

The Dual Faces of Mobility: A Study on the Resilience Mechanism of Border Ethnic Communities amid Cross-Border Population Mobility—A Case Study of Menglian County, Yunnan Province

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Abstract: There are numerous border ports in the southwest border region of China, with inbound personnel with diverse and complex identity backgrounds, close exchanges among cross-border ethnic groups, and complex topographical conditions that pose severe challenges to border governance. Against this backdrop, ethnic communities in the southwest border areas are facing multiple challenges. As a normal feature of border regions, cross-border population mobility exerts both risk and resource impacts on community development. Taking Menglian Dai, Lahu and Va Autonomous County in Yunnan Province as the research area, this paper examines how cross-border mobility shapes the resilience mechanism of border ethnic minority communities based on cultural pluralism theory and community resilience theory. The study finds that on the one hand, irregular mobility phenomena such as irregular migration, cross-border crimes, and sudden public security events impact community governance and expose the institutional vulnerability of communities; on the other hand, border folk trade, cross-border employment, kinship networks, and cultural exchanges inject economic resilience and social capital into communities. Instead of passively bearing the impacts of mobility, border communities construct a dynamic equilibrium between openness and control. Through the resilience transformation of social networks, the localized adaptation of grassroots governance, and the mutual identification and cohesion of different ethnic cultures, communities convert potential risks of mobility into adaptive resources. This paper proposes the concept of “resilience in mobility,” reveals the generation logic of community resilience in border areas, and provides practical implications for revitalizing border areas and enriching residents, as well as the modernization of border governance.

Keywords: Community resilience; Border ethnic community; Resilience in mobility

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1. Introduction

Since the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, the strategic importance of China's southwest border region has been continuously enhanced. As a critical link radiating to South Asia and Southeast Asia, the southwest border has become a priority of national strategy and an important component of fostering a new development pattern. In recent years, amid rising transnational population mobility and increasingly prominent border issues, ethnic communities in China's southwest border region, which is characterized by a complex geographical environment, diverse ethnic minorities, long national border lines, numerous ports and frequent personnel exchanges, are enduring multiple tests. The social stability, economic development, and people's well-being of border ethnic communities are closely related to China's overall development and the modernization of national governance. Improving people's livelihood, stabilizing society, activating the resilience of ethnic communities, and promoting the all-round development of border areas, while enhancing friendship and cooperation between countries, can better safeguard national security and public interests.

2. Theoretical framework and research methods

2.1. Relevant concepts and theoretical framework

The concept of resilience was introduced from ecology into urban planning research in the 1990s, and was subsequently applied to all levels and aspects of urban systems. It is generally recognized that ecological, engineering, economic, and social dimensions are the priority fields of resilience research ^[1]. Due to the subjective initiative of human beings, the resilience of social systems has particular characteristics compared with other research objects, and cannot be directly measured by the resilience metrics of ecosystems and other systems ^[2]. Social resilience should include attributes such as the degree of social support, people's risk knowledge, group efficiency, and collective consciousness ^[3]. To a certain extent, community resilience depends on the resilience capacity and resources of other community dimensions.

The core propositions of Will Kymlicka's pluralism include: acknowledging the legitimacy of cultural differences and the right of different ethnic or cultural groups to maintain their own cultural traditions and identities; multiculturalism is compatible with democratic equality, and cultural differences should not be a reason for unequal treatment; maintaining the interaction of different ethnic cultures has positive value for democratic countries ^[4]. Cultural pluralism provides a normative basis for cultural differences and composite identities of cross-border ethnic groups.

Existing research on community resilience mostly focuses on urban communities and is based on large-scale urban resilience, holding that communities are the grassroots governance units and disaster-bearing bodies of cities, and that resilient cities can achieve sustainable development amid major natural disasters, public health events, and other risks. Most attention is paid to the static understanding of "resistance-recovery." Based on the latest achievements in the interdisciplinary field of psychology and social science, this paper analyzes dynamic resilience in the interaction between humans and the environment, and probes the two-way flow characteristics of cross-border entry and exit in ethnic minority communities of border areas. Research on dynamic resilience featuring continuous adaptation, learning, and transformation is of more practical significance for border communities.

