

“Golden Corner and Silver Edge” and the Construction of the Chinese Overland “Frontier Economic Belt”

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In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the opening-up of its frontier areas, China possesses regional advantages known as the “golden corner and silver edge”. Local governments at all levels should leverage their geographical and resource strengths, while the country as a whole can systematically and proactively plan the development of an overland frontier economic belt. The formation of a “One Belt” along China’s overland frontier regions as well as the establishment of a “One Belt, Multiple Points” pearl chain comprising towns at the frontier-road intersection, highlights great potentials for frontier development and embodies China’s bigger strategy of constructing a “frontier economic belt”.

Keywords: overland frontier, “golden corner and silver edge”, frontier economic belt, China

INTRODUCTION

In the field of economic geography, it is generally recognized that overland frontier regions often lag behind coastal and inland areas in terms of development. Uneven development is not unique to a capitalist society but rather a universal phenomenon (Smith 2021: 178). Overland frontiers, as a spatial location, are typically situated at the edges of sovereign states’ territories, bordering neighboring countries along national frontiers, and connecting other administrative regions within the country based on state-defined administrative boundaries. They exhibit irregular distributions along geographic borderlines.

As is commonly acknowledged, “space is a political tool employed globally” (Lefebvre 2015: 24). The space of overland frontiers holds significant strategic importance in various aspects, such as international relations, national security, defense construction, geopolitics and ethnic politics. From the perspective of regional economic development, in periods characterized by stable economic and social relations with neighboring countries, the economic development of overland frontiers can be more effectively planned and executed through comprehensive macro-level strategies implemented by the country.

The discipline concerning frontier economics in China was established in the mid-1980s (Xiaoguang 1986: 106-108). In 1993, Yuan Qingshou and Niu Delin published *An Overview of China’s Frontier Economic Development*, the first book on frontier economics in China. In 1998, Niu and others proposed the concept of a “peripheral economy”, suggesting that provinces and regions along the Chinese frontiers could form a cohesive “peripheral economic belt”. In 2009, Liang Shuanglu published *Frontier Economics-International Regional Economic Integration and China’s Frontier Economic Development*, which discussed the development mechanism of marginal economic growth centers within the context of international regional integration and the “boundary effect”. In 2016, Yang Minghong introduced the term “frontier economic belt” without providing a comprehensive conceptual explanation (Yang 2016: 161-175).

Foreign research on this topic focuses more on frontier regional economics, emphasizing cross-frontier regional economic cooperation and transborder economic development from the perspective of spatial economics. The aforementioned studies have laid a solid foundation for exploring the spatial theory and practice of the “frontier economic belt”.

This article will begin by examining China’s macro-geographical location, with a focus on its overland frontier areas and those regions associated with them. Using the spatial theory of the game of Go, known as the “Golden Corner and Silver Edge”, we will analyze the realistic basis for constructing a “frontier economic belt” from a strategic perspective. According to this spatial theory, the most stable “territory” is easily established in the “corners” and “edges” of marginal areas, allowing for the consolidation and extension of interests. Similarly, the author argues that there are favorable conditions for constructing a “golden corner and silver edge” in the frontier areas of China’s national territory. This concept applies not only to politics and military matters but also to economic and social development. The author will conceptualize the “frontier economic belt” in view of previous research and propose some basic ideas for its construction.

CHINA’S OVERLAND FRONTIERS AND FRONTIER BELT

China’s Overland Frontiers

In Chinese history, frontier areas had always been of great significance. However, as modern nation-building progressed, precise national frontiers were gradually established, transforming formerly vague frontiers into well-defined geographic areas, which have become highly stable under the strict control of the involved countries and constrained by relevant international laws and the United Nations Charter.

This article focuses on the geographic space of China’s contemporary overland frontiers, excluding “maritime frontiers”. The author does not fully agree with the view that “maritime frontiers, especially those along the coast, are often more economically developed areas of a country” (Yang 2016: 161-175). It is worth further discussion whether “maritime frontiers” extend along the coastline or whether they “often become more economically developed areas of a country”. Maritime demarcation lines generally exist at sea, rather than in coastal areas. Moreover, maritime areas are not always considered frontier regions. For island countries, their true maritime boundaries are often far from the continental coastlines, and “maritime frontiers” should refer to the concept of water. Traditionally, China’s overland frontiers primarily encompass the buffer zones adjacent to its frontiers, with varying widths. The outer boundaries of these areas bordering on neighboring countries, while their inner boundaries are adjacent to inland provinces and territories. Therefore, overland frontier areas are geographic spaces situated between inland provinces and neighboring countries, as discussed in previous research in terms of the geographic scope of administrative divisions in frontier provinces.

