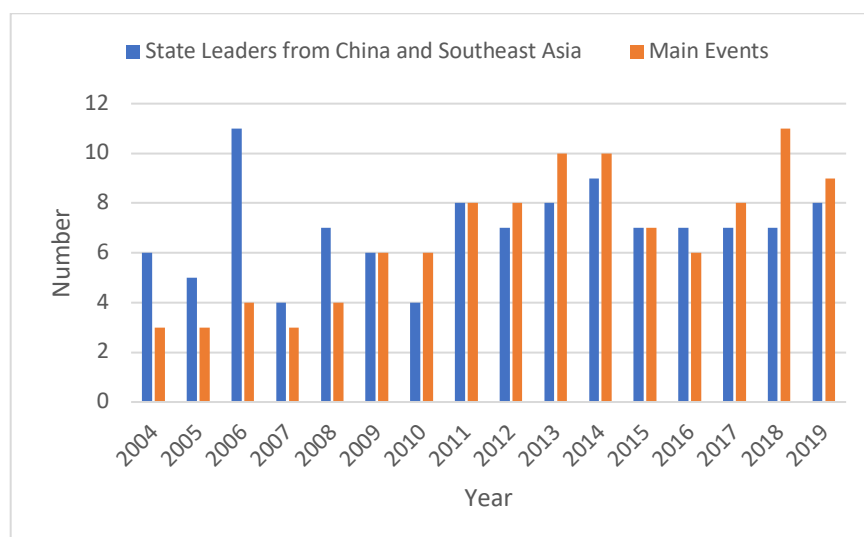


Figure 3.5 The Number of State Leaders Hosted and Main Events Held in CABIS: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s compilation from CABIS official website.

The first PBGECECF was held in Guangxi in 2006. From 2006 to 2012, it was held annually, but since 2014, it had been held every two years. This forum was conceived, financed, and organized by the Guangxi government. From 2006 to 2019, eleven Chinese national leaders, more than 150 Chinese ministerial-level officials, and more than 3500 officials from Southeast Asia and other regions participated in the event (Jian 2018). Each time, nearly all of Guangxi government's highest-ranking officials participated. For instance, at the 10th Forum in 2018, the then-party secretary of the Guangxi government, Lu Xinshe, gave welcome speeches and the then-governor, Chen Wu, delivered the keynote address. Vice party secretaries, vice governors, and the leaders of Guangxi's People's Congress and People's Political Consultative Conference were also in attendance (Yize Chen et al. 2018). The presence of so many high-ranking officials indicates that the Guangxi government assigned this event—and, by extension, regional cooperation—high priority.

3.1.3. Friendship Cities in Southeast Asia

As of the end of 2019, Guangxi had a total of fifty-five friendship cities in eight Southeast Asian countries. Vietnam hosted the most friendship cities of Guangxi, with eighteen (see Figure 3.6). With the exception of the friendship-city partnership between Nanning and Khon Kaen, Thailand, the other fifty-four friendship-city partnerships were established between 2004 and 2019.

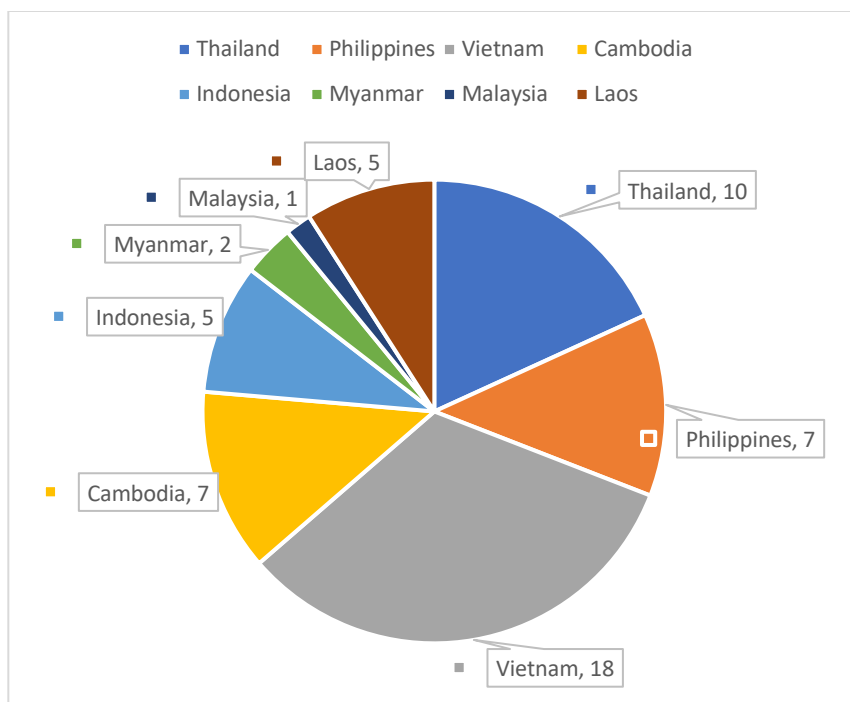


Figure 3.6 The Number of Guangxi's Friendship Cities in Southeast Asia. Source: Author's compilation from official website of Guangxi Foreign Affairs Office (2021).

Moreover, the Guangxi government did not view friendship-city relationship as mere lip service, but rather utilized the scheme to strengthen its comprehensive cooperation with Southeast Asian counterparts in practice. For instance, the leaders of friendship cities in Southeast Asia actively participated in the Pan-Beibu Gulf Regional Economic Cooperation Major Forum held in Beihai (Xian Huang 2009). The Guangxi government also invited mayors and representatives of friendship cities like Bandung, Indonesia, and Rayong, Thailand, to attend the China–ASEAN (Liuzhou) Automotive Industry Expo (Q. Luo 2015).

3.1.4. Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation

The *Guangxi Daily* (*Guangxi Ribao*) is the provincial government's official newspaper, operating under its direct supervision. During 2004–2019, there were 2131 articles in the *Guangxi Daily* that

matched the theme of regional cooperation in the CNKI online database of newspaper.²⁵ During the study period, an upward trend in media coverage of this official newspaper on the theme of regional cooperation was observed (see Figure 3.7).

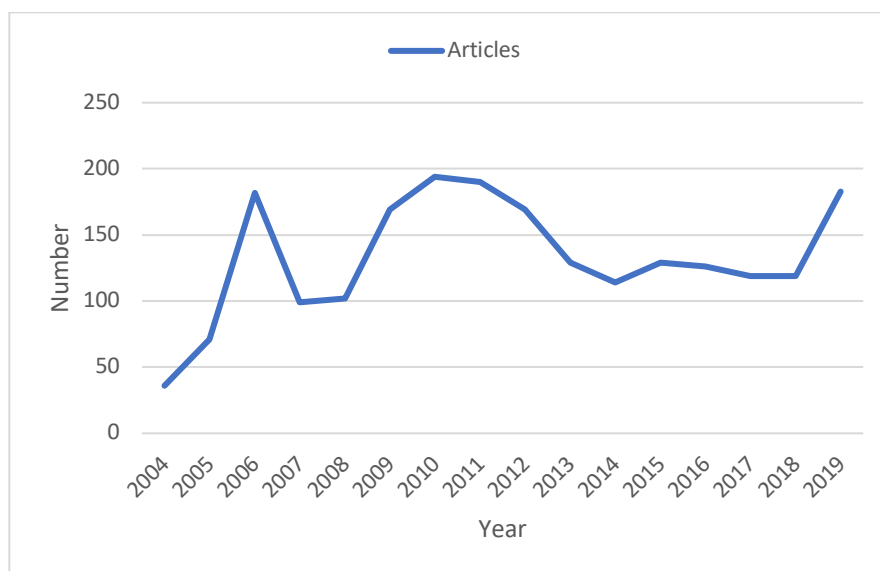


Figure 3.7 Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation in the Guangxi Daily: 2004–2019. Source: Reproduced by author based on visualization analysis provided by CNKI Database.

In addition to local official media, Guangxi leaders (governors and party secretaries) published six articles in the *People’s Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*) between 2004 and 2019 (see Table 3.1). All of them mentioned the Guangxi government’s cooperation with the ASEAN region. More importantly, two articles published in 2013 and 2019, respectively, were entirely devoted to the Guangxi government’s determination to promote and expand its cooperation with Southeast Asia.

²⁵ The search is done by typing in “dongnanya/dongmeng/weilai/laowo/yuenan/jianpuzhai/miandian/taiguo/xinjiapo/malaixiya/indunixiya/feilvbin” (Southeast Asia/ASEAN/Brunei/Laos/Vietnam/Cambodia/Myanmar/Thailand/Singapore/Malaysia/Indonesia/Philippines) by theme and “hezuo” (cooperation) by theme in the search box.

Table 3.1 Guangxi Leaders' Authored Articles in the People's Daily: 2004–2019

Article Title	Publication Date
Fifty years of great changes, carry on and open up a new chapter (<i>Cangsangjubian wushinian jiwangkailai puxinpian</i>)*	12/11/2008
Strive to build a pilot demonstration zone for China–ASEAN cooperation (<i>Quanli dazao zhongguo-dongmeng kaifanghezuo xianxingshifanqu</i>)*	02/27/2013
Ethnic unity is the lifeline of the people of all nationalities (<i>Minzutuanjie shi gezurenmin de shengmingxian</i>)*	09/29/2014
Focus on “spare efforts in four aspects” to achieve further economic and social development (<i>Zhuahao “sigexiagongfu” kaichuang jingjishehuifazhan xinjumian</i>)*	07/14/2017
Strive to further develop the magnificent Guangxi (<i>Nulikaichang zhuangmeiguangxi jianshe xinjumian</i>)*	08/05/2019
Strive to play a more important role in the BRI construction (<i>Nuli zai yidaiyilu jianshe zhong fahui gengda zuoyong</i>)*	09/19/2019

* Refers to the article mentions regional cooperation.

Source: Author's compilation and translation from CNKI online database.

3.2. Economic Indicators

3.2.1. China–ASEAN Expo

The China–ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) was one of the most extraordinary platforms for China–ASEAN cooperation and exchanges, as confirmed by the leaders of China and ASEAN. Since the first CAEXPO was successfully concluded in 2004, as of 2019, CAEXPO had been held annually in Nanning, the provincial capital of Guangxi, for a total of sixteen consecutive years. Although the Expo was co-sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, the respective ministries or departments of commerce, trade, and/or industry of the ten ASEAN member states and the ASEAN Secretariat, the Guangxi government was the de facto organizer for the event. In other words, the size, scope, and success/failure of the Expo were largely due to the efforts of the Guangxi government.

The Guangxi government established a two-tiered organizational structure in order to better prepare for and organize this annual event between China and ASEAN member states. This

structure consisted of the CAEXPO Guangxi Leadership Group (CAEXPO-GLG) (*zhongguo dongmeng bolanhui guangxi lingdaoxiaozu*) and the Guangxi International Expo Affairs Bureau (GIEAB) (*guangxi guojibolan shiwuju*).

The CAEXPO-GLG was responsible for directing and coordinating all Expo-related activities. Typically, the group leader was the governor of the Guangxi government while the six deputy positions were held by other prominent Guangxi government officials. In 2004, the then-governor of Guangxi, Lu Bing, led CAEXPO-GLG; its deputy team leaders included three vice party secretaries of the Guangxi government (Liu Qibao, Pan Qi, and Li Jiheng); one vice governor and vice party secretary of Guangxi at the time, Wang Wanbing; one vice governor of the Guangxi government at the time, Li Jinzao; and one secretary general of Guangxi government at the time, Che Rongfu (xinguiwang 2004). Moreover, sixteen provincial-level departments and the Nanning municipal government were the institutional members of CAEXPO-GLG due to the Guangxi government's "the-whole-of-autonomous region (*ju quanquzhili*)" approach to organizing the exhibition. This structure was institutionalized and, consequently, the CAEXPO-GLG members' rankings and titles in 2019 closely resembled those of 2004. In 2019, CAEXPO-GLG was directed by the then-governor of Guangxi, Chen Wu. In addition, there were nine deputies, including Sun Dawei (the then-vice party secretary of Guangxi), Qin Rupei (the then-vice party secretary and vice governor), and other vice provincial/ministerial-level officials in Guangxi at the time (Guangxi ribao 2019).

In addition to CAEXPO-GLG, GIEAB (or the CAEXPO Secretariat) was also established.²⁶ Li Jinzao, the then-vice governor of the Guangxi government and deputy team leader

²⁶ The brand of "CAEXPO Secretariat" is used for global outreach, whereas GIEAB is used for government bureaucratic setting (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2012). They are actually "two brands with the same team" (*liangkuaipaizi, yitaorenma*). Because we focus on how active Guangxi government is in promoting its cooperation with ASEAN, I use GIEAB for the rest of dissertation.

of CAEXPO-GLG, who was also a vice provincial/ministerial level official, led the GIEAB from 2004 until 2008. In other words, GIEAB did not have its own full-time director during this time. However, during 2008–2019, this concurrent post between vice governor/deputy team-leader and director was no longer applied. GIEAB was established as a department-level public-service unit directly supervised by the Guangxi government (*quzhi shiyedanwei*). It had its own full-time director, a bureau-level cadre (*zhengtingji ganbu*). Therefore, GIEAB held the same administrative rank as other Guangxi government departments, such as the Department of Education and the Department of Finance. GIEAB was responsible for the overall management, planning and execution of CAEXPO, including the organization of major events, the invitation and coordination of exhibitors and trade visitors, and the management of exhibition hall and booth leasing (CAEXPO n.d.).

Thus, the following indicators can further illustrate the efforts that the Guangxi government invested in the exhibition: 1) the number and scope of activities, 2) the number of exhibitors and trade visitors, 3) the number of exhibition pavilions and booths.

From 2004–2019, the number of booths set up in the exhibition halls nearly tripled, from 2506 to 7000 (see Figure 3.8). An increasing number of exhibitors, as well as professional visitors and traders, participated in the exhibition. The number of exhibitors increased from 1505 in 2004 to over 2800 in 2019 (see Figure 3.9) while the number of professional visitors and traders skyrocketed from 18000 in 2004 to 86000 in 2019 (see Figure 3.10).

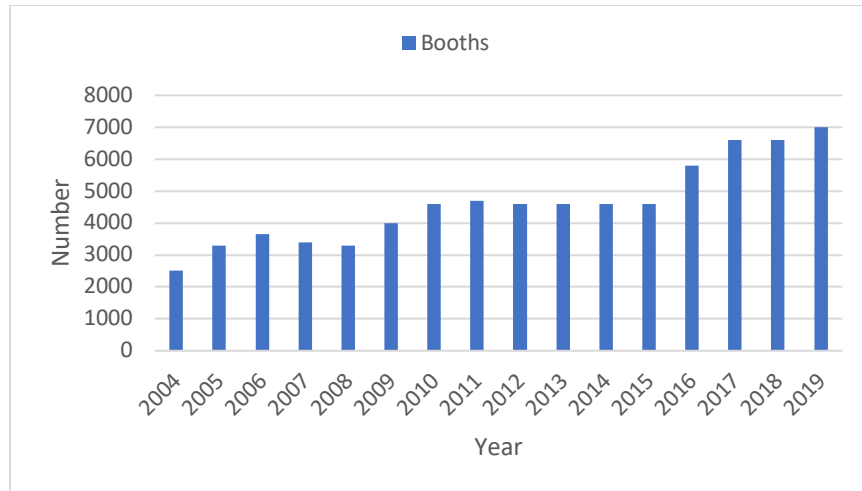


Figure 3.8 The Number of Booths in CAEXPO: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s compilation based on GIEAB official website (2020) and various news reports.

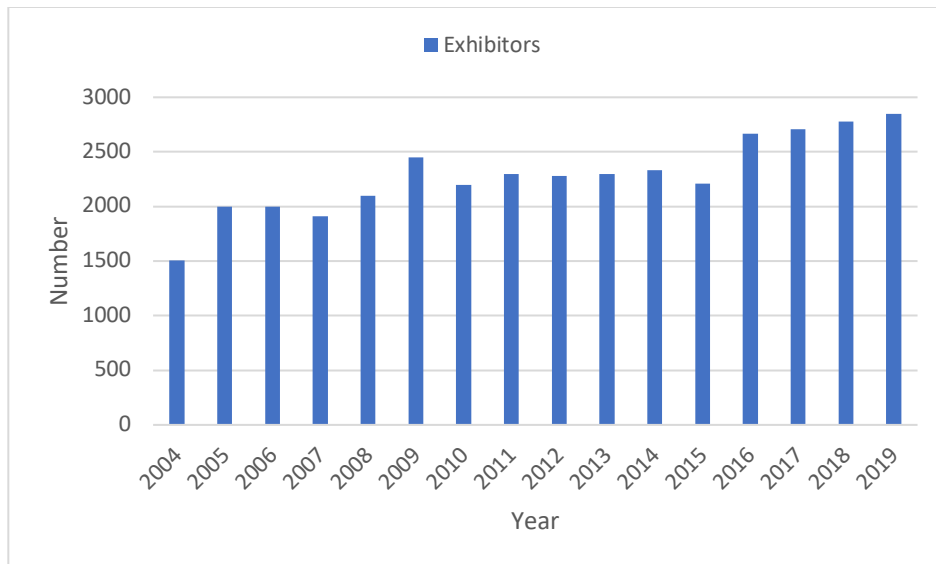


Figure 3.9 The Number of Exhibitors in CAEXPO: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s compilation based on GIEAB official website (2020) and various news reports.



Figure 3.10 The Number of Professional Visitors and Traders in CAEXPO: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s compilation based on GIEAB official website (2020) and various news reports.

GIEAB spared no effort in organizing a variety of activities at each Expo. From twenty-six in 2004 to ninety in 2019, the number of trade and investment promotion activities increased dramatically (see blue column in Figure 3.11). A number of high-level conferences and forums had been held as an integral part of CAEXPO since 2006 (see red column in Figure 3.11). In 2006, only six high-level forums and conferences were held, covering cooperation on entry–exit inspection, women, logistics, development of collectives, rural energy, and legal affairs of the China–ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA) (Song, Du, and Zheng 2008). In 2019, thirty-three high-level conferences and forums were held. More topics and areas were discussed, such as international production capacity, agriculture, finance, environment, tourism and think tank. Despite the exhibition’s economic focus, the Guangxi government annually organized a variety of culture activities. For instance, there were international tourism and food festivals, as well as golf and tennis competitions.

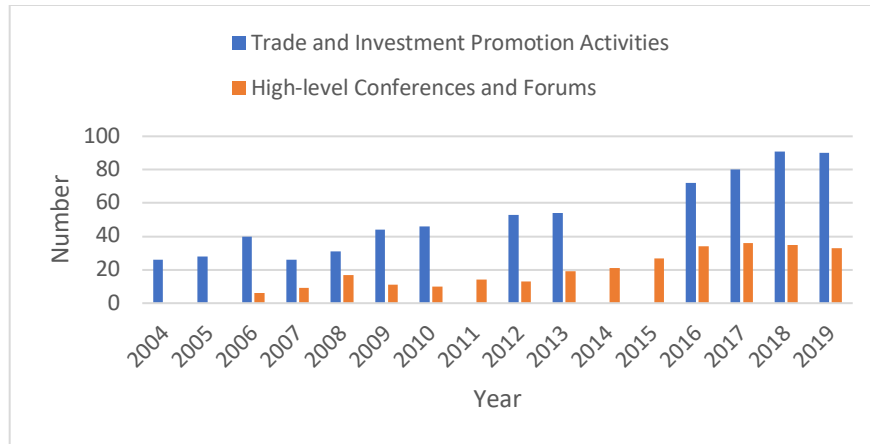


Figure 3.11 The Number of Activities held in CAEXPO: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s compilation based on multiple versions of China–ASEAN Yearbooks and various news reports. *Note:* 1) the data of trade and investment promotion activities in 2011, 2014 and 2015 are not found; 2) high-level conferences and forums began in 2006.

3.2.2. Development and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs)

The central government approved two Development and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs) in Guangxi from 2004 to 2019, first in Dongxing, followed by Pingxiang.

The Dongxing DOPZ is one of the State Council’s first three approved DOPZs. In 2012, the Guangxi government set up a working committee to “coordinate and push ahead the planning, construction, and management of Dongxing DOPZ” (Dongxing DOPZ Portal 2021). The committee was an agency of the Guangxi government. The directorship of the committee was held by the party secretary and mayor of Fangchenggang, a bureau-level official.

The Pingxiang DOPZ was established in 2016. Similarly to the Dongxing DOPZ, a management committee was formed to oversee the Pingxiang DOPZ’s “application, development and management, DOPZ’s developing plans, infrastructure construction and public goods provisions, coordination among different departments and institutions, projects assessments, investment promotion and industry upgrade, policy research” (Pingxiang Bureau of Finance 2020). The committee was governed by a vice-division-level official, the vice party secretary of the

Pingxiang government. This suggests that, of the two DOPZs, the Guangxi government placed a greater emphasis on Dongxing.

3.2.3. Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs)

Four Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs) were set up in Guangxi between 2004 and 2019, including Nanning Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Nanning CBZ), Beihai Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Beihai CBZ), Pingxiang Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Pingxiang CBZ), and Qinzhou Bonded Zone (Qinzhou BZ).

Pingxiang CBZ is the first SCCA in Guangxi and the first CBZ to be established along the national land border. At the early stage, the Guangxi government set up a Pingxiang CBZ Leading Group, which was led by the then-vice governor of the Guangxi government (Huangzhong Zhou 2010, 205). A management committee, which was an agency of the Guangxi government, was established to operate the zone. The director of the committee was a bureau-level official (Management Committee of Pingxiang CBZ 2018).

Guangxi's application to set up the Qinzhou BZ was approved by the State Council in 2008. The management committee of Qinzhou BZ, the governing body of the BZ, was led by the Qinzhou mayor, who was also a bureau-level official.

In 2015, the State Council approved the establishment of Nanning CBZ. A management committee was set up to manage and run the CBZ. It was responsible for implementing laws and policies from superiors, drafting and implementing CBZ developing plans, and coordinating among all the other institutions on CBZ-related matters. The committee was headed by a vice-bureau-level official (Nanning Municipal Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision 2021).

Beihai CBZ was officially launched in 2019. It was upgraded from the Beihai Export-Processing Zone with an area of 2.28 square kilometers. The management committee of Beihai CBZ was an agency of the Beihai government and led by a division-head-level official (Management Committee of Beihai CBZ n.d.).

3.2.4. Ports of Entry (POEs)²⁷

A Port of Entry (POE) Working Coordination Mechanism led by a vice governor of the Guangxi government was set up. However, only one meeting was held between 2004 and 2019 (Q. Lu 2017). In addition, a POE office was established to construct, develop, coordinate, and regulate POE-related works; its director was also the director of the Guangxi Department of Commerce, a bureau-head-level official.

As of 2019, twenty-two POEs in Guangxi had been permitted to open up. Four new road POEs were established between 2004 and 2019; the Pingmeng road port in Baise was approved in October 2011; the Aidian road port in Chongzuo was approved in January 2015; and the road ports of Dongzhong and Shuolong were both approved for operation in October 2017. Meanwhile, the Guangxi government was preparing for the expansion of several former Class II POEs, including Pingerguan road POE, Kejia road POE, and Yuexu road POE. In addition to gaining approval for additional POEs, the Guangxi government also obtained permission from the central government to expand the opening-up areas of existing POEs in Youyiguan, Dongxing, Shuikou, Beihaigang, and Wuzhougang. Moreover, in 2019, the Guangxi government released a three-year plan to develop border POEs from 2019 to 2020. The plan highlighted continuous improvement of POE infrastructures, digitalization of customs clearance, and regulatory system reform (Guangxi Provincial Local Chronicles Compilation and Revision Committee Office 2020).

²⁷ Information were obtained from multiple *China's Ports-of-Entry Yearbooks* from 2005-2020 which were published by China Customs Publishing House.

3.2.5. Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs) in Southeast Asia

Between 2004 and 2019, the Guangxi government established two industrial parks/zones in Southeast Asia. The first was the China–Indonesia Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (CIETCZ) in Indonesia. The second was the Malaysia–China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP) in Malaysia.

The construction of CIETCZ started in 2007. It is funded and overseen by the Guangxi State Farm Corporation, a large-scale state-owned enterprise directly managed by the Guangxi government (Guangxi government 2020). The zone is designed for the production of auto components, agricultural products processing, and construction material manufacturing. It is the first overseas economic and trade cooperation window park set up by the Guangxi government. USD 2 billion in total was eventually invested in this zone (G. Li 2013b).

MCKIP was officially launched in 2013. MCKIP Sdn. Bhd. (MCKIPSB) was formed as a joint venture between a Malaysian consortium (with 51% stake) and a Chinese consortium (with 49% stake) to construct and operate the park. The Chinese consortium's 49% stake was held by the state-owned conglomerate Guangxi Beibu Gulf International Port Group (GBGIPG) (95% equity interest) and Qinzhou Investment Company (QIC) (5% equity interest) (Tsang 2017). Both were managed by the Guangxi government. In addition to jointly building the park, the Guangxi government also encouraged enterprises, both state-owned and private, to set up more businesses in the park. Alliance Steel, for instance, is a state-owned joint-stock foreign investment enterprise in which GBGIPG and Guangxi Shenglong Metallurgical Co., Ltd. (GSM) had invested. Alliance Steel was expected to invest a total of USD 1.4 billion to build an integrated steel plant in the park (Alliance Steel n.d.).

3.2.6. Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs)

There were two national BECZs in Guangxi: Pingxiang BECZ and Dongxing BECZ. Both were set up in 1992. Since their establishment, the Guangxi government has established management committees to oversee the operation of BECZs. Both BECZ committees were division-level government agencies (Li Ma 2019b).

Despite not being authorized to establish any new national BECZs between 2004 and 2019, the Guangxi government conducted research on three potential sites for new BECZs, namely Jingxi, Fangcheng, and Longzhou. In 2015, both the Fangcheng BECZ and Longzhou BECZ proposals were submitted to the State Council for consideration (Fangchengqu 2017; Guangxi Commerce Department 2017). The Guangxi government approved the Jingxi BECZ plan in 2015, and the proposal was submitted to the central government by the end of 2018 (Baise Investment Promotion Bureau 2018).

3.2.7. Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs)

Three Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs) were planned by the Guangxi government and approved by China's central government. However, due to sovereignty concerns voiced by Vietnam's central government and military, none of the CBECZs were operated as planned (Interview Nanning-211012 2021). Nevertheless, the Guangxi government remained enthusiastic about the development of these CBECZs in terms of planning, policymaking, and convening implementation meetings (UNDP n.d.).

In 2007, the Guangxi government and Vietnam's border provincial governments agreed to set up three CBECZs: Pingxiang–Dong Dang CBECZ, Dongxing–Mong Cai CBECZ, and Longbang–Tra Linh CBECZ. The Guangxi government had already appointed institutions and personnel to develop the Chinese side of the planned zones by 2019. A management committee was formed for the Pingxiang–Dong Dang CBECZ; it was directed by a bureau-leadership-level

official (Lijun Zhang et al. 2019, 115). A headquarters was set up to lead the construction of Dongxing–Mong Cai CBECZ; its director was a vice-bureau-level official (Lijun Zhang et al. 2019, 69). A leading group responsible for the construction of Longbang–Tra Linh CBECZ was formed in 2011; its director was the then-mayor of Baise, a bureau-leadership-level official (Baise government 2011).

3.2.8. Guangxi Pilot Free Trade Zone (Guangxi PFTZ)

The Guangxi government started preparing for its PFTZ application in January 2019. A PFTZ application working leading group was formed, with the then-governor of the Guangxi government as the group leader. The State Council approved the Guangxi PFTZ on August 26, 2019. The zone is designed to become a leading free trade zone for China–ASEAN cooperation with high standards and quality (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2019b). Once approval was given, the Guangxi government established a three-tiered organization structure to develop the zone (see Figure 3.12). At the helm of the Guangxi PFTZ Working Leading Group (WLG) were the party secretary and governor of Guangxi. There were two commanders appointed to the Guangxi PFTZ construction headquarters, both of whom were vice-provincial leadership officials. The third tier of the structure was the PFTZ office. The director of the office was a bureau-leadership-level official. Since the establishment of this organization structure, each level of the organization has held regular meetings to discuss how best to perform their duties.

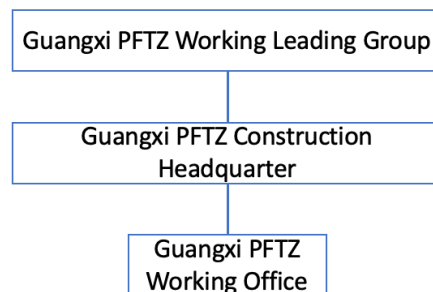


Figure 3.12 Organization Structure for Guangxi PFTZ. Source: Author’s reproduction from the official website of Guangxi PFTZ (n.d.).

3.3. Socio-Cultural Indicators

3.3.1. Scholarships Provided to International Students from Southeast Asia

In 2007, the Guangxi government began providing international students from Laos and Cambodia with scholarships to study at Guangxi’s institutions. Since 2010, the Guangxi government has extended the scholarship to students from all ten ASEAN member states. The scholarship is available to students who seek to enroll in undergraduate or graduate programs at general institutes of higher education in Guangxi (Guangxi Education Department 2010).

