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Salt, Smuggling, and Sovereignty: The Burma-China Borderland, c. 1880–1935

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ABSTRACT

The formal demarcation of what is today the Burma-China border began following the British conquest of Upper Burma from the Konbaung dynasty in 1885 and the signing of international agreements with the Qing Empire (1886, 1894, 1897), the process only completed in the 1960s. Around the turn of the century and into the twentieth, therefore, the highlands between British Burma and Qing (later Republican) China remained a contested ‘borderland’; specifically, one over which successive lowland states had never been able to exert direct control – a space James C. Scott and others have named ‘Zomia’ – but toward which they had been expanding by the mid-nineteenth century (if not earlier). This article looks not at the ways in which Zomia’s inhabitants contested this expanding state authority, which has been the focus of most work on this space, but how the British pressed their territorial claims over part of this contested borderland vis-à-vis the Chinese. Salt was a monopoly of both the Government of India (of which Burma was a province until 1935) and the Qing and Republican states. Smuggling – trade, to British eyes – salt from Burma into China thus undermined Chinese sovereignty *qua* the expression of the latter’s monopoly powers. Complaints about smuggling were met with ‘masterly inactivity’, not only because the colonial administration was weak in Upper Burma and along the frontier, but also because it meant the British imperial state could permit the expansion of ‘legitimate’ trade and thereby contest Chinese sovereignty *qua* its territorial claims over the borderland. In contrast to other works positing that smuggling over defined borders undermined state power, this article shows how a permissive attitude to complaints about smuggling undergirded British sovereignty and was very much part of the *making* of the border.

KEYWORDS

Zomia; British India; Burma; Qing; Republican China

‘Zomia’ now looms large over any study of upland southeast Asia, for in light of the anthropologist James C. Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), it has become impossible to think of either the power of the state or the presence of

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human populations without also considering the role of the spatial peculiarities – the ‘friction of terrain’ – of this landlocked part of the world.¹ To view this a statement of the obvious – this connection of place, people, and political authority – is to underestimate the extent to which Scott’s work on Zomia has captured the (scholarly) imagination, and the fruit born to scholars of thinking *with*, rather than *against*, the topography and climate of the region, which is peculiarly arduous and has historically presented to outsiders a miasma of disease and death.² To argue that the Burma-China borderland, for example, was a space where people could escape the power of states and empires (even, for example, as highlanders remained integrated through trade and religious networks with lowland societies, and vice versa) is to rightly recognise a fact; namely, the limited reach of multiple, successive state authorities over those occasionally claimed as ‘subjects’.³ ‘Hilliness instead becomes largely a state effect,’ Scott writes, ‘the defining trait of a society created by those who have, for whatever reason, left the realm of direct state power.’⁴

If the essential issue at stake is the difficulty faced by expansionist lowland states in ever fully expressing their political authority into Zomia, however, then it is vital to note a state’s sovereignty was forged not only through the compact made between ruler and would-be subjects, but also – in regard to a different aspect of sovereignty – through the recognition of territorial claims in the eyes of other legitimate entities. If states on one side of the border struggled to exert their claims over these uplands to thus control indigenes, the same was likely the case on the other. In such context, therefore, states strived not only to make use of technology in a bid to control *their* ‘subjects’, but also to press their claims over borderland space vis-à-vis neighbouring polities – a matter that Scott and others have not given significant attention because of their primary concern with the agency of highlanders in escaping and contesting the authority of centralised states.⁵

Thinking about globalisation as a process potentially culminating in a ‘world without borders’ necessarily involves contemplating these very demarcations, their crossing, and the construction of space itself, both by nature and by man.⁶ Thus, in an essay on globalisation, Arjun Appadurai proposed decisively shifting from focussing on ‘trait’ geographies to ‘process’ geographies, from essentialising landscapes as fixities constituted of immutable physical properties to envisioning the malleability of space through human activity.⁷ Appadurai’s target was scholarship produced within the confines of ‘area studies’, but his thinking is useful in conceiving of upland southeast Asia beyond Zomia; that is, beyond a supposedly immutable landscape that explains enduring and rather particular patterns of state-society interaction (or the lack thereof).⁸ Among those transformative human endeavours pinpointed by Appadurai is trade, which was certainly lively in the context of the Burma-China borderland, this vast space laced by the nineteenth century with networks plied by indigenes as well as Chinese.⁹ This borderland has received very little attention from

historians of colonial Burma, however, save in connection with efforts to delineate the Burma-China frontier.¹⁰ The Burmese side was after 1885 brought under the authority of the British Burma government, and the circulation of merchants – some now British subjects – was sufficiently large, in fact, to necessitate the opening of a British consular office in neighbouring Chinese territory.

This consular office in Tengyueh, in the Yunnan province of southwestern China, has recently been studied by Emily Whewell. This office, like those established on China's seaboard following her defeat in the Opium War (1839–42) and 'opening' to foreign powers, was intended to protect the rights of British subjects. Trade and the resulting presence of Britons in China was the main rationale for its existence, although the prospects for trade by British expatriate firms via Burma into Yunnan were soon deemed disappointing on account of the modest profits to be had and the very nature of the itinerance (over pony tracks). Tengyueh's consular office remained operational from its foundation in 1897 until its closure in 1943 but serviced a small expatriate population of which only a handful were merchants, the larger part mostly comprised of missionaries.¹¹ The consul's other function was to settle disputes involving indigenes and agree upon sums in compensation across a porous borderland, where one party were British subjects (mostly Shans, Kachins, and Lisus) and the other Chinese, thus acting as mediators and negotiators, the intention to resolve situations that might otherwise brew into turbulence and insecurity.¹² In resolving competing claims to people, resources, or even land on the frontier, therefore, successive British consuls in Tengyueh projected into this disputed and undelimited borderland claims to British sovereignty. By focussing on smuggling across the Burma-China frontier, this article examines and further develops these ideas.

This article's primary concern lies neither within the substance of the state's law nor the character of legal regimes and their role in articulating the shape of states' sovereignty; this connection has been richly revealed by Lauren Benton, among others.¹³ This article also seeks not to examine the lifeworlds of smugglers – their motivations and operations, their relationships to states and the law or to markets and free enterprise, their identities variously as honest and hardworking subjects or as moral pugilists fighting political tyranny – but not only because such subjects are notoriously difficult to retrieve from the historical shadows, smuggler's evasion of state authority amounting to their disappearing themselves from the archive.¹⁴ In much of the scholarship on smuggling (particularly that adopting a statist point of view), attention is fixed upon the 'optics of states' – how states 'see' the movement of contraband – with a view to catching smugglers and bringing an end to smuggling.¹⁵ In contrast, the focus here is on the British colonial state's permissive attitude toward what was known to be illegal: the movement of salt from or through northern or 'Upper' Burma into southern China. This commodity was transformed into contraband, according to law agreed between the two powers, upon its crossing the Sino-Burmese border despite the consumption,

production, and trade in salt being perfectly legal *within* each of the two polities. It examines not how smugglers (merchants, in the eyes of British colonial officials) evaded state authority, but how the British Burma government evaded complaints about smuggling made by Chinese authorities to produce and project its sovereignty into a disputed borderland.

This article is based on a range of materials that survive in the National Archives of Myanmar (NAM) – following the archives’ partial destruction during the Second World War – and within the India Office Records (IOR) collection at the British Library, encompassing government correspondence, administrative reports, and trade returns, as well as published materials by retired Burma administrators and others.¹⁶ The next section introduces the space – one still neglected by colonial and imperial historians – at the heart of this article; uplands that formed a borderland between China and Burma. The geography, routes, and seasonal rhythm of circulation between Upper Burma and Yunnan are detailed against the efforts of states – on each side of the hilly borderland – to move more deeply into and colonise this space. The Qing state commenced this process in the late seventeenth century, penetrating deeper and more aggressively into the borderland in the eighteenth century through the construction of roads and other infrastructure in support of a massive military (and civilian) movement from central China into the south. The final defeat of the Konbaung dynasty in 1885 extended the borders of British Burma to abut those of the Qing Empire, initiating efforts to extend the colonial administration’s reach and presence and to demarcate the border.

Yet, as demonstrated in this section, such endeavours were vexed in numerous ways. In the first place, the (sluggish) development of transportation and communications infrastructure was the result of very real difficulties of getting to know the country, while in both its rationale and effects reveals the vulnerability and predicament of the colonial state. On the one hand, the motivation for expenditure or investment was primarily political, rather than commercial, be it the fear of French expansion in neighbouring parts of southeast Asia or the danger resulting from the Japanese invasion of China, while the combination of a variety of terrestrial and maritime routes became the object of paranoia as colonial officials fearfully speculated upon the difficulty of exerting control over – and capacity to undermine the state’s sovereignty unleashed by – new forms of connectivity. On the other hand, the benefits seldom accrued to those groups supporters of such schemes envisaged: once opened, the opportunities presented by the Burma-China road, for example, were more readily exploited by Chinese merchants and American firms than British subjects. Second, the twitches and shifts of the colonial state’s bureaucratic arm – evinced by the opening and closing of many customs posts whose existence was meant to help better record and control the passage of goods and flow of information – reflected the extent of the knowledge deficit as well as the inherent porosity of the

border, the latter making it easy for merchants and smugglers to evade customs posts by re-routing across the uplands.