Based on the discussions above, China’s overland frontier provinces include Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Tibet, Yunnan and Guangxi. When these provinces are connected in a specific order, they form what is known as the “overland frontier region”. This traditional frontier belt is somewhat similar to the “central-peripheral” structure of ancient China’s “middle circle” and can be referred to as “semi-civilized” or “intermediate” areas (Yang 2016: 82-99). However, due to the varying widths of the administrative boundaries of the frontier provinces, the overland frontier belt formed by their connection exhibits a highly irregular distribution, without a unified geometric spatial logic and resulting in a lack of a relatively coherent visual effect on maps.

Today, overland frontier regions are generally considered to encompass not only frontier provinces but also specific prefectures, counties, townships and other administrative divisions. From this perspective, the administrative geographic division of frontier regions gradually decreases as we move down the administrative hierarchy. However, people still tend to view the geographic area of the “frontier” as limited to the provincial and prefectural levels, designating frontier counties and cities as “frontier regions”. Although there is little difference between the terms “border” and “frontier”, the administrative geographic scope they encompass has significantly decreased.

Regardless of the extent or reference of the “border” or “frontier”, the concept of the “overland frontier” proposed by the author must surpass traditional thinking, which solely relies on the administrative division of frontier provinces or autonomous regions as the geographic boundary. It should encompass reasonably broad and unified boundary regions determined through a scientific and unified spatial planning logic, since this approach can reflect modern national-level unified planning for a frontier geographic space.

The Overland Frontier Belt of China

Boundaries play a vital role in enabling a nation to govern itself, and overland frontiers refer to the administrative divisions extending from the precise overland frontier lines into the inland areas. The traditional administrative division of frontier regions is influenced by various factors such as national history, geography, politics, military situation, culture and economy. Consequently, the frontier belt formed along the national frontiers is a patchwork of irregularly connected “blocks”, which, shaped by the construction of modern nation-states, hold significant political, social and cultural implications that are closely tied to the country’s development. They serve as a valuable national historical and cultural heritage, preserving a rich tapestry of social history and national practices. Thus, the frontier areas are not only a division of natural geographic space but also a region divided by human geography. The significance and value of human geography become evident in the construction of a “frontier economic belt” with economic development as its primary objective.

According to the author, the construction of China’s “frontier economic belt” does not require a change in the existing local administrative divisions. Instead, it necessitates a reorganization, reproduction and redefinition of the “overland frontier area” within the economic space framework. For example, the frontier lines can be used as a reference point, extending inward by 20 kilometers, 60 kilometers, or even wider, thereby creating a new unified “frontier area”. This approach has the potential to establish a new spatial range and promote the development of the entire frontier regions of China, carrying strategic significance.

From an economic space perspective, the author envisions China’s overland “frontier areas” stretching from the Yalu River estuary in Liaoning Province, Southern China, through Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Tibet, Yunnan, Guangxi, and ultimately ending at the Beilun River estuary in Guangxi in Southern China. This vast and expansive area takes the form of a C-shaped curve on the national map and represents an overall spatial range of the “frontier economic belt” discussed in this article. The immense C-shaped area, transitioning from a border “line” to a frontier “belt”, safeguards China’s central region. Its open eastward-facing “C” direction connects with China’s eastern and southeastern coastal areas, as well as its extensive territorial waters and island regions.

FRONTIER-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE: “GOLDEN CORNERS AND SILVER EDGES” AND THE “FRONTIER ECONOMIC BELT”

Frontier-Centered Perspective: “Golden Corners and Silver Edges”

The frontier-centered perspective is a method of observing the frontier area as a central region and considering the entire country’s frontier as the center of observation. This perspective views the country’s frontier or the frontiers of multiple countries as a whole, rather than a single macroscopic physical space (Zhou 2015: 6). The concept of “Golden Corners and Silver Edges” in Chinese culture suggests that corner and edge positions are more likely to gain benefits in competition. From the frontier-centered perspective, this concept corresponds to the areas along the frontiers that form a geographic foundation for the development of the “frontier economic belt”, with significant spatial implications and construction possibilities.