3.3.2. Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asia

With the Guangxi government’s support, three Guangxi universities—Guangxi Normal University, Guangxi University for Nationalities, and Guangxi University—established a total of seven Confucius Institutes in four Southeast Asian countries between 2004 and 2019 (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asia Built by Guangxi Institutions

Confucius Institutes at	Country	Partners in Guangxi	Date Established
Maharakham University	Thailand	Guangxi University for Nationalities	12/26/2006
Suan Dusit University	Thailand	Guangxi University	12/27/2006
Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	Guangxi Normal University	12/29/2006
National University of Laos	Laos	Guangxi University for Nationalities	3/24/2010
State University of Malang	Indonesia	Guangxi Normal University	3/14/2011
Tanjungpura University	Indonesia	Guangxi University for Nationalities	12/7/2011
Hanoi University	Vietnam	Guangxi Normal University	12/27/2014

Source: Author’s compilation from official websites of Confucius Institute and host institutions.

4. Summary

From 2004 to 2019, the Guangxi government demonstrated a high level of activism in cooperating with Southeast Asian countries. Its activism was described using fourteen indicators in the areas of politics, economics, and socio-culture. Guangxi provincial leaders maintained frequent exchanges with their Southeast Asian counterparts through foreign visits as well as institutionalized bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms. The Guangxi government also frequently promoted its cooperation with ASEAN states in official media, both local and national. In addition, the Guangxi government allocated substantial resources to the development of economic cooperation platforms. To better organize the CAEXPO, for example, the Guangxi government established a two-tiered institutional structure and a government agency with full-time personnel and professional expertise. Similarly, the Guangxi government allocated significant human resources to the development of SCCAs and PFTZs. Moreover, the Guangxi government actively promoted socio-cultural exchanges with its Southeast Asian neighbors. It granted scholarships to foreign students from Southeast Asia who wanted to study in Guangxi, and it encouraged universities in Guangxi to set up Confucius Institutes in Southeast Asia.

How should we interpret the Guangxi government's activism in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019? The findings and analyses presented in this chapter—based on data collected from interviews and through examinations of publications by major scholars and government officials in Guangxi—demonstrate that Embedded Local Liberalism, compared against previous approaches in the existing literature, offers a superior explanation for the activism of the Guangxi government. On the one hand, the Guangxi government was motivated by the economic benefits derived from economic exchanges with Southeast Asia—the “motivator” suggested by the

analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism. A great deal of Guangxi's economic growth was fueled by the province's exports to the ten ASEAN member states. Thus, by participating in regional cooperation, the Guangxi government hoped to secure greater economic performance. On the other hand, the Guangxi government conducted analyses and concluded that the geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia where China was situated was conducive to regional cooperation—the “moderator” proposed by Embedded Local Liberalism.

From the perspective of the Guangxi government, first, the institutions established between China and ASEAN as a group, and between China and ASEAN member states as individuals, presented significant opportunities for enhancing regional cooperation. Second, the Guangxi government's perception of China's dominance in the South China Sea and regional affairs, combined with China's non-military approach to SCS maritime disputes, bolstered the belief that it was easier for the provincial government to cooperate with Southeast Asia. Moreover, the environment held promise for the Guangxi government's regional cooperation projects. As a result, in addition to lending support to the primary hypothesis (H_p) provided by Embedded Local Liberalism, the case of the Guangxi government demonstrates the validity of the first Sub-Hypothesis (H_{S1}) (recall Chapter I, Section 5.4.). The effects of Guangxi's economic openness to Southeast Asia were facilitated—and even amplified—by the Guangxi government's positive perception that China enjoyed a favorable geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia.

IV. The Government of Xinjiang

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (abbreviated as Xinjiang) is located in northwest China's border area within the interior of the Eurasian continent. It has a land area of 1.66 million square kilometers, making it China's largest province by land area. Domestically, Xinjiang borders Gansu and Qinghai provinces to the southeast and Tibet to the south. Xinjiang also has the longest international land border of any Chinese province—5600 kilometers—which it shares with eight countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to the southwest; Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the west; Kazakhstan to the northwest; Russia to the north; and Mongolia to the northeast (see Map 4.1). In addition to these eight adjoining countries, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are historically, socially, and culturally close to Xinjiang. These ten countries constitute Xinjiang's neighboring region. Xinjiang is home to approximately 25.85 million people, 10.92 million of whom are Han and 14.93 million ethnic minorities (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2021). Urumqi, located in the heart of Xinjiang, is the provincial capital as well as the political, economic, and social center of the province (see Map 4.2). In addition, there are a number of major border cities in Xinjiang—these are, from north to south: Altay (bordering Russia, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan), Tacheng, Bole, and Yining (bordering Kazakhstan); Aksu (bordering Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan); Artush (bordering Kyrgyzstan); and Kashgar (bordering Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kyrgyzstan) (see Map 4.2).



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自然资源部 监制

Map 4.1 Xinjiang's Geographic Location. Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (2019b, my translation).



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自然资源部 监制

Map 4.2 Major Cities in Xinjiang. Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (2019b, my translation).

Since the time of the ancient Silk Road, Xinjiang has been a strategically important crossroads between the East and the West (Millward 2021; Vicziany 2019). Recognizing Xinjiang's strategic location and its advantages in cementing China's relationship with neighboring countries in the heart of Eurasia, China's central government has made clear its support and provided numerous incentives for its administrative subordinates in Xinjiang²⁸ to directly cooperate with its neighboring region. Former President Hu Jintao instructed Xinjiang officials to develop the autonomous region into a bridgehead and hub for the country's opening to

²⁸ As stated in the research design, I make no distinction between the People's Government of Xinjiang and the Xinjiang Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China. Furthermore, I make no distinction between provincial and sub-provincial governments (such as city and county governments) nor between different provincial and sub-provincial departments. Instead, I treat them all as components of the Xinjiang government.

the West (sina.com 2006). Later, at the Second Central Xinjiang Work Symposium held in 2014, national leaders also addressed the need for the Xinjiang government to capitalize on its advantages and commit to becoming a core area of the Silk Road Economic Belt (Xinhuanet 2014). Whether referred to as the “bridgehead of opening to the West” or the “core area,” the objective of China’s central government is to encourage and mobilize the Xinjiang government to cooperate with its neighboring region. In light of this context, this chapter explains—using the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism—the factors that motivated or constrained the Xinjiang government’s activism (or level of participation) in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019.

This chapter is divided into four sections. Section 1 describes Xinjiang’s economic openness to its neighboring region from 2004 to 2019 using primarily quantitative data, as well as how this economic openness inspired the Xinjiang government’s activism for regional cooperation. Section 2 focuses on how the Xinjiang government viewed the geopolitical environment for China in its neighboring region. In particular, using written materials and interviews, I analyze how the intellectual and policy-making community in Xinjiang interpreted, understood, and described China’s interactions with Russia, the US, and five central Asian countries. More importantly, using Embedded Local Liberalism, I demonstrate how this perception moderated the effects of economic openness and determined the Xinjiang government’s level of activism in regional cooperation. In Section 3, to show the Xinjiang government’s activism in regional cooperation during 2004–2019, I evaluate how the Xinjiang government behaved in all fourteen indicators. Section 4 provides a summary of all findings.

1. Motivator: Xinjiang’s Economic Openness to Its Neighboring Region

From 2004 to 2019, exports from Xinjiang to its neighboring region (hereinafter “XJ EN”) increased significantly, rising from USD 2.4 billion in 2004 to USD 14.7 billion in 2019 at an average annual growth rate of 18.12% (see Figure 4.1). Foreign trade was essential to Xinjiang’s economic development; relative to imports, Xinjiang’s total exports had a greater impact on GDP growth (Qianrun Wang 2011b; Yinshan Zhang 2005). Consequently, because its neighboring region was Xinjiang’s largest export destination, the intellectual and policy-making community of Xinjiang focused heavily on how to strengthen and facilitate Xinjiang’s exports to neighboring countries, particularly five Central Asian countries (Haiyan Wang 2005a; Jingbing Sun and Du 2016; Shuling He and Du 2019).

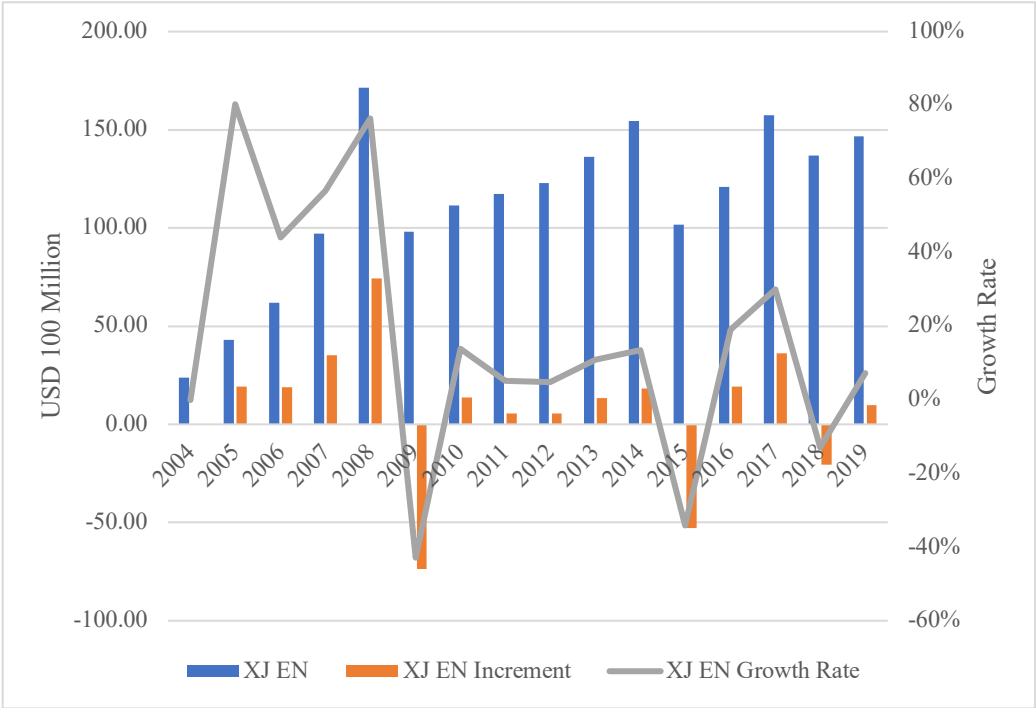


Figure 4.1 Xinjiang's Exports to Its Neighboring Region (XJ EN): 2004–2019.²⁹ Source: Author's compilation and calculation based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

Xinjiang's exports to the neighboring region-to-GDP ratio (hereinafter "XJ EN-to-GDP ratio") can be used to measure the contribution of XJ EN to Xinjiang's GDP. As shown in Figure 4.2, during 2004–2019, the XJ EN-to-GDP ratio peaked at 28.75% in 2008 and then declined, indicating that the contribution to provincial GDP of Xinjiang's exports to its neighboring region had decreased. In addition, as depicted in Figure 4.3, which compares the annual growth rate of XJ EN to that of the provincial GDP, XJ EN's contribution to Xinjiang's economic growth varied.



Figure 4.2 Xinjiang's Exports to Neighboring Region-to-GDP Ratio (XJ EN-to-GDP Ratio): 2004–2019. Source: Author's calculation and drawing based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

²⁹ See Appendix Table 22 in Appendix III for all raw data.

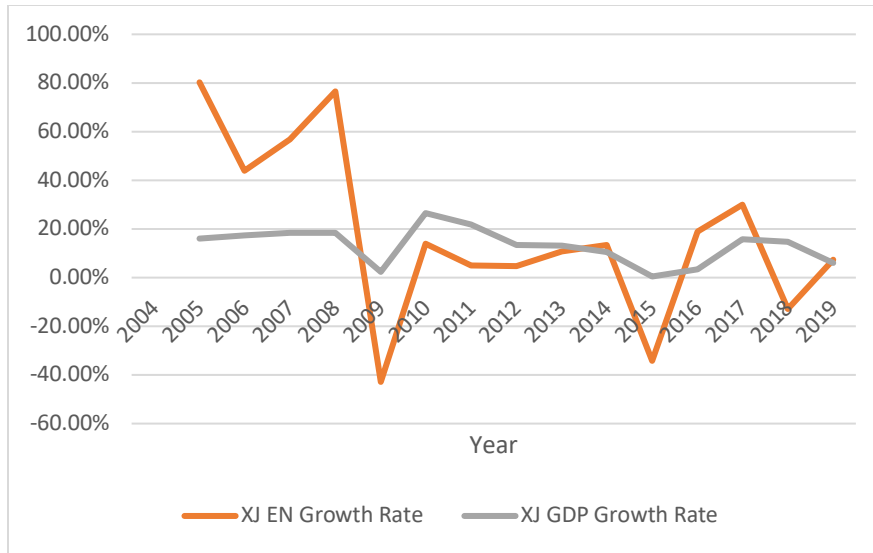


Figure 4.3 The Growth Rate of Xinjiang’s Exports to Neighboring Region (XJ EN) and the Growth Rate of Xinjiang GDP: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

Regardless of the strength of the positive correlation between XJ EN and Xinjiang’s GDP, the province’s long-term economic development was dependent on Xinjiang’s exports, especially exports to its neighboring region and exports in the border trade (G. Meng 2007; Jingbang Sun 2012; T. Huang 2016a). Therefore, as suggested by Embedded Local Liberalism, economic development was the most influential factor in motivating the Xinjiang government to engage in regional cooperation (G. Meng 2007; Interview Urumqi-220505 2022). Moreover, recognizing that Xinjiang’s exports to its neighboring region were crucial to the province’s economic development, policy consultants for the Xinjiang government concurred that it was necessary to take steps to bolster and expand these economic exchanges (Ge Liu, Sun, and Zhang 2014; S. Meng and Yu 2017). For instance, it was deemed necessary to develop bonded areas and ports of entry in Xinjiang, as well as to strengthen political and cultural cooperation with the governments of neighboring countries (H. Guo 2019; Xia Wang and Jiang 2019).

2. Moderator: The Xinjiang Government's Perception of China's Geopolitical Environment in Its Neighboring Region

Based on the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, this second section investigates how the Xinjiang government perceived China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region³⁰ from 2004 to 2019. According to the analysis that follows, the Xinjiang government concluded that China's geopolitical environment in the region was stable in general—but also that tensions and uncertainties were increasing, and that the environment was becoming more complex. In such an environment, Xinjiang's provincial government perceived opportunities as well as constraints.

Scholars and government officials from Xinjiang argued that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) significantly stabilized China's geopolitical environment in the region bordering Xinjiang. First, the “three forces,” namely extremism, separatism, and terrorism, rendered Xinjiang's neighboring region geopolitically unstable (Interview Urumqi-211217 2021; Interview Urumqi-220422 2022; Pan 2008). The establishment of the SCO indicated that China and Xinjiang's neighboring countries had not only agreed on these three common threats to their respective national security and regional stability, but had also committed to combatting these threats with joint actions through a strategic community with common interests (Fu 2016; Yanqi Chen 2004). Second, by initiating the SCO, China was able to institutionalize its cooperation with Central Asian countries (D. Chen 2008). Third, over years of development, cooperation under the SCO had expanded from border security to regional security and economic development; this

³⁰ Ten countries make up the region: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (recall Table 1.3).

marked the beginning of a new phase of cooperation between China and Central Asia countries (Gao 2005). Fourth, China and Russia are the two major countries supporting the SCO, and their cooperation in establishing and developing the organization demonstrated that they respected each other's strategic interests in Central Asia (D. Chen 2008). Importantly, cooperation among countries which were promoted by the SCO prevented not only geopolitical competition between both countries, but also disruptions of regional peace and stability by countries from outside of the region (X. Jiang 2007; Z. Li, Sun, and He 2014).

Therefore, Xinjiang's academics and government officials agreed that the SCO gave the provincial government opportunities for regional cooperation (Abulaiti 2011; Gao 2005; Honghui Zhu and Yu 2007; Ni and Li 2007; Yanqi Chen 2004). For instance, the SCO and Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) made it easier for the Xinjiang government to collaborate with Central Asian countries (D. Li and Hu 2011; Gao 2014; Y. Hu and Li 2010). Documents signed by SCO member states on enhancing regional economic cooperation provided the Xinjiang government with cooperation direction and political assurance when proposing cooperation projects with neighboring countries (Qingyan Liu, Gong, and Li 2008). The SCO's promotion of mutual trust provided a crucial basis for the Xinjiang government to establish free trade zones targeting neighboring countries (Xiaomin Zhu 2005a). It was argued by Xinjiang's scholars and officials that the SCO provided a solid political foundation as well as economic support for the Altay Regional Cooperation Mechanism (hereinafter referred to as "ARCM"), a subregional cooperation arrangement in which the Xinjiang government had participated, as countries participating in ARCM were either members or observers of the SCO (Project team of "Research on Altay Regional Cooperation of China–Russia–Kazakhstan–Mongolia" 2005).

Nevertheless, the Xinjiang government acknowledged that the SCO's lackluster development could hinder the expansion of its own cooperation with neighboring countries. First, the SCO was weak and failed to protect the security and stability of its member states and the region. For instance, Kyrgyzstan did not seek assistance from the SCO when ethnic riots occurred (J. Zhou 2014; Lan Shi and Ma 2010). Second, in recent years, "the geopolitical tensions caused by China and India's hardline stances on their border dispute had made Xinjiang's neighboring countries to feel the pressure of the great powers. The deadlock [between China and India] had caused these states to become more conservative and wary of SCO-led cooperation. Many things had become uncertain and ambiguous" (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022, my translation). Third, Xinjiang's intellectual and policy community suggested that the future of SCO might not be very bright due to China and Russia's divergent visions and understanding of the organization's roles in managing regional affairs. China actively promoted economic cooperation within the SCO, in addition to security cooperation, whereas Russia had consistently viewed the SCO as a security organization (W. Zhang and Duan 2013). Moreover, Russia's proposal for the "Eurasian Union" and the "Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan" undermined China's efforts to promote regional economic cooperation (Kuang 2012; Shujuan Wang and Li 2015; W. Zhang and Duan 2013). Due to Russia's alternative proposals, SCO member states were distracted and lacked motivation to develop the organization's institutions (Gao 2014). Consequently, the insufficiency of the SCO in protecting national and regional security, the lack of institutional development of the SCO, the geopolitical tensions resulting from the China-India border dispute, and Russia's alternative economic cooperation posed substantial obstacles and challenges to Xinjiang's ability to conduct regional cooperation (Gao 2014; Shujuan Wang and Li 2015; Z. Wang 2013b).

In addition to the SCO, the Xinjiang government realized that the “great game” between China, the US, and Russia had complicated China’s geopolitical environment in Xinjiang’s neighboring region, especially Central Asia. In comparison to Russia and the US, China was a passive participant in this “*boyi*” (game), as it had neither its own sphere of influence nor interest in regional leadership (Han 2013). Moreover, China lacked the influence to play a significant stabilizing role in the region in the events of riots or violence (Lan Shi and Ma 2010). Scholars and government officials of Xinjiang argued that the Xinjiang government’s regional cooperation prospects were bleak due to China’s relative lack of influence and its complex geopolitical environment in the region (Hongli Wang 2015, 2018a; Lan Shi and Ma 2012; Shujuan Wang and Li 2015; Y. Liu 2015). In the meantime, “the domestic instability within Central Asian countries was mainly resulted by the great game” (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022, my translation). The resulted “fanfanfufu” (back-and-forth) (Interview Urumqi-211217 2021) made the Xinjiang government hard to implement its regional cooperation projects.

During the study period, it was widely acknowledged that Russia remained economically and politically dominant in Xinjiang’s neighboring region (Interview Urumqi-211217 2021; Pan 2016; Z. Wang 2013a; Z. Wang and Shi 2013). More importantly, China respected the fact that Central Asia was within Russia’s sphere of influence and refrained from challenging Russia’s dominance in the region (Han 2013, 2014; Interview Urumqi-220505 2022). Although China and Russia strengthened their relations, allowing the Xinjiang government to conduct regional cooperation (Yongming Zhang and Tang 2008), this did not mean that Russia accepted China’s growing economic and political influence in Central Asia. The expansion of China’s influence in the region, including the Xinjiang government’s regional cooperation, was deemed to be fraught with challenges and difficulties (Han 2013; Z. Wang and Shi 2013).

In the meantime, Xinjiang's scholars argued that US military re-engagement in Central Asia since 2001 was the most significant political change in Xinjiang's neighboring region (Zhenghong Zhu 2005b). It was also one of the most important factors contributing to the deterioration of China's geopolitical environment in the region, as the US attempted to alienate China and Russia while drawing the region into its own sphere of influence (Pan 2003, 2015). First, the Xinjiang government's regional cooperation was directly challenged by US efforts to construct the New Silk Road (Shujuan Wang and Li 2015), an initiative proposed by the US in 2010s to integrate Afghanistan with Central Asia. Second, China's geopolitical environment in Xinjiang's neighboring region became more complicated as a result of US support for pro-Xinjiang-independence groups, which were mostly based abroad (F. Ma 2013a; Interview Urumqi-220422 2022; Keyimu 2012). As a result, the Xinjiang government faced additional challenges in regional cooperation, as it had to prevent the infiltration of these forces when opening up to and cooperating with neighboring countries. "[These two] needs be technically balanced ... a point of complexity" (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022, my translation). Third, even though US influence in Central Asia declined after the Obama administration announced its decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, countries in the region still viewed the US as an important balancer (Mamut 2006; Pan 2016). Moreover, the policies of SCO member states toward the US diverged; for example, Uzbekistan closed an American airbase while Kyrgyzstan allowed the US continue using its Manas Airbase. As a result, the US weakened the cohesion among SCO members, diminished the influence of SCO, and made it more difficult for the Xinjiang government to cooperate with these countries (K. Liu, Gong, and Liu 2011).

The Xinjiang government believed that China enjoyed friendly relationships with Central Asian countries because China had resolved border demarcation issues with Central Asian

countries, high-level officials from China and Central Asian countries met frequently, and bilateral/multilateral economic and political cooperation between China and Central Asia had continuously progressed (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022; Interview Urumqi-220505 2022; Lan Shi and Ma 2012; Pan 2008; W. Zhang and Duan 2013). Such a favorable evaluation bolstered the Xinjiang government's confidence in conducting regional cooperation (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022; Interview Urumqi-220505 2022). Nevertheless, Xinjiang's policy-makers and policy consultants acknowledged that, in Central Asia, the narratives of "China's threat," "over-reliance on China economically," and "cultural colonialism" persisted, causing Central Asian countries to be wary of cooperating with China and making it more difficult for the Xinjiang government to cooperate with those countries (Gao 2014; Interview Urumqi-220422 2022). For instance, the Xinjiang government, as well as universities based in Xinjiang, were unable to advance the construction of Confucius Institutes in Central Asian countries (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022). In the meantime, the engagement of other great powers increased the unpredictability of China's relations with Central Asian countries and dimmed the outlook for regional cooperation by the Xinjiang government. It was observed that Central Asian countries deliberately maintained a certain distance from China due to the influence of other great powers (Hongli Wang 2015). In particular, global strategic competitions between China and the US put significant pressure on countries in Central Asia and had the potential to negatively impact China's relationship with those countries (Han 2014; Interview Urumqi-220422 2022). Therefore, Central Asian countries neither actively communicated with China nor effectively coordinated policies and projects with China (Hongli Wang 2015).

In summary, the Xinjiang government had a mixed view of China's geopolitical environment in Xinjiang's neighboring region from 2004 to 2019. On the one hand, as

hypothesized by Embedded Local Liberalism, the Xinjiang government was encouraged to participate in regional cooperation by the perceived positive side of China's geopolitical environment in the neighboring region. The establishment and expansion of the SCO, the mutual trust and good relations between China and Central Asia, and the strengthening of China–Russia ties provided the Xinjiang government with numerous opportunities to engage in regional cooperation. On the other hand, the Xinjiang government was discouraged by the challenges and difficulties presented by the negative side of the perceived environment: the lackluster future of the SCO; China's relative lack of influence in the region; the “great game” between China, Russia, and the US; and China's concerns about infiltration by pro-Xinjiang-independence groups from abroad—all of these factors led the Xinjiang government to conclude that China's geopolitical environment was not favorable for regional cooperation. These increasing uncertainties and instabilities delivered a message to the Xinjiang government that it was difficult to implement regional cooperation projects.

3. The Xinjiang Government's Activism in Regional Cooperation

As one interview explicitly put, “regional cooperation can only be developed in a stable geopolitical environment” (Interview Urumqi-211217 2021, my translation). The Xinjiang government was unable—or at least reluctant—to conduct regional cooperation without a favorable geopolitical environment, despite the fact that increasing economic exchanges with neighboring countries through regional cooperation was crucial for Xinjiang's economic growth. In this section, I use fourteen indicators to illustrate the inconsistency of Xinjiang's participation in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019. For some indicators, such as the development of

Confucius Institutes and border economic cooperation zones, the Xinjiang government displayed great activism because it invested a significant amount of resources in creating and developing these platforms. However, the Xinjiang government paid little attention to other facets of regional cooperation. For instance, provincial leaders rarely visited countries in the neighboring region.

3.1. Political Indicators

3.1.1. Provincial Leaders’ Visits to the Neighboring Region

Neither the governor of Xinjiang nor the party secretary made frequent trips to neighboring countries between 2004 and 2019 (see Figure 4.4). The governor of Xinjiang traveled abroad only three times in total: once to Pakistan and twice to India. The party secretary of Xinjiang traveled to Pakistan and Kazakhstan in 2004, to Tajikistan in 2011 and 2015, and twice to Pakistan in 2016.

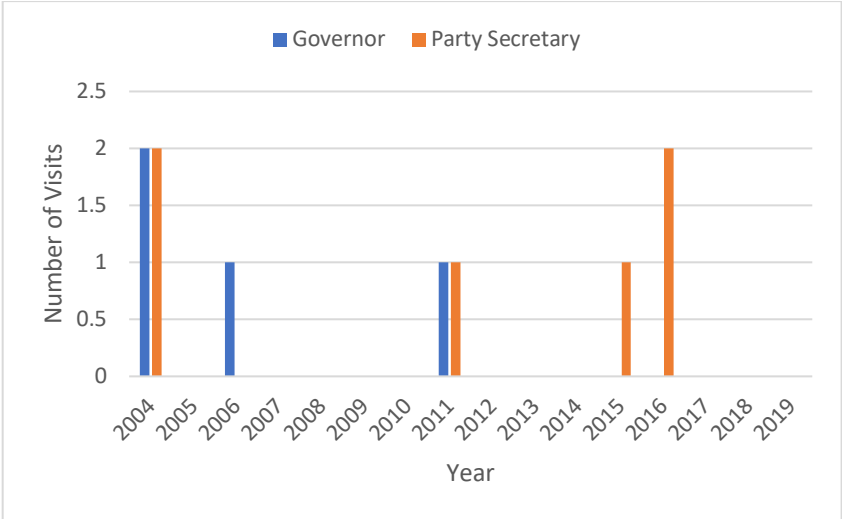


Figure 4.4 Xinjiang Leaders’ Visits to Neighboring Region. Source: Author’s compilation from Xinjiang Yearbooks during 2005–2018 and news reports.

3.1.2. Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanisms (B/MDMs)

The Xinjiang government maintained direct communication with its counterparts in neighboring countries mainly through three B/MDMs. First, under the economic and trade cooperation committee between China and Kyrgyzstan, the Xinjiang government formed an economic and trade cooperation working group with Kyrgyzstan; the group held its first meeting in 1998, although more frequent meetings did not commence until 2007.³¹ From 2007 to 2019, the governments of Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan held six annual meetings. The second B/MDM was the Xinjiang–Tajikistan working group for economic and trade cooperation, which was under the economic and trade cooperation committee between China and Tajikistan. In 2010, this group held its first meeting. As of 2019, there had been five meetings. Third, in 2000, the Xinjiang government initiated the Altay Regional Cooperation Mechanism (ARCM), which aimed to promote and advocate economic and technological cooperation between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. In 2003, an International Coordination Committee on Altay Regional Cooperation was established to further institutionalize this mechanism. As of 2019, the Committee had convened fifteen working meetings (X. Chen 2019, 25). Xinjiang delegations attending meetings of these three B/MDMs were typically led by a vice governor.

3.1.3. Friendship Cities in Neighboring Countries

As of 2018,³² the Xinjiang government had established thirty-three friendship-city partnerships with six neighboring countries. Kazakhstan hosted nine of the Xinjiang government’s friendship cities (see Figure 4.5). Twenty-eight of the thirty-three friendship-city relationships between the governments of Xinjiang and its neighboring region were established between 2004 and 2019.

³¹ The working group held its fifth meeting in 2007 (Xinjiang Enter-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau 2008). There is no record of the second, third, or fourth meetings in public sources.

³² A complete list of Xinjiang’s friendship-city partnership was most recently updated in 2018 (Hong 2019, 2020). By the end of 2018, the Xinjiang government had 44 international friendship cities. Data for 2019 is lacking. The Xinjiang government had established 47 friendship-city partnerships worldwide by June 2020 (Statistics Bureau of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region 2020), so the lack of data would not make a significant difference. (That is, no more than two such partnerships were formed in 2019.)