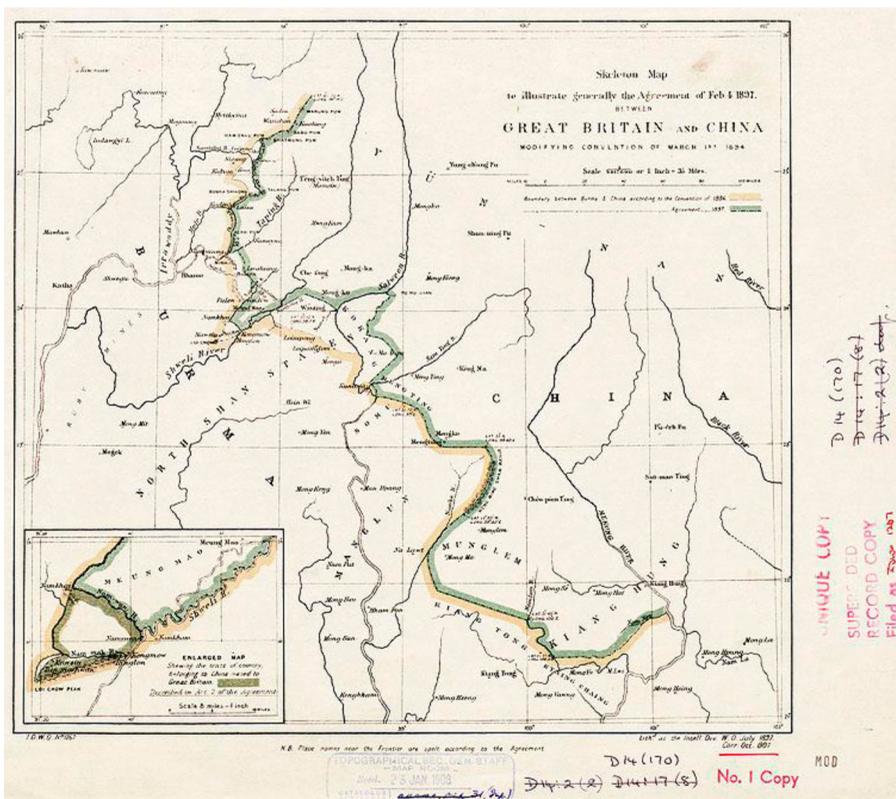
The second and third sections turns to salt trade/smuggling, examining it within this particular geographical, political, epistemological, and affective context. The former examines the relationship of salt and sovereignty in China to set up the problem of smuggling/trade from Burma from a Chinese perspective, the latter examines complaints about smuggling and the way it helped reify British sovereign claims over part of the Burma-China borderland. Salt was a monopoly of both the Qing and British Indian governments, and is thus a useful lens through which to understand their relations as sovereign authorities, not least because the former prohibited imports to uphold their monopoly and shore up the revenue flowing to the central treasury therefrom, while the latter power wished to promote trade in salt into and through Burma to enlarge its fiscal receipts.¹⁷ In other contexts, the state 'saw the smuggler, his infrastructure of control, and his ability to operate at the interface of multiple political geographies as akin to its own power – a parallel state of sorts' and thus as 'an actor undermining its territorial sovereignty', as with the case of gold 'smuggling' in the western Indian Ocean in the mid-twentieth century lately brought to life by Nisha Mathew.¹⁸ In the Burma-China borderland, viewed from the perspective of the Burma government, by contrast, those deemed 'smugglers' were sometimes British subjects or else working in concert with the opportunities afforded within British Burma, smuggling ultimately a tool undergirding rather than undermining British territorial sovereignty.

At work from the mid-1880s, following the British conquest of Upper Burma from the Konbaung dynasty, were attempts to transform the Sino-Burmese 'frontier' – *pace* Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron's study of borderlands witness to acute imperial rivalries, a space seen as a 'borderless land' – by demarcating a border.¹⁹ Until that was (partially) completed in the 1930s, the area under investigation was a 'borderland' – a space contested between the two states, British Burma and Qing (later, Republican) China, much as Adelman and Aron have shown north America's borderlands to have been contested between European colonial regimes in the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries.²⁰ Yet, the Burma government asserted its claims over this space neither through a massive deployment of military or civilian personal, nor through heavy investment in the infrastructure and technologies of surveillance and control. Instead, the state worked through local powerholders and, more critically, through 'masterly inactivity.' It was by waving away complaints made by the Chinese about smuggling, or through amnesia, ostensibly the product of the bifurcation and compartmentalisation of knowledge stored in its archives, that the state promoted its own and its subjects' interests. It was by doing so that the state affirmed its rights over part of the borderland and contested the territorial reach and political control of its neighbour across the undemarcated border. In light of these arguments, the conclusion reflects

on what studying smuggling reveals about the colonial state and its sovereignty in the context of Zomia.

The Burma-China Borderland

The mountains of China's most southwesterly province – highest in the north-east and descending in altitude to the southwest – formed a 'natural frontier' or borderland zone with Burma (Figure 1). The undulation of river valleys with rugged uplands, combined with the June-September wet season, made Yunnan a malarial zone; outsiders – unlike indigenes, who were more resistant to malaria – struggled to traverse let alone settle in the region.²¹ Topography and the disease environment historically impeded the development of routinised long-distance transportation: the Yangtze was navigable to the edge of the province, but only in places where the rocks and rapids were not too treacherous, while paved roads zigzagging across the mountains and plains were in



Courtesy: The British Library

Figure 1. 'Skeleton Map to Illustrate Generally the Agreement of Feb. 4 1897 Between Great Britain and China Modifying Convention of March 1st 1894 [Corrected 1907]' (Imperial Division War Office, 1267).

many places in a state of disrepair by the dawn of the twentieth century, at least according to one traveller.²² Trade across this borderland – including the Burma-China traffic – was of very long standing, however, constitutive of what some scholars have dubbed the ‘Southwest Silk Road’, and seems to have been given greater impetus in the Qing period.²³

The Qing conquest of Yunnan Province in 1662 brought nominal control over southwest China, but it was necessary from the 1720s to consolidate and assert firmer control, resulting in deeper intrusions – military and economic, demographic and cultural – into the borderland, transforming indigenous societies and political authorities, as brought to light in a rich recent study by C. Patterson Giersch.²⁴ Giersch describes the space from Tengyueh and Bhamo in the northwest to Simao and Kengtung in the south as a ‘borderland’ between China and Burma, since the Qing ‘never demarcated clear political boundaries’; in fact, rival claims over this space were staked by the courts of the Burmese Konbaung and Siamese Chakri dynasties.²⁵ Nested within this borderland, Giersch defines a ‘crescent-shaped zone from Muong Mau and Tengyue[h] in the north, curving southeastward to Chiang Hung and Simao in the south’ where the Qing actively claimed territories by moving into it imperial officials and troops.²⁶

As in much of Afro-Eurasia, the period from the sixteenth century witnessed economic expansion, ongoing commercialisation, and sharper patterns of labour and land specialisation, so that even rural populations in this region came to rely ever more on markets.²⁷ For many borderland people, even those for whom subsistence production formed the greater part of their output, market exchange – whether by barter or by use of cash – became essential, for permanent or periodic markets made it possible for them to buy such necessities as salt.²⁸ In tandem with ongoing commercialisation was the pioneering of new caravan routes. Yunnan’s major trade towns – Kunming, Dali, Yongchang, Tengyueh (Tengchong), Simao, Jingdong – were well connected by the mid-nineteenth century toward Assam and Tibet in the east, but also to western and southern marts. Toward the west were Bhamo, Kaungton, Katha, Mogaung, Hsenwi, Bawdwin Mine, Ava, and Amarapura, trade through which linked the Yangtze and Irrawaddy economies. Toward the south: Kengtung, Chiangmai, Nan, and Phrae, and eventually Uttaradit and Moulmein.²⁹ That being said, travellers, porters, and the drivers of oxen, mules, and ponies continued to journey mainly over narrow and unevenly paved roads or dirt paths, and across bamboo, chain, or stone bridges well into the twentieth century.³⁰

For the Burma-China trade, the route from Bhamo to Tengyueh was especially important, the upkeep of the road paid for before the turn of the twentieth century by mule taxes levied by the ‘Pao-Shang Office’ (the branch of the Chinese bureaucracy charged with the collection of provincial trade taxes) and the *sawbwas* (hereditary rulers) of the Shan States.³¹ Once the

Customs Office was established in Tengyueh in 1902, duty collection fell to this body, which disbursed monies to the *sawbwas* to guarantee the safe passage of the caravans. 'This agreement seems to work well on both sides', it was alleged in 1911 by a British expert surveying the mineral resources in the Crescent, for 'the sawbwas are saved the trouble of the collection,' while also being spared of 'the danger in the old days of the richer Chinese merchants refusing to pay.' At the same time, in a statement indicative of mistrust of Chinese (examined further in the following section), it was alleged that 'the funds are saved from the speculation which they would receive if they passed through the hands of the Chinese officials themselves, who now possess nothing more than a mere nominal supervision over them.'³² That said, the meetings of the road committee to make improvements were not sufficient to improve the capacity or comfort it afforded in the long term, which would not change until the opening of the Burma-Yunnan Road almost three decades later.³³ The caravans were in motion during the winter months from October to May, when conditions were drier and thus less treacherous, with twenty to thirty miles covered a day.³⁴ The muleteers were Chinese but also Kachin and Tai, with Shan also carrying on a large salt trade on the backs of their bullocks.³⁵

On the eve of the final Anglo-Burmese War, British knowledge of the area above Mandalay was steadily improving but still very partial, based on prior expeditions up the Irrawaddy and into Yunnan.³⁶ Upon annexing Upper Burma, a new imperative presented itself: the delimitation of the border with neighbouring powers to precisely mark out the area of British sovereign authority within this porous borderland. A wholly new approach to the frontier was coming into being across British India around the same time, Kyle Gardner has highlighted, which gave the imperative facing the Burma authorities even greater significance and urgency. This approach was marked by novel bureaucratic procedures, forms of knowledge, and technologies (of surveying, for example). It was part and parcel, concomitantly, with the emergence of a new type of 'frontier expert', of a new set of attitudes toward territory (emphasising the need to enclose space in the interests of security), and thus of a newfound significance of borders (and, ultimately, of border-defining projects). It not only marked a break with the past, but also led to the birth of 'geopolitics', an endeavour in which the Royal Geographical Society and its journal played a significant part by providing a venue to the frontier 'men on the spot' and their interlocutors.³⁷ And, it not only ushered in novel approaches toward neighbours such as China, their sovereignty, and the issue of the border, but also a self-confidence – occasionally, outright arrogance – in diplomatic exchanges even in spaces where British authority was weak or fissiparous, as will become apparent in what follows. Yet, as elsewhere on the 'natural frontier' of its Indian Empire, the state was beset with difficulty and delay.³⁸ Just as the Durand Line demarcating the Indo-Afghan border was not delineated until a half-century after British conquests in the region, so did the Burma-

China Boundary Commission substantially fix the almost 1500-mile long (and long-disputed) border (Figure 1) only in the 1930s, with the process completed well in the postcolonial period.³⁹