In the field of regional economics, overland frontier areas are often seen as having a low economic density. As relatively peripheral areas of a country, frontiers are far from the domestic market and their outer edges are adjacent to neighboring countries. Except frontier cities, most frontier areas mark the end of domestic product sales. The division of national frontiers also poses challenges to domestic and international markets, as their circulation relies on favorable conditions such as sound international relations. Prior to the reform and opening-up era in China, its frontier regions were at the forefront of “anti-

revisionist” and “preparation for war” strategies, and they lagged behind in terms of top-level design and development. Despite some towns and cities on the frontiers seemingly enjoying advantages in foreign trade due to their proximity to neighboring countries, cross-frontier trade was often interrupted due to the shielding effect of frontiers and other factors. As a result, the economic density in frontier areas was much lower compared to non-frontier areas.

After the reform and opening-up, the advantages of frontier areas gradually emerged with increased openness and helped improve cross-frontier transportation. The removal of barriers to cross-frontier communication attracted a large number of goods for two-way exchanges between domestic and foreign markets. Frontier areas transformed from obstacles into bridges, becoming concentration areas for people, goods, information and funds. The positive function of the “frontier effect” strengthened continuously, leading to rapid improvement in infrastructure on the frontiers. Furthermore, with the expansion of internal and external openness, a foundation has been laid for the gradual formation of “Golden Corners and Silver Edges”.

From the perspective of China’s contemporary territory, the concept of “Golden Corners and Silver Edges” under the frontier-centered perspective is not purely geographical. It refers to the national political frontier administrative division and the geographic sense of the frontier economy. Generally speaking, “Golden Corners” refer to the geographical junction areas of at least three countries, such as the commonly used academic concept of the “Golden Triangle” involving China, North Korea and Russia, or other areas where the border of multiple countries meet. These areas are considered frontier regions with characteristics and potentials like that of a “Golden Triangle”. Whether they can form prosperous economic zones depends on various factors. “Silver Edges” refer to areas along the overland frontier between two neighboring countries. While not all areas along the entire frontier can be classified as “Silver Edges”, some places with sound international relations, a relatively dense population, good natural conditions, abundant local resources and convenient transportation can be considered excellent “Silver Edge” areas. In the long run, the entire overland frontier zones of China may have the potential to transform into “Silver Edge” areas.

The Frontier Economic Belt from the Perspective of a Frontier Center

Since the 1990s when China implemented its opening-up strategy along the frontier, significant progress has been made in the economic and social development of frontier regions, though those places still lag behind the mainland. However, the development of the export-oriented economy thereof remains underdeveloped. For instance, the urban belt formed by frontier ports is limited in terms of driving force and still exhibits a loose and imbalanced “pearl chain” structure, far from the concept of a “Golden Corner and Silver Edge”.

Before the reform and opening-up, economic development in the frontier areas was characterized by a small population base, limited personnel flow, minimal trade clearance and a lack of modern market presence with abundant industrial products. Initially, only a few traditional port towns were established along the overland frontier, such as Dandong, Manzhouli, Ruili and Pengxiang. With the reform and opening-up, the market effect started to attract a large number of resources, technologies, funds, and mainland population to those frontier areas. Consequently, China’s overland frontier gradually formed a more active economic environment, with an increasing flow of people, goods, information and capital driven by cross-frontier trade. This also led to the emergence of city economic growth poles characterized by port economies, harnessing the resource concentration and advantages of internal and external circulation in frontier regions.

Taking Guangxi and Yunnan in Southwest China as examples, these areas have a relatively high population density compared to other frontier regions, and they boast a higher level of economic integration with ASEAN, as well as convenient customs clearance for people, goods and funds. The zero tariff policies on agricultural products between these regions have stimulated active economic development along the entire overland frontier. In terms of transportation, the 725-kilometer S325 provincial highway known as the “frontier road”, built by Guangxi Province, has connected the Sino-Vietnamese frontier areas in Guangxi as a whole, thus having laid a foundation for the construction of a block-shaped frontier economic belt. Similarly, Yunnan Province is actively rebuilding and expanding its frontier roads, designing an

overall blueprint for frontier tourism, developing numerous frontier and cross-frontier tourist routes and creating belt-shaped economic zone in certain frontier areas.

In contrast, the Northeast and Northwest frontier areas in China face constraints in terms of natural geographical climate, international environment and population conditions, resulting in a relatively slower development of the “Silver Edge”. Development mainly revolves around sporadic and active port-based initiatives. Provinces such as Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Gansu, and Xinjiang primarily rely on the development of frontier port towns. From the perspective of the “Golden Corner”, places such as Hunchun at the junction of China, North Korea and Russia, and Manzhouli at the junction of China, Russia and Mongolia have only laid a preliminary foundation in this respect.

