

a chapter, but it is not uncommon to find one theme (e.g. postcolonialism or informality) creeping into the treatment of another (e.g. governance or the 'wounds' of violence, crime or war afflicting African urban dwellers). This crossover of themes highlights the richness and complexity of urbanization in Africa in contrast with the simplicity of the univocal dystopian view of the 'Africa talk'. Each chapter begins with introductory stories which are effective in bringing the reader closer to the reality of urban life in Africa and in showing the multiplicity of meanings, practices, and activities going on there. The book does not shy away from portraying the difficult circumstances under which many ordinary urban dwellers live in Africa and from tying these to colonial and postcolonial histories and to more contemporary power struggles and inequalities.

What is at times unclear is the extent to which Myers seeks to remain squarely within the geographical boundaries of sub-Saharan Africa with his theorizing and practical insights. Does he want to use Lusaka to understand other African cities, or does he want to extend the scrutiny within the loose (and elusive) boundaries of the global South (by using Lusaka to understand Mexico City or Manila)? Does he hope his undertaking will extend to the (also elusive) global North (by using Lusaka to understand London and New York)? Irrespective of Myers's intellectual direction, *African Cities* remains an important contribution to urban theory. It will certainly entice the interest of scholars regardless of their geographical location and disciplinary allegiance (whether in anthropology, development studies, geography, history or planning).

Ultimately, what I appreciate the most in Myers's volume is how this is a book of hope. In his attempt at reframing how cities in Africa are 'discussed, studied, theorized and written about' (p. 1), Myers offers hope to urban scholars, practitioners, and activists alike in the form of a mode of theorization and analytical inquiry that is keen to search for alternative urban futures.

Idalina Baptista

*Department for Continuing Education and the School of Anthropology and Museum
Ethnography, University of Oxford*

Cashing in Across the Golden Triangle: Thailand's Northern Border Trade with China, Laos, and Myanmar *Thein Swe and Paul Chambers*. Mekong Press, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2011, pp. xx + 192 (ISBN: 978-616-90053-4-6) (pbk).

The extent of success of modern cross-border trade depends a lot on good road connections. Over the last two decades since the Asian Development Bank founded the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) concept, mainland Southeast Asia has witnessed major road constructions acting as economic corridors to better facilitate border trade with landlocked southwest China. *Cashing in Across the Golden Triangle: Thailand's Northern Border Trade with China, Laos, and Myanmar* is a timely and well-structured book addressing the burgeoning border trade that Thailand is experiencing with its northern neighbours through improving transport linkages. The authors, Thein Swe and Paul Chambers, seek to highlight the major transformation of the Golden Triangle from one of the world's key opium producing areas to a bustling and thriving cross-border trading region. In highlighting the major transformation in the Golden Triangle, they are concerned with important questions that are associated with cross-border trade and transnational economic corridors, such as the unequal benefits of the flourishing trade, the facilitation and impediments of the trade, and the crucial social consequences of the

rapidly growing economy in this part of the world. It is a book that engages numerous official data, detailed field observations over a few years, and interviews with important stakeholders across societal levels that influence or are influenced by the mushrooming cross-border economic activities.

This slim and easy to read book is organized into 12 chapters after a brief introduction. The introduction gives a short historical account of the Golden Triangle where it was (and to some extent still is) infamously known as a dangerous drugs crossroads area. The authors are quick to alert readers to another meaning of the Golden Triangle which encompasses a larger geographical size comprising Chiang Rai, Thailand's northernmost province and the area which it borders Laos and Myanmar as their area of research investigation. Particularly, they are most interested in the western section of the North-South Economic Corridor (NSEC) that passes through the Golden Triangle and three main permanent border checkpoints: Mae Sai in Thailand and Tachilek in Myanmar; Chiang Khong in Thailand and Houay Xay in Laos; and Chiang Saen in Thailand and southern China. Both Thein Swe and Paul Chambers are keen to show that their work goes beyond existing studies on the GMS, stressing on the need to look more at provincial and local governments' involvement following Thailand's process of decentralization and fleshing out the negative aspects of heightened cross-border trade.