The eventual delineation of British India's northern borders was, nevertheless, the culmination of a larger process of improving knowledge about the borderland. In the first instance, this process involved understanding the flow of goods and people to and from neighbouring territory.⁴⁰ Taxation of trans-frontier trade was also a source of revenue, but the problem was the porosity of the border; not only were expatriate officials largely in the dark about the routes used, but their multiplicity meant merchants and porters could redirect their caravans away from customs posts to evade the colonial presence, much as was the case on the Indo-Afghan or Northwest Frontier.⁴¹ Of course, the leakiness of the border – not least because of the multiple points of crossing and the ease of evasion – was a constant thorn in the side of the administration.⁴²

The state in Upper Burma – like its counterpart on the Northwest Frontier – tried to improve its statistical and, ultimately, fiscal capture. The annexation of Upper Burma rendered existing – now 'internal' – 'frontier stations' redundant, such as Allammyo on the Irrawaddy river and at Toungoo on the Sittang river.⁴³ By 1889, the new administration had established stations at Bhamo, at Maymyo in Mandalay district, and at Hlaingdet in Meiktila district, for the registration of trade with Kachin territory, the Shan States, and China.⁴⁴ By 1891, further stations in Bhamo district – in Manayng and Sawadi – were established, the administration realising not only the scale of trade, but also the range of routes through which it could pass en route to China and the northern Shan States.⁴⁵ By recording trade at the new stations in Bhamo district, rather than in Bhamo town, a greater proportion of the traffic was thought to have been captured, leading to statistical returns of improved accuracy.⁴⁶ There were eleven stations for the registration of trade by 1895, three of which had been opened only that year – at Taungdaw, Myittha and Yewun, all in the Kyaukse district – with a further three stations opened so that the total stood at fourteen by the decade's end (Table 1).⁴⁷

This expansion of administrative capability suggests the steady improvement of knowledge, a fact underscored by changes under the surface: the closure of certain stations suddenly deemed to be insignificant and the shifting of trade (and its registration) to other locations. 'The extension of the Burma Railway to Myitkyina has made this station an emporium for the Western China trade,' it was declared in 1898, so that 'a portion of the trade which formerly found its way into Bhamo has of late been diverted thither.'⁴⁸ Situated on the left bank of the Irrawaddy and at the confluence of various routes in Myitkyina district, Waingmaw was thought to be the main beneficiary, but was actually one of *four* new stations opened in 1898–99 for the registration of trade (Table 1).⁴⁹ Within two years, however, it was reported that hopes for Myitkyina's trade had suffered a false start, for this was an entrepot used by Chinese

Table 1. Trans-frontier trade registration stations.

District	Stations open at close of 1895–96	Stations open at close of 1898–99	State with which trade carried on	Means of transport
Myitkyina		Waingmaw Kasu Talawgyi Ayeindama	WC [Western China] and Kachin Hills	Ponies, mules, and porters
Bhamo	Bhamo, Nyaungbinyat Bhamo, Tatkale Bhamo, Mingun Bhamo, river Myothit		WC, NSS [Northern Shan States], Kachin Hills [KH] WC WC and KH	Ponies, mules, pack-bullocks, porters Boats Ponies, mules, pack-bullocks, porters
Mandalay	Sawadi Maymyo		NSS and KH WC, NSS, SSS [Southern Shan States]	Ponies, mules, pack-bullocks, carts, porters
Kyaukse	Myittha		SSS, WC	Ponies, mules, pack-bullocks, porters
Yamethin	Pyawbwe		SSS, WC	Ponies, mules, pack-bullocks, carts, porters
	Pyinmana		SSS	

merchants in the transport of jade from Burmese mines, so that the railway had neither substantially enhanced the amount of trade overall nor caused Myitkyina to displace Bhamo, justifying closure of two of the new registration posts.⁵⁰

These twitches and shifts of the state's bureaucratic arm continued into the following century.⁵¹ They reflected not only the extent of the knowledge deficit and the lagged impact of communications and information-gathering, but also the inherent porousness of the border and the ease with which muleteers and merchants could reroute to evade customs posts or avoid detection when smuggling contraband. The figures for the Yunnan trade were thought too low in the three years to 1893, for example, for 'the Panthès [Panthays] [...] evade registration on every possible occasion and give the recording establishment endless trouble', such 'only by the aid of the police [...] can [they] be got to register at times.'⁵² Only in 1917, furthermore, was British Burma's trade with 'the Unadministered Kachin Country, the Shan States and Karenni' – 'hitherto [...] treated incorrectly as foreign trade' – finally redesignated as 'internal trade' and separated from transfrontier trade proper to Siam, Western China, and Tongking.⁵³ Indicative of the autonomy of those Crescent states falling under the umbrella of British sovereignty after 1885, such delay is also telling of the colonial state's confusion about the boundaries and shape of its sovereignty in the borderland, as well as its only very gradual accumulation of the requisite institutional, material, and human resources for the exertion of its claims to paramountcy.

With the spread of the nineteenth century's premier communications and transportation technologies, new geographies of circulation came into being. On the one hand, the remoteness of the Crescent – and the limited reach of

railway and telegraph lines into this space – meant it was later and largely less affected by such transformations. The opening of the railheads at Mogaung and Myitkyina in 1898 by the recently incorporated Burma Railway Company was thought as early as 1899 to have stimulated the expansion of salt trade across the borderland (described below), but it is difficult to disentangle in the figures presented the actual increase in trade from the state's improved capacity to capture and record movements across the frontier.⁵⁴ Since the most arduous part of the journey lay ahead of the railheads, it was scarcely likely that their opening for business much affected the volume of transfrontier trade – a fact at the heart of long-standing proposals for extending the railway's reach deep into the Crescent, dismissed each time as uneconomical given the calculation of high costs to limited rewards.⁵⁵ Several decades later, after the dawn of the motorcar, the Burma government expressed anxiety over French advantages and gains in China's interior markets stemming from the Haiphong-Yunnan railway. Plans emerged in 1934, therefore, for the building of a road from Myitkyina to the Burma-Yunnan frontier.⁵⁶

Aiming to support British imperial trade and the prestige deriving therefrom, road traffic was to be stimulated through concessions on duties for certain goods (excluding salt, for reasons discussed in the next section). Such measures would enhance the competitiveness of the route and precipitate the displacement of at least part of the caravan traffic, not least because the cost of lorry transportation was estimated at under one-third that of animal-powered haulage.⁵⁷ Only after Japan went to war with China in 1937, however, was construction begun, the newfound imperative of transporting military supplies to aid the Nationalist government prompting the state into action. Opened in 1938, the road between Lashio and Kunming was built by Burmese and Chinese labourers, its ongoing maintenance – widening to accommodate lorries, repairs necessitated by damage from torrential rain – placed under the eye of American experts. Transportation companies newly-created by Chinese entrepreneurs and the government were the large purchasers not only of British Thornycrofts but also American Ford lorries, fuelled by the American-owned Standard Oil Company's petrol, the zeal to exploit the opportunities presented by the highway resulting in pile-ups in Kunming of goods for Burma as early as 1939.⁵⁸ Ultimately, therefore, this (belated?) intrusion into Crescent life unleashed a free-for-all typical of the impact of technological modernity in a range of settings. Technology's effects were chaotic and unruly; rather than functioning 'smoothly' and in the manner their designers intended, their power was adapted in unexpected or idiosyncratic ways.⁵⁹ There were unexpected winners and losers, furthermore, as the opportunities presented by the new road were harnessed by a range of actors – Chinese entrepreneurs and American business more, perhaps, than subjects of the British state that claimed dominion over Burma and some degree of suzerainty over China but refused to contribute to ongoing costs of the Burma-China road.

On the other hand, nevertheless, the combination of terrestrial routes toward the frontier with faster and denser networks of maritime transportation by steamships engendered the possibility that people, goods, and money might move along routes appearing counterintuitive at first glance.⁶⁰ Because colonial officials' knowledge of transfrontier motilities was so piecemeal, the archive is also the repository of their accumulated speculations, if not fantasies. 'The figures [for 1916–17] do not however show the true balance of trade', it was stated in that year's *Report on Transfrontier Trade*, 'as remittance to banks in China by drafts on Rangoon banks are not shown in these returns.'⁶¹ There was thought to be an 'enormous increase in imported silver' of some 117 lakhs of rupees, due 'partly to the exchange of Chinese for British coin,' and 'partly to sales of silver for export to Bombay.'⁶² Here are evident the echoes of similar speculation by the Government of India two decades earlier regarding Peshawari merchants' diversion of their trade to Bukhara from the overland routes via Kabul to road, rail, and sea routes via the Persian Gulf or the Suez, so confident was the state of the transformative power of new technologies.⁶³ Only after considerable digging was the notion definitively squashed: findings shows that the lengthy and difficult overland route still held sway over the circuitous and as-yet insufficiently cost-effective land-sea route.⁶⁴ Only in the 1940s, against the backdrop of the Second World War and in violation of resultant controls on currency and bullion movements, did this spectre actually come to life.⁶⁵

Burma's cotton trade to China was of long-standing, with raw cotton (as well as twist and yarn) remaining the largest export in volume and value through the later nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Observers in Bhamo in the nineteenth century also saw salt among the cargoes headed for the uplands; it was mostly the production of the salt lakes in Sagaing and Shwebo, north of the former royal court at Ava on the banks of the Irrawaddy, which was transported upstream to Bhamo.⁶⁷ Onward trade with China was sufficiently valuable on account of its scale for Chinese merchants to evade full payment of customs duties on consignments of salt offloaded from steamers at Mandalay, where salt was taxed at 5 per cent ad valorem.⁶⁸ Cotton remained of primary importance to transfrontier exports around the turn of the century, but salt – although not exactly a close second in either bulk or value, so large was trade in the former – also retained its place as the second most significant production transported for sale in Crescent markets. Of the recorded trade from Bhamo destined for Yunnan in 1890, for example, raw cotton exports totalled 24,789 maunds and Rs.447,080 with salt at 12,216 maunds and Rs.36,041.⁶⁹ The ratio of salt to cotton was 8 per cent by value but 49 per cent by volume, the two together representing almost all of total exports (excluding preciosities such as jade not recorded in these figures).⁷⁰ The precise figures varied from year to year, but the annual trade reports reveal that this overall portrait of exports held fast into the following century, as did the primary importance

of salt (next to tobacco) in trade to the autonomous states under British suzerainty in the Kachin and Shan highlands.⁷¹ The volume of (mostly foreign) salt exported into the Crescent rose to 148,855 maunds in 1896, 179,616 maunds in 1897, and 180,410 maunds in 1898, the total rising to almost 250,000 maunds by 1903 – although, as aforementioned, these figures perhaps also reflect the state's improved knowledge of the frontier and its improved capacity to record trade, in turn.⁷²