However, as of the end of 2019, only a few friendship-city partnerships had been followed up with additional communication and cooperation.³³

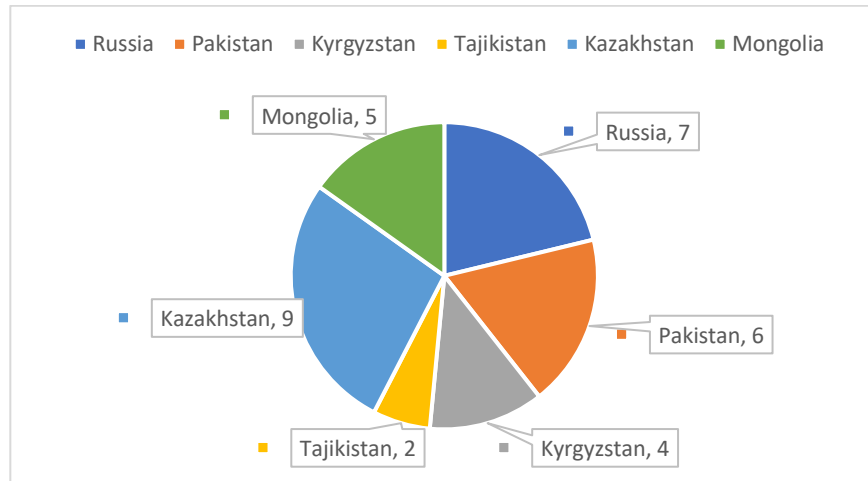


Figure 4.5 The Number of Xinjiang's Friendship Cities in Its Neighboring Region. Source: Author's compilation from *Xinjiang Yearbook 2018* (Xinjiang Provincial Local Chronicles Compilation and Revision Committee Office 2018) and *The Yearbook of China's Cities 2019* (Hong 2019).

3.1.4. Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation

In the *Xinjiang Daily* (*Xinjiang Ribao*), the official newspaper of the Xinjiang government, only 179 articles on regional cooperation were published between 2004 and 2019. The number of articles peaked between 2012 and 2017 (see Figure 4.6). Compared to other regional cooperation platforms/projects, the China–Eurasia Expo was mentioned the most in these articles, indicating that it was one of the most important ways for the Xinjiang government to participate in regional cooperation. In addition, Kazakhstan appeared frequently in these publications, indicating that it

³³ I searched provincial and sub-provincial official newspapers, such as the *Xinjiang Daily* and the *Urumqi Daily*, for any pertinent news. Nearly all of the follow-up visits and activities focused on just eight friendship-city partnerships: Urumqi–Osh, Urumqi–Bishkek, Urumqi–Peshawar, Karamay–Gwadar, Karamay–Iskitim, Kashgar–Osh, Changji–Khovd, and Altay–Ulgii.

was one of the most significant cooperation partners of the Xinjiang government. This is consistent with the fact that Kazakhstan was one of Xinjiang’s largest trading partners.

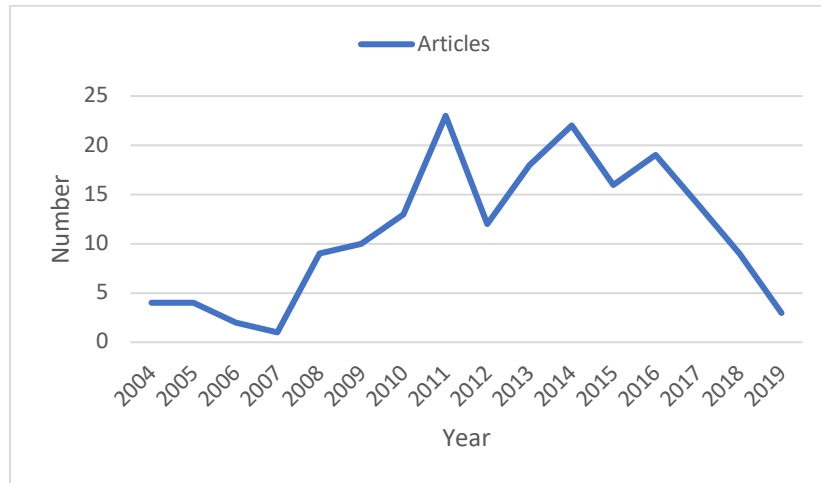


Figure 4.6 Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation in the Xinjiang Daily: 2004–2019. Source: Reproduced by the author based on visualization analysis provided by CNKI Database.

Xinjiang leaders authored five articles in the *People’s Daily* from 2004 to 2019 (see Table 4.1). Only one, titled “Strive to build a united, harmonious, prosperous, rich, civilized, progressive, and socialist Xinjiang where people can live and work in peace and happiness,” addressed regional cooperation. In the article, the then-party secretary of Xinjiang pledged that “Xinjiang will actively participate in the construction of the economic belt of the silk road ... give cooperation with Central Asia greater prominence, and promote pragmatic and comprehensive regional cooperation” (Chunxian Zhang 2014a, my translation).

Table 4.1 Xinjiang Leaders’ Authored Articles in the *People’s Daily*: 2004–2019

Article Title	Publication Date
Vow to make leap-forward development of talents in Xinjiang (<i>Chuixiang xinjiang kuayueshi fazhan rencai “jijiehao”</i>)	06/17/2009
Strive for leap-forward development and prolonged peace and stability (<i>Quanli tuijin xinjiang kuayueshi fazhan he changzhijiu</i>)	12/24/2009

Strive to build a united, harmonious, prosperous, rich, civilized, progressive and socialist Xinjiang for people to live and work in peace and contentment (<i>Fenli jianshe tuanjie hexie fanrong fuyu wenming jinbu anjuleye de shehuizhuyi xinjiang</i>)*	05/26/2014
Comprehensively promote the rule of law in Xinjiang (<i>Quanmian tuijin yifa zhijiang</i>)	01/07/2015
Implement Xinjiang strategy of Communist Party of China in the new era (<i>Tuidong xinshidai dang de zhijiangfanglue luodishenggen</i>)	08/16/2019

* Refers to the article mentions regional cooperation.

Source: Author’s compilation and translation from CNKI online database.

3.2. Economic Indicators

3.2.1. China–Eurasia Expo

In 2010, the Xinjiang government submitted a report to the central government in which the provincial government proposed upgrading the existing Urumqi Foreign Economics and Trade Affair to a China–Eurasia Expo (CEE) in an effort to expand cooperation with its neighbors and beyond (Lei Shi 2013, 13). The proposal was swiftly approved, and the first CEE was held the following year, in 2011. From 2011 to 2014, the CEE was held on an annual basis. Beginning from 2015, CEE was held biannually on even-numbered years, while its “sister expo,” the Eurasia Commodity and Trade Expo (EACT EXPO), was held on odd-numbered years. Six CEEs (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018) and two EACT EXPOs (2015, 2017) were held between 2011 and 2019.

As the de facto organizer of CEE, the Xinjiang government—similarly to what the Guangxi government did for CAEXPO—established a two-tiered institution to manage all exhibition-related matters prior to the inaugural CEE. This organizational structure had been preserved ever since. A CEE executive committee was established at the top, which was led by a vice-provincial-leadership-ranking official. For example, Hu Wei, the then-director of Xinjiang propaganda department, was the first director of the CEE executive committee (Z. Wu 2011). During 2013–

2016, Shi Dawei, the vice-governor of Xinjiang at the time, took over the position and presided over the committee (Xinjiang government 2016). Under the executive committee, the Xinjiang government set up the Xinjiang International Expo Administrative (XIEA) to manage the daily operations of both the CEE and EACT EXPO. Founded in 2010, XIEA, also known as the Secretariat of CEE,³⁴ was a department-level public-service unit directly subordinate to the Xinjiang government (*quzhi shiyedanwei*). Its director was a bureau-head-level official. Each of the six divisions within XIEA was equivalent to a county-level administrative agency. Therefore, XIEA, together with the CEE executive committee, was accountable for the overall planning, organization, and coordination of the CEE/EACT EXPO. In addition to the institutional setting, the number of booths organized, exhibitors attracted, and activities held in each CEE between 2011 and 2019 demonstrate the efforts made by the Xinjiang government to promote regional cooperation through the exhibitions.³⁵

In the first four CEEs, the number of booths was relatively stable, but in 2016, the number of booths nearly doubled (see Figure 4.7). A similar pattern can be observed in the number of exhibitors participating (see Figure 4.8). The year 2014 marks the peak in terms of the number of activities organized in the CEE, when approximately 130 events were held (see Figure 4.9). Thirteen conferences, including the Forum on China–Central Asia Technology Innovation

³⁴ The “Secretariat of CEE” brand is used for global outreach, whereas XIEA is used for government bureaucratic settings (Xinjiang government 2010). They are “two brands with the same team” (*liangkuaipaizi, yitaorenma*). Because the focus is on the extent to which the Xinjiang government promoted regional cooperation, I will refer to XIEA for the remainder of my dissertation.

³⁵ Information regarding EACT EXPO is extremely limited. It is possible to find only that 824 exhibitors participated in the first EACT EXPO in 2015 (sohu.com 2015); no such information is available for the second EACT EXPO in 2017. Similarly, 32 trade and investment promotion activities were held in the first EACT EXPO (sohu.com 2015), but no comparable information is available for the second EACT EXPO. Instead, the report states only that the number of forums held at the second EACT EXPO was double that of the first EACT EXPO (China Daily 2017). Due to the lack of data on the EACT EXPO and the fact that the EACT EXPO was held only twice, I focus on CEE—which has more data and a longer history—to show the efforts of the Xinjiang government to participate in regional cooperation through exhibitions.

Cooperation and the Seminar on the Development of Animal Husbandry in Shanghai Cooperation Organization, were held as part of these events. In the same year, nearly 120 trade and investment promotion activities were also organized.

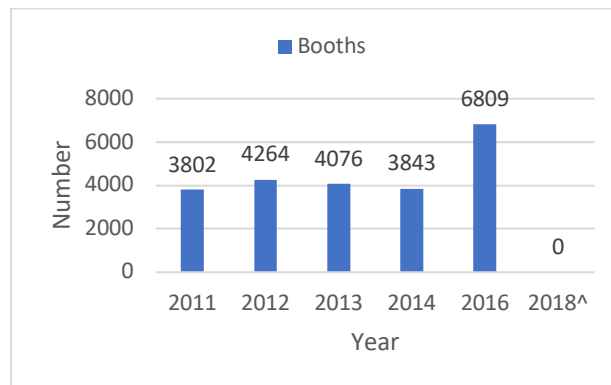


Figure 4.7 The Number of Booths in CEE: 2011–2018. Source: Author’s compilation from *Annual Report of China–Eurasia Expo 2016* (Xinjiang International Expo Administration and Xinjiang University of Economics and Finance 2018) and news report. Note: ^ The data for 2018 was not found.

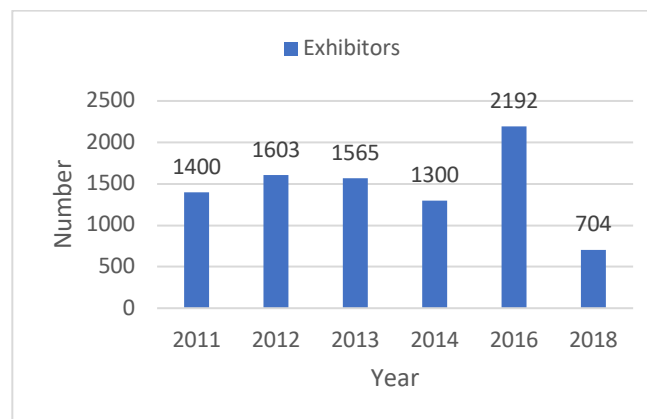


Figure 4.8 The Number of Exhibitors in CEE: 2011–2018. Source: Author’s compilation from *Annual Report of China–Eurasia Expo 2016* (Xinjiang International Expo Administration and Xinjiang University of Economics and Finance 2018) and news report.

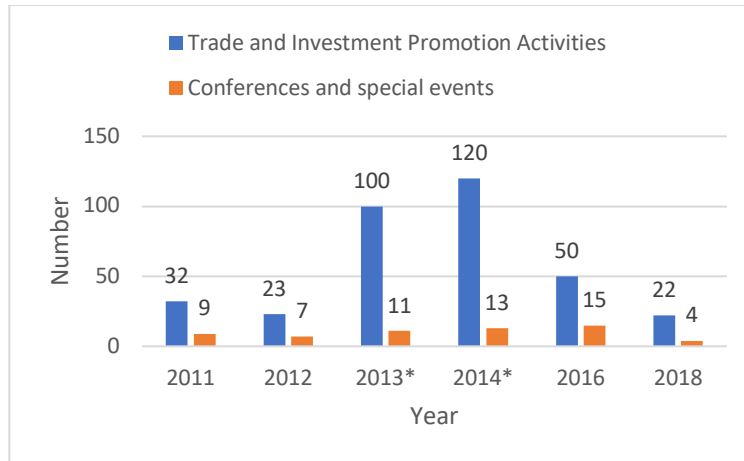


Figure 4.9 The Number of Activities Held in CEE: 2011–2018. Source: Author’s compilation from *Annual Report of China–Eurasia Expo 2016* (Xinjiang International Expo Administration and Xinjiang University of Economics and Finance 2018) and various news reports. *Note:* * The number of trade and investment promotion activities is a rough estimate. It was about 100 in 2013, and it was near 120 in 2014.

3.2.2. Development and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs)

In 2017, the Xinjiang government informed the central government of its intent to construct a Tacheng Development and Opening Pilot Zone (DOPZ) in Xinjiang (Tacheng prefecture government 2017). In 2018, the Xinjiang government established a leading group to expedite the application; the group was led by a bureau-head-level official. Under the leadership of the leading group, the provincial government set up an office to handle day-to-day application tasks; the office was led by a vice-bureau-head-level official. The office drafted seven special reports to support the DOPZ application, and the central government approved the feasibility research report and implementation plan after numerous consultations and revisions. Additionally, the office organized meetings between business sectors and relevant government agencies to discuss the application. Based on these discussions, the office drafted numerous supporting documents for the application, including reports on the Development and Opening-up Path for Tacheng DOPZ. Furthermore, it assisted in coordinating a study trip conducted by a working group from the

National Development and Reform Commission (Tacheng prefecture government 2018). Overall, although the Xinjiang government was not granted permission to construct the Tacheng DOPZ between 2004 and 2019, it expended considerable effort in this endeavor, and the central government approved the Xinjiang government's application at the end of 2020.

3.2.3. Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs)

From 2004 to 2019, the Xinjiang government set up three Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs). In 2011, the Alashankou Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Alashankou CBZ) was established as the first of its kind. Kashgar Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Kashgar CBZ) and Urumqi Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Urumqi CBZ) were established in 2014 and 2015, respectively. The Xinjiang government set up a management committee for each of these CBZs. The committees of Alashankou CBZ and Kashgar CBZ were both led by county-leadership-level officials. The Xinjiang government appointed a vice-bureau-head-level official to lead the Urumqi CBZ management committee, indicating that this CBZ was more important to the Xinjiang government than the other CBZs.

In addition to these three CBZs, the Xinjiang government was working on a fourth one by transforming the existing Chinese side of the China–Kazakhstan Horgos International Border Cooperation Center into the Horgos CBZ. The Horgos CBZ was approved by the central government in 2020 due to the Xinjiang government's efforts (Weiwei Chen 2020).

3.2.4. Ports of Entry (POEs)

The Xinjiang government set up an office to oversee all ports of entry (POEs) in the province. The office was directed by a vice-bureau-head-level official. There were nineteen POEs in Xinjiang as of 2019, two of which were newly established between 2004 and 2019. The first was the road port of Kalasu, which was permitted to open in 2004, and the second was the railway port of Horgos,

which began operations in 2014. Meanwhile, the Xinjiang government also drafted a plan to create an economy belt connecting all POEs. It dispatched a research team to conduct fieldwork at various POEs, but the plan had not been released as of the end of 2019 (Bortala government 2018).

3.2.5. Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs) in Neighboring Countries

In the period between 2004 and 2019, the Xinjiang government invested in two foreign industrial parks in its neighboring region. In 2014, Xinjiang government-owned Xinjiang Zhongtai Xinjian New Silk Road Agriculture Investment Co., Ltd. decided to establish a Zhongtai New Silk Road Agriculture and Textile Industrial Park in Tajikistan, with support from the Tajikistani government. The total planned investment for this park was RMB 3 billion, of which the Xinjiang government-owned company would invest RMB 2.5 billion (COCZ 2021). In addition, the Xinjiang government assisted in the establishment of the China–Tajikistan Industries Zone, which was funded by Tacheng International Resources Co., Ltd., a Xinjiang-based company. The Xinjiang government promised to promote and facilitate the zone’s construction (chyxx.com 2017; Qiao 2015). This zone would receive an investment of USD 500 million (New Silk Road 2015).

3.2.6. Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs)

Between 2004 and 2019, there were four BECZs operating in Xinjiang. The management committee of Yining BECZ was a division-level agency, whereas the management committees of Bole BECZ and Tacheng BECZ were led by vice-division-head-level officials. The fourth BECZ, Jeminay BECZ, was granted approval for establishment in 2011. Its management committee was led by a division-head-level official.

3.2.7. Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs)

The first and only Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zone (CBECZ) in China is located in Xinjiang. China and Kazakhstan agreed in 2006 to set up the China–Kazakhstan Horgos

International Border Cooperation Center (hereinafter “the Center”). It encompasses an area of 5.28 square kilometers, which is divided between China and Kazakhstan. People, goods, and vehicles from all countries with valid passports or exit and entry permits are permitted to move freely between the Chinese and Kazakhstan sides of the Center.

According to the agreement between China and Kazakhstan, the Xinjiang government was responsible for running the Chinese side of the Center (Lijun Zhang et al. 2019). The Xinjiang government established a leading group to oversee the construction of the center at the beginning; the group was led by a provincial/ministerial-level official (*China Daily* 2011). Although the Center had been operational since 2012, the Xinjiang government did not establish a management office to oversee its overall daily operation, management, coordination, and development until 2017. In addition, the office was directed by a mere section-chief-level official (*zhengkeji*)³⁶ (Horgos government 2021). The late arrival of the management office, as well as the relatively low administrative ranking of its director, indicates that during the study period, the Xinjiang government paid little attention to the development of the Horgos Center.

3.2.8. Pilot Free Trade Zone (PFTZ)

As of the end of 2019, no Pilot Free Trade Zones (PFTZs) were permitted to be established in Xinjiang. This does not mean, however, that the Xinjiang government had no interest in establishing a PFTZ. Indeed, the Xinjiang government had finalized its PFTZ plan and submitted an application to the central government for approval as early as 2016 (Tong 2016).

3.3. Socio-Cultural Indicators

3.3.1. Scholarships Provided to International Students from the Neighboring Region

³⁶ The section-chief level is one level below vice-county leadership/division-head level.

The Xinjiang government offered scholarships to international students from its neighboring region to attend tertiary institutions in Xinjiang. However, the limited information on the scholarship as well as the annual budget plans disclosed by various universities in Xinjiang suggested that the scholarship was modest in size. Students from Xinjiang’s neighboring region currently enrolled in half-year and one-year non-degree programs at Xinjiang’s universities were eligible to apply (Xinjiang Arts University 2017).³⁷

3.3.2. Confucius Institutes in the Neighboring Region

The establishment of the first two Confucius Institutes in partnership with Xinjiang universities in 2008 marked the beginning of the Xinjiang government's efforts to establish Confucius Institutes in neighboring countries. By the end of 2019, all ten Confucius Institutes set up by Xinjiang’s institutions were located in Xinjiang’s neighboring region. These institutes were dispersed among five neighboring countries; four of the ten Confucius Institutes were located in Kyrgyzstan (see Table 4.2). To expedite the construction of Confucius Institutes, the Xinjiang government established the “Xinjiang Mandarin International Promotion Leading Group” (XJMIPLG), which was led by a vice governor of the provincial government (China News 2012). Moreover, the efforts of the Xinjiang government to establish Confucius Institutes were recognized by the central government when the Xinjiang Department of Education, an agency of the Xinjiang government, was awarded Outstanding Confucius Institute Chinese Partners of the Year in 2016 and 2018.

Table 4.2 Confucius Institutes in the Neighboring Region Built by Xinjiang Institutions

Confucius Institutes at	Country	Partners in Xinjiang	Date Established
Bishkek Humanities University	Kyrgyzstan	Xinjiang University	6/15/2008

³⁷ I contacted the Education Department of Xinjiang to inquire about the scholarship. They responded that they could provide no further information beyond what I had found on the internet.

Tajik National University	Tajikistan	Xinjiang Normal University	8/27/2008
Kyrgyz National University	Kyrgyzstan	Xinjiang Normal University	5/14/2009
Zhubanov University	Kazakhstan	Xinjiang University of Economics and Finance	6/25/2011
Karaganda National Technical University	Kazakhstan	Xinjiang Shihezi University	11/27/2012
Osh State University	Kyrgyzstan	Xinjiang Normal University	6/20/2013
University of Agriculture Faisalabad	Pakistan	Xinjiang Agricultural University	2014
Khovd University	Mongolia	Xinjiang Vocational University	9/2015
Jalalabad State University	Kyrgyzstan	Xinjiang University	12/2016
Novosibirsk State University	Russia	Xinjiang University	7/12/2018

Source: Author's compilation from official websites of the Confucius Institute, host institutions and various news reports.

4. Summary

Shifting from the previous chapter's focus on southwestern China, this chapter examines northwestern China to assess the activism of the Xinjiang government in regional cooperation. From 2004 to 2019, the Xinjiang government was more active in certain aspects of regional cooperation than others. The Xinjiang government, for instance, spared no efforts in building Confucius Institutes in its neighboring region. It also placed a premium on the institutional arrangements of POEs, BECZs, the China–Eurasia Expo, and a number of SCCAs. In the meantime, however, provincial leaders of Xinjiang rarely visited its neighboring region. In addition, regional cooperation was not a popular subject in either the daily coverage of the official provincial newspaper or in the articles written by provincial leaders for the official national media.

How should we understand the Xinjiang government's mixed participation in regional cooperation during this period? The findings presented in this chapter suggest that Embedded

Local Liberalism provides a powerful explanation. As shown in the first section, it was the contributions of provincial exports to the neighboring region to Xinjiang's economic development (the "motivator" in Embedded Local Liberalism) that primarily motivated the Xinjiang government to engage in regional cooperation. Even though the contributions varied from year to year and showed a declining trend overall, the Xinjiang government recognized strong incentives to conduct regional cooperation during the study period due to the generally high level of provincial economic openness to the neighboring region (12.57%). However, as shown in this chapter, the Xinjiang government's decision-making in regional cooperation was also affected by its mixed perception of the geopolitical environment in the neighboring region where China was situated (the "moderator" in Embedded Local Liberalism).

On the one hand, the Xinjiang government noted that with the establishment of the SCO, the mutually trusting relationships between China and Central Asian countries, as well as China's deepening strategic relations with Russia, made regional cooperation easier and more effective. On the other hand, the Xinjiang government found it difficult to conduct regional cooperation when the future of the SCO was uncertain; China lacked influence in the region; the "great game" between China, Russia, and the US became tense; and China faced increasing pressure to prevent overseas pro-Xinjiang-independence forces from infiltrating. Due to this mixed perception, the Xinjiang government did not participate actively in all facets of regional cooperation. As a result, the case of the Xinjiang government supports the primary hypothesis (H_p) proposed by Embedded Local Liberalism (recall Chapter I, Section 5.4.); that is, the economic incentives and this mixed perception jointly determined the Xinjiang government's participation in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019. The case of Xinjiang government also embraces both the first (H_{S1}) and the second sub-hypotheses (H_{S2}) derived from the analytical framework (recall Chapter I, Section 5.4.);

that is, the effects of economic incentives on the Xinjiang government's decision-making can be both facilitated or diminished because the Xinjiang government perceived that significant opportunities as well as great challenges existed in the geopolitical environment in the neighboring region where China was situated.

V. The Government of Jilin

Jilin is a province located in northeastern China. To the east, it shares borders with North Korea and Russia. Domestically, it is bounded to the north by Heilongjiang province, to the south by Liaoning province, and to the west by Inner Mongolia autonomous region (see Map 5.1). The province has a land area of 187,400 square kilometers and a population of 24 million people (Jilin government n.d.). Changchun, the provincial capital and seat of government, is located in the geographic center of the province.³⁸ Furthermore, there are three border cities in Jilin: Yanbian, at the intersection of China, North Korea, and Russia; and Baishan and Tonghua, both of which border North Korea (see Map 5.2).

³⁸ Again, as in my previous analyses of the governments of Guangxi and Xinjiang, I make no distinction between the People's Government of Jilin and the Jilin Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China. Furthermore, I make no distinction between provincial and sub-provincial governments—such as city and county governments—nor between different provincial and sub-provincial departments. Instead, I treat them all as components of the Jilin government.



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Map 5.1 Jilin's Geographic Location. Source: Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China (2019b, my translation).



Map 5.2 Major Cities in Jilin. Source: Jilin government (n.d.).

With explicit authorization and encouragement from the central government, Jilin's provincial government sought to capitalize on its geographical proximity and socio-cultural similarities to promote greater cooperation with the Northeast Asian region, which includes South Korea, North Korea, Japan, Russia, and Mongolia.³⁹ For instance, with the support of the central government, the Jilin government played a significant role in initiating regional cooperation projects with Northeast Asia—notably the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI)—as early as the 1990s (Cotton 1996). Later, by introducing the Northeast Policy in 2004 and approving Changjitu as a DOPZ for Tumen River regional cooperation in 2009 (Xinhuanet 2015), the central government gave the Jilin government greater freedom and incentive to play a more active role in regional cooperation and integration. With this context in mind, I will discuss how international factors

³⁹ In this chapter, Northeast Asia refers to a region consisting of these five countries (recall Table 1.3).

both motivated and constrained the Jilin government's activism in regional cooperation with Northeast Asia using the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: In Section 1, I show that the Jilin government lacked strong economic incentives to initiate and participate in regional cooperation using interview findings and quantitative data from 2004 to 2019. In Section 2, I show how the Jilin government perceived that China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia was complex and unstable, and therefore concluded that this perceived environment was unfavorable for regional cooperation. Section 3 presents the limited level of participation in regional cooperation by the Jilin government from 2004 to 2019 by discussing its activities in all fourteen indicators. Finally, Section 4 concludes the chapter with a summary of findings.

1. Motivator: Jilin's Economic Openness to Northeast Asia

Jilin's intellectual community and government officials agreed that neither Jilin's economic openness to Northeast Asia nor its overall economic exchanges with foreign countries contributed significantly to the province's economic development—for, as some interviewees admitted, Jilin's economy was not yet export-driven. First, with the exception of automobiles and rice, Jilin lacked export-oriented industries (Interview Changchun-220310 2022). Second, provincial exports and FDI inflows remained not only modest in quantity but also deficient in quality (Interview Changchun-220314 2022). Third, Jilin's major trade partners were European countries (especially Germany), rather than Northeast Asian countries (Interview Changchun-220306 2022). Due to a lack of economic openness to the neighboring region, the Jilin government had little motivation to

engage in regional cooperation. For instance, Jilin’s border economic cooperation zones were under-developed due to unstable and volatile border trade (Yujing Li, Zhang, and Jin 2016).

A detailed comparison of Jilin’s exports to Northeast Asia and provincial GDP corroborates the aforementioned interview findings. From 2004 to 2019, Jilin’s exports to Northeast Asia (hereinafter “JL EN”) fluctuated, rising from USD 994 million in 2004 to a peak of USD 2.35 billion in 2008. Since 2008, the trend had been fluctuating but generally decreasing; JL EN was down to USD 1.3 billion in 2019 (see Figure 5.1). Between 2004 and 2019, the average annual growth rate of Jilin’s exports to its neighboring region was only 4.14%, significantly lower than Guangxi’s 28.12% and Xinjiang’s 18.12%.

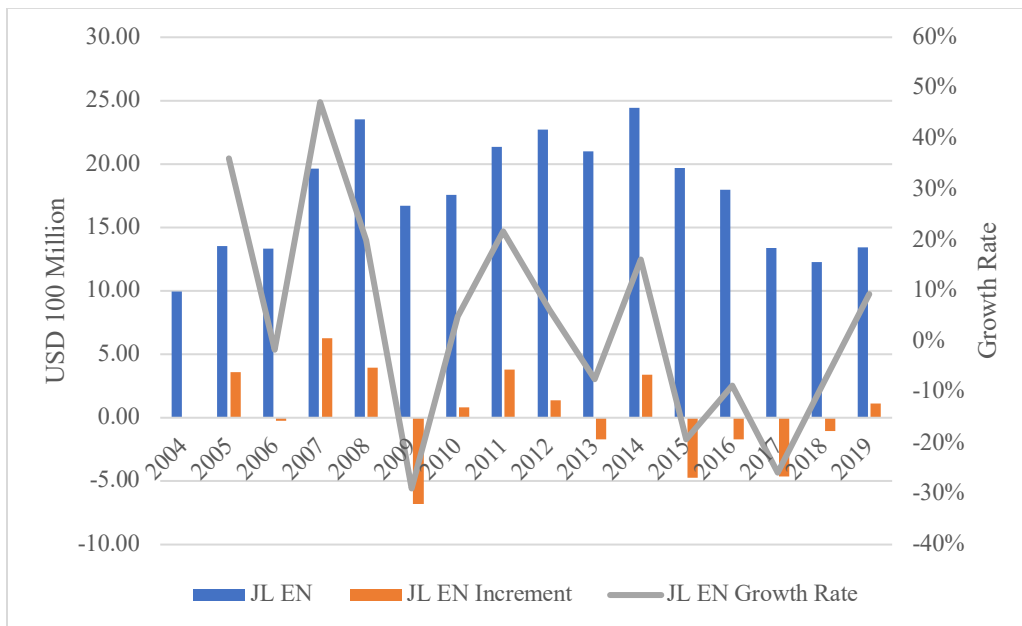


Figure 5.1 Jilin’s Exports to Northeast Asia: 2004–2019.⁴⁰ Source: Author’s compilation and calculation based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

⁴⁰ See Appendix Table 23 in Appendix III for all raw data.