This paper proposes the concept of "resilience in mobility," which refers to the dynamic capacity of border communities to transform mobility risks into adaptive resources through the activation of social capital, the cohesion of cultural identity, and government-community collaborative governance in the context

of sustained cross-border mobility. The study holds that elements of cross-border mobility such as population flow, economic exchanges, and cultural interactions in border areas are both sources of risk and reserves of resilience. Combined with the ADAPTOR theoretical model — that is, community pressure exposure triggers the mobilization of reserve capacity, and resilience is activated and adapted through reserve sources — this paper deeply investigates residents’ perceptions and attitudes in border communities ^[5]. Based on the model framework set as follows (**Figure 1**), this paper puts forward the concept that border community resilience governance needs to activate different resilience capacities at different risk stages, namely the process of “stage resilience — mobility resilience.”

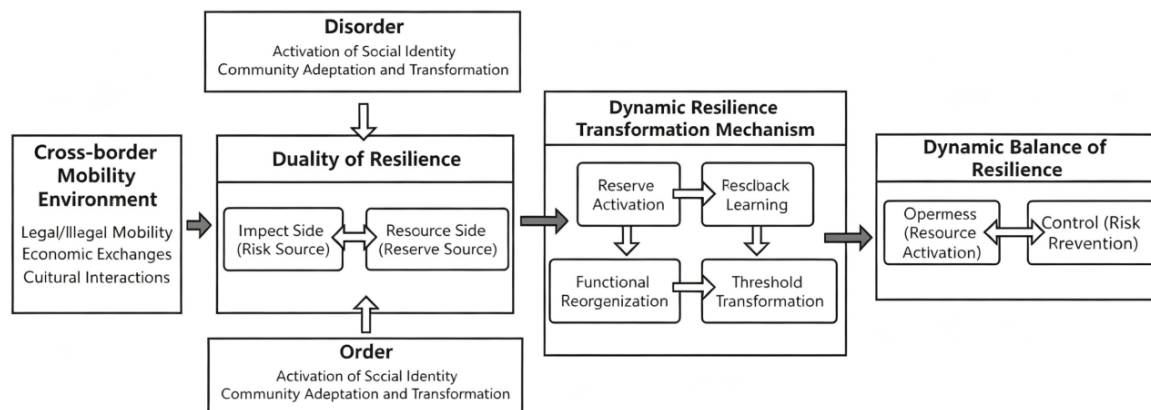


Figure 1. Establishment of the dynamic resilience model (Source: Drawn by the author)

2.2. Research methods

2.2.1. Literature research method

This paper systematically collects and sorts out domestic and foreign research literature in the fields of community resilience, cross-border mobility, border governance, and cultural pluralism, with a focus on analyzing theoretical resources such as the ADAPTOR dynamic resilience model, social capital theory, and adaptation strategies of cross-border ethnic groups. Meanwhile, official documents including Menglian County statistical yearbooks, government work reports, port operation bulletins, and judicial data of courts are consulted to provide a theoretical basis and data background for empirical analysis.

2.2.2. Field survey method

Through participant observation, the research team went deep into typical border villages such as Longhai Villager Group of Meng’a Village and areas along Mangxin Channel to observe daily cross-border mobility scenarios, including border folk trade, festival activities (such as the Sacred Fish Festival and border trade fairs), and village councils, and recorded details of community interactions, commodity transactions, and language use.

In-depth interviews with local residents adopted a semi-structured interview outline. The interviewees mainly included border residents, community governors, port management personnel, judicial staff, and police officers. All interviews were recorded and transcribed into text with the consent of the respondents. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection, and all interview records have been fully anonymized to protect personal privacy.

2.2.3. Quantitative analysis method

Official statistical data of Menglian Port, including import and export freight volume, cargo value, entry-exit personnel, number of border folk trade transactions, and cross-border crime cases over the years, are analyzed in terms of trends and comparisons to reveal the scale evolution of cross-border mobility and the effectiveness of governance.

2.2.4. Comparative case analysis method

Two representative border villages in Menglian County are selected for comparative analysis.

The above methods correspond to theoretical construction, in-depth understanding, quantitative verification, macro description, and mechanism refinement, respectively, forming a multi-dimensional research design of “qualitative + quantitative” and “macro + micro,” which can effectively support the core argument of this paper.

3. Empirical analysis of cross-border mobility and community resilience in Menglian County

3.1. Overview of Menglian County: A portrait of border ethnic communities

Menglian County has a national border line of 133.399 kilometers and a border resident population of nearly 140,000, among which ethnic minorities account for as high as 86.4%. Relying on national first-class ports, Menglian County has the material foundation and social soil for cross-border mobility. Menglian is not only a border in the geographical sense, but also a field for material and information flow.