Salt and the State in China

Salt was a monopoly claimed by successive imperial dynasties and thus of long-standing in China, enacted during the Qing era through various means that sought not to transform private enterprise into government production, but to tax output and/or its transit to market.⁷³ Journeying into Yunnan first in 1894 and again in 1900, and publishing his findings in 1909, H.R. Davies sketched in detail three main centres of salt production in the province.⁷⁴ First, Yunlong, which supplied most of north-western and western Yunnan, including Yingjian, Tengyueh, and Dali. Second, the wells in the districts of Weiyuan, Chenyuan, and Ching-tung, as well as Mohei near Puerh, which supplied the province's southern and southeastern parts. Third, Chuxiong, which supplied the centre and north of Yunnan, including the capital at Yunnanfu (Kunming), that city being 'a great distributing centre of salt and tea.'⁷⁵ The northern and northeastern-most parts of Yunnan were said to obtain their salt from neighbouring Sichuan province.⁷⁶

Salt was thus critically important to the maintenance of the edifice of Qing sovereignty, but it also played an important part in the process of its establishment.⁷⁷ Qing frontier expansion in the eighteenth century was excessively costly, necessitating large outflows of silver bullion in support of war and post-conquest garrisons and administrative presence, as true in Yunnan as, for example, in Xinjiang.⁷⁸ In Yunnan, however, a counterflow to the silver influx was salt of local manufacture. For the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722–35), therefore, asserting control over the local salt industry was an immediate imperative, part of the Qing 'pacification' of borderland peoples as well as the rendering more remunerative of newly-established control over the southwest.⁷⁹ Fairly soon, control over the salt revenues was put to service of supporting the growing civil and military presence in the province.⁸⁰ Because salt taxation was so integral to Qing sovereignty, it became, in time, a target of the foreign powers seeking to make inroads into Chinese markets. In every Chinese 'treaty port' – places where foreigners could trade – there was an office of the Imperial Maritime Customs, which had been under foreign control since 1861, following the Qing dynasty's defeat in the Second Opium War. In the wake of Qing defeat to the foreign powers in the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), the imperial government agreed to use customs revenues –

specifically, its lucrative and reliable salt revenues – for payment of its indemnity. Because the salt revenues were not under their control, there was hope from the foreign powers – seeking solid guarantees of payment of the indemnity – that such control might be secured in the near future. In fact, this came to fruition in the early Republican era (1912–49), when the need for guarantees for repayment of additional foreign loans resulted in the creation of the Sino-Foreign Salt Inspectorate, led from its inauguration in 1913 until 1918 by a retired administrator of the Salt Excise in British India, Sir Richard Dane.⁸¹

In 1901, hoping they might soon secure direct control of the salt revenues, the Deputy Inspector-General of the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs, Robert Bredon, commissioned inquiries toward a comprehensive report on the salt trade. It was published in 1906.⁸² Despite numerous problems and complexities in calculating comparable statistics, it is clear that the retail price of salt in Yunnan was the most expensive of anywhere in China at 105–120 cash a catty – the cheapest rates being 3–4, and consumers in almost all other parts of China paying up to around 60.⁸³ In part, this was because of how Yunnanese salt was manufactured, which was more costly than elsewhere.⁸⁴ In part, this was also because of high taxes (especially *lijin*, and other ‘irregular levies’ taken by officials to supplement government salaries, the latter frequently insufficient because of the imperial state’s weak fiscal base) and the high cost of taking salt to market across the hilly uplands suffering from poor transport infrastructure.⁸⁵ Furthermore, estimates of average annual production in China, 1840–90, place Yunnan salt production at around 1.4 per cent of total national output, thus perhaps short of local demand.⁸⁶ Buyers in those places in Yunnan at a distance from the imperial salt fields likely found salt smuggled from Burma and Vietnam significantly cheaper or else available where Yunnan (or other Chinese) salt was in short supply.⁸⁷ Quality may also have been a rationale for trade, Burma or ‘sea salt’ allegedly better than Chinese salt according to the British Superintendent of the Northern Shan States.⁸⁸ Such expressions of sympathy with Chinese eating contraband should be read carefully – as the following discussions make clear – for they were among many rhetorical flourishes through which the Burma government not only assuaged responsibility for, but even rationalised and encouraged, smuggling from Burma to China.

Contraband salt punctured Chinese sovereignty in two ways: first, because it undermined the salt monopoly and the revenues deriving therefrom, and, second, because the ensuing struggle to check illegal imports did more to flag the empire’s weakness than to improve the Qing dynasty’s teetering position in the international system.⁸⁹ The latter issue has been thrown open in a brilliant study by Philip Thai.⁹⁰ The larger outcome of China’s defeat to Britain in 1842 was the signing of a succession of treaties and agreements – the first of these later leveraged to make further exactions, while also serving as the basis for agreements with other powers – that significantly circumscribed

and shrank Chinese sovereignty. Of particular relevance, here, was the principle of extraterritoriality, which ‘conferred on foreigners in China virtual immunity from domestic laws’, to say nothing of the way it ‘fragmented domestic sovereignty’ and militated against the creation of a unified legal and political space, Thai argues.⁹¹ Only in 1943, during the Second World War, did Britain and the United States acquiesce these privileges. This is not to say the Qing state was inactive, however, and combatting smuggling offered one arena in which to build not only state authority and state capacity (by capturing otherwise lost revenues and curbing the flow of dangerous goods that undermined the government), but also a vision of modern and ‘unified national economy’, Thai maintains.⁹² In the Republican period, when the state really ramped up its response, the war on smuggling created the very problem it was meant to eradicate and thereby weakened state authority, yet, in time, this ‘invis[ed] repression that reified and strengthened state authority.’⁹³ Indeed, by the 1930s, the war on smuggling had become ‘a transformative agent in expanding state capacity, centralising legal authority, and increasing government reach over economic life.’⁹⁴

What of salt, and salt smuggling, specifically? The problem of salt smuggling was not unique to Yunnan and the borderland, but pervasive across China, where peddlers carried salt in pursuit of opportunities for arbitrage, while ‘powerful lineage groups, secret societies, and peasant armies [...] could marshal resources and manpower to produce, transport, protect, and sell salt in defiance of state strictures.’⁹⁵ There were occasional campaigns against ‘salt bandits’ (*yan fei*) led by provincial governors, but ‘local magistrates routinely turned a blind eye so long as illicit sales did not reach alarming and visible levels.’⁹⁶ At the start of twentieth century, therefore, the Qing Civil Code – which set out laws and punishments – was effectively defunct as a result of numerous changes in law and frequent non-enforcement.⁹⁷ Around that time, a series of legal reforms did away with criminalising non-payment of duty on numerous goods in light of earlier laws having become dead letters, yet defined smuggling more narrowly and sharply ‘to address the carriage of specific contraband like opium, weapons, and salt’.⁹⁸

Where it involved non-Chinese, the war on smuggling had another consequence, for ‘[e]very time Chinese officials attempted to fine a British businessman for duty evasion, confiscate a Japanese trawler for carrying contraband, or enter a foreign concession to arrest a Chinese smuggler, they confronted fundamental questions of state sovereignty and legal authority’, although – to temper Thai’s arguments somewhat – the unfavourable outcomes did more to highlight just how shackled the Chinese government was than to help make any headway toward the dismantling of extraterritoriality.⁹⁹ In this context, the matter of British subjects smuggling salt is doubly significant. In the first place, it reveals how the Chinese state was frustrated in claiming the revenues deriving from a commodity historically intertwined with Chinese sovereignty in the domestic sphere – a space, moreover, in which it was

desperately trying to assert control through the law and use of force to build a modern nation-state around the *fin de siècle*. Second, if ‘official repression of smuggling helped reinforce state authority and harden national borders’, as Thai argues, then a corollary is that – left unchecked – sovereignty was weakened if the borderland remained a fuzzy and porous place.¹⁰⁰ Elucidating this latter issue, and the implications for British Burma, are the focus of the remainder of this analysis.

Smuggling in the Burma-China Borderland

The matter of salt smuggling surfaces repeatedly in the archives of the Burma government, usually as part of the ‘opium-salt question’. This discussion drew the matter of salt smuggling into dialogue with the problem of the illicit opium trade in the contrary direction (from China to Burma), the latter threatening the Government of India’s opium monopoly in South Asia and its strict regulation of the drug in (Lower) Burma.¹⁰¹ The matter also arose whenever the Chinese issued new legislation or acted with renewed vigour in the prosecution of offenders, in turn transgressing – in the eyes of some British officials – British sovereignty in the Burma-China borderland. The diplomatic fallout following the murder of a British officer and his Chinese party in 1875 (the so-called ‘Margary affair’) led to the Chefoo (Zhifu) Convention of 1876 that enhanced the extraterritorial privileges of Britons and British subjects. Britain finally ratified the agreement in 1885, the same year as the defeat of the Konbaung dynasty, and the extension, therefore, of British administration further into the dry zone and up to the as-yet undelimited China border. Ten years later, Britain and China agreed the treaty or convention of 1886 (recognising Britain’s newly-established claims over Upper Burma, which had hitherto been a tributary of the Qing Empire), and then the Anglo-Chinese Trade and Frontier Convention of 1894, amended in 1897, the last resulting in the posting of a British consul to Tengyueh.¹⁰² These agreements largely pertained to permissible movements across the frontier, including the free movement of British and Chinese subjects and restrictions on the traffic in opium and spirits in both directions, as well as the administrative obligations deriving therefrom, such as maintenance of the roads and rates of duty on goods.¹⁰³ Looser than formal treaties, there was considerable scope for Britain – *qua* the global and regional hegemon – to throw around its might by overtly or covertly contesting particular parts of the conventions as befitted the changing interests of its subjects and its government.