The frontier economy is a concept that integrates regional and international economies. Optimizing various cross-frontier economic factors and transforming “border areas” into a “frontier economic belt” or even a “cross-border economic belt” involves a shift from a political concept to an economic one and a transition from geopolitical thinking to geoeconomic thinking. From the perspective of “frontier centrality”, we must consider the current situation both inside and outside of China, particularly with neighboring countries, in the construction of a frontier economic belt. This belt should serve as a two-way spatial zone for cross-frontier flows, connecting people and goods on both sides of the frontier through social networks formed by local knowledge.

Currently, various resources, technologies, funds, and information are converging towards the frontier with the aim of exchanging and obtaining greater economic benefits. Therefore, improving relations with neighboring countries and actively engaging in bilateral mutually beneficial economic and trade exchanges are crucial for both China and its neighbors. While the construction of China’s frontier economic belt naturally influences and drives the economic construction of neighboring countries, effective cooperation between them is a more resilient and sustainable approach. Cooperative agreements such as the “Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation” and “Greater Tumen River Basin Cooperation”, can play a positive role in forming the frontier economic belt.

Traditionally, national power and symbolic capital have played a dominant role within a nation-state, but their effects have been limited to internal boundaries. The construction of the frontier economic belt should emphasize its international economic characteristics while also being based on a country’s self-construction to actively develop a domestic economic spatial belt along the frontier. Although structural factors of the national frontier, especially external neighboring frontiers, constrain the natural formation of various frontier channels, the network construction of people, goods, information and funds within a country running parallel to the frontier line is no longer restricted by rigid constraints like a frontier. This network construction gradually connects the previously divided and disjointed active areas in the frontier, forming a comprehensive connection.

In summary, the frontier economic belt is a frontier zone encompassing China’s overland frontier areas, which cover numerous ports, passages and towns forming densely populated areas. Integrating these “points” and “planes” into a cohesive economic space and social structure constitutes a frontier economic belt. By continuously constructing interconnected customs, passages and frontier towns along the overland frontier and systematically connecting the early-formed “pearl chain” along the frontier with the current “Golden Corner and Silver frontier”, China can create a vast frontier economic belt, which represents a combination of frontier areas, integration of historical and present national frontiers, interdependence of multiple objective structures involving the state, locality and frontier residents, and the necessary requirement for nation-building and consolidation. The overall concept and connection of the frontier economic belt help overcome structural constraints within and between frontier provinces and regions, contribute to national macro-planning and assume a profound significance for the comprehensive development of China’s entire frontier area.

“CORE-PERIPHERY” INTER-CONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE “FRONTIER ECONOMIC BELT”

The “core-periphery” structure is a concept within spatial economic theory that assumes that economic development between regions exists in a “core-periphery” state (Liang 2009: 154). In the Chinese case, the “core” refers to the developed regions along the eastern coast and central provinces, while “periphery” represents the underdeveloped frontier areas. Additionally, the “core” symbolizes the central government, while “periphery” represents local governments. The central government leads but is influenced by the local governments. Therefore, the construction of a “frontier economic belt” requires both active efforts from local governments and overall planning and promotion from the central government.

“Boundary Effects” and Frontier Economics

Since the emergence of modern national frontiers, “boundary effects” have become apparent. Some scholars believe that frontiers serve three functions: isolation, engagement and penetration. Each function is determined by the specific relationship between the two countries involved. (Fang 1999: 108-111). When discord arises in state relationships, the frontier’s isolation and defense functions become prominent. Conversely, when state relationships are amicable, the frontier’s contact and penetration functions are highlighted. The frontier’s unique functions inherently impact social development on both sides of the frontier, which is known as the “boundary effect”.

With regard to the current situation of the Chinese market and existing research on the boundary effect, there are significant gaps in economic development levels between the frontier and mainland areas, due to the distance between the frontier regions and the center of the country’s economic activity. As a result, the economic development levels and activity densities in frontier areas are relatively lower. Therefore, utilizing the positive functions of the “boundary effect” should be a key consideration in constructing the “frontier economic belt”, which should be seriously studied by economic geographers and regional economists. Anthropologists, on the other hand, are more concerned with the people living along the frontier areas, namely the frontier residents, who play a critical role in participating in the construction of the “frontier economic belt”. Although national frontiers delineate sovereignty boundaries between countries and create political and social differences on both sides, political distinctions should not completely shut down daily economic and cultural exchanges between people on both sides. Moreover, traditional two-way exchanges between frontier populations have never been entirely blocked by national frontiers.