However, although Jilin’s exports to Northeast Asia increased over the course of the first few years, their contribution to the province’s GDP steadily declined, as depicted in Figure 5.2. In addition, Figure 5.3 shows that the growth of JL EN had a limited impact on the growth of Jilin’s GDP, as the changes in the two indicators did not coincide closely. In other words, numerous factors may influence the Jilin government’s policymaking regarding cooperation with Northeast Asia. However, as argued by Embedded Local Liberalism, “there are a number of considerations, but economic benefits were among the most significant motivators; it was unlikely that the Jilin government would engage in regional cooperation without sufficient economic incentives” (Interview Changchun-220310 2022, my translation).

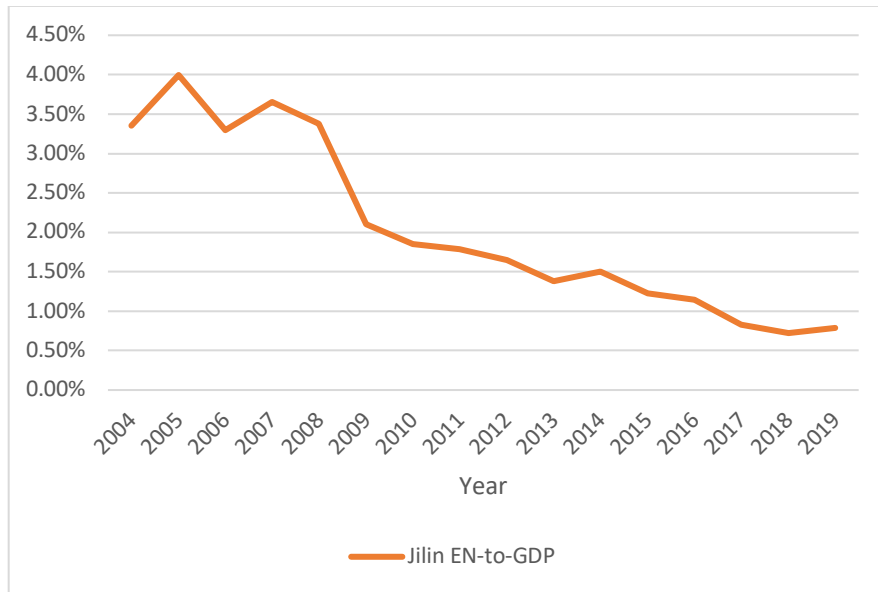


Figure 5.2 Jilin’s Exports to Northeast Asia-to-GDP Ratio (JL EN-to-GDP Ratio): 2004–2019.
 Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

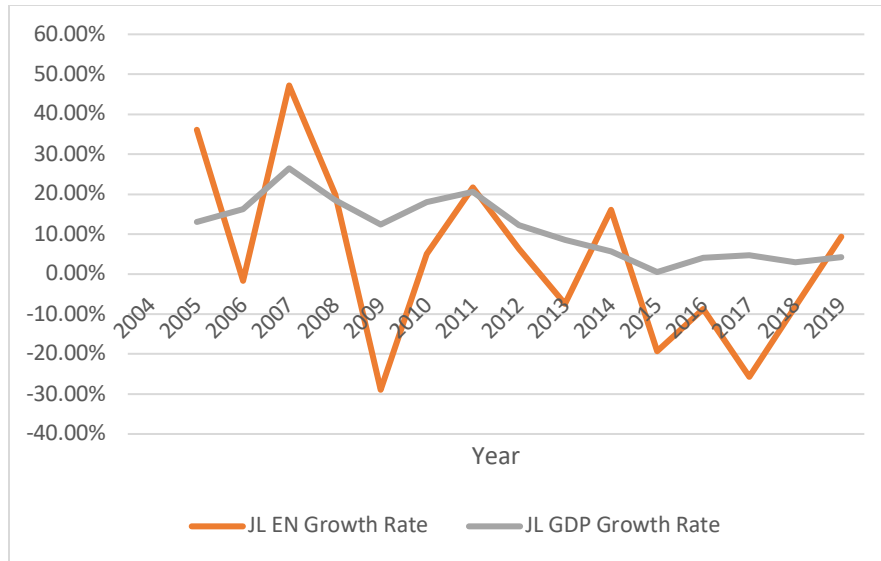


Figure 5.3 The Growth Rate of Jilin’s Exports to Northeast Asia (JL EN) and the Growth Rate of Jilin GDP: 2004–2019. Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

2. Moderator: The Jilin Government’s Perception of China’s Geopolitical

Environment in Northeast Asia

In this section, I examine how the Jilin government perceived and defined the geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia where China was situated, from 2004 to 2019. As shown in the details below, the Jilin government had a negative view of the environment. Moreover, based on this negative perception, as posited by Embedded Local Liberalism, the Jilin government was reluctant to cooperate with neighboring countries because it anticipated more obstacles and challenges than opportunities.

On the surface, the Jilin government had a number of reasons to believe that there was some mutual trust among countries in the region, such as the signing of China–South Korea Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA), China and Russia’s implementation of the Program of Cooperation between Northeast China and Russia’s Far East and Eastern Siberia (2009–2018), and China–

Japan–South Korea trilateral economic cooperation entering into a new phase as negotiations for the China–Japan–South Korea Free Trade Agreement (CJSFTA) commenced (D. Ba and Liu 2020; Guobin Liu 2018b; H. Yang and Zhang 2018; L. Zhu 2011; Y. Shen 2011b; Yunmu Yang 2011b). However, because there were no inter-governmental institutional arrangements involving all of the countries in the region, mutual trust in fact remained severely lacking (D. Ba 2009; Shengjin Wang et al. 2012). More importantly, the Jilin government argued that the suspicions among Northeast Asian countries and the resulting increasing uncertainty, insecurity, and instability in the region created enormous obstacles for it to engage in regional cooperation, for instance, it was unable to implement cooperation projects in the Tumen River area, the major pillar of the provincial government’s regional cooperation agenda, due to lack of mutual trust at the state level in Northeast Asia (Mao, Liu, and Zhang 2012; Y. Shen 2010).

Furthermore, scholars and government officials in Jilin largely agreed that international relations in Northeast Asia were among the most complex in the world, and that the complicated geopolitical environment had a significant impact on the potential for regional cooperation (D. Ba 2009; Ning and Wu 2017; Yi and Sun 2010).

Jilin’s policy-making community argued that North Korea’s nuclear weapons program made the geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia more complex and unstable for China. On the one hand, North Korea’s increasing nuclear capacity remained a significant regional and international security concern; even though the leaders of North Korea and the US had met three times since 2018, mistrust between the two countries remained high and the denuclearization process had yet to commence (J. Ma 2019a). These security concerns caused China and Jilin’s neighboring countries to prioritize security over economic development in their interactions (Interview Changchun-220419 2022; Quan 2006). In addition, tensions on the Korean peninsula

prevented countries in the region from deepening their economic cooperation and discouraged international investment in the region due to the elevated investment risk associated with the ongoing turbulence (J. Ma 2013b). Consequently, because there were no workable cooperation projects, it was difficult for the Jilin government to conduct regional cooperation for the joint development of the Tumen River area (X. Jin and Wang 2012). On the other hand, China's limited capacity to alleviate these concerns reinforced the negative perception of Jilin's academics and government officials' regarding China's geopolitical environment in the region. Although China initiated and chaired the Six-Party Talks (hereinafter "the Talks"), China's role was limited because the Talks were not legally binding (D. Ba and Bian 2006). In addition to lacking the ability to coerce the US to make any substantial compromise in the negotiations on nuclear issues, China was not able to pressure North Korea through the Talks either (X. Liu and Cui 2007). The fact that North Korea was always eager to escape the Talks and directly communicated with the US only bolstered the view that China lacked influence in the region (D. Ba 2008). Moreover, China's ability to play a proactive role in stabilizing regional security and promoting regional cooperation was hampered by its insistence on using diplomacy and strengthening economic and investment ties to peacefully denuclearize North Korea (Junjiang Li and Fan 2012; L. Zhao 2016; X. Liu and Cui 2007).

As a result of the suspension of the Talks and the continued escalation of North Korea's nuclear weapons development, China was put in a passive position, and the leverage was shifted in favor of the US and its allies in the region, namely South Korea and Japan (Piao and Zhang 2018; X. Wu 2018). "The strategic space for China to play a role [in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue] is small" (H. Shen 2011a, 14, my translation). Some scholars in Jilin were even more pessimistic, predicting that the security concern would persist: "China had no solution to this

security dilemma” (Xiao 2011, 78, my translation). As a result, Northeast Asian countries, including China, had no interest in regional cooperation prior to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula (X. Yu 2007). The absence of state governments’ participation diminished the likelihood of bilateral or multilateral cooperation initiated by local governments and business sectors (X. Yu 2007). With international relations among countries in the region characterized by fear, mistrust, and suspicions due to security concerns, subnational governments had little room to initiate or even participate in regional cooperation (Interview Singapore-220225 2022). “As long as the Korean Peninsula remained unstable, stable regional cooperation would be impossible” (Interview Changchun-220314 2022, my translation). One interviewee expressed his helplessness, “even though the Jilin government would like to help the central government implement national strategies, officials from the Jilin government were aware of the obstacles and acknowledged that they could do nothing to overcome them” (Interview Changchun-220310 2022, my translation).

Despite the fact that, by geographical definition, the US is not a Northeast Asian country, it has maintained a strong presence and extensive engagement in the region for decades. Academics in Jilin concurred that the US was the only country in Northeast Asia with a dominant role and even hegemonic status (F. Huang 2006a, 2006b; X. Liu and Cui 2007). In addition, Sino-US relations affected not only China’s relationship with other Northeast Asian countries, but also determined regional security and stability. The Sino-US relationship was described as the “primary axis and barometer” (G. Sun 2014, 30, my translation) of security and stability in Northeast Asia. “When relations between the US and China are amicable, Japan and South Korea will be eager to improve their relationship with China, and Sino-Russia and Sino-Mongolia relations tend to be normal” (Lang 2017, 91, my translation). More importantly, Jilin scholars emphasized that China, Russia, and Japan were major powers in Northeast Asia, but that only the US enjoyed a dominant

position (F. Huang 2006a; F. Huang and Lv 2011; X. Liu and Cui 2007). On the one hand, the US chose to contain China's rise in order to maintain its regional and international hegemony since the early 21st century (F. Huang and Lv 2011). Observing the US pivot to Asia and its decision to assist South Korea and Japan in enhancing their defense capabilities, it was argued that the relationship between China and the US was increasingly characterized by conflict rather than cooperation (H. Zhang 2019). China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia deteriorated as the US had become increasingly hostile to China (X. Liu and Fan 2018). The US, on the other hand, prevented countries in the region from cooperating on a large scale, maintaining the so-called "*fenlie de wending*" (divide and stability) (Q. Jin 2012). As a result of the obstructions caused by the US presence in the region, the Jilin government faced formidable challenges in collaborating with neighboring countries (W. Guo 2016). Before Sino-US relations improved, it was difficult for the Jilin government to gain economic benefits from regional cooperation (Lang 2017).

The intellectual and policymaking community in Jilin was also concerned about the geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia in which China was situated, due to the current state of Sino-Japanese relations. The fact that China had surpassed Japan to become the world's second-largest economy was the most significant change to the Northeast Asian geopolitical landscape between 2004 and 2019 (Interview Changchun-220310 2022; Interview Changchun-220314 2022; X. Wu 2016b). It was the first time in Northeast Asia that two major powers co-existed (Xiao 2008). As a major power in the region, Japan had never encountered a competitor that could emerge as rapidly and as powerfully as a rising China (F. Huang 2006b). In addition, scholars who were based in Jilin observed that Japan did not welcome China's rise. In reference to a Thucydides trap, Sun and Huang (2014) noted that Japan regarded China as a rival. Lang (2017) stated that

Japan was the country most opposed to a rising China. The conclusion of Jilin's scholars and government officials was that Japan's attitudes toward China were characterized by fear and hostility. On the one hand, Japan had adopted an increasingly hard stance on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island dispute and had intensified its competition with China for regional leadership in Northeast Asia (G. Sun and Huang 2014). On the other hand, after the 2010 boat collision near Diaoyu/Senkaku Island, Japan decided to strengthen its alliance with the US by joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (X. Liu and Zhang 2012). In addition, since there was no mechanism for the two countries to communicate and resolve the maritime dispute, and because China could not change the fact that Japan controlled the disputed islands, it was possible that the dispute over the island's sovereignty might spiral out of control (Lihua Zhang and Wang 2014). "Solving the East China Sea problem is urgent" because "from the public to the government, and now being escalated to military level, [maritime dispute between China and Japan] is very likely to spark a war" (Lihua Zhang and Wang 2014, 22, my translation). As a result, between 2004 and 2019, Sino-Japanese relations entered a stage in which the two countries confronted one another: "contradictions are more than mutual benefits, competitions are more than cooperation" (X. Wu 2016a, 25, my translation). Consequently, the Jilin government viewed Sino-Japanese relations as one of the greatest obstacles to its participation in regional cooperation (C. Chen 2013).

The intellectual community in Jilin argued that the relationship between China and South Korea was also unstable because South Korea, like Japan, was concerned about China's rise (Xiaoke Wang 2018b). On the one hand, South Korea turned to the US out of disappointment with China's limited influence over North Korea's policies and out of fear of North Korea's nuclear diplomacy (Lang 2017; X. Liu and Fan 2018; X. Sun 2019). On the other hand, despite enjoying the economic benefits brought by China's rise, South Korea viewed China as a geopolitical

pressure and was in favor of engaging with the US to counter China (F. Huang and Liu 2013). Its decision to deploy Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) not only broke its balance between the US and China by reinforcing its alliance with the former, but also indicated that it prioritized security over economic benefits concerning regional affairs (H. Zhang 2019; X. Sun 2019). Some scholars in Jilin were more pessimistic about China–South Korea relations, arguing that “South Korea has never balanced between the US and China ... South Korea does not have an independent foreign policy. [It] is always developing relations with China in deference to the US” (Interview Changchun-220419 2022, my translation). Therefore, any cooperation between South Korea and China was deemed to be affected by South Korea’s alliance with the US (X. Yu 2007), and the Jilin government’s regional cooperation projects were no exception (Caixia Li et al. 2017).

As shown in the previous paragraphs, the Jilin government perceived that China’s geopolitical environment in Jilin’s neighboring region was not only complex, but also increasingly uncertain and unstable, from 2004 to 2019. According to the viewpoints of the Jilin government, the foremost source of that uncertainty and instability was the continuing escalation of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and China’s inability to defuse related security concerns. Second, China lacked relative strength in comparison to the US in the region. More importantly, the US not only chose to contain China on its own, but also successfully coerced and persuaded other countries in the region not to cooperate with China. Third, Japan’s opposition to China’s rise and the disputes over Diaoyu/Senkaku Island between the two countries further deteriorated China’s geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia. Finally, South Korea was inclined to continue aligning itself with the US due to the strength and influence of the US and the disappointment caused by China’s limited influence over North Korea. In other words, from the perspective of

Jilin's provincial government, the complexity, escalating uncertainty, and instability of Northeast Asia produced a geopolitical environment inhospitable to any efforts by it to pursue regional cooperation. Within the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, given that "local governments are constrained by the whole situation" ("the whole situation" referring here to China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia), the Jilin government faced significant challenges in conducting regional cooperation (Interview Changchun-220418 2022, my translation). Even though the perceived environment offered some opportunities for regional cooperation, the obstacles and difficulties were overwhelming. "Anticipating that it would be hard to develop the local economy through regional cooperation, such as cross-border cooperation projects, the Jilin government became increasingly unwilling to engage in regional cooperation and was forced to implement an alternative strategy that emphasized mobilizing domestic forces and relying on the domestic market to develop Jilin's economy" (Interview Changchun-220419 2022, my translation).

3. The Jilin Government's Activism in Regional Cooperation

Not only did Jilin's provincial government lack sufficient economic motivations to prioritize regional cooperation; it also had a negative perception of China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia as being inhospitable to regional cooperation. This section describes the limited participation by the Jilin government in the majority of the fourteen indicators, and thus demonstrates that the Jilin government was not active in pursuing regional cooperation between 2004 and 2019.

3.1. Political Indicators

3.1.1. Jilin Leaders' Visits to Northeast Asia

During the study period, Jilin leaders paid twenty-four visits to all five neighboring countries. Almost every year, the governor or party secretary made at least one foreign visit (see Figure 5.4). Russia was the most visited country, having been visited nine times. During these visits, deepening bilateral and multilateral cooperation with neighboring countries was the primary focus. For instance, the governor and party secretary of Jilin traveled to South Korea in 2005 and 2010, Mongolia in 2009, and Russia in 2013 to attend annual meetings of the Governors' Conference of Northeast Asia and to meet with subnational government leaders from neighboring countries. Furthermore, during their visits, Jilin leaders met with political and business leaders from the host countries.

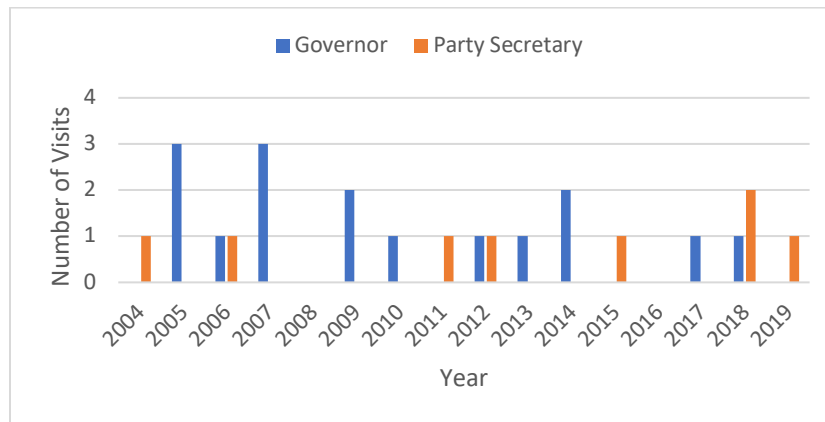


Figure 5.4 Jilin Leaders' Visits to Northeast Asia. Source: Author's compilation from multiple Jilin Yearbooks during 2005–2020 and news reports.

3.1.2. Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanisms (B/MDMs)

As of 2019, the Jilin government had not established a bilateral dialogue mechanism with any Northeast Asian counterparts. Although the Jilin government was a member of several multilateral dialogue mechanisms in Northeast Asia, it did not play a leading role in any of them. Among all

these mechanisms, the Jilin government attached the greatest importance to the Governors' Conference of Northeast Asia (hereinafter "the Conference"), which was proposed by Gangwondo Province of South Korea in 1994 (Gangwon province n.d.). During 2004–2019, the active membership of the Jilin government in the Conference can be illustrated in two ways. First, Jilin's delegations to the annual meetings were typically led by a vice-provincial leadership or higher-ranking official. Second, the Jilin government hosted the annual meetings in 2006, 2011, and 2016.

The Jilin government also participated in other regional multilateral institutions. However, these platforms were either recently established or had been inactive for several years. From 2012 to 2014, the Jilin government, led by a vice governor or even the governor, participated in the Economic Cooperation Forum between China's three northeastern provinces and South Korea. The Forum had not been held since 2015. The Jilin government also attended the first and second meetings of the Governmental Cooperation Committee between China's Northeast Region and Russia's Far East and Baikal Region in 2017 and 2018.⁴¹ Overall, none of these participations by the Jilin government can be compared to that of the Conference.

3.1.3. Friendship Cities in Northeast Asia

As of 2019, the Jilin government had established thirty-three pairs of friendship-city relationships with Northeast Asian counterparts. However, only thirteen partnerships were formed between 2004 and 2019; the rest were established prior to 2004. Among all neighboring countries, Russia was the country that hosted the most Jilin friendship cities (see Figure 5.5).

⁴¹ The third meeting was held in 2020.

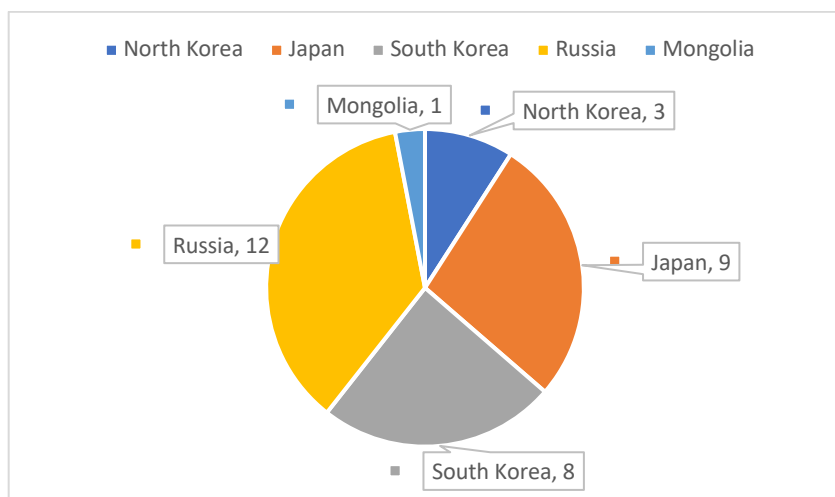


Figure 5.5 The Number of Jilin’s Friendship Cities in Northeast Asia. Source: Author’s compilation from Jilin Provincial People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (2022).

3.1.4. Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation

The official newspaper supervised by the Jilin government, *Jilin Daily (Jilin Ribao)*, published 827 articles on regional cooperation between 2004 and 2019. In 2012, the number of articles reached its peak, after which it decreased sharply (see Figure 5.6). Compared to other regional cooperation initiatives, the China–Northeast Asia Expo was mentioned the most in these articles, indicating that it was the primary means for the Jilin government to strengthen its cooperation with Northeast Asian states. In addition, Russia was frequently mentioned, indicating that the Jilin government viewed Russia as one of the most important partners in regional cooperation among all Northeast Asian countries.

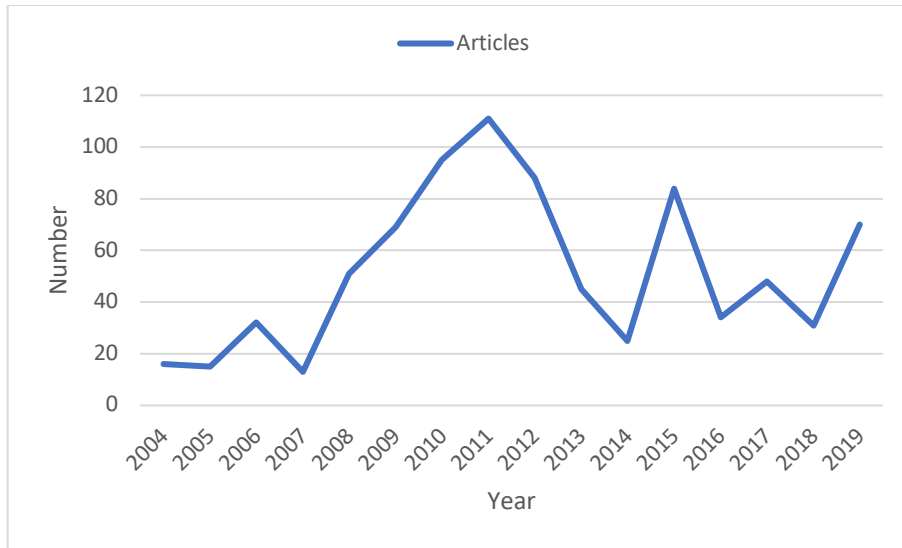


Figure 5.6 Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation in the Jilin Daily: 2004–2019. Source: Reproduced by author based on visualization analysis provided by CNKI database.

Jilin leaders published fourteen articles in the *People’s Daily* between 2004 and 2019 (see Table 5.1). Five of these articles discussed the cooperation between the Jilin government and its Northeast Asian neighbors. In all five articles, the Jilin government pledged to develop the Changjitu Development and Opening-up Pilot Zone, a regional cooperation master plan approved by the central government to promote cross-border trade and economic cooperation with neighboring countries, as well as the China–Northeast Asia Expo.

Table 5.1 Jilin Leaders’ Authored Articles in the *People’s Daily*: 2004–2019

Article Title	Publication Date
Strive to improve the quality and efficiency of economic development (<i>Zhuoli tigao jingjifazhan zhiliang he xiaoyi</i>)	8/24/2007
Comprehensively understand the characteristics of inland provinces, implement strategy spearheaded by opening-up (<i>Chongfen bawo neidi shengfen tedian dali shishi kaifangdaidong zhanlue</i>)	11/27/2007
Industry supports agriculture, urban areas support rural areas (<i>Gongye fanbu nongye chengshi zhichi nongcun</i>)*	11/3/2008

Make full use of the leading role of important talents projects in talents building (<i>Fahui zhongda rencai gongcheng dui rencai duiwu jianshe de yinling zuoyong</i>)	6/11/2010
Promote scientific development, make people's life in urban and rural areas better (<i>Tuidong kexue fazhan rang chengxiang jumin shenghuo de gengjia meihao</i>)*	9/30/2010
Working on the three issues of agriculture under new situations must be based on farmers (<i>Xingxingshixia "sannong" gongzuo xu shizhong jianchi yi nongmin weiben</i>)*	3/26/2012
Use the spirit of perseverance to solve the Four Malfeasances (<i>yi "dingdingzi" jingshen jiejie "sifeng" wenti</i>)	9/26/2013
Strive to make new breakthroughs on scientific development (<i>Nuli shixian kexue fazhan xintupo</i>)	4/28/2014
Revitalization and development under the lead of Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy (<i>yi "sige quanmian" tongling zhenxing fazhan</i>)*	7/27/2015
Always prioritise disciplines and rules, build up stronger core of leadership (<i>Shizhong ba jilvguiju tingzai qianmian duanzao gengjia jianqiang de lingdaoheixin</i>)	10/27/2015
Spare no efforts to speed up a new wave of revitalization and development in Jilin (<i>Quanli tuijin jilin xinyilun zhenxingfazhan</i>)*	5/4/2016
United to promote a new-wave of comprehensive revitalization (<i>Ningxinjuli tuidong xinyilun quanmian zhenxing</i>)	8/14/2017
Write a new chapter on Jilin's revitalization of rural areas in the new era (<i>Puxie xinshidai xiangcun zhenxing de jilin pianzhang</i>)	4/10/2018
Implement new ideas, strive for revitalization and development (<i>Guanche xinlinian zouchu zhenxing fazhan xinlu</i>)	8/23/2019

* Refers to the article mentions regional cooperation.

Source: Author's compilation and translation from CNKI online database.

3.2. Economic Indicators

3.2.1. China–Northeast Asia Expo

In 2004, the Jilin government submitted an application to the central government to host a national-level exhibition in Jilin in an effort to strengthen ties with its five Northeast Asian neighbors. After five attempts, the Jilin government finally received approval from the central government to permanently host the China Jilin Northeast Asia Investment and Trade Expo (hereinafter “Jilin Expo”) (Meiliang Yang 2005a). The first Jilin Expo was held in 2005. In 2012, the Jilin Expo was

upgraded to what is known today as the China–Northeast Asia Expo (CNEAEXPO).⁴² From 2004 to 2019, CNEAEXPO was held a total of twelve times. It was held annually from 2005 to 2013, then twice yearly since 2015.

As the initiator and de facto organizer, the Jilin government gave CNEAEXPO considerable attention. It established a two-tiered institution to plan, organize, and execute the expo. There was an executive committee at the top, which was typically led by a vice-provincial leadership official. In 2005, a vice governor was appointed as the first director for the committee (Jilin government 2005). In 2015, the director position was held by a vice provincial/ministerial level official in Jilin (CRJ Online 2015). To improve coordination, the committee’s deputy directors included the heads of other provincial government agencies, such as the Department of Propaganda and Department of Commerce. In addition, the first-ranking deputy director of the committee was the secretary-general of the executive committee’s secretariat, which was the second layer of the two-tiered institution. Since 2008, the secretariat has been replaced by the Jilin Expo Affairs Bureau (JEAB), a permanent and professional government organization. The establishment of JEAB indicated that the Jilin government had begun to incorporate the expo into their daily operations with a more competent and professional team. In its early years, JEAB was a vice-bureau-level agency supervised by the Jilin Department of Commerce (Guojishangbao 2009). Starting in 2013, it was elevated to the bureau level and merged with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade Jilin Committee (CCPIT Jilin Committee). In other words, the head of the CCPIT Jilin Committee was also the head of JEAB (12371.com 2013; Jilin ribao 2008).

⁴² For the sake of simplicity, the rest of the discussion uses “CNEAEXPO” rather than alternating between “Jilin Expo” and “CNEAEXPO” depending on the time period.

Due to the efforts of the Jilin government, CNEAEXPO grew steadily from 2005 to 2019. The number of booths increased from 1900 at the first expo to 3502 in 2019 (see Figure 5.7). The number of exhibitors also increased; in 2009, there were only 559 companies, but ten years later, that number had nearly tripled (see Figure 5.8). All of these increasing numbers indicate that the Jilin government invested a substantial amount of resources to promote the expo among business sectors.