By Article XI of the 1886 agreement, for example, salt was not to be taken from Burma to China. But smuggling continued, toward which the British government not only turned a blind eye, but openly acted in ways that undermined their agreements with the Qing government, if not even encouraging the illicit trade. In the first place, parts of the British administration rather conveniently

deemed trade in salt too small to merit much attention, although such judgements were based on the size of tax receipts without much acknowledgement of the significant latitude for the evasion of duty payment by routing away from both British and Chinese customs posts – as well as the feebleness of the frontier administration – on the wide and permeable frontier.¹⁰⁴ In winter 1895, for instance, the officer posted at Bhamo, G.W. Dawson, encountered a group of Chinese taking 116 mule loads of salt by a road beneath that to Nampaung. These men informed him that the issuance of fresh orders in China against the import of foreign salt made it impossible for them to use the regulated routes. The poor quality of Chinese salt made a lively contraband trade viable, they claimed, despite the Chinese authorities stopping caravans and seizing any salt they found. Rather than seizing the salt himself and halting their onward progress, Dawson returned the salt to the mule drivers, merely warning them that they were taking an unsafe route.¹⁰⁵

Secondly, the British authorities waved away the articulation of a set of rules – in supplement to Article XI – by arguing that whatever was carried by individuals traversing the frontier might reasonably form part of their personal allowances of controlled substances, such as salt and opium.¹⁰⁶ Instead, some officials actually advocated for the dismantling of the restrictions agreed between the Qing and British governments. Rationalising that the ‘Chinese must have the salt’, since the locally-manufactured article was considered inferior, and that ‘the officials would probably be glad of the profits’ derived from the sale of Burmese salt, the Acting British Consul posted at Tengyueh, C.A.W. (Archibald) Rose, proposed to the Burma Government in May 1909:

that we should endeavour to arrange some agreement by which representatives of the Burma Government and the Yunnan Provincial Government should annually purchase a certain fixed quantity of opium and sea-salt respectively, import it and stamp it as Government property in a regular way and dispose of it through official channels [*italics in the original*].¹⁰⁷

Regulation, in other words, would transform smuggling into something mutually beneficial for the British and Qing governments, and for consumers, merchants, and producers on both sides of the frontier. A year later, almost to the day, a note was sent to Viscount Morley, the Secretary of State for India, by seven signatories from the upper echelons of the Foreign Department of the Government of India, its contents to much the same effect, although opium was substituted for Chinese rice, grains, and pulses (not least because widening the market for these commodities would disincentivise opium cultivation and the illicit trade in opium).¹⁰⁸ Again, pains were taken to emphasise that ‘salt has practically become a necessity of life’ to Chinese across the border, so that ‘the suppression of the trade is even likely to lead to disturbances.’ And it was thought ‘probable that [...] Chinese officials, knowing the impossibility of providing the people with official salt of a quality and at a price which could

command a market, will connive out the trade in the future as in the past,' so that the trade would be better placed on a regular footing by removing the restrictions agreed in 1896 and 1894, and thereby also remove the 'periodic exactions and disturbances' to which the salt trade was subject.¹⁰⁹

Finally, the British often assuaged any responsibility for policing the trans-frontier trade altogether, claiming the burden ought to be borne by the Chinese, since they desired the prohibition of salt imports. Besides, the Chinese government sold onto the market the salt coming from Burma that it was able to intercept and confiscate, thus making additional revenue while also supplementing the insufficient supply of local manufacture with salt of a quality that allegedly preferred by Yunnan's inhabitants. In fact, the Acting British Consul at Tengyueh in 1909 reported the local Chinese official of the Salt Preventive Department saying that the slowdown of trade/smuggling was damaging precisely because it left holes in the provincial finances from sales of confiscated salt.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, the Burma government's stance was simple: since they did not encourage the traffic in either opium or salt, they were not duty-bound to protect the Chinese, who ought either to turn a blind eye or tackle the problem themselves.¹¹¹

This stance and such underlying opinions were voiced prevalently from winter 1908–09 when the 'opium-salt question' was (re-)opened. The spark was retaliation by the *taotai* (local governor) of Tengyueh against the confiscation by border officials on the Burmese side of the goods of one Ma Chun, a Chinese military official.¹¹² This retaliation took the form of the confiscation by agents of the Salt Preventive Department in Mang-Shih of a train of forty-one pack animals and their cargoes, the incident coming to the attention of the colonial authorities following notice from the Sub-Prefect of Lungling to H.E. Sly, the Acting British Consul at Tengyueh.¹¹³ The immediate discussion within the Government of Burma centred on the legitimacy of the confiscation: Ought the animals have been sequestered along with the cargoes? Ought even those goods which were not prohibited have been seized? The answer to the former was that such confiscation was akin to the punishment of those caught bringing opium into Burma under the Opium Act (1878).¹¹⁴ As to the latter question, there was consensus that the authorities' actions were unfair, but also acknowledgement of tit-for-tat over the incident involving Ma Chun.

In fact, inquiry revealed to the higher authorities in British Burma that Ma Chun's goods had been seized by agents on the spot as payment in kind for the fine imposed for his 'smuggling' of opium into the colony.¹¹⁵ In this light, the Chinese authorities' sequestration of non-prohibited goods seemed less overtly an act of aggression or hostility. In evidence, here, was the clunking of the colonial information order at the frontiers of the Indian Empire at large, as C.A. Bayly famously showed, which was the product of the distance from control centres, the diffuse nature of political authority, and the difficulties of

tapping into local pools of knowledge and their indigenous practitioners.¹¹⁶ In the wake of both the ‘frontier turn’ and the ‘epistemic turn’ in colonial history, Bayly’s pioneering work has been elaborated by a number of scholars – among them, B.D. Hopkins and Martin Bayly – interested in the epistemic gaps and chronic epistemological problems sedimented within the colonial state on the frontier, its implications for the articulation of colonial power, and its longer-term (and disastrous) consequences upon the Western powers’ engagement with Afghanistan to this day.¹¹⁷ Although the Indo-Afghan borderland has been a central site to these inquiries, the experience there was not exceptional, for there is much commonality with the Burma-China borderland.¹¹⁸

Returning to tensions with Tengyueh, it was understood that the *taotai* announced he would penalise those bringing salt from Burma, which was followed – in September 1910 – by news that eight Kachin porters from the Sadon district had been executed for bringing 9 loads (262 cattles) of Burma salt to exchange for Chinese rice at Kyong Kai. In fact, the men had not been executed, but returned to Myitkyina.¹¹⁹ In the absence of a dense information network and effective communications, rumour had not only a propensity to spread but also a currency, thus travelling all the way to the official colonial archive in Rangoon (Yangon), rather than remaining within the locality of the borderland. The frontier was a site where the colonial state’s epistemic gaps and epistemological failures are most amply revealed, as recent scholarship shows, but this is not to say contemporaries were unaware of their informational disadvantages. In fact, feelings of vulnerability – especially palpable along the frontier – were an important driver of the development of what James Hevia terms the ‘imperial security state’, a central institution of which was the archive, a place where information could be systematically stored and valuable knowledge created to guide defensive policy.¹²⁰ If the archive contains numerous instantiations of misinformation and misunderstanding, yet came into being precisely because better-quality information was so prized, this does not mean it was utilised effectively or in the intended manner by its own architects, who struggled (or refused?) to locate its knowledges upon demand or else suffered bouts of amnesia about prior events and precedent.¹²¹

For all the paperwork produced by the opium-salt question in the years 1908–10, colonial officials looked elsewhere – to a brief correspondence produced in 1903 – when complaints regarding salt smuggling were reiterated in 1929.¹²² Across the border, Qing rule had given way to nationalist forces in 1911, with the Chinese Civil War breaking out in 1927. In other words, the complainants might have changed their political colours, but this cannot explain the difficulty in British Burma of reaching into the state’s repositories to research the matter of salt smuggling into China. In fact, one correspondence within the file remarked the issue was an old one, while another explicitly recollected recent discussion on the subject, the documentation of which – it was noted – could not be found.¹²³ ‘We have no recent papers regarding the

export of salt from Burma into China', it was claimed, although it was speculated that 'presumably the trade is still entirely in the hands of the Chinese.'¹²⁴ Were it so, the government 'had no objection to the imposition by China of an import duty', but the imposition of an export duty was deemed 'out of the question because of the cost involved and because of the existence of the prohibition clause' in the first place.¹²⁵ And to this was added the hardship to follow if trade were prevented, for the Chinese were incapable of supplying either the quantity or quality of salt needed by the people, these statements a barb aimed at the heart of the Chinese state, opening to scrutiny its failure in its duty to its subjects to provide sufficient salt – a necessity critically entangled with the expression of sovereignty in monsoon Asia.¹²⁶ Even without reference to previous discussions, therefore, the Government of Burma mobilised many of the same arguments employed in evading responsibility for tackling traffic deemed illicit by the conventions signed between Burma and China in the previous century.