Chapter 1 deals with the theoretical conceptualization of the emerging patterns in trade and development of the Golden Triangle borderlands and reviews six schools of thought in international relations (liberalism, constructivism, neo-Marxism, neorealism, neoliberal-institutionalism and postclassical realism). The authors eventually settled on postclassical realism which works fine conceptually but I have a minor quibble on the presentation in this chapter. Rather than moving from one school of thought by showcasing its relative strengths and shortcomings, and deciding on its overall suitability to aid the book's research analysis, the authors could have picked up some similar shortcomings between the different conceptual thoughts to argue for their preferred choice. For example, the authors' belief that states and their central governments should be given sufficient regard in the Golden Triangle, could see them downplaying liberalism and neoliberal-institutionalism together, and thus reflecting a clearer flow of their theoretical argument.

After illustrating Thailand's role in regionalism and border trade in the Mekong Basin, five empirical chapters are devoted to discuss the border trade and ramifications of the new highways in linking Mae Sai and Chiang Khong to Yunnan province of China, and the river trade between Chiang Saen and China. The chapters on the R3B (from Mae Sai to Mongla) and R3A (from Chiang Khong to China) highways are well written with attention given to not only the border towns of Thailand and China, but also critically, the areas that the economic corridors meander past in Myanmar and Laos. Grassroots concerns of unequal benefits and environmental degradation from the ground are obtained through interviews and fieldwork observations that serve to inform current and future development policies of the GMS. The analysis on Chiang Saen is incisive as the authors stress that the improved transportation linkages in Chiang Khong and Mae Sai may not necessarily lead to the demise of river trade as the river trade remains the most cost effective of movement of goods in cross-border trade between Thailand and China and complements the land connections.

The discussion of the economic competition in the next two chapters between the two northern provinces of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai is highly relevant to northern Thailand's political economy. The gateway (Chiang Rai) and core (Chiang Mai) of northern Thailand are examined in detail here, and sheds light on how future

comparative research could be done to dig deeper into understanding the role these two provinces play in their respective important roles in border trade with China, Myanmar and Laos.

Lastly, the conclusion that the authors reach is perhaps too optimistic. They argue that the cross-border cooperation in trade and economic development will lead to a form of regional stability which to me is not that likely to transpire. Previous research in this economic borderland suggests that the increasing Chinese presence and goods, along with the controversial land sales to the Chinese via Thai business partners irk locals in Chiang Khong and to some extent in Houay Xay (Lin & Grundy-Warr, 2012). Of course, full scale conflicts against Chinese traders and immigrants seems unlikely, but regional stability in this particular economic quadrangle is hard to achieve considering that Myanmar and Laos have much to catch up in terms of getting a bigger share of the cross-border trading pie, and Thailand's apparent increasing interest in the Dawei project and the East-West corridor linking Kanchanaburi and Mae Sot in western Thailand with Mukdahan/Savannakhet and central Vietnam. Thus cashing in across the Golden Triangle may not be that smooth sailing in the future despite some impressive achievements gained so far.

Reference

Lin S, Grundy-Warr C (2012) One bridge, two towns and three countries: anticipatory geopolitics in the Greater Mekong Subregion. *Geopolitics* **17** (4), 952–79.

Shaun Lin
*Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS),
University of Wollongong*

The Ashgate Companion to Border Studies Doris Wastl-Walter (ed). Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham, UK, 2011, pp. xiii + 705 (ISBN 978-0-7546-7406-1).

Beijing's Power and China's Borders: Twenty Neighbors in Asia Bruce A. Elleman, Stephen Kotkin and Clive Schofield (eds). M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York, 2013, pp. xvii + 371 (ISBN 978-0-7656-2764-3).

The Borderlands of Southeast Asia: Geopolitics, Terrorism, and Globalization James Clad, Sean M. McDonald and Bruce Vaughn (eds). Center for Strategic Research Institute for National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., 2011, pp. ix + 266 (ISBN 978-0-1608-8678-2).

These three edited volumes taken together are testimony to current dynamism in border research. They are part of a growing multi-disciplinary literature on borders tackling a broad range of issues: theorizing borders, border delineation, demarcation, evolution, management, cross-border trade, territoriality, ethnography, security, displacement, terrorism, insurgency, natural resources and transnational governance. This brief review will highlight some key themes and contributions of each edited book followed by a few selective comparisons drawing out thematic and conceptual connections and departures between these volumes.

The mammoth *Ashgate Companion* contains 32 chapters divided into 8 sections: 1) Theorizing borders, 2) Geopolitics, 3) Border enforcement in the 21st century, 4) Borders and territorial identities, 5) Borders in a seemingly borderless world, 6) Crossing