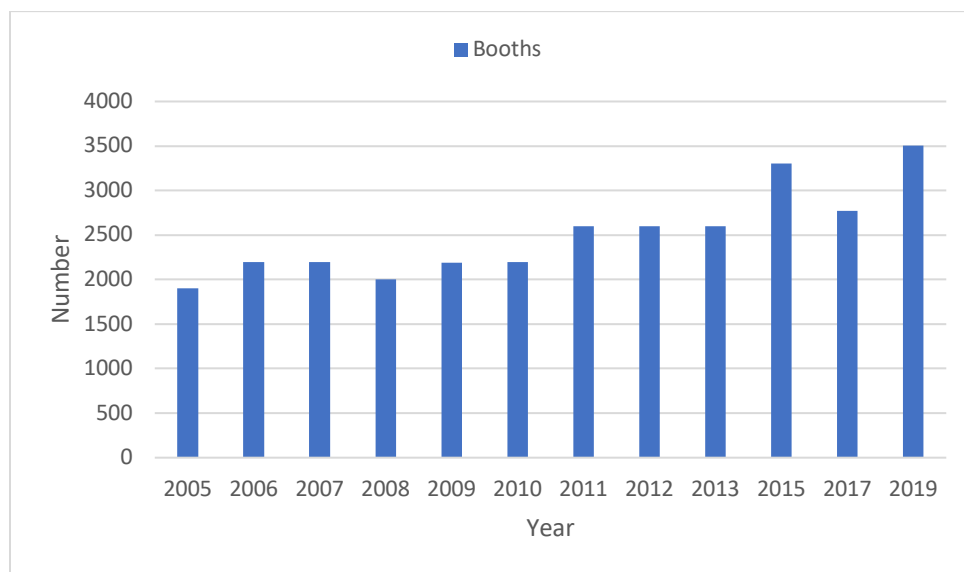


Figure 5.7 The Number of Booths in CNEAEXPO: 2005–2019. Source: Author’s compilation from multiple *Jilin Yearbooks* during 2006–2020, *Annual Report on China’s Convention & Exhibition Economy* (J. Guo 2011, 2012) and various news reports.

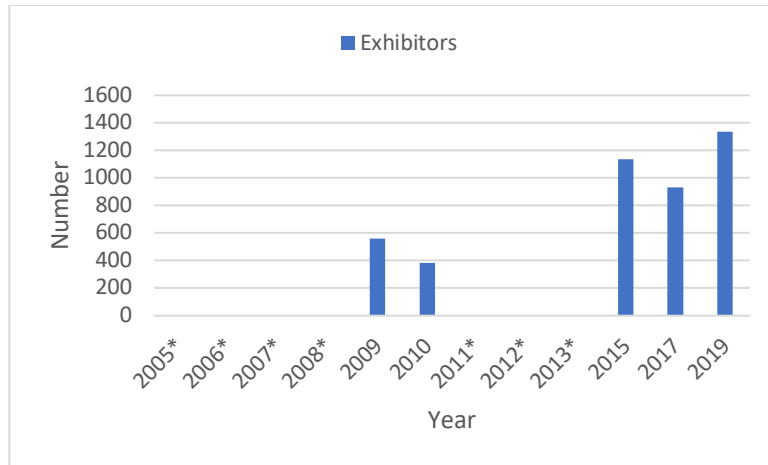


Figure 5.8 The Number of Exhibitors in CNEAEXPO: 2005–2019. Source: Author’s compilation from multiple *Jilin Yearbooks* during 2006–2020, *Annual Report on China’s Convention & Exhibition Economy* (J. Guo 2011, 2012) and various news reports. *Note:* * the data is not found.

In addition, the Jilin government planned a variety of activities and conferences while hosting CNEAEXPO (see Figure 5.9); the number of these events peaked between 2008 and 2012. These events included several high-level forums, including the Cooperation Forum on Law in Northeast Asia and Forum on Youth Entrepreneur Development in Northeast Asia. In the meantime, numerous cultural activities were also organized, such as friendly golf tournaments and art performances.

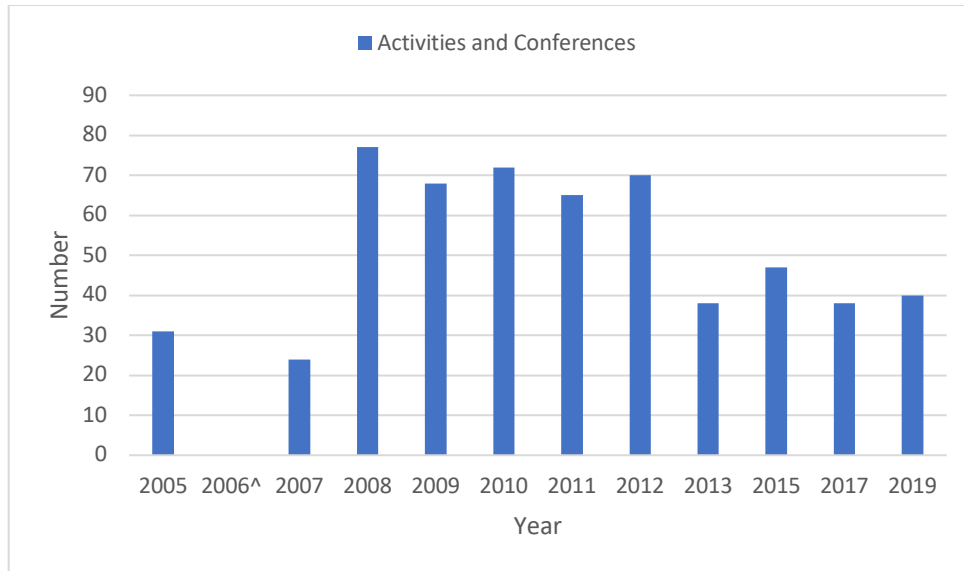


Figure 5.9 The Number of Activities and Conferences Held in CNEAEXPO: 2005–2019. Source: Author’s compilation from multiple *Jilin Yearbooks* during 2006–2020, *Annual Report on China’s Convention & Exhibition Economy* (J. Guo 2011, 2012) and various news reports. *Note:* [^] The total number of activities and conferences for 2006 is not found. Various news reports mentioned *only* that four professional conferences *were* held.

3.2.2. Development and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs)

The Jilin government began working on the Yanji DOPZ application in 2015, but significant progress had not been announced by 2022 (let alone 2019, the end of our study period). In its 2016 and 2017 annual working reports, the Jilin government promised to speed up the application process, but did not specify the steps it would take (Jilin government 2016b, 2017). In its 2018 and 2019 annual working reports, the Jilin government made no mention of the application (Jilin government 2018, 2019), suggesting that, although the Jilin government proposed the zone, it did not exert sufficient effort to make it a reality.

3.2.3. Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs)

In Jilin, two SCCAs were established between 2004 and 2019. In 2011, the State Council authorized the Changchun Xinglong Comprehensive Bonded Zone (Changchun CBZ). The management committee of this zone was headed by a vice-bureau-leadership-level official. Later,

in 2018, the establishment of a second CBZ in Jilin, Hunchun CBZ, was approved. However, the administrative rank of the Hunchun CBZ's management bureau was lower than that of the Changchun CBZ management agency. According to available data, the head of the Hunchun CBZ's management bureau was below division-head level (Hunchun government 2019).

3.2.4. Ports of Entry (POEs)

An office of the Jilin Department of Commerce was responsible for POE planning, coordination, and development; this office was a division-level agency (Department of Commerce of Jilin Province 2019). As of 2019, there were sixteen POEs in Jilin, two of which were authorized between 2004 and 2019. The Ji'an road port opened in 2014, while the Shuangmufeng road port was established in 2019 (Zhongguo kouan xiehui 2020).

3.2.5. Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs) in Northeast Asia

During the study period, the Jilin government assisted Jilin-based Jilin Taiyuan Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Technology Development Co., Ltd., in establishing the first provincial FIP in Russia. As of 2017, it was reported that RUB 230 million would be invested in the first phase (sohu.com 2017). The Jilin government also promised to support the continued construction and development of the park (people.com 2017).

3.2.6. Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs)

Jilin had two national BECZs during 2004–2019. The first was Hunchun BECZ, which was founded in 1992. Its management committee was directed by a division-head-level official. Helong BECZ, the second national BECZ in Jilin, was approved by the central government in 2015. The management committee of Helong BECZ was led by a vice-bureau-head-level official. In addition to developing these national BECZs, the Jilin government also worked to establish provincial

BECZs. In 2019, the government of Jilin approved two provincial BECZs: Ji'an BECZ and Lingjiang BECZ (T. Wang 2019b).

3.2.7. Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs)

The Jilin government proposed three CBECZ plans between 2004 and 2019: two between China and Russia (Hunchun–Khasan CBECZ and Hunchun–Zarubino CBECZ), and one between China and North Korea (Shatuozi–Ryudasom-ri CBECZ).

As early as 2008, the Jilin government and the government of Russia's Primorskij kraj reached an initial agreement on the operational plan and schedule for the Hunchun–Khasan CBECZ (Xiang 2013). Later, in 2015, it was reported that in addition to the Hunchun–Khasan CBECZ, the Jilin government was also accelerating the development of the Hunchun–Zarubino CBECZ (Zong and Zhao 2015). Also in 2015, the then-mayor of Hunchun sought to build up a CBEC with North Korea in response to North Korea's decision to build the Ryudasom-ri International Cooperation Demonstration Park (hereinafter "the Park") in its North Hamgyong Province, which connected with Hunchun (Hunchun government 2015). In 2019, the then-vice-governor of Jilin stated that the construction of a Shatuozi–Ryudasom-ri CBECZ between China and North Korea, along with the Hunchun–Khasan CBECZ, was one of the most important tasks for the Jilin government to develop the province into an example of ocean-economy cooperation (Xiang 2019).

However, it should be noted that although the three CBECZs had been proposed by the Jilin government for years, no further information—such as the size of the planned areas—is available from public sources. This dearth of information suggests that as of 2019, the Jilin government had not begun concretizing any of these three CBECZs.

3.2.8. Jilin Pilot Free Trade Zone (Jilin PFTZ)

Like the Xinjiang government, the Jilin government had no PFTZs built or approved between 2004 and 2019. In 2015, it was reported that the Jilin government was drafting a PFTZ plan (Hao 2015); however, Jilin’s provincial leaders did not publicly announce that they had been actively working on the PFTZ application until the end of 2019 (CE Weekly 2019). Nothing more is known about what progress (if any) the Jilin government had made by the end of 2019.

3.3. Socio-Cultural Indicators

3.3.1. Scholarships Provided to International Students from Neighboring Countries

From 2004 to 2019, the Jilin government offered no scholarships exclusively for international students from Northeast Asia. Instead, all international students admitted to postgraduate programs, including those from Northeast Asia, were eligible to apply for a provincial scholarship (College of International Education at Yanbian University n.d.).

3.3.2. Confucius Institutes Built by Jilin Institutions in Northeast Asia

From 2004 to 2019, Jilin-based institutions established eight Confucius Institutes in three Northeast Asian countries: five in South Korea, two in Russia, and one in Mongolia (see Table 5.2). Furthermore, the Jilin government’s efforts to build Confucius Institutes were formally recognized when Jilin University and the Jilin Department of Education⁴³ were named Outstanding Confucius Institute Chinese Partners of the Year in 2014 and 2017, respectively, in recognition of their exemplary efforts in establishing Confucius Institutes.

Table 5.2 Confucius Institutes in Northeast Asia Built by Jilin Institutions

Confucius Institute at	Country	Partners in Jilin	Date Established
Chungbuk National University	South Korea	Yanbian University	9/2006
Dong-A University	South Korea	Northeast Normal University	12/2006

⁴³ Jilin University is a strategic partner of the Jilin government (Jilin University 2013). The Jilin Department of Education is an agency of the Jilin government.

Buryat State University	Russia	Changchun University Of Science and Technology	7/2007
Kangwon National University	South Korea	Beihua University	2007
Ryazan State University named for S.A. Yesenin Confucius Institute	Russia	Changchun University	9/2010
Rainbow Confucius Institute	South Korea	Jilin Provincial Foreign Language Education and Training Center	2014
Mongolian State University of Education	Mongolia	Northeast Normal University	9/2015
Hanyang University	South Korea	Jilin University	11/2015

Source: Author's compilation from official websites of Confucius Institute and cooperating institutions in Jilin, and various news reports.

4. Summary

This chapter has focused on the provincial government of Jilin, an inland border province in northeastern China. Between 2004 and 2019, the Jilin government's participation in regional cooperation was limited. Aside from organizing exhibitions, establishing Confucius Institutes, and publishing reports on regional cooperation in both provincial and national official media, the Jilin government was not active in most areas. For example, the Jilin government did not take concrete steps to apply for regional cooperation platforms such as FTPZs, DOPZs, and CBECZs. Neither did it provide scholarships exclusively for international students from the neighboring region, nor did it staff the management offices of POEs and BECZs with high-ranking government officials.

Why was the Jilin government reluctant to cooperate with neighboring countries despite having the encouragement and support of the central government? As in the preceding discussions of Guangxi and Xinjiang provincial governments, the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism once again offers a persuasive explanation. As economic exchanges with Northeast Asia (i.e., the “motivator” in Embedded Local Liberalism) became increasingly irrelevant to Jilin's

economic growth from 2004 to 2019, Jilin's government lacked strong incentives to engage in regional cooperation. In the meantime, the Jilin government's negative perception of China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia dampened the motivating effects of economic openness—which, as mentioned above, was itself diminishing. According to the Jilin government and its policy advisors, the Northeast Asian geopolitical environment that China inhabited was complicated, uncertain, and unstable from 2004 to 2019.

First, regional security concerns stemming from North Korea's nuclear weapons program prompted China and other Northeast Asian countries to prioritize security over economic development in their relationships, leaving the Jilin government with limited space to promote regional cooperation. Second, China's lack of influence in resolving North Korea's nuclear issues, US intervention in regional cooperation and its dominance in regional affairs, competitions between China, the US and Japan for regional leadership, as well as South Korea's growing skepticism toward China posed significant difficulties and obstacles for the Jilin government to implement regional cooperation projects. Even though the geopolitical environment presented the Jilin government with some opportunities for regional cooperation—such as the signing of the CSFTA and the continuation of trilateral economic cooperation between China, Japan, and South Korea—the challenges and obstacles it faced were overwhelming. As a result of this negative perception, the Jilin government concluded that achieving optimal economic results through regional cooperation was challenging. These findings support the primary hypothesis (H_p) advanced by Embedded Local Liberalism (recall Chapter I, Section 5.4.); that is, the Jilin provincial government's limited activism in regional cooperation was jointly determined by Jilin's low economic openness to Northeast Asia as well as the provincial government's negative perception of China's geopolitical environment in the region. Furthermore, the case of the Jilin

government demonstrates the validity of the second sub-hypothesis (H_{S2}) of the analytical framework; that is, the negative perception of China's geopolitical environment in the region diminished the effects of motivations and disincentivized the Jilin government against pursuing an active role in regional cooperation.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, I summarize and compare the cases on the governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin. In particular, I demonstrate how the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism adequately explains why the three provincial governments showed varying levels of activism in regional cooperation between 2004 and 2019. In the second section, I extend the analysis beyond those three provincial governments to the remaining six Chinese inland border provincial governments, also from 2004 to 2019. The third section focuses on both the practical and theoretical implications of this research. In the fourth section, I discuss the developments of China's inland border provincial governments' activism in regional cooperation since the eruption of COVID-19 pandemic. The fifth section concludes the chapter with a summary of the entire dissertation.

1. Summary of the Three Cases

From 2004 to 2019, the provincial governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin displayed varying levels of activism in regional cooperation, despite receiving support and incentives from the central government. The Guangxi government was

the most active in engaging in regional cooperation. For instance, Guangxi's provincial leaders maintained close ties with Southeast Asian countries by conducting a total of fifty-eight foreign visits to countries in that region and by institutionalizing four dialogue mechanisms with Southeast Asian counterparts. Furthermore, regional cooperation was the subject of 2131 articles published in the *Guangxi Daily*, and provincial leaders discussed regional cooperation nearly every time they published an article in the *People's Daily*. In addition, Guangxi's provincial government established a total of fifty-four city-to-city friendships with cities in Southeast Asia. Regarding economic cooperation, the Guangxi government built administrative institutions for each regional cooperation platform, most of which were led by officials ranked at the level of bureau leadership or higher. The Guangxi government was also active in promoting socio-cultural regional cooperation, such as by offering exclusive government scholarships to international students from Southeast Asia enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs and by establishing seven Confucius Institutes in the region. Such efforts demonstrate that the Guangxi government placed a high value on regional cooperation in every respect and intended to promote and accelerate the cooperation process.

From 2004 to 2019, the Xinjiang government was not as active in regional cooperation as the Guangxi government, despite its success in constructing more Confucius Institutes in its neighboring region and building more economic

cooperation zones at the border. For instance, top officials from Xinjiang visited countries in its neighboring region only three times (versus Guangxi's fifty-eight foreign visits) and established three institutionalized dialogue mechanisms with the region (versus Guangxi's four B/MDMs). The Xinjiang government signed twenty-seven friendship-city partnerships with cities in its neighboring region (versus Guangxi's fifty-four). In terms of media coverage, regional cooperation was the subject of only 179 articles in the *Xinjiang Daily* (versus 2131 articles in the *Guangxi Daily*), and provincial leaders mentioned it only once in the *People's Daily* (versus six articles by Guangxi's leaders). In terms of economics, in addition to the government's institutional settings of the exhibition and ports-of-entry, the majority of institutions established by the Xinjiang government to promote regional cooperation had administrative ranks below the bureau level. In addition, the provincial government provided scholarships for students from its neighboring region only to take language courses in Xinjiang's tertiary institutions.

Compared the government of Guangxi, the Jilin government achieved superior results only in constructing Confucius Institutes in its neighboring region. Meanwhile, the provincial government of Jilin surpassed that of Xinjiang in only three indicators: the frequency of provincial leaders' visits to neighboring region, the number of media reports on regional cooperation, and the organization of exhibitions targeted at neighboring region. In all other aspects of regional cooperation, the Jilin government lagged behind. For example, the Jilin government formed only thirteen

friendship-city partnerships with Northeast Asian countries. It did not initiate the construction of any cross-border economic cooperation zones or free trade pilot zones, nor did it offer any exclusive scholarships for international students from Northeast Asia to study in Jilin's tertiary institutions. Overall, among the three provincial governments studied, Jilin was the least active in regional cooperation during the study period.

The three provincial governments' varying levels of activism in regional cooperation is best explained by the two variables proposed by the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, as detailed in previous chapters. The first variable is the "motivator"; promoting provincial economic development was one of the fundamental reasons for the Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin governments' engagement in regional cooperation between 2004 and 2019. Due to the fact that the three provinces had varying degrees of economic openness to their respective neighboring regions during the time period, the economic growth of each province benefited to varying degrees from economic exchanges with its neighboring region. Consequently, the three provincial governments were variously motivated by differing levels of incentives for engaging in regional cooperation. Figure 6.1 demonstrates that the Xinjiang government had the strongest incentive, because Xinjiang's economic development benefited the most from economic exchanges with its neighboring region. Guangxi's government, albeit to a lesser degree, was also increasingly motivated to engage in regional cooperation due to the increasing

economic importance of exports to its neighboring region. In contrast to Guangxi and Xinjiang, Jilin’s government lacked the motivation to conduct regional cooperation due to its low (and progressively declining) level of economic openness to its neighboring region.

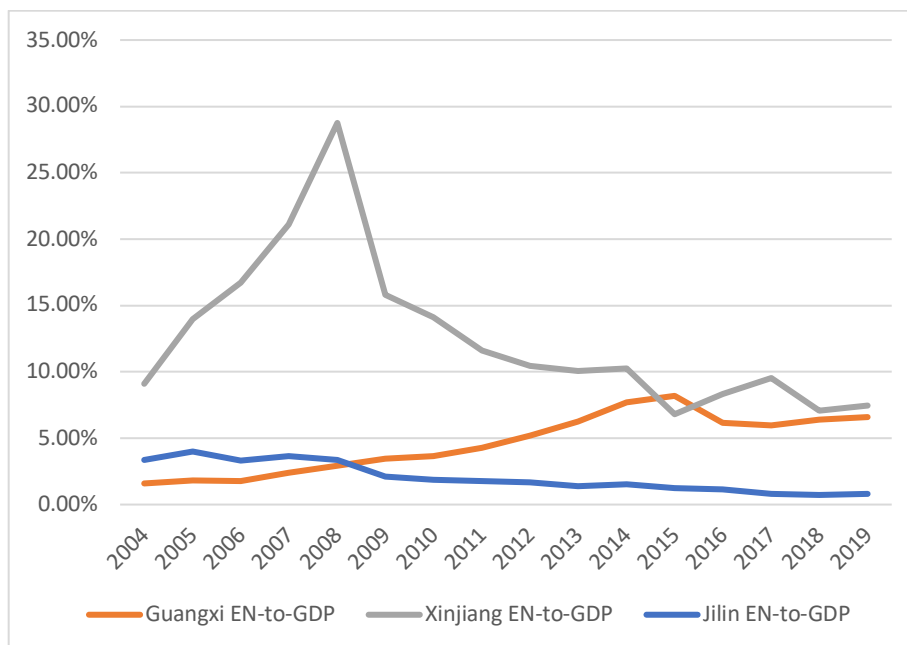


Figure 6.1 Provincial Exports to Neighboring Region-to-GDP Ratio (EN-to-GDP Ratio): 2004–2019. Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on 2005–2020 Statistics Yearbooks of Guangxi, Xinjiang and Jilin, China Customs, and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

The varying levels of “motivator” are not sufficient to fully explain the differences in the activism in regional cooperation among the three provincial governments. In particular, the Guangxi government was more active in regional cooperation than the Xinjiang government, despite Guangxi’s economic openness to

its neighboring region between 2004 and 2019 being, on average, lower than that of Xinjiang. Consideration of the second variable, the “moderator,” as proposed by Embedded Local Liberalism, addresses the limitation of the “motivator” and enhances the explanatory power of the analytical framework.

The provincial governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin all recognized that a favorable geopolitical environment for China in their respective neighboring regions was crucial for regional cooperation. As presented in previous chapters, a number of elements shaped their perceptions of a favorable geopolitical environment: a formal regional institution with China and major countries in the region as members; China’s dominance in bilateral relationships, especially when there are sovereignty and territorial disputes; China’s relationships with other major powers in the region; and China’s influence and capability in managing regional affairs, particularly with regard to national and regional security and stability. On the one hand, the three provincial governments argued that they, as substate actors, were offered rich opportunities to cooperate with their respective neighboring regions in a perceived favorable geopolitical environment. On the other hand, such an environment provided a promising outlook for their regional cooperation projects because they encountered fewer obstacles and difficulties. Because of their different perceptions of China’s geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions during the study period, the “motivator” effects were moderated differently.

From 2004 to 2019, the Guangxi government had the most positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region compared to the governments of Xinjiang and Jilin. The signing and upgrading of the CAFTA, China's participation in the GMS—particularly the central government's decision to make the Guangxi government a formal participant of the regional institution—and China's increasing attractiveness to, and influence over, Southeast Asian countries led the Guangxi government to believe that it had ample space and plentiful opportunities to conduct regional cooperation. In addition, China's dominance over regional affairs, such as China's growing role in fostering regional economic development and its peaceful approach to resolving maritime disputes in the South China Sea, bolstered the Guangxi government's positive view. In light of this perceived favorable geopolitical environment for China in Southeast Asia, the Guangxi government believed that it faced fewer obstacles and challenges in advancing regional cooperation.

During the study period, the Xinjiang government had a mixed view of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region. The provincial government of Xinjiang, like that of Guangxi, had a positive perception due to the establishment and continued development of the SCO, as well as the strengthening of ties between China and Russia, as well as between China and Central Asian countries. Because the geopolitical environment provided numerous opportunities for regional cooperation, this positive perception encouraged the Xinjiang

government to collaborate with neighboring countries. However, unlike the Guangxi government, the government of Xinjiang was deterred by its negative assessment of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region at the same time. The limited development of the SCO, China's lack of influence and strength vis-à-vis Russia and the US in the region, and China's sovereignty concerns regarding pro-Xinjiang-independence groups posed significant obstacles and challenges for the Xinjiang government to cooperate with neighboring countries.

Between 2004 and 2019, the provincial government of Jilin had the most negative perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring regions among all three provincial governments. Although the Jilin government acknowledged that the implementation of the CSFTA, China's coordination and cooperation with Russia, and the ongoing development of the China–Japan–South Korea trilateral economic cooperation created opportunities for it to conduct regional cooperation, its perception of China's geopolitical environment was predominantly negative due to the complexity and increasing uncertainty in the region. China's lack of dominance in stabilizing territorial disputes with Japan, its limited capability in easing regional security concerns over North Korean nuclear issues, the containment policies adopted by the US and Japan toward China, and South Korea's intensifying alliance with the US constituted to this complexity and growing uncertainty, and fundamentally shaped the negative perception of the Jilin government. This

perceived environment presented formidable obstacles and challenges to the Jilin government's prospects for regional cooperation.

Comparing the three provincial governments illustrates the differing effects of the “moderator” introduced by Embedded Local Liberalism. Even though Guangxi's economic openness to Southeast Asia was not the highest among the three inland border provinces from 2004 to 2019, the Guangxi government was the most active in regional cooperation because it held the most positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region. This perception made the Guangxi government more confident than the governments of Xinjiang and Jilin that regional cooperation could effectively facilitate provincial economic development. In other words, as the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism argues, provincial economic openness to its neighboring region is more likely to result in regional cooperation when the provincial government perceives a favorable geopolitical environment for its state in the region. In contrast to the Guangxi government, the Xinjiang government was discouraged by the “moderator” from cooperating with its neighboring region. Unlike the Guangxi government, which had a mostly positive perception of China's geopolitical environment, the Xinjiang government had a mixed view; China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region presented abundant opportunities but also posed significant challenges for it to conduct regional cooperation. Therefore, the Xinjiang government was less confident than the Guangxi government that regional cooperation could stimulate

provincial economic development. It was willing to cooperate but exhibited less activism in general, despite possessing greater motivations. According to Embedded Local Liberalism, provincial economic openness to its neighboring region is less likely to result in regional cooperation when the provincial government perceives an unfavorable geopolitical environment for its state in the region. This deactivating effect of “moderator” is most significant in the case of the Jilin government. Both the Jilin and Guangxi governments had weaker economic motivations than the government of Xinjiang, but due to its predominantly negative perception of China’s geopolitical environment in its neighboring region, only the Jilin government became less active in regional cooperation than the Xinjiang government. Because this perceived environment presented mostly obstacles and challenges, the Jilin government deemed it unlikely that the province’s economy would be developed through regional cooperation. As a result, as suggested by the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, the Jilin government was hesitant to cooperate with neighboring countries due to its weaker motivations and predominantly negative perception of China’s geopolitical environment in its neighboring region.

2. The Activism of the Remaining Inland Border Provincial Governments: 2004–2019

China's land border is 22,800 kilometers long. There are nine provinces located along this border, which adjoins fourteen countries. Despite being consistently encouraged and supported by the central government, the provincial governments of these inland border provinces exhibited varying degrees of activism in regional cooperation. From 2004 to 2019, in descending order, from the most active provincial government to the least, these were Guangxi, Yunnan, Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Liaoning, Gansu, and Tibet.⁴⁴ At one end of this spectrum, the most active provincial governments, such as the government of Guangxi, attached importance to and invested efforts in nearly every aspect of regional cooperation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the least active provincial governments, such as the government of Tibet, pursued almost no developments in any regional cooperation areas. In the middle of these two extremes, provincial governments such as that of Xinjiang concentrated their efforts on certain aspects of regional cooperation rather than all. This section provides a brief analysis of this variation in relation to the two factors proposed by Embedded Local Liberalism.

Similar to the provincial governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin, economic development was one of the primary reasons for the rest of China's inland border provincial governments to conduct regional cooperation. For instance, the Yunnan government was motivated to develop POEs after realizing that provincial exports—particularly exports in border trade—significantly contributed to Yunnan's

⁴⁴ See Appendix I for more details.

economic growth (Jiyun Li 2013c; Y. Yan 2015). Russia was Heilongjiang's largest export partner, and exports were important to the growth of provincial economy. Because of this, the Heilongjiang government set up frequent communications with Russian counterparts, organized trade fairs and exhibitions with Russia as the main partner, promoted the development of overseas industrial parks in Russia, and built up POEs to improve and increase the economic exchanges between Heilongjiang and Russia (Suo 2014). Because Liaoning's economic growth depended heavily on trade with its neighboring region—in particular, Japan and South Korea—the Liaoning government decided to upgrade POEs (Chi Zhang and Zhang 2008).

Despite the fact that all provincial governments along China's inland border participated in regional cooperation for provincial economic development, the intensity of the incentives varied. Figure 1.2 (recall Chapter I, Section 5.3) demonstrates that provincial governments were motivated to conduct regional cooperation to varying degrees. From 2004 to 2019, Xinjiang had, on average, the greatest economic openness to its neighboring region, followed by Liaoning, Tibet, Guangxi, Heilongjiang, Yunnan, Jilin, and Inner Mongolia. Gansu had the least economic openness to its neighboring region. According to Embedded Local Liberalism, this indicates that the Xinjiang government had the strongest incentives to engage in regional cooperation among all the others, because the provincial economy was highly dependent on economic exchanges with its neighboring region. Figure 1.2 illustrates an additional noteworthy trend. Between 2004 and 2019,

provincial economic openness to their respective regions decreased for all provinces except Guangxi, Yunnan, and Gansu. Based on Embedded Local Liberalism, this downward trend suggests that the provincial governments of these provinces may be motivated by fewer incentives. A government official from the Inner Mongolia government testified, “(since) the level of export reliance has decreased ... our work to cooperate with neighboring countries in the North has further stalled” (Duan 2016, 6, my translation).