Another tactic, however, was to present the problem as essentially one of the Chinese authorities' own creation. After the signing of the 1894 convention, a Liverpool merchant solicited the Burma government for information regarding the prospect for trade in English salt to the Chinese Shan States. This inquiry prompted discussion revealing not only confusion about the implications of the agreement with China, specifically whether and what rate of tax the *sawbwas* would levy, but also a blasé attitude toward 'smuggling', for it was remarked that the prohibition of imported salt was of prior standing but ignored on the Chinese side, the Chinese Shan States having even dispensed with interventionism.¹²⁷ Three decades later, in 1924, the British consul at Yunnan reported to the Burma government (and onward therefrom to the Government of India) of the establishment of the Superintending Office for the Transportation of Salt, its remit to control the purchase, transportation, distribution, and importation of salt in Yunnan. The motivation was the latter administration's ceasing the remittance of salt revenues to Peking in 1917, instead retaining these for local needs.¹²⁸ It was speculated that the effect of the newly-established office would be to enlarge the illegal import of large volumes of – specifically Tonkin, thus altogether ignoring the prevalence of Burmese – sea salt.¹²⁹

Trade in salt *was* acknowledged in 1929, when the finger was pointed firmly at the Chinese authorities. 'Yunnanfu [the centre of the Yunnan provincial administration] and Tengyueh seem to be at cross purposes', for 'Tengyueh is encouraging free importation by levying a tax' of Rs.3/100 viss of salt, 'but Yunnan wants us to take steps to prevent it.'¹³⁰ What good could be effected by British intervention when 'everyone engaged in the trade must know that the so-called Preventive Staff in China actually protects instead of preventing the trade.'¹³¹ Corruption, it was suggested, was rife within the very institutions and administrative offices of the Chinese state whose purpose it was to punish

and thereby tackle the problem of cross-border salt smuggling. Some reasoned differently: John Clague, posted as an administrative officer in (and later becoming the Commissioner of) the Federated Shan States, determined the trade very large – around 30,000 loads of salt per annum – so that British assistance with the curtailment of the salt trade to China might be imperative in securing Chinese support for abating the counterflow of opium into Burma.¹³² Others waved away the entire problem as essentially academic at that moment: if the purpose of prohibiting salt imports was to shore up the Chinese government's revenues from its salt monopoly, then the real problem was 'the chief salt-producing centres in Yunnan being in the hands of militarists opposed to the Provincial Government, which for some time has been receiving practically no revenue therefrom.'¹³³

A number of these manoeuvres can be seen at once in a file from 1932, which was opened upon the British Consul at Tengyueh reporting a complaint alleging salt smuggling into Burma made that April by the Yunnan provincial government. At issue, some investigation revealed, was a Chinese named as 'Su Wen-su' who had established a small factory near Monglin, south of Kengtung, where he refined salt crystals brought from Siam for local sale and trade.¹³⁴ The Chinese authorities thought Su a 'notorious bad character' and requested British assistance in securing his extradition to China. The consul posed:

Apart from the question of a request for Su's extradition on account of some previous offence in China, supposing it were proved that he is engaged in contraband salt to China, would it not be possible for action to be taken against him in Burma? I see that in the letter from your office referred to above it is maintained that in the past merchants have been warned of the dangers of this illicit trade and of the risk of having the contraband salt and their pack animals confiscated. But would not one regularly engaging in the traffic render himself liable to some further penalty?¹³⁵

With inquiries underway, Humphrey Ingelram Prideaux-Brune – a British diplomat and China hand since 1911, and from 1935 the British Consul at Nanjing – was instructed to inform the *tupan* (provincial governor) that the issue was being dealt with, thus waving away the problem by stalling.¹³⁶ Clague, meanwhile, reiterated an old position in dismissing the Chinese request; namely, that salt was a 'legitimate' article of trade, quite unlike opium. If the very prohibition of salt trade was questionable, the onus ought to be on the Chinese to flesh out their case regarding Su's bad character for the extradition case to be processed.¹³⁷ Once it was discovered that the factory had, in fact, long since closed down, the investigating officer reported that rock salt had been in the past years brought from China into the Burma Shan States. Although in contravention of Article VIII of the 1894 convention, the Burma government, he observed, had 'made no complaint as the remedy is provided for by confiscation' – his implication being that the Chinese government should do the same.¹³⁸

In laying claim over part of the Crescent while its border with China remained under dispute and with only a skeletal administration of its own in the region, and in holding fast to the freedom of legitimate trade by rebuffing the Chinese government's complaints about salt smuggling, the Burma government sought to plump up and reify its sovereignty in the borderland. And, yet, this case also reveals the very fragile nature of its political authority. In reporting to government in Rangoon that he would ask the Kengtung *sawbwa* for the factory to be shut down and salt production prohibited, Clague revealed how different British paramountcy in the borderland was to that elsewhere in British India.¹³⁹ India's princely rulers would routinely be exhorted to nudge policy (or their own behaviour) in directions supportive of British interests, although they might still evade or defy such requests.¹⁴⁰ If paramountcy was nevertheless effected from the top downward in much of British India, where the princely states were mostly engulfed within terrain under the Government of India's direct control, it was perhaps more a bottom-up arrangement in Upper Burma's remote and leaky borderland with China, where the terrain was too difficult, the administrative presence too thin, and its knowledge too partial or defective for it seek to prevent 'smuggling' without the cooperation of those local potentates with whom it had struck a political bargain. In this is evidence of the agency of Zomia's inhabitants – the fact of their participation, rather than passivity, in the face of the state to which James C. Scott's work has sought to draw attention.¹⁴¹ 'It is possible that if a smuggler on a large scale established himself on this side of the frontier and autonomously engaged in smuggling,' the file concluded, 'the Local Government might be prepared to do anything it could to discourage him, but I do not think the Chinese authorities should be told this in connection with this somewhat petty case.'¹⁴² In plain and dispassionate language, and with uncharacteristic self-reflection, the Burma government thus laid bare its predicament.

Conclusion

In a recent world history of smuggling, Alan L. Karras has argued that '[r]ather than risk violence, government representatives found ways to tacitly *permit* contraband trading activities by cutting back on enforcement actions, by turning the other way when smuggling took place,' but also 'by allowing officials charged with legal enforcement to get away with accepting bribes.'¹⁴³ In similar spirit, Johan Mathew has examined the case of a consignment of *charas* (a resin form of marijuana) from the Himalaya through British India, where it was legal, to Egypt, where it was not, drawing attention not only to role played by corrupt officials but also to race, for the smuggler – one 'Abd al-Hai, a Muslim [...] and a resident of Djibouti', born 'Henri de Monfreid in the south of France' – was able to benefit 'from all the privileges of his race and aristocratic pedigree' as well as the status of his accomplice, Edward

Ternel, as a white Briton.¹⁴⁴ Permissiveness on the part of the state and its representatives is reduced in these analyses either to the fear of reprisals upon prohibiting, or the lure of rent-seeking from partaking in, smuggling.

Permissiveness toward smuggling was the product not only of the bribery and corruption of those officials in contact with actors in the marketplace, however. In drawing attention to opinion in the upper echelons of the colonial government to the effect that cross-border movements of what the Chinese deemed 'contraband' should not be policed and punished, this article has shown that smuggling supported – rather than undermined – British sovereignty in the Burma-China borderland, providing a very different rationale for the toleration of such activity. As neatly summed up by Eric Tagliacozzo in his study of the Anglo-Dutch frontier in southeast Asia, smuggling was connected to 'two sides of the same coin: boundary production and the boundary transgression (through contrabanding) that accompanied it'.¹⁴⁵ Along the 'three-thousand kilometre stretch of land and sea in colonial Southeast Asia' examined by Tagliacozzo, boundary making is held to have come first, through acts of mapping to give shape to formal treaties between the two powers, alongside the use of new technologies of control to maintain the integrity of inter-state boundaries, and, logically, boundary transgressions – smuggling, not least – came second.¹⁴⁶ On the contrary, and despite seeming counterintuitive, *prima facie*, it has been demonstrated that the two processes went in tandem and that smuggling actually gave shape and substance to British claims over borderland space. Or, rather, the Burma government's permissiveness toward smuggling was part of the very process of bordering or border-making, for such permissiveness and protection of British subjects was part of the projection of British sovereignty into a disputed borderland to thereby lay claim over, and colonise, territory.

The arguments presented in this article thus bear some similarity to those made by Tagliacozzo but are also distinct in this and three other respects, pinpointing such variations serving to shape an agenda for future inquiry. In the first place, and notwithstanding the difficulty posed by open waters and the numerous coves, bays, and islands to first mapping and clearly demarcating an Anglo-Dutch border in southeast Asia, then its policing, the very terrain of the uplands seems to have posed a significant obstacle to the Burmese and Chinese governments in even marking the border, which remained blurry until the 1930s, some half-century after the British annexation of Upper Burma. Those technologies – modern roads and railways, telegraph lines and lighthouses – so critical to the 'taming' of the 'wild frontier', the aqueous border between British and Dutch southeast Asia, remained largely alien to the Burma-China borderland.¹⁴⁷ Yet, secondly, such outcomes were not solely determined by the peculiar environment of the uplands; they also reflected human constraints and choices.

The difficulty of establishing permanent posts for trade registration, for instance, resulted from the absolute poverty of colonial knowledge and the asymmetry of information between the state and merchants. Indigenes, after all, knew of the various passages across the uplands and were the ones choosing – presumably based on numerous factors to do with market opportunities, the evasion of the state’s fiscal machinery, the shifting safety and security of particular routes, and so forth – to switch from one route to another, thereby escaping the state’s gaze. It was not the landscape *per se*, therefore, but the difficulty of drilling down into local pools of knowledge and of closing the gap between state and society that compromised the exertion of state power. In another respect, however, the Burma government was not merely the ‘victim’ of its alienation from a place and its peoples, or of the extraordinary ability of people to escape its power (*pace* Scott). The state also chose not to deepen its physical presence or enhance its technologies of surveillance and control in the borderland. The Burma government could have invested in the building of paved roads, the extension of the railway, or the connection of far flung places to telegraph lines, but deemed the benefits insufficient, changing tack only when political concerns altered the cost–benefit calculus.

Aside from the particularities of place, people, and political regimes (often taking effect in combination), one final difference relates to the distinctive qualities of that which was smuggled. Tagliacozzo’s work is based on the smuggling of narcotics, arms, people (prostitutes, ‘coolies’, and slaves), and counterfeit currency, their movement sometimes accompanied by violence. The focus of this article has been a more innocuous substance that is one of life’s necessities: salt.¹⁴⁸ True, salt’s very necessity made it valuable – through taxation – as a source of revenue to the state, such that it was subject to government monopoly in British India and in Qing and Republican China. In this, salt shared something with opium, the latter also subject to government monopoly in both India and China, as well as British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. In colonial Burma, however, opium policy was steadily developed to regulate the sale and consumption of the substance on racialised lines, Ashley Wright has highlighted. The revenue deriving from opium and its effects on those Indian and Chinese coolies whose labour was essential to the profitability of the rice economy of the delta region, on the one hand, had to be balanced with fears of its corrupting effect upon the supposedly morally and physiologically ‘inferior’ Burmese, on the other.¹⁴⁹ In Burma, therefore, the opium monopoly had a twin rationale: to capture the revenue from opium sales and to restrict who could consume the drug.