Menglian Dai, Lahu and Va Autonomous County is located in the southwestern part of Yunnan Province, under the jurisdiction of Pu'er City. The county covers a total area of 1,893.42 square kilometers. It is adjacent to Lancang Lahu Autonomous County in the east, borders Ximeng Va Autonomous County in the north, and is connected to the border areas of Shan State and Myanmar in the west and south. It is one of the 25 border counties in Yunnan Province and an important gateway to Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Thailand. Meng'a Port is a national first-class port ^[6].

Menglian County administers 4 towns and 2 townships: Nayun Town, Mengma Town, Mangxin Town, Fuyan Town, Jingxin Township, and Gongxin Township. There are 39 village committees, 6 neighborhood committees, and 618 villager groups in total. The county people's government is located in Nayun Town.

According to the *2023 Statistical Communique on National Economic and Social Development of Menglian County* released by the Menglian County Bureau of Statistics in September 2024, the permanent resident population of the county was 139,700 by the end of 2023, including 72,500 males and 67,200 females. The ethnic minority population reached 116,315, accounting for 86.53% of the total population. Among them, the urban population was 63,000, the rural population was 76,700, and the urbanization rate was 45.10% ^[7].

In terms of ethnic composition, the three major ethnic groups account for the majority of the ethnic minority population of 116,300, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of ethnic minorities in Menglian County (Data source: Menglian County Bureau of Statistics, *2023 Statistical Communique on National Economic and Social Development of Menglian County*, 2024)

Ethnic Group	Population (persons)	Proportion of Total County Population
Dai Ethnic Group	27,210	20.24%
Lahu Ethnic Group	41,426	30.82%
Wa Ethnic Group	32,738	24.36%
Total Ethnic Minorities	116,315	86.53%

The Dai, Lahu and Va ethnic groups in Menglian County are all cross-border ethnic groups, which belong to the same ethnic groups as the Shan, Lahu and Va people on the Myanmar side respectively, with shared languages, similar customs and frequent intermarriage^[8]. This cross-border distribution pattern of the same ethnic group makes cross-border mobility a normal feature of border communities.

In 2022, the county's GDP reached 5.835 billion yuan, and the total volume of foreign trade imports and exports exceeded 10 billion yuan for the first time, reaching 11.35 billion yuan^[9]. In 2024, the county achieved a GDP of 6.832 billion yuan, with a growth rate of 3.4%^[10]. In 2025, the GDP reached 7.158 billion yuan, up by 4.77%^[11]. The area of green industries covers 1.1763 million mu, with 9.51 mu per farmer. The avocado planting area reaches 120,700 mu, with 25,700 mu put into production and an output value of over 600 million yuan, replacing 15% of imported fruits and making Menglian the largest domestic avocado-producing area. The coffee planting area is 111,600 mu, with a comprehensive output value of 1.255 billion yuan. The rubber planting area is 301,000 mu, with a comprehensive output value of 1.254 billion yuan. The sugarcane planting area is 78,100 mu, with a sugarcane crushing volume of 764,100 tons and a comprehensive output value of 1.07 billion yuan. The tea planting area is 103,900 mu, with a comprehensive output value of 1.345 billion yuan^[12].

3.2. Scale, types, and community perception of cross-border mobility

Cross-border mobility has long been a normal feature of Menglian's border communities. In terms of types, border folk trade is the main form through which border residents carry out daily commodity transactions relying on port channels, forming stable cross-border economic ties. Cross-border agricultural cooperation is also active: cash crops such as sugarcane planted on the Myanmar side enter China through ports and are processed by local enterprises, forming a cross-border industrial chain. In addition, social mobility such as cross-border marriage, family visits, and festival exchanges is widespread. The Dai, Lahu and Va ethnic groups share languages and similar customs with their homologous groups in Myanmar, with kinship networks stretching across national borders.

Meanwhile, due to geographical convenience, illegal acts such as smuggling and illegal border crossing were once prevalent, posing challenges to border control and community security. Illegal cross-border mobility was once a governance difficulty. In recent years, with the continuous strengthening of grassroots governance, the scale of illegal mobility has been significantly reduced.