Most international frontiers are currently semi-closed, with both blocking and intermediary functions coexisting, allowing selected entry and exit of people and goods. An open frontier is characterized by its intermediary function, facilitating a free flow of people, goods and information. “At that time, the function of an international border is basically equivalent to that of provincial borders, only with the basic function of administrative borders” (Liang 2009: 133). Many countries in the world have accumulated successful experiences in designing open frontiers. For example, the Schengen Agreement in Europe allows countries to be almost completely open to each other’s national boundaries. ASEAN countries also have relatively open circulation mechanisms between members, primarily aimed at promoting each other’s economic development.

Clearly, the construction of a “frontier economic belt” depends mainly on the positive, open and interconnected functions of the “boundary effect” oriented towards people. While nation-states construct themselves by delimiting territory and using frontiers to block the outside world, human societies reconnect nations through transformation and communication. By maximizing the positive function of people, we can achieve the integration of frontiers, enabling normal a two-way free flow of people, goods, information and funds, and promoting the development of frontier areas. The first step towards achieving this goal is to allow frontier residents to move freely and in an orderly manner on both sides of the national frontier.

Local Practices and Development of Frontier Areas

The development of the frontier economic belt relies on the local communities in frontier areas. Therefore, local practices play a crucial role in the formation and development of the frontier economic belt. The development gap between China's frontier provinces, considered as the frontier region, and other provinces in China, seen as the interior region, is significant, reflecting typical "core-periphery" structural characteristics (Liang 2009: 154). While it may be impossible to completely change this structure, partial improvement is feasible. This requires local governments to take full initiative and leverage the positive effects of the "boundary effect", displaying boldness in their actions and leading by example.

The spatial-economic theory of the "core-periphery" structure is similar to the "center-margin" structure in international political theory, particularly the triple structure of "center-semi periphery-margin", which offers a greater explanatory power. Although Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein's world system theory views the world as a whole to reveal the development, transformation and operational mechanisms of the structure, we can view China's eastern coastal provinces as an economically developed "center", central provinces as relatively developed "semi-periphery" areas, and frontier provinces as economically underdeveloped "margin" areas. As a marginalized part of the country, the frontier regions primarily represent local and regional aspects with limited authority and capability. From a national power perspective, the "center" holds absolute authority and leadership over the "periphery". However, the "periphery" also actively contributes to the "center".

Considering the entire frontier areas, each frontier province has a local, regional, fragmented and self-centered focus. While the "center-periphery" structure limits the active actions of local governments, it does not render them powerless. As rulers of the frontier areas, local governments possess a best understanding of the frontier regions and have specific development demands. They are the ones who grasp and directly implement local social strategies. Local governments aim to catch up with the developed regions economically while take into consideration the distribution characteristics of regional economic activities in the frontier areas and the developmental differences between frontier and inland areas. Local governments, as actors with local knowledge and practical experience, undertake more initiative in their interactions within national management systems.

Currently, China has implemented frontier pass systems with Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, North Korea and Mongolia. Additionally, a frontier crossing system called the Pauk Phaw Card is being implemented in Ruili, Yunnan Province (Liang 2009: 8-10). These policies demonstrate a proactive approach of local governments in fostering positive interactions between the state and local administrations. However, local governments should be cautious in creating new restrictive systems under these circumstances. While structural problems have persisted for a long time and require time to make substantial changes, local governments must take subjective initiatives in the frontier areas (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004: 138). For example, they should creatively utilize the "boundary" to reproduce the structure between action and structure, while interacting with the state government. Local governments understand that, even within a nation-state, various social forms transcend social boundaries (Giddens 1998: 410). Ensuring a two-way flow of people crossing frontiers is vital for the economic development of frontier areas. Resolving issues related to the cross-frontier movement of frontier residents and various economic elements reflects China's open policy and humanitarian care, effectively promoting bilateral economic and social development while achieving common goals for frontier residents.

National Planning and the Construction of Frontier Economic Belts

Under the "core-periphery" structure, the role of the national center is crucial. "Only projects undertaken by the nation-state can have control over the entire society" (Scott 2012: 113). As the center of power, the state consolidates its authority while also involving itself in various aspects of social activities, promoting development and interconnections (Giddens 1998: 303). While it is undeniable that modern capitalism has contributed to the nation-state, it is also subject to the influence of the latter. With a well-established governance, the national management system defines its territorial boundaries and operations.