Unlike opium, salt presented no danger to society, so that establishment of government monopoly was purely economic, the Burma government desiring both to encourage consumption of the kind of salt that was easiest to tax (imported, rather than that of domestic manufacture) and to enlarge trade wherever possible.¹⁵⁰ In the borderland, however, the issue of salt smuggling

was entangled with opium – the ‘opium-salt question’ noted in the above analysis.¹⁵¹ In spite of this, exposition of opinions shared up and down the hierarchy of the colonial administration, from the locality to the centre, reveals that various forms of ‘masterly inactivity’ – rather than deception – explains the continuance of smuggling under the Burma government’s gaze.¹⁵² At the very elementary level, British officials collectively and rather conveniently shrugged their shoulders on the matter, alleging salt smuggling too small a problem either to police or to make the subject of supplementary laws to those already agreed with China. In fact, certain figures even proposed dismantling existing legislation with a view toward ‘regulation’ of the salt ‘trade’, their justification the wellbeing of Yunnanese, who were deprived of sufficient salt by a dirigiste Chinese state that was simultaneously impoverishing itself, losing the (large) revenues that might flow into its coffers if the trans-frontier salt trade were no longer illegal. It was even claimed that trade existed *because*, not *in spite*, of the Chinese authorities, for ‘smuggling’ was seen as the product of corrupt servants of the state.

At a deeper level, the handling of Chinese complaints about salt smuggling reveal something of the workings of the colonial administration in Burma, particularly on the frontier and in ways comparable to that of its counterparts elsewhere in south Asia. Thomas Simpson’s work on India’s northeast and northwest (or Indo-Afghan) frontiers brilliantly connects and compares two frontiers normally examined separately, and is especially pertinent to the present analysis. He outlines how ‘British agents of empire conceived of frontiers as productively strange.’¹⁵³ It provided men with a ‘space of freedom and play’ for their self-fashioning, while being a space for other forms of creativity, too, of which the career of Robert Sandeman in Balochistan (1866–92) serves as a good example. Sandeman not only saw ‘fixed boundaries as inimical to’ his role as an ‘agent of empire’, but actively violated boundaries by crossing them – unsanctioned – to deal with mobile tribesmen to shape local politics in the service of his perception of grander imperial priorities, very much as he saw fit.¹⁵⁴ This last raises an important aspect of distinction as regards the Burma-China borderland. By the end of the nineteenth century, many of British India’s ‘frontier’ zones were being (en)closed, as Simpson and Gardner have highlighted. By contrast to their counterparts’ anxiety over the mobility of indigenous borderland groups, the material presented above shows that the Government of Burma’s administrators at all levels relished the porousness of the Burma-China borderland and routine crossings into the Chinese Shan States and Yunnan proper.¹⁵⁵ This mobility was productive: it gave life to British claims over part of a borderland only weakly under the Burma government’s ambit, for every intrusion of British subjects into nominally Chinese territory and every dispute with Chinese officials provided an opportunity for the colonial state to press the interests of its subject people and thereby reify its claims to the territory they inhabited.

In tune with the arguments made in this article, Simpson also notes a phenomenon he calls ‘frontier forgetting’, which was sometimes a result of ‘the state’s shortcomings and quotidian cases of informal blockages and interpretative confusions’, but was more often a ‘deliberate strategy’, born of individual agents’ conscious ambiguity, wilful ignorance, and the desire to preserve their liberty within a space that George Nathaniel Curzon described as requiring men of ‘special talents’.¹⁵⁶ The affair involving Ma Chun brings to light the state’s epistemic gaps and the clunking of its information order on the frontier. This is not something revealed solely in hindsight, however: contemporaries felt acutely insecure on the frontier, such feelings motivating the development of the ‘archive’ as an institution in which they could find safety and comfort in the familiarity of knowledge sedimented over time. The difficulty (or disinclination?) of actually reaching into this archive to retrieve any – let alone useful – information was quite another problem. Again, it was something of which contemporaries were aware, one even passing comment on being unable to find any precedent or prior discussion of complaints about salt smuggling despite the problem widely known to have been ongoing for decades. Amnesia was endemic: it was allowed to take root and set seed because it served the state and its representatives well; better not to know and be able to delay a reply, than to easily find irrefutable evidence of being in the wrong. The colonial state variously failed or else deliberately decided not to reach into the remote and apparently ‘alien’ world of local society in Zomia, and into institutions of its own making, therefore. Where it did take action, it relied on local powerholders as intermediaries (the *sawbwas*), indicating how its sovereignty was constructed from the bottom up rather than exerted from the top down in the borderland. And, yet, by consciously sidelining or even contesting Chinese complaints about smuggling and requests to curb the activities of smugglers, the Burma government bolstered its territorial claims over the disputed borderland in which it exercised this topsyturvy and remote form of statehood. It thus moved more deeply – in the eyes of other sovereign authorities, if not in reality – into what was historically a ‘shatter zone’ of refuge and marronage, a place where people could keep at arm’s length (and maybe even escape from) the coercive power, predations, and demands of states and empires.

Notes

1. Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*, of which 40–63 discusses the ‘friction of terrain’ thesis, and 13–16 explains the derivation of this neologism, itself first proposed by Willem van Schendel. See, for further discussion of the history and geography of this conceptual category, its relation to others (e.g. the Southeast Asian Massif), and its utility: Michaud, “Editorial,” 187–8, 199–202, 212–14.
2. Scott himself traces this connexion to Fernand Braudel and, long before him, the medieval Arab historian, Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406): *Art of Not Being Governed*, especially

- 16–21 and 329. Nevertheless, many scholars have found Scott’s work productive, even if in need of refinement, for instance: Shneiderman, “Central Himalayas.”
3. Scott has himself only paid passing attention to trade and other forms of interaction between valley and hill peoples, positing a relationship in which the value of tradable commodities explains the degree of interdependence (or independence) of the two regions/societies: *Art of Not Being Governed*, 330. See, for critical responses: Lieberman, “Review Article”; Fiskesjö, “Mining.”
 4. Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*, 128.
 5. *Ibid.*, 60–2, for the extent of the discussion, which comes in the form of an abstract schematic.
 6. Appadurai, “Grassroots,” 1.
 7. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
 8. For such an application of these ideas, see: Giersch, “Across Zomia.”
 9. This is examined in the next section of this article, save here to mention that historians of China been more attentive to the history of this space and the role played by settlement and trade, such as: Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*; Bello, “Malaria and the Qing Construction.”
 10. For a review of this topic, see: Whewell, “Legal Mediators,” 97 and n. 4.
 11. *Ibid.*, 103–10.
 12. *Ibid.*, 110–20.
 13. Benton, *Search for Sovereignty*.
 14. See, for a vivid picture of the social world of smuggling: Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades*, especially 186–356.
 15. *Ibid.*, 2.
 16. Note that citations from sources from the NAM take the following format: government department, year, file number, accession number, page number. In the case of IOR materials, the full shelfmark precedes a short description of the item.
 17. Lally, “Salt and Sovereignty.”
 18. Mathew, “Crossroads of Empire and Nation-State,” 928.
 19. Adelman and Aron, “Borderlands to Borders,” 816.
 20. *Ibid.*, 816 and *passim*. The scope of the present analysis extends only to the early 1930s for a number of reasons; not only the divorce of Burma from the Government of India in 1935 (of which it was formerly a major province) and commencement of Japan’s war with China in 1937, but also the depression in the economy of southwest China that so affected trade. On this last, see: Wright, “Distant Thunder.”
- It would be remiss not to note that, by the 1880s, the dislocation brought about by the Panthay Rebellion – a bloody conflict between the Qing state and the Yunnan Muslims (Panthays) – had come to an end and several thousand Panthays had resettled on the British side of the borderland. For an excellent revisionist reframing of the history of the rebellion: David G. Atwill, *The Chinese Sultanate: Islam, Ethnicity and the Panthay Rebellion in Southwest China, 1856–1873* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).
21. Citations in n. 9.
 22. Brown, *Report*, 5.
 23. Yang, “Yunnan,” 281–2.
 24. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, *passim*, and chapter 2 for policies enacted by the Yongzheng emperor from the 1720s.
 25. *Ibid.*, 4, 61, and – for the competing territorial claims and contest between the three powers, and the disastrous Qing war against Burma of the mid-eighteenth century – 97–124.

26. *Ibid.*, 4.
27. *Ibid.*, 160–4, 174.
28. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 164, 166–7.
29. *Ibid.*, 170.
30. *Ibid.*, 20.
31. The Chinese dues were established late during the reign of the Guangxu emperor (r. 1875–1908) and were aligned with the maritime customs taxes; see: Anon., *Papers*, 225–6.

So as to maintain his thesis, Scott argues that – outside the lowland/valley states, in Zomia – there was political order (rather than disorder) of sorts: *Art of Not Being Governed*, 36–7, 208. Such political order existed on a sliding scale from lineages to hamlets to acephalous communities, and were unstable and always in flux; thus, he claims, the highlands were a stateless space. Cf. Sneath, *Headless State*. Scott does, however, suggest that the Shan states were mimicry of Burman and Siamese valley states, thereby recognising the existence of the political entities fashioned by the *sawbwas* – *op. cit.*, 115.