Much as how the “motivator” alone is insufficient to explain the variation in activism among the governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin between 2004 and 2019, economic incentives alone also cannot account for the differences among all Chinese inland border provincial governments during the same time period. For instance, the governments of Liaoning and Tibet were less active than those of Guangxi and Yunnan, even though Liaoning and Tibet had greater economic openness to their respective neighboring regions than Guangxi and Yunnan. In addition to analyzing the “motivator,” it is essential to examine the “moderator,” or provincial governments’ perceptions of China’s geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions, as introduced by Embedded Local Liberalism. Here, I collected articles written by officials of the remaining six inland border provincial governments, as well as scholars based in these provinces, using the CNKI online database. All of these articles reveal those officials’ and scholars’ perspectives on, and analyses of, China’s interactions with the provinces’ respective neighboring

regions on issues with geopolitical implications, as well as how these interactions affect the provincial governments' cost-benefit calculations for their regional cooperation projects. Based on this data, I summarize the perceptions of each of these provincial governments from 2004 to 2019, i.e., the “moderator,” and discuss how the “moderator” varied among them and how this variable differently moderated the effects of “motivator” in determining their activism in participating in regional cooperation.

The Perception of the Yunnan Government

As indicated by articles written by Yunnan's scholars and government officials, similar to the Guangxi government, the provincial government of Yunnan was optimistic about China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region from 2004 to 2019. The establishment and development of CAFTA provided the Yunnan government with easy access to enormous opportunities for regional cooperation. The launch of CAFTA significantly improved China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia, as it marked the first time that China's neighboring countries collectively showed willingness to share prosperity and stability with China (Qu and Li 2004). Therefore, the Yunnan government was able to pursue a more comprehensive and in-depth cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, particularly countries located on the China-Indochina Peninsula (Bi 2009; G. Wang and Chen 2012; Mu Yang 2006; Qu and Li 2004; Z. Liu 2007).

The Yunnan government and its policy advisors also deemed the development of GMS and Lancang–Mekong Cooperation (LMC) to be conducive to their participation in regional cooperation. Years of GMS cooperation between China and five countries in the region of the Mekong River had deepened the Yunnan government’s regional cooperation (Yong Ma et al. 2014). In light of the development of GMS and CAFTA, policy consultants in Yunnan anticipated that their provincial government would have strategic opportunities to collaborate with Southeast Asia for twenty years to come (Shengda He 2004). Even though the LMC was not established until 2016, its accomplishments and impacts were impressive; it was lauded by Yunnan’s scholars as exemplifying China’s efforts to build a shared community with its neighboring countries (G. Lu 2019). Through the platform given by the LMC, not only the Yunnan government, but also those of Guangxi, Guizhou, and even Chongqing, were able to cooperate with Southeast Asia (G. Lu 2019). Moreover, with China at the center of these mechanisms, China was able to play a more influential and proactive role in regional affairs; Chinese dominance in the region was a prerequisite for the Yunnan government to participate in regional cooperation (G. Wang and Chen 2012; N. Lu and Zhang 2011; S. Luo 2014).

Although the growing presence of other major powers (such as India, the US, and Japan) in Southeast Asia—particularly in the area of the Mekong River—posed challenges to China’s relationship with the region, China remained a priority in Southeast Asian countries’ balancing strategies, and the long-standing cooperative

relationship between China and Southeast Asia remained robust (Chenyang Li 2013a; G. Lu and Jin 2015; Qiang Liu, Qin, and Zhu 2017; S. Luo 2014). Together with the establishment and achievements of CAFTA, GMS, and LMC, this perception led Yunnan's intellectual and policy-making community to conclude that China's geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia was favorable for regional cooperation.

The Perception of the Tibetan Government

During the study period, Tibet's government had one of the most negative perceptions of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region, compared to other Chinese inland border provincial governments. Tibet's government believed that Sino-Indian relations presented one of the greatest obstacles for it to engage in regional cooperation. First, India viewed South Asia as its own sphere of influence and regarded China's engagement with the region as an attempt to increase influence in the region and even to vie for regional leadership (H. Yan 2017; Z. Feng 2010). Second, border disputes between China and India occasionally escalated into military standoffs (X. Luo 2017) that damaged Sino-Indian relations. Third, the relations between China and India were tense due to divergent policies and attitudes toward the Dalai Lama (P. Chen and Wang 2018; P. Zhao 2005; Z. Feng 2010). As a result, India's skepticism and hostility toward China's presence in South Asia significantly restricted the space in which Tibet's government might conduct any cooperation with India (P. Chen 2018; Tu Deng Ke Zhu 2017).

What's more, India's dominance in Tibet's neighboring region and its influences on other neighboring countries created additional obstacles for regional cooperation by Tibet's government. Although the comprehensive cooperative partnership between China and Nepal afforded Tibet's government opportunities and starting points for regional cooperation (Di and Liu 2018; Tu Deng Ke Zhu 2017), Tibet's government acknowledged that it was difficult to collaborate with Nepal due to India's overwhelming influence on the country (P. Chen 2018; W. Xu 2017). Due to its topography, Nepal was geographically closer to India than to China, making it difficult or even impossible for it to maintain a balanced and equidistant relationship between China and India (P. Chen and Wang 2018). China–Nepal cooperation remained limited, and any cooperation with Nepal proposed by Tibet's government would prompt India's vigilance and countermeasures due to India's desire to maintain its substantial influence over Nepal (J. Huang and Xin 2019; Yabo Yang 2015b). Furthermore, Nepal's heavy reliance on the US and Japan for development assistance hindered cooperation between Tibet's government and Nepal (H. Yan 2020; J. Huang and Xin 2019). Moreover, like Xinjiang's government, Tibet's government was concerned about pro-Tibetan-independence groups that were primarily based in South Asia and had infiltrated from Nepal; the provincial government had to strike a balance between cooperating with South Asian countries and protecting China's sovereignty and national stability (Niu and Liu 2018; P. Chen and Wang 2018).

Finally, India's dominance in South Asia, combined with the competitions between a rising India and a rising China, also had significant influences over Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh and their China policies; this substantially increased the costs for Tibet's government to cooperate with these countries, which were under intense pressure from India (Niu and Liu 2018; P. Chen 2018; Tu Deng Ke Zhu 2017; W. Zhou 2019).

The Perception of the Gansu Government

From 2004 to 2019, the Gansu and Xinjiang governments shared a similar perspective on China's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions. In their views, this environment presented both opportunities and challenges for regional cooperation.

Similar to the Xinjiang government, the Gansu government saw the establishment of the SCO (especially the implementation of the Program of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation under the SCO) and the China–Mongolia cooperation framework as providing significant opportunities for it to cooperate with neighboring countries (Chang 2014; Lixun Yang and Su 2015; S. Li and Wang 2007). However, like Xinjiang's scholars and government officials, the policy-making circle in Gansu acknowledged that the slow pace of SCO development, as well as the fact that China and Russia held different visions of the organization, had hampered SCO's ability to foster a favorable geopolitical environment for regional cooperation (Jiao 2018; S. Yang 2013). Additionally,

China's lack of dominance in Gansu's neighboring region presented additional obstacles for the Gansu government's pursuit of increased regional cooperation. On the one hand, the presences of the US, Japan, and even India in the region, as well as competition between these countries and China, resulted in difficulties for the Gansu government to implement regional cooperation projects (Cui 2014; Yazhou Chen and Zeng 2018; Y. Zhu and Yang 2007). On the other hand, due to Russia's dominance in Central Asia, Russia's support was essential for China to conduct regional cooperation. However, Russia's concerns about China's growing influence in the region, as well as its ambivalence and reluctance to support China's cooperation with the region, created one of the largest obstacles for all of China's regional cooperation projects, including those initiated by the provincial government of Gansu (Jiao 2018; Zeng 2015).

The Perception of the Inner Mongolia Government

Although Inner Mongolia and Jilin are both neighbors to Northeast Asia, the provincial government of Inner Mongolia had a more positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region from 2004 to 2019. In this environment, the Inner Mongolia government found more opportunities than challenges.

Scholars and government officials in Inner Mongolia agreed that the relations between China, Mongolia, and Russia were at an all-time high during the study period (Bao 2017; L. Fan 2012; R. Li 2019c). Specifically, the strategic partnership

between China and Mongolia, the establishment and deepening of a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination between China and Russia, Russia's increasing need to cooperate with China since the 2013 Ukraine Crisis, and the signing of a comprehensive deal on developing the China–Mongolia–Russia (CMR) economic corridor provided ample opportunities for Inner Mongolia's government to play an active role in regional cooperation (Jiadong Li 2015; Liang Yang 2011a; Tai 2017; Xiaojun Zhu and Zhao 2015). The advancements in trilateral economic cooperation between China, Japan, and South Korea offered the provincial government of Inner Mongolia with additional opportunities to engage in regional cooperation (Y. Dong 2010b).

However, the decision-makers and their policy advisors in Inner Mongolia recognized that the geopolitical environment for China in Northeast Asia was not devoid of challenges. First, Mongolia's declaration as a "permanently neutral state" and that its balancing strategy intensified competition between China and Russia made it difficult for the Inner Mongolia government to conduct regional cooperation (L. Yun 2012; Y. Feng 2017). Second, Russia's vigilance regarding China's increasing influence in Mongolia—a country within Russia's traditional sphere of influence—also posed challenges for the provincial government of Inner Mongolia (L. Fan 2015; L. Fan and Li 2016; Ligu Ma 2019c). Third, agreeing with intellectuals from Xinjiang, the Inner Mongolia government believed that Russia's Eurasia Union, as well as its desire to prevent China's influence from penetrating

Mongolia and Central Asia, impeded its ability to engage in regional cooperation (L. Fan 2015; Xiaojun Zhu and Zhao 2015).

The Perception of the Heilongjiang Government

Compared to the Inner Mongolia government, the Heilongjiang government had a more positive view of China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia. Although the Heilongjiang government recognized that the continuation of North Korean nuclear issues and the US involvement and dominance in regional affairs posed obstacles for it to conduct regional cooperation, it also recognized that these factors created complexity in China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia but did not result in more conflicts among countries in the region (Da and Ren 2011; Da 2013; X. Zhang 2014b; Yu Zhang, Yang, and Guo 2012). Instead, the provincial government found numerous opportunities by analyzing China's relationships with Russia as well as China's progress in FTA negotiations with other Northeast Asian countries.

Intellectuals and policymakers in Heilongjiang were elated to learn that Sino-Russian relations had not only reached their highest point in history, but had also become a model for relations between great powers (B. Liu 2018a; Ding and Ding 2011; Mingyuan Yang 2007; Youjun Ma and Zhang 2011). The high level of mutual trust between China and Russia gave the Heilongjiang government access to many opportunities for regional cooperation (Da 2014; Xiaofu Wang et al. 2011). For instance, the implementation of the program of cooperation between Northeast China

and Russia's Far East and Eastern Siberia (2009–2018), and especially the Joint Declaration on Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and Construction of Eurasian Economic Union, indicated that Russia had begun to proactively pursue cooperation with China, which made it easier for the Heilongjiang government to implement regional cooperation projects, such as a pilot zone for free trade, a trade fair targeting at Russia, and the development and digitalization of POEs (Xiaofu Wang et al. 2011; Youjun Ma 2019d). A policy consultant for the provincial government even suggested that China–Russia cooperation could effectively promote multilateral cooperation between China, Japan, and South Korea, which was conducive to the Heilongjiang government becoming more active in participating in regional cooperation (Da 2014). In addition, the implementation of the China–South Korea FTA, the negotiation of the China–Mongolia FTA, and the China–Japan–South Korea FTA all offered the Heilongjiang government ample opportunities and a promising outlook for its own regional cooperation initiatives (Da 2013; Qiulan Wang 2019a).

The Perception of the Liaoning Government

During the study period, among inland border provincial governments of China, the Liaoning government had one of the most negative perceptions of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region. First, countries in Northeast Asia continued to prioritize political security over economic cooperation due to the ongoing insecurity caused by North Korea's nuclear issues (Bian 2012). Due to the

absence of mutual political trust and the prevalence of a Cold-War mentality, it was difficult to establish formal institutional frameworks for state-to-state cooperation in such a context (Bian 2015; Diao and Zhang 2011). On the one hand, this left the Liaoning government little room to participate in regional cooperation (Diao and Zhang 2011). On the other hand, the resulting security dilemma prevented the Liaoning government from advancing any regional cooperation projects, particularly along Liaoning's land border and between Liaoning and South Korea (Bian 2012, 2015; Man 2010; M. Jin 2009). Due to the security concern, the Liaoning government had to terminate its plan to organize a China–South Korea exhibition (Yonhap News Agency 2016). Second, because the US, the hegemon in Northeast Asia, contained China, the Liaoning government faced great challenges and uncertainties in pursuing greater involvement in regional cooperation, such as cross-border economic zones (Cao, Chen, and Zhao 2014; Diao and Zhang 2011; X. Dong and Li 2018). Third, the improvement of Sino-Japanese relations was a prerequisite for the Liaoning government to cooperate with Japan's counterparts, but Sino-Japanese relations were tense due to China's rise and Japan's alliance with the US to contain China (H. Xu 2008; Qin 2019; X. Xie and Yue 2013). Finally, although the Liaoning government agreed with the provincial governments of Heilongjiang and Jilin that the China–South Korea FTA, China–Japan–South Korea FTA and Sino-Russian strategic partnership provided opportunities for it to conduct regional cooperation, it more strongly emphasized the risks and obstacles posed by Japan and

South Korea's vigilance toward China's rise, South Korea's military alliance with the US, and Russia's discontent with China's growing influence in Northeast Asia (Bian 2015; Jingqiu Li 2014a; X. Dong and Li 2018).

Summary

The above analysis shows that Chinese inland border provincial governments held different perceptions of China's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions, even though some of them are adjacent to the same region. The governments of Guangxi and Yunnan held the most positive views; they believed that China's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions presented ample opportunities for them to engage in regional cooperation and that China's dominance in the region was favorable for them to advance regional cooperation. The governments of Xinjiang and Gansu shared the view that China's geopolitical environment in their neighboring regions presented both significant opportunities and challenges for regional cooperation; they were able to participate in regional cooperation, but they had to overcome some challenges and obstacles.

Although Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning are all adjacent to Northeast Asia, the provincial governments of these four provinces held different views of China's geopolitical environment in the region. The provincial governments of Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang acknowledged that the security concerns caused by North Korea nuclear issues, US dominance in Northeast Asia, and China's lack of influence in the region vis-à-vis the US and Russia presented difficulties for their

participation in regional cooperation; nevertheless, they believed that these obstacles were not significant and did not make the environment unfavorable for regional cooperation. However, the perceptions of the Jilin and Liaoning governments were considerably more negative. Security concerns related to North Korean nuclear issues, China's competition and even conflicts with the US and Japan, as well as US regional dominance and influence over Japan and South Korea alarmed the two provincial governments, particularly the Liaoning government. Not only did such an environment limit their ability to advance regional cooperation, but it also presented substantial challenges and enormous obstacles.

The Tibetan government's perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region was considerably more negative. Due to India's dominance in the region and its influence over other countries in the region, particularly Nepal, as well as the conflicts between China and India over border disputes and the Dalai Lama, it was difficult for the Tibetan government to engage in regional cooperation, let alone make any progress in its participation.

As suggested by the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism, provincial governments' involvement in regional cooperation is jointly determined by provincial economic openness to their respective neighboring regions and provincial governments' perceptions of China's geopolitical environment in those regions. Chinese inland border provincial governments were motivated to participate in regional cooperation to varying extents because of their varying levels of

economic dependence on their respective neighboring regions. This economic motivation partially explains why the Guangxi government was more active than the Yunnan government in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019; that is, because Guangxi's economic openness to its neighboring region was higher than that of Yunnan. However, how provincial governments perceived China's geopolitical environment in their respective regions moderated the effects of economic motivation. When an inland border provincial government perceives that its state's geopolitical environment is favorable in its neighboring region, provincial economic openness to the region is more likely to result in active participation in regional cooperation. In contrast, when an inland border provincial government perceives that its state's geopolitical environment is unfavorable in its neighboring region, provincial economic openness to the region is less likely to lead to active participation in regional cooperation. In other words, a positive perception can amplify the effect of economic motivation, whereas a negative perception can diminish their effect. The more positive perception of the geopolitical environment by the Guangxi government facilitated the effects of economic motivation, making the Guangxi government more active than the Yunnan government. What's more, Embedded Local Liberalism best explains why Xinjiang, Tibet, and Liaoning enjoyed higher levels of provincial economic openness to their respective neighboring regions compared with Guangxi and Yunnan (recall Figure 1.2), and yet their provincial governments were much less active in regional cooperation from

2004 to 2019 than those of Guangxi and Yunnan (see Appendix I). The comparison between the governments of Xinjiang, Tibet, and Liaoning, and those of Guangxi and Yunnan demonstrates that a perceived favorable geopolitical environment is a prerequisite for provincial governments to actively engage in regional cooperation, regardless of the strength of their economic motivations. Even if some provinces are adjacent to the same region, such as Heilongjiang and Liaoning, their provincial governments may be active to varying degrees. This is likely due to their locations (i.e., the countries with which they share physical borders), which cause them to emphasize different aspects of the geopolitical environment, resulting in different assessments.

3. Implications of the Research

As discussed in Chapter II, many scholars have long studied subnational governments' increasing activism in international relations (Hocking 1999; Soldatos 1991). China's subnational governments are no exception; they have played important roles in China's foreign relations (Cheung and Tang 2001; Wong 2018; Y.N. Zheng 1994). In particular, China's provincial governments, notably the governments of Guangxi and Yunnan, now play a significant role in implementing and even forming the country's regional strategy (M. Li 2014b; Mierzejewski 2021; Summers 2013). The findings of this dissertation complement and expand upon these

works. Using China as an example, my research shows that subnational governments' perceptions of their state's status in the regional/international system determine how far economic incentives can motivate them to conduct regional and international cooperation. In other words, subnational governments are more confident, and therefore, more likely to conduct regional and international cooperation when they perceive that their state enjoys a more dominant role relative to the others and that this dominance is less contested. In contrast, subnational governments tend to be more cautious and reluctant to engage in regional and international cooperation when they believe that most of the other states in the regional and international system are attempting to contain their state. It suggests that increasing globalization has profound impacts on central–local relations in centralized states such as China. States are not effective gatekeepers because international politics can facilitate or limit subnational governments' willingness and ability to comply with their central government.

In addition, when considering state-to-state relations—and, possibly more broadly, regional and international order—subnational governments are more likely to play a “strengthening” role for the existing order. When they perceive that their state has already benefited from a stable geopolitical environment in which it holds a position of strength and faces less competition, they are more willing and capable to engage in regional cooperation. In turn, their activism helps consolidate this order by drawing more countries into the state's orbit of influence through cooperation. In

the meantime, when they perceive that their state is engaged in fierce competition with others in the regional and international system and is contained by others, they tend to believe that pursuing a greater role in regional and international cooperation would be fraught with significant obstacles. Their reluctance to cooperate may only reinforce the reality that their state's influence is limited and difficult to expand. Even if they are able to advance some cooperation activities, it is possible that these activities will increase the suspicions and fears of others, making their state still less advantageous and more vulnerable in the world system.

The implications of this study's findings extend to China's central government and foreign cooperative partners. On the one hand, to better mobilize its administrative subordinates for regional cooperation, China's central government must prove to its provincial governments that it enjoys a stable geopolitical environment in its neighboring regions that is favorable for provincial governments' engagement in regional cooperation. For instance, as shown in the previous chapters, China's successful establishment of regional and international institutions can shape positive perceptions of provincial governments and enable them to engage in regional and international cooperation, and also facilitate this cooperation. On the other hand, if China's neighboring countries wish to deepen their cooperation with China by cooperating with its provincial governments, they may first need to address provincial governments' concerns regarding China's geopolitical environment in the region and shape their positive perceptions of the environment. Participating in

China's proposed regional and international institutions, such as CAFTA and SCO, may be an effective means of doing so.

4. Developments in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era

The spread of COVID-19 and its subsequent effects have caused a global crisis of unprecedented scope and scale (United Nations 2020). In addition, the ongoing pandemic inhibits the participation of China's inland border provincial governments in regional cooperation. For instance, COVID-19 has prevented all provincial leaders from visiting any foreign countries, including their neighboring countries. Furthermore, when they were not suspended, meetings of B/MCMs and exhibitions have been held virtually. Using the governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin as examples, I demonstrate how the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism can be applied to explain the developments in the COVID-19 pandemic era.

During the pandemic era, the three provincial governments have not made significant progress in a number of aspects of regional cooperation, such as the institutional management structure of exhibitions and DOPZs, the contents of scholarships provided to students coming from neighboring regions, and the number of Confucius Institutes established in neighboring regions. However, subtle developments in other aspects reveal differences. The Guangxi government has

remained the most active in regional cooperation. It has established more friendship-city partnerships with its neighboring region and issued a number of actions plans and pledged to implementing a number of policy measures to develop DOPZs,⁴⁵ SCCAs,⁴⁶ FTPZs,⁴⁷ BECZs⁴⁸ and POEs.⁴⁹ In addition, while awaiting approval from the central government to set up three national BECZs in Jingxi, Fancheng and Longzhou, the Guangxi government has already designated these three BECZs as provincial-level BECZs (Guangxi government 2021a). In contrast to the Guangxi

⁴⁵ See, for example, the Guangxi government-issued Notice by the General Office of the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Master Plan for Guangxi Baise Key Developing and Opening Pilot Zones (2021–2030) [*Guangxi Zhuangzi zizhiqun renmin zhengfu bangongting guanyu yinfa guangxi baise zhongdian kaifa kaifang shiyanqu jianshe zongti guihua (2021–2030)*] and Reply by the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Supporting International Fintech Industrial Park in Guangxi Baise Key Developing and Opening Pilot Zones [*Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqun renmin zhengfu guanyu zhichi guangxi baise zhongdian kaifa kaifang shiyanqu guoji jinrong keji chanyeyuan fazhan youguan zhengcecuoshi de pifu*].

⁴⁶ See, for example, the Guangxi government-issued Notice by the General Office of the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Three Years' Plan of Speeding up the Development of Comprehensive Bonded Zones with Quality (2021–2023) [*Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqun renminzhengfu bangongting guanyu yinfa guangxi jiakuai zonghe baoshuiqu gaozhiliang fazhan sannian xingdongjihua (2021–2023nian)*]. In addition, the Guangxi government has also decided to apply for bonded logistic centers in Guilin.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the Guangxi government-issued Notice by the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Replicating and Promoting the Second Batch of Provincial-level Institutional Innovative Achievements of China (Guangxi) Free Trade Pilot Zones [*Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqun renminzhengfu guanyu zuohao zhongguo (Guangxi) ziyou maoyi shiyanqu dierpi zizhiquji zhidu chuanguan chengguo fuzhi tuiguang gongzuo de tongzhi*] and Notice by the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Amendments on Promoting the Development of China (Guangxi) Free Trade Pilot Zone With High Quality [*Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqun renmin zhengfu guanyu xiugai cujin zhongguo (Guangxi) ziyou maoyi shiyanqu gaozhiliang fazhan zhichi zhengce youguan neirong de tongzhi*].

⁴⁸ See, for example, the Guangxi government-issued Notice by the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Promoting the Development of Border Economic Cooperation Zones With High Quality [*Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqun renmin zhengfu guanyu cujin bianjing jingji hezuoqu gaozhiliang fazhan de ruoganyijian*]. In addition, the provincial government has already decided to set up three province-level BECZs in Fangchenggang, Jingxi and Longzhou, respectively.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the Guangxi government-issued Notice by the General Office of the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region on Three Years' Construction Plan on Beibu Gulf International Port (2021–2023) [*Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqun renmin zhengfu bangongting guanyu yinfa guangxi beibuwan guoji menhugang jianshe sannian xingdongjihua (2021–2023)*].

government, the governments of Jilin and Xinjiang have been less active. They have made progress in only a few indicators. For instance, the Xinjiang government has prioritized the formation of friendship-city partnerships as well as the development of DOPZs⁵⁰ and platforms in Horgos, including the Horgos CBZ, the China–Kazakhstan Horgos International Border Cooperation Center, and the Horgos Port.⁵¹ The Jilin government has been the least active, focusing only on the development of SCCAs,⁵² BECZs, and an FTPZ.⁵³

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted regional and international economic exchanges, but this disruption has made the provincial governments more cognizant of the significance of exports to economic growth in general. Both the provincial governments of Guangxi and Xinjiang have issued policies to expedite the construction of SCCAs and POEs in order to stabilize foreign trade in general (Hongmei Zhou and Kang 2020; TS news 2020). Moreover, compared to that of the pre-pandemic era, Guangxi’s level of economic openness to

⁵⁰ See, for example, the Xinjiang government-issued Multiple Policy Measures to Speed up the high-quality development on Xinjiang Tacheng Key Developing and Opening Pilot Zone [*Guanyu jiakuai tuijin Xinjiang Tacheng zhongdian kaifa kaifang shiyanqu gaozhiliang jianshe de ruogan zhengce*].

⁵¹ See the Guiding Suggestions on Further Promote the High-Quality Development of Horgos [*Guanyu jinyibu tuijin huoerguosi gaozhiliang fazhan de zhidaoyijian*].

⁵² See, for example, the Jilin government-issued Notice by People’s Government of Jilin Province on Implementation Plans on Promoting the High-Quality Opening-up and Development of Comprehensive Bonded Zones [*Jilisheng renmin zhengfu guanyu yinfa jilisheng cujin zonghe baoshuiqu gaoshuiping kaifang gaozhiliang fazhan shishifangan de tongzhi*].

⁵³ See, for example, in the Suggestions by the General Office of Jilin’s People’s Government on Key Arrangements on Comprehensive Opening-up and cooperation [*Jilisheng renminzhengfu bangongting guanyu quanmian kaifang hezuo zhongdian buju de yijian*], in addition to detailing the development plan for SCCAs, the Jilin government also mentions the development of BECZs in Hunchun and Helong as well as province-level BECZs in Lingjiang, Ji’an, Changbai, Tumen and Longjin. Furthermore, the Jilin government reiterates its plan to apply for a FTPZ.

its neighboring region has surpassed that of Xinjiang (see Table 6.1), indicating that, among the three provincial governments, the Guangxi government has the strongest economic incentives to engage in regional cooperation during the pandemic era. In the meantime, the Jilin government continues to have the weakest motivations for engaging in regional cooperation.

Table 6.1 Provincial Exports to Neighboring Region-to-GDP Ratio (EN-to-GDP Ratio): 2020–2021

	2020	2021
Guangxi	6.93%	6.70%
Xinjiang	5.93%	6.34%
Jilin	0.57%	0.65%

Source: Author’s calculation and drawing based on China Customs and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People’s Republic of China.

The pandemic’s impacts on the participation of subnational governments in regional cooperation extend beyond economic exchanges. However, despite the fact that the pandemic has presented a significant shock to the post-Cold War world order and may accelerate geopolitical changes (Burrows and Engelke 2020; Nye 2020), the perceptions of the governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin remain largely unchanged from prior to 2019.

Guangxi’s intellectuals and policymakers maintain a positive view of China’s geopolitical environment in Southeast Asia during the pandemic era. Although scholars and provincial government officials recognize that geopolitical rivalry

between China and the US is intensifying as a result of the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy and Western countries' politicization of China's donations of vaccines to Southeast Asia, they continue to view China–ASEAN relations as one of the most successful and robust examples of Asia-Pacific regional cooperation, which is resilient in the face of the aforementioned challenges (Interview Nanning-211126 2021; Lei 2022; X. Lu 2021; Z. Fan 2021). Moreover, they believe that the implementation of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the accelerated advancement of CAFTA 3.0 afford the Guangxi government ample opportunities for regional cooperation (B. Zhou 2022; Interview Nanning-211126 2021; Jiashou Zhang 2022). Similar to before the outbreak of the pandemic, the Xinjiang government has a mixed perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region, but this perception is growing more positive. Increasing rivalry between great powers will eventually affect the willingness of Central Asian nations to cooperate with China (Hui Zhu 2020a, 2020b). In the meantime, however, the outbreak of the Ukraine–Russia War in 2022 has compelled Russia to turn to China, and Russia's decision to coordinate its Eurasia Union with the BRI presents opportunities for the Xinjiang government to pursue further regional cooperation (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022; Silamu and Awuti 2021). Moreover, due to the Ukraine-Russia War, Central Asian countries have become more defensive towards Russia out of fear that Putin may “fanlian” (turn hostile) one day (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022). On the contrary, they have increased “fangxin‘gan” (sense of

assurance) towards China due to the fact that China has no intention of invading and has no history of invasions except during the Western Han Dynasty (Interview Urumqi-220422 2022). The Jilin government's perception of China's geopolitical environment in Northeast Asia has not changed significantly either. The Jilin government concurs with the governments of Guangxi and Xinjiang that the protracted antagonism between the US and Russia and the signing of the RCEP provide it with new opportunities to advance regional cooperation (C. Yang 2021a; R. Zhao, Yu, and Nataliya 2022). However, due to the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between China and the US in Northeast Asia and globally, which may result in more inter-state conflicts and force other countries in Northeast Asia to take sides—as well as the alliances established by the US in Northeast Asia, which are based on exclusive regionalism and promote competition rather than cooperation—the Jilin government is unable to engage in regional cooperation (X. Meng and Lu 2021).