Maps have abstracted specific topography, terrain, and landforms onto paper ever since their invention. Observing maps has become a prerequisite for many social practices. In today's world, a map without

nations is unacceptable and impossible, as nations have become indispensable entities. The overall development of a society depends on the macro-design of the nation. The modern nation aims to control material and human resources within its territory and make them more productive and easily available. To achieve this, the state machine requires a comprehensive understanding of the community (Scott 2012: 60). The state believes that an ambiguous society hinders effective intervention. As a vast political structure, the central government continuously strives for power. It utilizes simplified scientific plans to develop and manage society. “The simplification of the state, including the drawing of maps, population censuses, land valuation and standard units of measurement, demonstrates the state’s mastery of complex technology.” (Scott 2012: 95) Projects such as planning the entire frontier region of China and constructing the “frontier economic belt” can only be undertaken at the national level. While certain projects aimed at improving human conditions may be deemed failures from the state’s perspective, it does not negate the fact that the conviction of harnessing nature for human benefit and security has led to numerous successful economic and social development projects initiated by the state. (Scott 2012: 118)

John Friedmann’s core-periphery theory focuses on urban areas, explaining the progression from isolated regions to interconnected ones, with uneven development gradually leading to balanced development. This thinking has significant analogical significance for studying China’s “frontier economic belt”. Connecting previously disconnected regions is essential for achieving an overall connectivity and balanced development within the frontier economic belt. The state certainly plays a strategic role in macro space development planning. China has already laid a foundation for the macro development blueprint of the “frontier economic belt” through the current development of its transportation network. Basic road and railway infrastructure has been established in China’s frontier areas. Following the Belt and Road Initiative, outward transportation nodes connected with neighboring countries have been opened, including ports, channels and towns along the frontier. Additionally, parallel road and railway networks along the frontier have been continuously improved. For example, the completion of the link between the “Frontier Highway” S325 in Guangxi and National Road G219 has essentially connected the highway along the frontier from Xinjiang through Tibet and Yunnan to Guangxi. The state has also planned and constructed railway hubs such as the “Nanjing-Kunming Railway”, “Southern Jiang Railway” and “Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway” along the frontier areas, laying a solid foundation for further frontier railway projects. Therefore, transforming the vast natural space of the country into an ordered and scientific space is an active practice for every sovereign state. As China’s national strength continues to grow and in response to the call for rural revitalization, it should further advance the construction of the “frontier economic belt”.

CONCLUSION

“The organization of space always serves a specific strategy. It encompasses both abstract and concrete elements, as well as ideological and desire-oriented aspects; it is also subject to planning” (Lefebvre 2015: 24). The introduction of the “Golden Corner and Silver Edge” and China’s “frontier economic belt” strategy not only represents a spatial extension of the “frontier center’s perspective”, but also involves a macroeconomic reproduction of the frontier’s social space. The construction of this strategy requires further a macro design by the country based on existing foundations, as well as proactive and dynamic practices by local governments. Only when the country and local governments, i.e., the “center” and the “periphery”, mutually contribute to a constructive relationship, can the construction of the “frontier economic belt” follow a logical path that is scientific, orderly, and mutually beneficial. This approach benefits not only the overall economic and social development of China’s frontier areas, but also neighboring countries and regions, making it an integral part of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and the establishment of a global community with a shared future. While the “connectivity” of the “Belt and Road Initiative” represents an internationalist spatial production, the concept of the “frontier economic belt” in China primarily pertains to nationalist spatial construction, extending influence and driving economic development in neighboring countries’ frontier areas, thereby playing a positive role in building a community with a shared future between China and these countries.

The idea of the “frontier economic belt” does not solely rely on a strong belief in scientific and technological progress. Instead, the author believes that, under the prerequisites of respecting historical territorial heritage, valuing local social and cultural factors and ensuring the well-being of frontier residents, the identification of the “Golden Corner” as a new urban growth pole and the “Silver Edge” as a new economic growth belt in the frontier center should be actively planned and constructed using technology and scientific means. Through national projects such as the continuous 14th Five-Year Plan, “China’s Western Development” policies and the “Program to Revitalize Frontier Areas and Improve the Lives of Residents”, significant achievements have already been witnessed in the frontier areas, with rich experience accumulated. Therefore, when it comes to the new spatial development strategy of the “frontier economic belt”, China is equipped with rational and proactive macro design capabilities, while also respecting local knowledge. This approach obviously aligns with the logic of economic development and the aspirations for a better life of ethnic groups in the frontier areas.

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