32. Brown, *Report*, 8.
33. *Ibid.*, 8.
34. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 170–1.
35. Couchman, *Report*, 15, 68. These Chinese included the Panthays; see, above: n. 20.
36. An excellent guide to British exploration of, and the accumulation of knowledge about, Upper Burma from the seventeenth to the twentieth century can be found in: Croizier, “Antecedents,” 1–10. Travel in the reverse direction, from China to Upper Burma and down the Irrawaddy, was less common; however, see: Colquhoun, “Exploration,” *passim*, and 715 for a digest of prior exploration.
37. Gardner, *Frontier Complex*, 204–32.
38. *Ibid.*, 204–32, for difficulties in demarcating the India-China border. The informational dimension of this difficulty in the context of the Burma-China border is examined in the next section.
39. Note that the work of the Burma Boundary Commission toward delimiting the border began after the 1897 amendment to the Sino-British treaty of 1894, discussed below; see: IOR/V/24/4256: ‘Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year Ending the 31st March 1898’, 5. For the protracted discussions starting in 1936 until 1938: IOR/M/3/175: ‘Burma-China Boundary Commission: 1937 Negotiations’. See: Gardner, *Frontier Complex*, 207–12, 222, for the role of Thomas Holdich in the setting of increasingly uniform ‘boundary commissions’ to work across the frontier of the Indian Empire.
40. Compare these arguments with those made by: Gardner, *Frontier Complex*, 92–178.
41. IOR/V/24/4166: ‘Note on the Trade Statistics of the Punjab for the Year 1873–74’, 8, for discussion of the inadequacy of the earlier system. See, for a map of the frontier posts: IOR/V/24/4166: ‘Note on the Trade Statistics of the Punjab for the Year 1874–75’.
42. For a schedule of taxes, tolls, and imposts along more well-travelled routes, see: IOR/V/24/4256: ‘Report on the Transfrontier Trade of Burma during the Year 1901–02, and the Triennial period ending 31st March 1902’, 5–6.
43. IOR/V/24/4256: ‘Report on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Three years ending the 31st March 1890’, 1.
44. *Ibid.*, 1.
45. IOR/V/24/4256: ‘Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year ending 31st March 1891’, 1

46. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year ending 31st March 1892', 11.
47. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year Ending the 31st March 1895', 1.
48. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year Ending the 31st March 1898', 2.
49. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Report on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Three years Ending the 31st March 1899', 2.
50. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year Ending the 31st March 1900', 1–2.
51. See, for example: IOR/V/24/4256: 'Report on the Transfrontier Trade of Burma during the Year 1910–11, and the Triennial period ending 31st March 1911', 1–2.
52. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Report on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Three years ending 31st March 1893', 22. The Panthays were said to carry on most of the traffic in the Trans-Salween territory: *op. cit.*, 2.
53. IOR/V/24/4257: 'Note on the Transfrontier Trade of Burma, 1917–18', 1.
54. See, for instance: IOR/V/24/3934: Report on the Administration of Salt Revenue in Burma for the Year 1899, 4–5.
55. Christian, "Anglo-French Rivalry," wherein can also be found discussion of the folly of so many plans for railways and roads discussed in the century up to the Second World War.
56. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1934, 145 B34, 5063.
57. Chang, "Economic Development," 2, for calculations of relative costs.
58. NAM, Defence Secretary's Office (British Burma), Miscellaneous I. Department, 1939, 633D(M), 5978, especially 2–5, 41–3.
59. See, also: Lally, *India and the Silk Roads*, chapter 8.
60. Chang, "Stories."
61. IOR/V/24/4257: 'Report on the Transfrontier Trade of Burma and the adjoining Foreign Countries during the Year 1916–17, and the Triennial period ending 31st March 1917', 3.
62. *Ibid.*, 3.
63. NAI-F, Frontier A, December 1885, Nos. 3–8, frontmatter, 3.
64. NAI-F, Frontier A, May 1888, No. 295–300, 1–2.
65. Mathew, "Crossroads of Empire and Nation-State."
66. Dale, "Silk Road."
67. Hannay, *Sketch of the Singphos*, 39.
68. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1873, No. 6, 8112, 2–3.
69. A maund was a unit of measurement in widespread use in British India, equivalent to 82.3 pounds avoirdupois.
70. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Report on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Three years ending the 31st March 1890', 12, which also shows that imports were more diverse than exports.
71. IOR/V/24/4256: 'Memorandum on the Trade between Burma and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the Year ending 31st March 1892', 20–2.
72. IOR/V/24/3934: 'Report on the Administration of Salt Revenue in Burma for the Year 1897', 3; IOR/V/24/3934: 'Report on the Administration of Salt Revenue in Burma for the Year 1898', 2; IOR/V/24/3934: 'Report on the Administration of Salt Revenue in Burma for the Year 1902', 4.

73. Chiang, "The Salt Trade in Ch'ing China," 197–219, here 202–5.
74. Davies, *Yün-nan*. For the relationship of China's political divisions with the Qing salt administrative regions, see: Chiang, "Salt in China," 517–18.
75. Davies, *Yün-nan*, 162.
76. *Ibid.*, 197.
77. Similar argument can be made in the case of British India/Burma; see: Lally, "Salt and Sovereignty."
78. For a general overview, and the larger effects of this expansion in Xinjiang, see, respectively: Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 78–177; Kim, *Borderland Capitalism*.
79. See, for the control over the tea industry as another part of the pacification: Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 52–8.
80. Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 47–8, 50, 52–8.
81. Strauss, *Strong Institutions*, especially 58–79; Samuel Adrian M. Adshead, *The Modernization of the Chinese Salt Administration, 1900–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
82. Tase and Yan, "Salt in China," 127–8.
83. *Ibid.*, 131–40 for statistical matters, and 140–41 for tabulation of prices across China. The catty is a Chinese measure equivalent to one and one-third pounds avoirdupois.
84. Brown, *Report*, 10–13. See, also: Chiang, "Production of Salt," 527–8.
85. Tase and Yan, "Salt in China," 154–5.

A tax on goods in transit, the *lijin* was imposed on all kinds of commerce during the Taiping Rebellion (and maintained thereafter), including on salt, was necessary since the imperial state and its presence in the localities needed to vastly ratchet up its fiscal capture to fight the most devastating global conflict of the century; Zelin, *Merchants*, 140. See, for the 'economy' of the irregular levies: Strauss, *Strong Institutions*, 58–9.
86. Chiang, "Production of Salt," 519.
87. Tase and Yan, "Salt in China," 156, 183–4.
88. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1909, 1C-10 Part I, 6603, 4.
89. *C.f.* Day, *Qing Travellers*, which reevaluates the reckoning of Qing administration and its diplomats with the realities of the international system.
90. Thai, *China's War on Smuggling*.
91. *Ibid.*, 14, for citations, and 26.
92. *Ibid.*, 4.
93. *Ibid.*, 4, for citation, and 44.
94. *Ibid.*, 3.
95. *Ibid.*, 42.
96. *Ibid.*, 47.
97. *Ibid.*, 48.
98. *Ibid.*, 50.
99. *Ibid.*, 15, for citation, and 25–6 and 51–2, for discussion of an example of such a dispute and the difficulty facing the Chinese.
100. *Ibid.*, 10, for citation, and n. 18.
101. Wright, *Opium and Empire*.
102. Whewell, "Legal Mediators," 102.
103. Trager, "Burma and China," 37–40.
104. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1895, No. 1C-7, 3374, 21.
105. *Ibid.*, 58–60.

106. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
107. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1909, 1C-10 Part IV, 6606, 2. Note that Archibald Rose would become the Consul that year, serving until 1911. For brief biographies of his career and those of the other Tengyueh consuls: Whewell, "Legal Mediators," 112–13.
108. The signatories were: Minto, Creagh, Miller, Fleetwood Wilson, Sinha, Jenkins, and Robertson.
109. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1910, 1C-38 Part I, 6783, 4–5.
110. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1909, 1C-10 Part I, 6603, 3–4.
111. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1910, 1C-38 Part II, 6784, 3.
112. *Ibid.*, 6.
113. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1909, 1C-10 Part I, 6603, 3.
114. *Ibid.*, 2; NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1909, 1C-10 Part II, 6604, 2.
115. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1909, 1C-10 Part IV, 6606, 21 and 30.
116. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 97–141.
117. See, for example: Lally, "Landscape." The conclusion of the present article returns to these issues.
118. See, for other pertinent similarities: Lally, "Salt and Sovereignty."
119. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1910, 1C-38 Part II, 6784, 15–17.
120. Hevia, *Imperial Security State*, 53–72.
121. To amnesia might be added the fragmentation of knowledge resulting from 'archiving'. The annual reports on transfrontier trade mention the 'illegal' salt trade substantially only once: IOR/V/24/4256: 'Note on the Transfrontier Trade of Burma, 1900–01', 1. Discussion of contraband revolved around imports, not exports (e.g. *from* Burma to China). The latter was acknowledged only once – in 1902 – in an undigested excerpt relating the issue while at once revealing the competitive politics of the local elites: IOR/V/24/3934: 'Report on the Administration of Salt Revenue in Burma for the Year 1901', 5.
122. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1929, 138B28, 4787, 3.
123. *Ibid.*, 8 and 4, respectively.
124. *Ibid.*, 3.
125. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
126. *Ibid.*, 12–13. See, also: Lally, "Salt and Sovereignty."
127. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1894, 1C-2, 3275.
128. Sources make no mention of the turbulence in Sipsongpanna, 1881–1911, marked by, first, a long civil war, then the division of the borderland between Burma, China, Indochina, and Siam following European conquests, before occupation by the Chinese army. See: Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*, 122.
129. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1924, 389B, 4570.
130. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1929, 138B28, 4787, 6. The viss is a Burmese measure of around 3.6 pounds avoirdupois.
131. *Ibid.*, 8.

132. Ibid., 7.
133. Ibid., 22.
134. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1932, 171B32, 4968, 3, 8.
135. Ibid., 3.
136. Ibid., 10.
137. Ibid., 8.
138. Ibid., 12.
139. Ibid., 8.
140. Taking but one example pertinent to the present analysis – opium trade/smuggling through the princely states of western India – suffices to elaborate this point: Boehme, “Smuggling India.”
141. See, also: Michaud, “Editorial,” on this point especially 211–12.
142. NAM, Chief Secretary's Office (British Burma), Political Department, 1932, 171B32, 4968, 16.
143. Karras, *Smuggling*, 111.
144. Mathew, “Smoke on the Water,” citations from 76 and 85.
145. Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades*, 3, for citation, and *passim*.
146. On the former process: *ibid.*, especially 28–52, and also 362 for the citation.
147. The phrases in quotation marks are Tagliacozzo's: *ibid.*, 108.
148. Of these, the global arms traffic of the long nineteenth century has received the most attention, especially in the Asian context. Chew, *Arming*, is an example that broaches the matter of smuggling and piracy.
149. Wright, *Opium and Empire*.
150. Lally, “Salt and Sovereignty,” *passim*, and also 22–3, for discussion of why salt affords a particularly novel and valuable vantage-point for scholars working at the nexus of commodity (economic) and legal (political) histories.
151. For the contours of the history of opium production in Zomia, specifically southwest China's borderland: Michaud, “Editorial,” 195–6.
152. *C.f.* Pianciola, “Illegal Markets,” which offers a fascinating contrast.
153. Simpson, *Frontier*, 1.
154. *Ibid.*, 39–46.
155. *Ibid.*, 30.
156. *Ibid.*, 6, for first citation, 259, for the quotation from Curzon, and also 8–9, 248–9, 260–4.

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