In conclusion, in the pandemic era, the Guangxi government continues to be the most active in promoting regional cooperation, for its efforts can be seen in nearly all indicators of regional cooperation. The Xinjiang and Jilin governments are less active because they prioritize certain aspects while ignoring others. According to Embedded Local Liberalism, two factors account for this variation. First, the three provincial governments face different levels of economic incentives; the Guangxi government has the strongest incentive to engage in regional cooperation, while the

Jilin government has the weakest incentive. Second, when provincial governments perceive China's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions to be favorable, economic incentives are more likely to motivate them to engage in regional cooperation. The Guangxi government's positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region facilitates—or even amplifies—the effect of the “motivator” on the Guangxi government's engagement in regional cooperation. However, this effect is not significant in the case of the Xinjiang government, and it is absent altogether in the Jilin government, whose perceptions are less positive or even negative.

5. Summary of the Dissertation

In recent decades, an increasing number of subnational governments have begun participating in regional and international affairs. However, although academics have observed varying levels of participation among subnational governments within this overall upward trend of internationalization, they have yet to develop a comprehensive index to measure these variations. Even when some of them have recognized such variations, they have attributed them primarily to domestic political factors, such as different constitutional arrangements, while ignoring international political factors. To address these limitations, this dissertation proposes a composite index to comprehensively measure subnational governments' activism in regional

cooperation. It also investigates the international political factors that motivate and moderate the activism of subnational governments in regional cooperation, assuming all of which have been encouraged and supported by the central government. This research proposes a new analytical framework, Embedded Local Liberalism, based on local liberalism and the role of subnational governments' perceptions in influencing their policy decision-making. It asserts that subnational economic openness to their respective neighboring regions motivates subnational governments to engage in regional cooperation, but this economic motivation will likely lead to subnational governments' participation in regional cooperation if subnational governments perceive that their state's geopolitical environment in their respective neighboring regions is favorable. In contrast, if subnational governments perceive that the geopolitical environment is unfavorable, they are less likely to engage in regional cooperation, even in the face of strong economic motivations.

The case study is unfolded by comparing three of China's inland border provincial governments—namely the provincial governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin—from 2004 to 2019. In doing so, this dissertation constitutes a significant and novel effort to examine China's cooperation with Asia from a subnational perspective, as opposed to the majority of prior research, which takes a statist approach. Of these three provincial governments, Guangxi was the most active in regional cooperation during the study period, despite having fewer economic incentives than Xinjiang. Meanwhile, Jilin had the lowest economic motivation and

was the least active in regional cooperation. According to Embedded Local Liberalism, the Guangxi government had a higher level of activism, considering its merely moderate economic incentives, because its government's positive perception of China's geopolitical environment in its neighboring region facilitated—and even amplified—the effects of economic motivations, whereas the governments of Xinjiang and Jilin's less positive—or even negative—perceptions of the environment failed to facilitate—or even diminished—the effects of economic motivations. As demonstrated by these three cases, the answer to the question posed in the first chapter as to why some Chinese inland border provincial governments are more active in regional cooperation than others can be found in combinations of two factors with varying values. One is provincial economic openness to respective neighboring regions, which demonstrates the economic motivations of provincial governments. Another factor is provincial governments' perceptions of the geopolitical environment in which China is situated in their respective neighboring regions, which reflect provincial governments' prospects for their participation in regional cooperation. The greater the provincial economic openness to its neighboring region, the more actively an inland border provincial government participates in regional cooperation. However, this stronger economic motivation is more likely to drive an inland border provincial government to be more active in regional cooperation if the provincial government has a favorable perception of the geopolitical environment in which China is situated in its neighboring region. In

contrast, if the provincial government has a negative perception, it will be less active in regional cooperation, regardless of the strength of its economic motivation.

The findings indicate that the engagement of subnational governments in regional/international affairs and regional/world order are mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, subnational governments' participation in regional/international cooperation is contingent on their perceptions of their state's position in the regional/world system. On the other hand, their participation can either strengthen their state's dominance by cooperating with more foreign countries, or further disadvantage their state in the regional/world system by isolating from foreign countries or provoking greater suspicion and increased conflict. The findings suggest that China's central government must prove to its provincial governments that it enjoys a favorable geopolitical environment before they can be effectively mobilized for regional cooperation. In addition, foreign countries that seek to deepen their cooperation with China's provincial governments may first need to show to Chinese partners that their relationship with China is robust and resilient to outside influence. This dissertation concludes by demonstrating how the analytical framework of Embedded Local Liberalism can be utilized to explain different levels of activism among all Chinese inland border provincial governments in conducting regional cooperation, from 2004 to 2019, as well as the developments regarding the governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Jilin during the pandemic era.

Appendix I.A Comparison of China’s Inland Border Provincial Governments’ Activism in Regional Cooperation (2004–2019)

In this Appendix, I describe levels of activism in regional cooperation presented by China’s nine inland border provincial governments from 2004 to 2019. Using the data collected, I compare and rank these provincial governments from most to least active. For each indicator, I assign a score from 1 to 9 to each provincial government; 1 is assigned to the least active provincial government and 9 is assigned to the most active one. If there is no significant variation among provincial governments, the same score is assigned. The total score of a provincial government—that is, the sum of all the scores from all fourteen indicators—represents its activism in regional cooperation. Appendix Table 1 gives a bird's-eye view on the result of this comparison and calculation. A breakdown description as well as measurements on each indicator by each provincial government are also provided afterward.

Appendix Table 1 China's Inland Border Provincial Governments' Levels of Activism in Regional Cooperation: 2004–2019

Province Category	No.	Indicators	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
Politics	1	Provincial Leaders' Foreign Visits	9	7	2	3	2	5	8	6	4
	2	Bilateral/Multilateral Cooperation Mechanisms (B/MCMs)	7	9	5	6	2	5	8	5	2
	3	Friendship Cities	9	8	2	7	1	7	5	4	3
	4	Media Coverage	9	7	1	4	3	5	2	8	7
Economics	5	Exhibitions	9	6	4	7	2	4	5	8	1
	6	Developing and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs)	9	8	2	5	2	7	6	3	4
	7	Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs)	9	5	1	7	2	6	5	3	8
	8	Ports-of-Entry (POEs)	8	9	4	8	1	2	4	5	6
	9	Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs)	6	7	3	5	3	8	9	4	3
	10	Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs)	6	9	2	8	2	6	6	7	3
	11	Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs)	9	8	3	6	1	7	5	4	1
Socio-culture	12	Free Trade Pilot Zones (FTPZs)	9	8	1	5	4	4	6	2	7
	13	Scholarship	8	9	1	6	5	7	4	3	3
	14	Confucius Institutes (CIs)	7	6	1	9	3	3	4	8	6
		Total Scores	114	106	32	86	33	76	77	70	58
		Level of Activism in Regional Cooperation (1st – the most active, 9th – the least active)	1st	2nd	9th	3rd	8th	5th	4th	6th	7th

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author.

1. Political Indicators

1.1. Provincial Leaders' Foreign Visits to Neighboring Regions

This indicator summarizes and compares the number of foreign visits made by provincial party secretaries and governors of each inland border province from 2004 to 2019 (see Appendix Table 2). During that period, the Guangxi government was the most active on this indicator. Guangxi's then-leaders traveled to its neighboring region the most of any other inland border province—a total of 58 times. Because the then-leaders of Tibet and Gansu visited their respective neighboring regions only three times, the Tibetan government and the Gansu government were the least active on this indicator.

Appendix Table 2 Foreign Visits to Respective Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

Measurements	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
No. of Visits	58	33	3	10	3	20	38	24	15
Score	9	8	2	3	2	5	7	6	4

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author's summary from each province's *Yearbooks* during 2005–2020 and various news reports.

1.2. Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanisms (B/MDMs) with Neighboring Regions

This indicator summarizes the number of major B/MDMs between each inland border provincial governments and their respective neighboring regions from 2004 to 2019 (see Appendix Table 3). These provincial governments regularly participated in these mechanisms with a delegation led by a provincial government official of ministerial or vice-ministerial ranking.

Appendix Table 3 Bilateral/Multilateral Dialogue Mechanisms (B/MDMs) with Respective Neighboring Regions Participated by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

Measurements	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
No. of B/MDMs	4	6	2	3	0	2	6	2	0
Score	7	9	5	6	2	5	8	5	2

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author’s summary from each province’s *Yearbooks* during 2005–2020 and various news reports.

The Guangxi government was the most active on this indicator. It participated regularly in four B/MDMs, namely: 1) Spring Talks between the Secretaries of the Provincial Party Committees of four Vietnamese border provinces and the Secretary of the Party Committee of Guangxi, China; 2) the Joint Working Committee (JWC) between the provinces of Lang Son, Quang Ninh, Cao Bang, and Ha Giang (Vietnam) and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (China); 3) the China–ASEAN Business Investment Summit (CABIS); and 4) the Pan-Beibu Gulf Economic Cooperation Forum (PBGECF).

The Yunnan government participated regularly in six B/MDMs, namely: 1) the Yunnan–Northern Laos Working Group; 2) the Economic Corridor Cooperation of Five Provinces and Cities, namely Hanoi, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, and Lao Cai in Vietnam and Yunnan in China; 3) the Joint Working Group of Lai Chau, Ha Giang, Lao Cai, and Dien Bien provinces in Vietnam and Yunnan province in China; 4) the China–Myanmar Cooperation Forum; 5) the China–South Asia Cooperation Forum; and 6) the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation.

The Tibetan government attended two B/MDMs on a regular basis, namely: 1) the China (Tibet)–Nepal Tourism Joint Coordination Committee, and 2) the China (Tibet)–Nepal Economic and Trade Coordination Committee.

The Xinjiang government participated regularly in three B/MDMs, namely: 1) the Economic and Trade Cooperation Working Group between Xinjiang and Kyrgyzstan; 2) the Xinjiang–Tajikistan Working Group for Economic and Trade Cooperation; and 3) the International Coordination Committee on Altay Regional Cooperation among China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia.

The Inner Mongolia government established and participated in a mechanism for regular meetings with the Russian local government of Zabaykalsky Krai.

The Heilongjiang government set up five meeting mechanisms with five regions in Russia, namely: Primorsky Krai, Khabarovsk Krai, the Jewish Autonomous Oblast, Amur Oblast, and Zabaykalsky Krai.

The Jilin government frequently participated in Governors’ Conference of Northeast Asia, and the governments of Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, and Jilin were members of the Association of Northeast Asia Regional Governments (NEAR).

According to public sources, the provincial governments of Gansu and Liaoning were the least active, as they were not regularly involved in any B/MDMs with their respective neighboring regions during 2004–2019.

1.3. Friendship Cities Established in Neighboring Regions

Appendix Table 4 summarizes the total number of friendship-city relationships set up between each inland border provincial government and their respective neighboring regions during 2004–2019. Appendix Table 5 provides additional information on these friendship-city partnerships,

including with whom the provincial government partnered and the year the partnership was established. The Guangxi government was the most active, establishing fifty-four friendship-city partnerships with its neighboring region. The Gansu government was the least active, establishing only two friendship-city relationships with its neighboring region during the study period.

Appendix Table 4 Newly Established Friendship-City Relationship in Respective Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

Measurements	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
No. of New Relationship	54	35	3	28	2	28	19	13	6
Score	9	8	2	7	1	7	5	4	3

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author’s summary from each province’s *Yearbooks* during 2005–2020 and various news reports.

Appendix Table 5 Additional Information on Newly Established Friendship Cities in Respective Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

The Guangxi Government (54)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Guangxi’s	Year Established
1	Thailand	Suratthani province	Nanning city	2004
2		Chanthaburi province	Guangxi province	2004
3		Hat Yai city	Beihai city	2005
4		Rayong province	Liuzhou city	2005
5		Samut Sakhon province	Qinzhou city	2007
6		Nakhon Sawan province	Yulin city	2008
7		Mukdahan province	Chongzuo city	2011
8		Rayong city	Hechi city	2013
9		Roy-Et city	Fangchenggang city	2018
10	Philippines	Muntinlupa city	Liuzhou city	2004
11		San Fernando city	Hezhou city	2004
12		Laoag city	Laibin city	2005
13		Davao city	Nanning city	2007

14		Puerto Princesa city	Beihai city	2007	
15		Cebu province	Guangxi province	2010	
16		Zamboanga city	Guigang city	2016	
17	Vietnam	Vĩnh Yên city	Liuzhou city	2004	
18		Hải Phòng city	Nanning city	2006	
19		Hạ Long city	Fangchenggang city	2008	
20		Bắc Ninh city	Laibin city	2010	
21		Nghệ An province	Guangxi province	2010	
22		Thái Bình province	Hezhou city	2011	
23		Meo Vac county	Napo county	2011	
24		Kim Thành county	Tianyang district	2012	
25		Lạng Sơn city	Chongzuo city	2013	
26		Phục Hòa county	Longzhou county	2013	
27		Cao Lộc county	Pingxiang city	2013	
28		Lộc Bình county	Ningming county	2013	
29		Hạ Lang county	Daxin county	2013	
30		Hải Hà county	Fangcheng district	2015	
31		Ho Chi Minh city	Guangxi province	2015	
32		Móng Cái city	Dongxing city	2015	
33		Hạ Long city	Guilin city	2018	
34		Quảng Nam province	Guangxi province	2018	
35		Cambodia	Prey Veng province	Guangxi province	2007
36			Sihanoukville city	Nanning city	2007
37	Kampot province		Baise city	2008	
38	Kep province		Beihai city	2010	
39	Siem Reap province		Guangxi province	2014	
40	Ratanakiri province		Chongzuo city	2016	
41	Angkor Thom district		Dongxing city	2016	
42	Indonesia	Bandung city	Liuzhou city	2005	
43		Semarang city	Beihai city	2008	
44		Pangkal Pinang city	Fangchenggang city	2011	
45		East Belitung county	Dongxing city	2014	
46		West Java province	Guangxi province	2017	
47	Myanmar	Yangon city	Nanning city	2009	
48		Yangon province	Guangxi province	2014	
49	Malaysia	Perak state	Guangxi province	2011	
50	Laos	Champasak province	Nanning city	2010	

51		Luang Prabang province	Guangxi province	2014
52		Pakse city	Longzhou county	2014
53		Thakhek city	Chongzuo city	2015
54		Xiangkhouang province	Wuzhou city	2015

The Yunnan Government (35)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Yunnan's	Year Established
1	Cambodia	Siem Reap province	Yunnan province	2006
2		Banteay Meanchey province	Yunnan province	2011
3		Phnom Penh	Kunming city	2011
4	Malaysia	Sarawak state	Yunnan province	2017
5		Kuching South city	Kunming city	2014
6		Kuching	Dali prefecture	2017
7	Laos	Phongsaly province	Pu'er city	2008
8		Vientiane	Kunming city	2011
9		Champasak province	Yuxi city	2009
10		Saysettha county	Honghe county	2018
11		Phongsaly county	Pu'er city	2014
12	Bangladesh	Chattogram city	Kunming city	2005
13	Myanmar	Yangon city	Kunming city	2008
14		Myitkyina city	Baoshan city	2010
15		Luang Prabang city	Jinghong city	2019
16		Muse city	Ruili city	2012
17		Yangon Region	Yunnan province	2018
18	Indonesia	Yogyakarta city	Kunming city	2013
19		Karo county	Jinning District	2011
20	India	Kolkata city	Kunming city	2013
21	Thailand	Nakhon Pathom city	Qujing city	2019
22		Phitsanulok city	Pu'er city	2011
23		Tak province	Dehong prefecture	2009
24	Vietnam	Bắc Hà district	Jianshui county	2018
25		Hà Giang city	Wenshan city	2007
26		Bắc Quang district	Malipo county	2008
27		Bảo Thắng district	Shiping county	2018
28		Lào Cai city	Mengzi city	2019
29		Lào Cai province	Yunnan province	2017
30		Đà Nẵng city	Kunming city	2015
31		Lào Cai city	Hekou county	2006
32		Sa Pa county	Pingbian county	2016

33		Mèo Vạc district	Funing county	2009
34		Xin Mãn district	Maguan county	2019
35		Mường Khương district	Maguan county	2019

The Tibetan Government (3)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Tibet's	Year Established
1	Nepal	Kathmandu city	Lhasa city	2011
2		Pokhara city	Nyingchi prefecture	2008
3		Bhadgaon city	Shannan prefecture	2016

The Xinjiang Government (28)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Xinjiang's	Year Established
1	Pakistan	North-West Frontier province	Xinjiang province	2009
2		Gawadar city	Karamay city	2015
3		Abbottabad city	Kashgar Prefecture	2007
4		Gilgit	Kashgar prefecture	2016
5		Gawadar city	Kashgar prefecture	2016
6	Kyrgyzstan	Osh city	Urumqi city	2015
7		Osh region	Kashgar prefecture	2008
8		Batken region	Kashgar prefecture	2015
9	Russia	Omsk city	Urumqi city	2016
10		Iskitim city	Karamay city	2011
11		Barnaul city	Changji Hui autonomous prefecture	2007
12		Novoaltaysk city	Altay city	2014
13		Berdsck city	Fukang city	2013
14	Kazakhstan	Aktobe city	Karamay city	2011
15		Aktau city	Karamay city	2013
16		Jambyl province	Changji Hui autonomous prefecture	2016
17				2015
18		Taldykorgan city	Yining city	2015
19		Öskemen city	Tacheng city	2006
20		Ayagoz	Emin county	2015
21	Mongolia	Ulaanbaatar city	Karamay city	2015
22		Khovd aimag	Changji Hui autonomous prefecture	2014
23		Ulgii city	Altay city	2015

24		Sagsai	Fuhai county	2016
25		Bulgan district	Qinggil county	2015
26		Kurshim district	Habahe county	2015
27		Zaysan district	Jeminay county	2013
28	Tajikistan	Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province	Kashgar prefecture	2005

The Gansu Government (2)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Gansu's	Year Established
1	Tajikistan	Dangara City	Tianshui city	2016
2	Kyrgyzstan	Osh City	Lanzhou city	2018

The Inner Mongolia Government (28)

No.	Country	County/City/Province	Paired with Inner Mongolia's	Year Established
1	Russia	Tuva Republic	Inner Mongolia province	2007
2		Priargunsky district	Ergun city	2013
3		Nerchinsko-Zavodsky district	Ergun city	2013
4		Red Stone city	Ergun city	2013
5	South Korea	Gwanak district	Hohhot city	2012
6		Gyeongsan city	Zalantun city	2005
7	Mongolia	Selenge aimag	Hohhot city	2019
8		Darkhan-Uul	Wuhai city	2018
9		Govi-Altai aimag	Inner Mongolia province	2009
10		Ömnögovi aimag	Bayannayur city	2006
11		Dornod aimag	Hulun Buir city	2007
12		Sükhbaatar district	Hulun Buir city	2013
13		Ömnögovi aimag	Alxa League	2015
14		Arkhangai aimag	Chifeng city	2015
15		Khentii aimag	Tongliao city	2018
16		Khentii aimag	Hulun Buir city	2018
17		Khan-Uul District	Erenhot city	2004
18		Choibalsan city	Zalantun city	2009
19		Songino Khaikhan district	Hailar district	2012
20		Choibalsan city	New Barag Right Banner	2014
21		Songino Khaikhan district	Arxan city	2014
22		Omsk city	Manzhouli city	2016
23		Choibalsan city	Hailar district	2016
24		Erdenet city	Manzhouli city	2016

25		Choibalsan city	Manzhouli city	2018
26		Chinggis City	Hailar district	2018
27		Saynshand city	Darhan Muminggan United Banner	2019
28		Zamyn-Üüd city	Erenhot city	2019

The Heilongjiang Government (19)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Heilongjiang's	Year Established
1	Russia	Jewish autonomous oblast	Heilongjiang province	2010
2		Sakhalin oblast	Heilongjiang province	2014
3		Yakutsk city	Harbin city	2007
4		Krasnodar city	Harbin city	2008
5		Pervouralsk city	Daoli district	2016
6		Murmansk city	Harbin city	2016
7		Vladivostok city	Harbin city	2017
8		Ufa city	Qiqihar city	2015
9		Novosibirsk oblast	Jixi city	2014
10		Birobidzhan city	Yichun city	2011
11		Artyom city	Qitaihe city	2004
12		Blagoveshchensk city	Heihe city	2009
13		Yakutsk city	Heihe city	2015
14		Neryungri town	Heihe city	2019
15		Magadan city	Shuangyashan city	2013
16	South Korea	Chungcheongnam province	Heilongjiang province	2015
17		Donghae city	Jiamusi city	2011
18		Samcheok city	Jixi city	2008
19		Jeungpyeong county	Qitaihe city	2013

The Jilin Government (13)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Year Established
1	Japan	Kottori	2017
2		Shimane	2018
3		Joetsu	2018
4	South Korea	Donghae	2013
5		Pohang	2016
6		Sokcho	2009
7		Cheorwon-gun	2009

8		Chungcheongnam-do	2019
9		Kyonggi-do	2019
10	Russia	Krasnoyarsk	2014
11		Vladivostok	2011
12		Khasansky	2016
13	Mongolia	Töv Province	2018

The Liaoning Government (6)

No.	Country	District/County/City/Province	Paired with Liaoning's	Year Established
1	Russia	Ufa city	Shenyang city	2011
2		Novosibirsk city	Shenyang city	2013
3	South Korea	Daejeon Gwangyeoksi	Shenyang city	2013
4		Incheon gwangyeoksi	Shenyang city	2014
5		Ulsan gwangyeoksi Nam-gu	Liaoyang city	2012
6	Japan	Miyazaki city	Huludao city	2004

Source: Authors' compilation and translation from multiple provincial *Yearbooks* during 2005–2020, *The Yearbook of China's Cities 2019* and various news reports.

1.4. Media Coverage of Regional Cooperation

The score of this indicator is assigned according to two measurements. The first is the number of articles published by each provincial daily on regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019. The second is the number of articles on regional cooperation written by party secretaries and/or governors of each inland border provincial government between 2004 and 2019 for the *People's Daily*. On this indicator, the final scores of each inland border provincial government are based on the average ranking of these two measurements. The Guangxi government was the most active on this indicator. The *Guangxi Daily* published 2131 articles on regional cooperation, and Guangxi's leaders published six articles on regional cooperation in the *People's Daily*. The Tibetan government was the least active. Despite publishing slightly more articles in the *Tibet Daily* than the Gansu government did in the *Gansu Daily*, Tibet's provincial leaders did not write about regional cooperation in the *People's Daily*, whereas Gansu's leaders wrote extensively on regional cooperation in that publication.

Appendix Table 6 Media Coverage on Regional Cooperation by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

Measurements	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
No. of Articles in Provincial Dailies	2131	1136	63	179	57	114	843	827	135
No. of Articles in <i>People's Daily</i>	6	3	0	1	7	1	5	5	1
Score	9	7	1	4	5	2	8	7	3

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author's compilation from CNKI.

2. Economic Indicators

2.1. Exhibitions Targeting Neighboring Regions

Appendix Table 7 provides a summary of the national-level exhibitions held by each of China's inland border provincial governments between 2004 and 2019 that targeted their respective neighboring regions. The provincial governments of Guangxi, Yunnan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, and Jilin all held such exhibitions. However, the frequency and administrative status of these exhibitions' respective management agencies varied. The Guangxi government was the most active, being the first to organize an exhibition of this kind. Guangxi was also the first of all China's provincial governments to establish a professional bureau-level government agency to organize the exhibition (Zhongguo maoyibao 2013). Moreover, the exhibition held by the Gansu government lacked a focus on its neighboring region. During the study period, the Liaoning government was the least active on this indicator, as it did not host any national level exhibitions targeting its neighboring region.

Appendix Table 7 Exhibitions Targeting at Respective Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	Name of Exhibitions	Since	Frequency	Administrative Ranking of Government Agency	Score
GX	China–ASEAN Expo	2004	Annual	Bureau-level	9
YN	China–South Asia Expo	2013	Annual (2013–2014); Every two years (since 2015)	Bureau-level	6
TB*	China Tibet–Nepal Economic and Trade Fair	2015	Every two years	<i>none</i>	4
XJ	China–Eurasia Expo/ Eurasia Commodity and Trade Expo	2011	Annual	Bureau-level	7
GS†	Lanzhou Trade and Investment Fair	2012	Annual	Vice-Bureau-level	2
InM	China–Mongolia Expo	2015	Every two years	<i>none</i>	4
HLJ	China–Russia Expo	2014	Annual	Bureau-level	5
JL	China–Northeast Asia Expo	2005	Annual (2005–2012); Every two years (since 2013)	Vice-Bureau-level (2008–2013) to Bureau-level (since 2013)	8
LN	-	-	-	-	1

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government. “*none*” means there was no professional government agency being set up by the provincial government.

* China Tibet–Nepal Economic and Trade Fair started in 1986 but was upgraded to become a national exhibition only in 2015.

† Lanzhou Trade and Investment Fair started in 1993 but was upgraded to become a national exhibition only in 2012.

Source: Author’s summary from each province’s *Yearbooks* during 2005–2020, governments’ websites and various news reports.

2.2. Developing and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs)

This indicator examines the efforts by inland border provincial governments to develop DOPZs.

Appendix Table 8 summarizes and compares the number of DOPZs inland provincial governments established between 2004 and 2019 as well as the administrative rankings of the agencies set up by each provincial government to operate the DOPZs.

The governments of Guangxi, Yunnan, and Inner Mongolia each set up two DOPZs in their respective provinces. However, these zones were developed and operated by management agencies with varying administrative ranks. The Guangxi government was the most active on this indicator. Not only did the Guangxi government set up two DOPZs, but it also created two bureau-level government agencies to operate the two zones. Although the Xinjiang government did not set up any DOPZs during 2004–2019, it successfully launched its first DOPZ in 2020, indicating that it had made efforts by engaging in the application process between 2004 and 2019, whereas others did not even submit an application. It was reported in 2014 that the Liaoning government had completed a construction and implementation plan for its first DOPZ, but the application procedure has since stalled (CAWD n.d.). The Jilin government mentioned only that it was considering applying for a DOPZ in 2016, but no further information was found. The governments of Gansu and Tibet were the least active on this indicator, proposing no DOPZ-related plans between 2004 and 2019.

Appendix Table 8 Newly Established Developing and Opening Pilot Zones (DOPZs) by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	No. of New DOPZs	Name (Administrative Ranking of Government Agency)	Score
GX	2	Dongxing DOPZ (Bureau-level), Pingxiang DOPZ (Bureau-level)	9
YN	2	Ruili DOPZ (Bureau-level), Mengla DOPZ (Vice-Bureau-level)	8
TB	0	-	2
XJ	<1>	<Tacheng DOPZ>	5
GS	0	-	2
InM	2	Erenhot DOPZ (Section-level), Manzhouli DOPZ (<i>none</i>)	7
HLJ	1	Suifenhe–Dongning DOPZ (Vice-Bureau-level)	6
JL	<1>	<Yanji DOPZ>	3
LN	<1>	<Dandong DOPZ>	4

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government. “*none*” refers to the fact that there was no professional government agency being set up. “<” refers to the number of proposals that the provincial government had initiated but was yet approved by the central government.

Source: Author’s summary from governments’ websites and various news reports.

2.3. Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs)

This indicator is measured by the number of new SCCAs set up in each province and the administrative ranking of management committees that provincial governments established to regulate and operate these SCCAs (see Appendix Table 9). On this indicator, the Guangxi government was the most active. It established the largest number of SCCAs, two of which were operated by bureau-level government agencies. The Tibetan government was the least active during the study period, as it neither set up any SCCAs nor created any government agencies related to SCCAs.

Appendix Table 9 Newly Established Special Customs Control Areas (SCCAs) by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	No. of New SCCAs	Name of SCCAs (Administrative Ranking of Government Agency)	Score
GX	4	Qinzhou CBZ (Bureau-level), Pingxiang CBZ (Bureau-level), Nanning CBZ (Vice-Bureau-level), Beihai CBZ (Division-level)	9
YN	2	Kunming CBZ (Vice-Bureau-level), Honghe CBZ (Vice-Bureau-level)	5
TB	0	-	1
XJ	3	Urumqi CBZ (Vice-Bureau-level), Alashankou CBZ (Division-level), Kashgar CBZ (Division-level)	7
GS	1	Lanzhou xinqu CBZ (Division-level)	2
InM	3	Hohhot CBZ (Division-level), Erdos CBZ (Division-level), Manzhouli CBZ (Division-level)	6
HLJ	2	Haerbin (Bureau-level), Suifenhe CBZ (Division-level)	5
JL	2	Changchun xinglong CBZ (Vice-Bureau-level), Hunchun CBZ (Division-level)	3

LN	3	Dalian bonded area (Bureau-level), Shenyang CBZ (Bureau-level); Yingkou CBZ (Division-level)	8
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Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government. CBZ stands for Comprehensive Bonded Zone.

Source: Author's summary from governments' websites and various news reports.

2.4. Ports-of-Entry (POEs)

This indicator compares the number of new POEs opened in each inland border province between 2004 and 2019, as well as how all POEs were managed by their respective provincial governments during the period (see Appendix Tables 10 and 11 for more details). The Yunnan government was the most active on this indicator, opening eight new POEs in Yunnan during the period. In addition, its governing institution for all POEs consisted of a vice-ministry-level POE coordination mechanism and a bureau-level POE office. The Gansu government was the least active on this indicator; it set up only one new POE during the period and established a single vice-bureau-level POE office to govern all POEs.

Appendix Table 10 Newly Established Ports-of-Entry (POEs) in Each Inland Border Province: 2004–2019

	No. of New POEs	Administrative Ranking of Governing Institutions	Score
GX	4	POE Coordination Mechanism (Vice-Ministry-level) + POE office (Bureau-level)	8
YN	8	POE Leading Group (Vice-Ministry-level) + POE office (Vice-Bureau-level)	9
TB	1	POE Leading Group (Vice-Ministry-level) + POE office (Division-level)	4
XJ	3	POE Leading Group (Vice-Ministry-level) + POE office (Vice-Bureau-level)	8
GS	1	POE office (Vice-Bureau-level)	1
InM	10	POE office (Vice-Bureau-level)	2
HLJ	2	POE office (Division-level to Vice-Bureau-level in 2019)	4

JL	2	POE Leading Group (Bureau-level*) + POE office (Division-level)	5
LN	4	POE Leading Group (Vice-Ministry-level) + POE office (Division-level)	6

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

* It was only found that the deputy leader of Jilin POE Leading Group was a vice-bureau-leadership official. Therefore, it is inferred that the leader of the Group was at least a bureau-leadership official.

Source: Author's compilation from *China's Ports-of-Entry 2020 Yearbook* (Zhongguo kouan xiehui 2020).

Appendix Table 11 Details of Newly Established POEs in Each Inland Border Province: 2004–2019

The Guangxi Government (4)			The Inner Mongolia Government (10)		
No.	Name of POEs	Year Established	No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
1	Pingmeng road port	2011	1	Manzhouli airport	2009
2	Aidian road port	2015	2	Erdos airport	2016
3	Dongzhong road port	2017	3	Baotou airport	2019
4	Shulong road port	2017	4	Ceke road port	2005
The Yunnan Government (7)			5	Ganqimaodou road port	2005
No.	Name of POEs	Year Established	6	Wuliji road port	2016
1	Lijiang airport	2011	7	Zhuengadabuqi road port	2006
2	Mangshi airport	2016	8	Mandula road port	2009
3	Mengding road port	2004	9	Ebudouge road port	2009
4	Daluo road port	2007	10	Aershan road port	2012
5	Mengkang road port	2011	The Heilongjiang Government (2)		
6	Tianpeng road port	2018	No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
7	Dulong road port	2015	1	Heixiazidao airport	2019
The Tibetan Government (1)			2	Tongjiang rail port	2019

No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
1	Lizi airport	2019
The Xinjiang Government (3)		
No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
1	Yining airport	2016
2	Kalasu road port	2004
3	Horgos rail port	2014
The Gansu Government (1)		
No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
1	Dunhuang airport	2015
The Jilin Government (2)		
No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
1	Ji'an road port	2014
2	Shuangmufeng road port	2019
The Liaoning Government (4)		
No.	Name of POEs	Year Established
1	Lvshun xingang shipping port	2006
2	Zhuanghe shipping port	2007
3	Changxingdao shipping port	2011
4	Panjin shipping port	2015

Source: Author's compilation and translation from *China's Ports-of-Entry 2020 Yearbook* (Zhongguo kouan xiehui 2020).

2.5. Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs) in Neighboring Regions

Appendix Table 12 provides a summary of the number of new FIPs established by companies based in each inland border province between 2004 and 2019. These companies are either owned by provincial governments or else they developed these FIPs with assistance from provincial governments. Appendix Table 13 provides a list of these parks by host country and the year when construction started. The Heilongjiang government was the most active on this indicator; it supported the construction of seventeen FIPs in its neighboring region. Although the governments of Guangxi, Yunnan, and Xinjiang each set up two FIPs apiece in their respective neighboring regions, the planned investment sizes of these FIPs vary, which further distinguishes those provincial governments' respective levels of activism on this indicator. The Guangxi government and its linked companies planned to invest USD 2 billion in one FIP (G. Li 2013b), but the amount of investment for the other FIP was not found. The Yunnan government and its linked companies planned to invest USD 5 billion in one FIP (Yunnan Development and Reform Commission 2020),

but the amount for the other one was not found. The Xinjiang government and its linked companies planned to invest RMB 2.5 billion in one FIP and USD 500 million in another (COCZ 2021; New Silk Road Horizon 2015). According to the list provided by the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (2018), the governments of Tibet, Gansu, and Liaoning did not sponsor any companies to set up FIPs in their respective neighboring regions. As such, they were the least active on this indicator.

Appendix Table 12 Foreign Industrial Parks (FIPs) in Respective Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
No. of New FIPs	2	2	-	2	-	6	17	1	-
Score	6	7	3	5	3	8	9	4	3

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author’s compilation from the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (2018).

Appendix Table 13 A List of New FIPs in Respective Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

The Guangxi Government (2)			
No.	Host Country	Name of FIPs	Construction Starting Year
1	Malaysia	Malaysia–China Kuantan Industrial Park	2013
2	Indonesia	China–Indonesia Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone	2007
The Yunnan Government (2)			
No.	Host Country	Name of FIPs	Construction Starting Year
1	Laos	Vientiane Saysettha Development Zone	2010
2		Boten Specific Economic Zone	2015
The Xinjiang Government (2)			
No.	Host Country	Name of FIPs	Construction Starting Year

1	Tajikistan	Zhongtai New Silk Road Agriculture and Textile Industrial Park	2014
2		China–Tajikistan Industries Zone	2014
The Inner Mongolia Government (6)			
No.	Host Country	Name of FIPs	Construction Starting Year
1	Russia	Russia Shangshenglong Wood Industry Cooperation Zone	2009
2		Russia Irkutsk Chenglin Business Logistics Park for Agricultural Products	2013
3		Russia Yusen Krasnoyarsk Forestry Cooperation Zone	2015–2019*
4		Jinsui Overseas Agriculture Cooperation Zone	2014–2019*
5		Irkutsk Xinjima Resource Utilization Park	2012–2019*
6		China–Russia Forestry Kansk Park	2008–2019*
* The start years are not found. However, the starting year should be in between the stated periods because the corresponding investors of these four parks—Manzhouli Yusen Economic and Trade Co., Ltd.; Manchuria Hengsheng Cereals, Oils & Foodstuffs Import & Export Co., Ltd.; Manzhouli Songhai Trading Co., Ltd.; and Manzhouli Xinyue Economic and Trade Co., Ltd.—were found in 2015, 2014, 2012, and 2008, respectively, and the dataset was most recently updated in 2019.			
The Heilongjiang Government (17)			
No.	Host Country	Name of FIPs	Construction Starting Year
1	Russia	Amur Oblast Hexing Trade & Logistics Cooperation Zone	2014
2		Dongninghuayang Oversea Green Agriculture Cooperation Park	2011
3		Russia Amur Beryozovka Petrochemical Manufacturing Park	2016
4		Russia Amur Comprehensive Park	2016
5		Polar Star Forestry Trade Zone	2014
6		Russia Spring Agriculture Industrial Economic & Trade Cooperation Zone	2016
7		Russia Huatai Forestry Wood Processing Park	2016
8		Russia Longyue Forestry Economic&Trade Cooperation Zone	2013
9		Russia Taiyuan Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Industrial Park	2013
10		Russia Ussuriisk Economic & Trade Cooperation Zone	2006
11		Heihe Beifeng China–Russia Amur Agriculture (Animal Husbandry) Industrial Park	2016
12		Ruipeng Overseas Forestry & Logging Processing Park	2016
13		China–Russia (Primorsky Krai) Modern Agriculture Industrial Cooperation Zone	2004

14		China–Russia Kansk Forest Resource Economic & Trade Cooperation Zone	2006
15		China–Russia Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Industrial Demonstration Park	2014
16		China–Russia Far East Economic & Trade Cooperation Park	2012
17	South Korea	China–South Korea Technology Innovation Economic Park	2016
The Jilin Government (1)			
No.	Host Country	Name of FIPs	Construction Starting Year
1	Russia	Russia Taiyuan Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Industrial Park	2013

Source: Author’s compilation and translation from Information dataset of China’s overseas industrial parks from 1992 to 2018 (Humei Li et al. 2019).

2.6. Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs)

This indicator is measured by the number of new national BECZs set up by each inland border provincial government as well as the administrative rankings of management committees established by these governments to develop and operate these BECZs (see Appendix Table 14). The Yunnan government was the most active on this indicator. From 2004 to 2019, it successfully established one BECZ and designated a government agency at the vice-bureau level to develop and operate it. The provincial governments of Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, and Heilongjiang were equally active during the period. Although they did not set up any new national BECZs, they all established management committees led by division-level officials to operate the two existing BECZs in their respective provinces. The Tibetan government was the least active on this indicator. Between 2004 and 2019, it neither set up any BECZs nor created any government agencies to oversee BECZ-related matters.

Appendix Table 14 Newly Established Border Economic Cooperation Zones (BECZs) by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	No. of New BECZs	Name of BECZs (Administrative Ranking of Government Agency)	Score
GX	[2]	[Pingxiang BECZ (Division-level)], [Dongxing BECZ (Division-level)]	6
YN	1[3]	Lincang BECZ (Vice-Bureau-level), [Wanting BECZ (Vice-Division-level)], [Hekou BECZ (Vice-Division-level)], [Ruili BECZ (Section-level)]	9
TB	0	-	2
XJ	1[3]	Jimunai BECZ (Division-level), [Yining BECZ (Division-level)], [Bole BECZ (Vice-Division-level)], [Tacheng BECZ (Vice-Division-level)]	8
GS	0	-	2
InM	[2]	[Manzhouli BECZ (Division-level)], [Erenhot BECZ (Division-level)]	6
HLJ	[2]	[Heihe BECZ (Division-level)], [Suifenhe BECZ (Division-level)]	6
JL	1[1]	Helong BECZ (Vice-Division-level), [Hunchun BECZ (Division-level)]	7
LN	[1]	[Dandong BECZ (Vice-Bureau-level)]	3

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government. “[]” refers to the number of BECZs which were established before 2004 but continued to operate throughout 2004–2019.

Source: Author’s compilation and translation from governments’ official websites and various news reports.

2.7. Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs)

This indicator assesses inland border provincial governments’ efforts in developing CBECZs. It is measured by the number of new CBECZs set up in each province from 2004 to 2019 as well as the administrative rankings of government agencies created by provincial governments to operate these CBECZs (see Appendix Table 15). The governments of Guangxi and Yunnan both proposed three CBECZs, but the administrative ranking of government agencies set up by the Guangxi government was higher. Therefore, the Guangxi government was the most active on this indicator. In contrast, the governments of Gansu and Liaoning were the least active, having neither

established nor proposed CBECZs, nor having established any government agencies for CBECZ-related issues.

Appendix Table 15 Newly Established Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones (CBECZs) by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	No. of New CBECZs	Name of CBECZs (Administrative Ranking of Government Agency)	Score
GX	3	Pingxiang–Dong Dang CBECZ (Bureau-level), Longbang–Tra Linh CBECZ (Bureau-level), Dongxing–Mong Cai CBECZ (Vice-Bureau-level)	9
YN	3	Ruili–Muse CBECZ (Vice-Bureau-level), Mohan–Boten CBECZ (Vice-Bureau-level), Honghe–Lao Cai CBECZ (Division-level)	8
TB	<1>	<Jilong Port CBECZ>	3
XJ	1	China–Kazakhstan Horgos International Border Cooperation Center (Section-level)	6
GS	0	-	1
InM	2	Erenhot–Zamyn Uud CBECZ (Vice-Bureau-level), China–Russia–Mongolia (Manzhouli) CBECZ (<i>none</i>)	7
HLJ	1	Suifenhe–Pogranichny CBECZ (<i>none</i>)	5
JL	<3>	<Hunchun–Khasan CBECZ>, <Hunchun–Zarubino CBECZ>, <Shatuozi–Ryudasom-ri CBECZ>	4
LN	0	-	1

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government. “*none*” refers to the fact that there was no professional government agency being set up. “<>” refers to the number of proposals that the provincial government had initiated but was yet approved by the central government.

Source: Author’s summary from *Report on Cross-Border Economic Cooperation Zones of China (2018)* (Lijun Zhang et al. 2019), governments’ websites and various news reports.

2.8. Free Trade Pilot Zones (FTPZs)

This indicator examines the efforts of inland border provincial governments spared to develop free trade pilot zones (FTPZs). It is measured by the number of FTPZs established by each provincial government between 2004 and 2019, as well as the structure of the institutions created to operate these FTPZs. From 2004 to 2019, the provincial governments of Guangxi, Yunnan, Heilongjiang,

and Liaoning were allowed to set up FTPZs; each established a set of government agencies to develop and operate these zones. The Guangxi government was the most active on this indicator; it created a three-tiered institution to develop the zone. The Yunnan government set up a two-tiered institution, but, like Guangxi, its FTPZ leading group was led by two ministerial-level officials. In contrast, the respective FTPZ leading groups in Heilongjiang and Liaoning were each led by a single ministerial-level official per province. The individual characteristics of their respective FTPZ office directors allow us to differentiate the governments of Heilongjiang and Liaoning in terms of activism on this indicator. In Liaoning, the director of the provincial Development and Reform Commission also served as the director of the FTPZ office. In Heilongjiang, the head of the provincial Department of Commerce served as the director of the FTPZ office. Although both are bureau-level officials, the Development and Reform Commission is generally regarded as being more important than the Department of Commerce with regard to practical government work (Heilmann 2017, 78). Although neither the Jilin nor Tibetan governments submitted any proposals to the State Council during the study period, the Jilin government was relatively more active on this indicator, as it had been working on the FTPZ application by 2019 (CE Weekly 2019). As late as 2020, the Tibetan government indicated its intention to set up an FTPZ (Tibetan government 2020).

Appendix Table 16 Newly Established Free Trade Pilot Zones (FTPZs) by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

	No. of New FTPZs	Administrative Setting of FTPZs	Score
GX	1	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> FTPZ Leading Group (ministry-level) [2 ministerial-level officials] </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> FTPZ Construction Headquarter (vice-ministry-level) [2 vice-ministerial-level officials] </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> FTPZ office [1 bureau-leadership-level official] </div> </div>	9
YN	1	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> FTPZ Leading Group (ministry-level) [2 ministerial-level officials] </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; text-align: center;"> FTPZ office [1 bureau-leadership-level official] </div> </div>	8

TB	0	-	1
XJ	0 (submitted its proposal to the State Council in 2016)		5
GS	0 (submitted its proposal to the State Council in 2020)		4
InM	0 (submitted its proposal to the State Council in 2020)		4
HLJ	1	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;"> FTPZ Leading Group (ministry-level) [1 ministerial-level official] </div> } <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; margin-left: 10px;"> FTPZ office [1 bureau-leadership-level official] </div>	6
JL	0	-	2
LN	1	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block;"> FTPZ Leading Group (ministry-level) [1 ministerial-level official] </div> } <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; display: inline-block; margin-left: 10px;"> FTPZ office [1 bureau-leadership-level official] </div>	7

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author’s compilation from governments’ official websites and various news reports.

3. Socio-Cultural Indicators

3.1. Provincial Governments’ Scholarships Provided for Students from Neighboring Regions

This indicator assesses the efforts made by each inland border provincial government between 2004 and 2019 to encourage international students from respective neighboring regions to study in their provinces. It is measured by two scholarship eligibility requirements: 1) whether these government scholarships were restricted to international students from respective neighboring regions, and 2) what types of programs these students must be enrolled in to be eligible to apply for the scholarships.

The Yunnan government was the most active on this indicator. It not only set up exclusive scholarships for international students from its neighboring regions, but also allowed language students and students enrolled in bachelor’s/master’s/Ph.D. programs to apply. The governments of Guangxi, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia also provided scholarships exclusively for international students from their respective neighboring regions; however, their scholarships were limited either to students from one of their neighboring countries or to students enrolled in a more limited number of programs. The governments of Gansu, Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning were even less active;

they set up no scholarships available only to students from their respective neighboring regions. The Tibetan government was the least active of all; it set up no scholarships whatsoever for international students to study in Tibet.

Appendix Table 17 Scholarships Provided by Each Inland Border Provincial Government to Students from Respective Neighboring Regions: 2004–2019

	Whether the Scholarship is Exclusive for Students from Respective Neighboring Regions	Other Requirements	Score
GX	Yes	Bachelor's/Master's/Ph.D. students	8
YN	Yes	Language students and Bachelor's/Master's/Ph.D. students	9
TB	-	-	1
XJ	Yes	Language students	6
GS	No (for students from countries along the BRI)	Vocational college/ Bachelor's/Master's/Ph.D. students	5
InM	Yes (only for students from Mongolia)	Bachelor's students	7
HLJ	No (for all international students)	Bachelor's/Master's/Ph.D. students	4
JL	No (for all international students)	Master's students	3
LN	No (for all international students)	Ph.D. students	3

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author's compilation from universities' websites, governments' documents and various news reports.

3.2. Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Neighboring Regions

This indicator examines the efforts expended by each inland border provincial government to develop CIs. It is measured by the number of CIs set up by institutions in each inland border province in their respective neighboring regions from 2004 to 2019 (see Appendix Table 18 for an

overview and Appendix Table 19 for additional information). Supported by the Xinjiang government, universities in Xinjiang established a total of ten CIs—more than any other inland border province. In contrast, the Tibetan government and its linked institutions set up none; as such, the Tibetan government was the least active on this indicator.

Appendix Table 18 Newly Established Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

Measurements	GX	YN	TB	XJ	GS	InM	HLJ	JL	LN
No. of New CIs	7	5	0	10	2	2	4	8	5
Score	7	6	1	9	3	3	4	8	6

Note: GX stands for the Guangxi government, YN for the Yunnan government, TB for the Tibetan government, XJ for the Xinjiang government, GS for the Gansu government, InM for the Inner Mongolia government, HLJ for the Heilongjiang government, JL for the Jilin government, LN for the Liaoning government.

Source: Author’s compilation from Confucius Institute (n.d.).

Appendix Table 19 Additional Information on Newly Established Confucius Institutes (CIs) in Neighboring Regions by Each Inland Border Provincial Government: 2004–2019

The Guangxi Government (7)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	Hanoi University	Vietnam	2014
2	Tanjungpura University	Indonesia	2011
3	State University of Malang	Indonesia	2011
4	National University of Laos	Laos	2010
5	Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	2006
6	Suan Dusit University	Thailand	2006
7	Maharakham University	Thailand	2006
The Yunnan Government (5)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	North South University	Bangladesh	2005
2	University of Dhaka	Bangladesh	2016
3	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	2006
4	Souphanouvong University	Laos	2017
5	Maritime Silk Road Confucius Institute at Phranakhon Rajabhat University	Thailand	2018

The Xinjiang Government (10)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	University of Agriculture Faisalabad	Pakistan	2014
2	Confucius Institute at Kazakh Aktobe State Pedagogical Institute	Kazakhstan	2011
3	Karaganda National Technical University	Kazakhstan	2012
4	Bishkek Humanities University	Kyrgyzstan	2008
5	Kyrgyz National University	Kyrgyzstan	2009
6	Osh State University	Kyrgyzstan	2013
7	Jalalabad State University	Kyrgyzstan	2016
8	Khovd university	Mongolia	2015
9	Tajik National University	Tajikistan	2008
10	Novosibirsk State University	Russia	2018
The Inner Mongolia Government (2)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	The Kalmyk State University	Russia	2007
2	Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University named after V.P. Astafjev (Krasnoyarsk)	Russia	2018
The Gansu Government (2)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	Kazakh National University	Kazakhstan	2009
2	Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies	Uzbekistan	2019
The Heilongjiang Government (4)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	Daejin University	South Korea	2007
2	Amur State University of Humanities and Pedagogy	Russia	2010
3	Far Eastern National University	Russia	2006
4	Blagoveshchensk National Pedagogical University	Russia	2007
The Jilin Government (8)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	Chungbuk National University	South Korea	2006
2	Dong-A University	South Korea	2006
3	Mongolian State University of Education	Mongolia	2015
4	Kangwon National University	South Korea	2007
5	Rainbow Confucius Institute	South Korea	2014
6	Hanyang University	South Korea	2015
7	Buryat State University	Russia	2007

8	Ryazan State University named for S.A.Yesenin Confucius Institute	Russia	2010
The Liaoning Government (5)			
No.	Confucius Institutes (CIs) at	Country	Year Established
1	Okayama Shoka University	Japan	2007
2	Incheon National University	South Korea	2009
3	Novosibirsk State Technical University	Russia	2007
4	Irkutsk State University	Russia	2007
5	Blagoveshchensk National Pedagogical University	Russia	2007

Source: Author's compilation from Confucius Institute (n.d.).

Appendix II. Open-Ended Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

Four open-ended questions were asked in each interview:

- 1) “How would you describe xx provincial government’s activism in regional cooperation from 2004 to 2019?”
- 2) “How does economic openness to the neighboring region contribute to xx province’s economic development, and how does this affect xx provincial government’s participation in regional cooperation?”
- 3) “How would you perceive China’s relationship with countries in xx province’s neighboring region, especially on issues such as security and sovereignty concerns, institutions built between China and countries in the region and between other regional powers and countries in the region, as well as China’s influence and capacity in the region?”
- 4) “How did this relationship affect xx provincial government’s participation in regional cooperation?”

Depending on interviewees’ answers, follow-up questions were also asked.

Appendix III. Detailed Export Data

Appendix Table 20 China's Inland Border Provinces' Exports to Neighboring Region-to-GDP Ratio (EN-to-GDP): By Provinces; 2004–2019

	GX EN-to-GDP	YN EN-to-GDP	TB EN-to-GDP	XJ EN-to-GDP	GS EN-to-GDP	InM EN-to-GDP	HLJ EN-to-GDP	JL EN-to-GDP	LN EN-to-GDP
2004	1.59%	2.25%	3.39%	9.11%	0.02%	2.38%	5.44%	3.35%	10.67%
2005	1.82%	2.83%	3.05%	13.99%	0.02%	1.78%	7.65%	4.00%	11.57%
2006	1.78%	3.45%	4.82%	16.71%	0.03%	1.49%	7.79%	3.29%	10.71%
2007	2.41%	3.57%	5.56%	21.11%	0.08%	1.91%	9.23%	3.66%	10.41%
2008	2.93%	2.91%	4.22%	28.75%	0.18%	1.93%	4.87%	3.38%	9.46%
2009	3.47%	2.57%	3.80%	15.80%	0.05%	1.73%	2.95%	2.10%	6.60%
2010	3.63%	3.10%	6.66%	14.09%	0.05%	1.32%	3.72%	1.85%	7.62%
2011	4.28%	2.97%	9.88%	11.59%	0.03%	1.73%	3.19%	1.78%	7.21%
2012	5.21%	2.37%	15.05%	10.47%	0.03%	1.28%	3.25%	1.65%	6.45%
2013	6.26%	3.57%	14.37%	10.05%	0.06%	1.14%	3.97%	1.38%	5.71%
2014	7.72%	4.09%	12.89%	10.25%	0.10%	1.00%	3.98%	1.50%	5.55%
2015	8.19%	3.82%	2.92%	6.80%	0.17%	0.74%	1.53%	1.23%	4.92%
2016	6.15%	2.68%	2.55%	8.34%	0.13%	0.70%	1.24%	1.15%	4.86%
2017	5.97%	2.61%	1.76%	9.51%	0.07%	0.70%	1.05%	0.83%	4.97%
2018	6.42%	2.50%	1.58%	7.07%	0.02%	0.66%	0.77%	0.72%	4.63%
2019	6.61%	2.74%	1.79%	7.45%	0.03%	0.57%	0.94%	0.79%	4.47%
2004–2019 Average	4.65%	3.00%	5.89%	12.57%	0.07%	1.32%	3.85%	2.04%	7.24%

Note: GX stands for Guangxi, YN for Yunnan, TB for Tibet, XJ for Xinjiang, GS for Gansu, InM for Inner Mongolia, HLJ for Heilongjiang, JL for Jilin, LN for Liaoning.

Source: Author's calculation and drawing based on 2005–2020 Statistics Yearbooks of Guangxi, Yunnan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning, China Customs, and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

Appendix Table 21 Guangxi's Exports to Southeast Asia (GX EN), GDP, and GX EN-to-GDP Ratio: 2004–2019

Year	Guangxi's Exports to Southeast Asia (GX EN)	GX EN Increment	GX EN Growth Rate	GDP	GDP Growth Rate	GX EN-to-GDP Ratio	1 USD to 1 RMB
	USD 100 Million	USD 100 Million		RMB 100 Million			
2004	6.36	-	-	3305.1	-	1.59%	8.28
2005	8.31	1.94	30.66%	3742.1	13.22%	1.82%	8.19
2006	9.85	1.54	18.53%	4417.8	18.06%	1.78%	7.97
2007	17.34	7.49	76.04%	5474.8	23.93%	2.41%	7.60
2008	27.19	9.85	56.81%	6455.4	17.91%	2.93%	6.95
2009	36.17	8.98	33.03%	7112.9	10.19%	3.47%	6.83
2010	45.88	9.71	26.85%	8552.4	20.24%	3.63%	6.77
2011	68.25	22.37	48.76%	10299.9	20.43%	4.28%	6.46
2012	93.37	25.13	36.81%	11303.6	9.74%	5.21%	6.31
2013	125.84	32.46	34.78%	12448.4	10.13%	6.26%	6.19
2014	170.73	44.89	35.67%	13587.8	9.15%	7.72%	6.14
2015	194.55	23.82	13.95%	14797.8	8.91%	8.19%	6.23
2016	149.34	-45.21	-23.24%	16116.6	8.91%	6.15%	6.64
2017	157.36	8.02	5.37%	17790.7	10.39%	5.97%	6.75
2018	190.38	33.02	20.98%	19627.8	10.33%	6.42%	6.62
2019	203.37	13	6.82%	21237.1	8.20%	6.61%	6.90
2004–2019 Average		13.13	28.12%		13.32%	4.65%	

Source: Author's compilation and calculations based on 2005–2020 Guangxi Statistics Yearbooks and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

Appendix Table 22 Xinjiang's Exports to Its Neighboring Region (XJ EN), GDP, and XJ EN-to-GDP Ratio: 2004–2019

Year	Xinjiang's Exports to Its Neighboring Region (XJ EN)	XJ EN Increment	XJ EN Growth Rate	GDP	GDP Growth Rate	XJ EN-to-GDP Ratio	1 USD to 1 RMB
	USD 100 Million	USD 100 Million		RMB 100 Million			
2004	23.88	-	-	262.23	-	9.11%	8.28
2005	43.04	19.16	80.26%	307.69	17.34%	13.99%	8.19
2006	61.99	18.95	44.04%	370.97	20.57%	16.71%	7.97
2007	97.18	35.19	56.77%	460.28	24.08%	21.11%	7.60
2008	171.51	74.32	76.47%	596.46	29.59%	28.75%	6.95
2009	97.99	-73.52	-42.86%	620.26	3.99%	15.80%	6.83
2010	111.57	13.58	13.86%	791.82	27.66%	14.09%	6.77
2011	117.23	5.66	5.07%	1011.33	27.72%	11.59%	6.46
2012	122.89	5.65	4.82%	1174.15	16.10%	10.47%	6.31
2013	136.17	13.28	10.81%	1355.13	15.41%	10.05%	6.19
2014	154.54	18.37	13.49%	1508.19	11.29%	10.25%	6.14
2015	101.68	-52.85	-34.20%	1494.27	-0.92%	6.80%	6.23
2016	120.99	19.31	18.99%	1449.92	-2.97%	8.34%	6.64
2017	157.27	36.28	29.98%	1652.88	14.00%	9.51%	6.75
2018	136.87	-20.39	-12.97%	1935.71	17.11%	7.07%	6.62
2019	146.77	9.90	7.24%	1971.02	1.82%	7.45%	6.90
2004–2019 Average		13.13	18.12%		14.85%	12.57%	

Source: Author's compilation and calculations based on 2005–2020 Xinjiang Statistics Yearbooks and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

Appendix Table 23 Jilin's Exports to Northeast Asia (JL EN), GDP, and JL EN-to-GDP Ratio: 2004–2019

Year	Jilin's Exports to Northeast Asia (JL EN)	JL EN Increment	JL EN Growth Rate	GDP	GDP Growth Rate	JL EN-to-GDP Ratio	1 USD to 1 RMB
	USD 100 Million	USD 100 Million		RMB 100 Million			
2004	9.94	-	-	2455.2	-	3.35%	8.28
2005	13.54	3.6	36.22%	2776.5	13.09%	4.00%	8.19
2006	13.33	-0.21	-1.55%	3226.5	16.21%	3.29%	7.97
2007	19.62	6.29	47.19%	4080.3	26.46%	3.66%	7.60
2008	23.54	3.92	19.98%	4834.7	18.49%	3.38%	6.95
2009	16.73	-6.81	-28.93%	5434.8	12.41%	2.10%	6.83
2010	17.56	0.83	4.96%	6410.5	17.95%	1.85%	6.77
2011	21.37	3.81	21.70%	7734.6	20.66%	1.78%	6.46
2012	22.72	1.35	6.32%	8678	12.20%	1.65%	6.31
2013	21.03	-1.69	-7.44%	9427.9	8.64%	1.38%	6.19
2014	24.42	3.39	16.12%	9966.5	5.71%	1.50%	6.14
2015	19.71	-4.71	-19.29%	10018	0.52%	1.23%	6.23
2016	18	-1.71	-8.68%	10427	4.08%	1.15%	6.64
2017	13.36	-4.64	-25.78%	10922	4.75%	0.83%	6.75
2018	12.29	-1.07	-8.01%	11253.8	3.04%	0.72%	6.62
2019	13.43	1.14	9.28%	11726.8	4.20%	0.79%	6.90
2004–2019 Average		0.23	4.14%		11.23%	2.04%	

Source: Author's compilation and calculations based on 2005–2020 Jilin Statistics Yearbooks and Online Database of National Bureau of Statistics, People's Republic of China.

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