3.2.1. Scale of cross-border mobility

Menglian County has two major designated channels, Meng'a Port and Mangxin Channel, serving as

important gateways from Yunnan to Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Thailand. According to statistics, in 2024, Menglian Port achieved an import and export freight volume of 1.845 million tons, a cargo value of 6.23 billion yuan, and about 1.5 million entry-exit person-times. In 2025, the import and export freight volume of Menglian Port reached 2.058 million tons, a year-on-year increase of 11.5%; the cargo value was 5.99 billion yuan, a year-on-year decrease of 3.8%; and the number of entry-exit person-times reached 2 million, a year-on-year increase of 43.4%^[13].

3.2.2. Types of cross-border mobility

Cross-border mobility in Menglian is mainly realized based on two dimensions: economic development demand and the cross-border distribution of the same ethnic minorities. Border folk trade brings material circulation of commodity exchange and cargo transportation, which further triggers large-scale cross-border agricultural cooperation. For example, during the 2025 sugarcane crushing season in Menglian, the inbound sugarcane reached 328,000 tons with a cargo value of 154 million yuan^[14]. Large-scale cross-border agricultural cooperation has spawned cross-border employment. Due to the low labor cost in Myanmar, according to surveys of more than 30 sugarcane-growing households, more than half of the manual harvesting and loading work of sugarcane in Menglian is completed by Myanmar migrant workers. Material demand drives the economy while promoting frequent personnel exchanges. In addition, Menglian is home to multiple ethnic groups and a large number of overseas Chinese and their relatives, giving birth to the “Binong Saihai” ethnic solidarity and mutual assistance culture, and cross-border marriage is common^[15–16].

Illegal cross-border mobility is another type of cross-border flow, mainly in the form of illegal employment, cross-border smuggling, and irregular employment, with undocumented migrants as the main participants and strong concealment.

3.2.3. Community perception

The intuitive growth of economic income is the dimension most strongly perceived by residents. In Yunruan Villager Group, the “border trade street” every Saturday has become an important channel for villagers to increase their income. Ethnic characteristic products such as Dai brocade, Dai pottery, glutinous rice, and roasted tea attract residents from surrounding villages and even the county seat to purchase. During the research, a Dai woman participating in street vending said, “I used to have nothing to do in the slack season. Now I can make several hundred yuan every week by setting up a stall, which covers the pocket money of my family.” Similarly, around Mangxin Channel, border residents can obtain labor income of thousands of yuan per season by participating in cross-border sugarcane transportation.

The improvement of life convenience and consumption choices is also frequently mentioned by residents. With the active cross-border trade, imported goods such as Myanmar snacks and Thai beverages have appeared in village canteens at affordable prices. A Lahu villager said, “In the past, we had to go to the county seat to buy these things. Now we can buy them at our doorstep, and the kids love them.” To a certain extent, the commodity interconnection brought by cross-border mobility has improved the quality of life in border villages.

The reshaping of community vitality is another important dimension of residents’ perception. The once quiet border villages have become lively due to mobility. The border trade street in Yunruan Group not only brings economic benefits, but also serves as a platform for villagers’ social interaction and cultural display.

Villagers' confidence in the future also grows along with mobility. Many interviewed border residents said that as long as the port is open and border trade is stable, life will be promising. This positive perception constitutes the psychological foundation of border community resilience — residents regard border mobility as a reliable resource.

Overall, cross-border mobility has become the basic background of production and life in Menglian's border communities. It is not only an important livelihood support for border residents, but also a key link in improving community resilience.

3.3. Mobility as an impact

While mobility as a resource brings economic vitality to border communities, its negative effects also impact community resilience.

3.3.1. Community challenges under lockdown

Menglian County was one of the counties in Yunnan with the highest risk of overseas epidemic import, the greatest pressure on prevention and control, and the heaviest tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic. After the epidemic outbreak in April 2021, Mengma Town implemented zonal management in Meng'a Village, designated the port area as red and yellow zones for hierarchical control, and prohibited vehicle and personnel access until lockdown measures were lifted at the end of 2022. The physical lockdown reduced or even interrupted the economic income of border residents. During the research, more than 20 individual business households in Mengma Town were visited, and all border resident merchants stated that their business was bleak and they could not operate normally during the lockdown. Such an actual situation reflects the essence of mobility as a community "resource."

Affected by the epidemic, the scale of border folk trade hit a low point in 2022. In response to the epidemic impact, Menglian County innovatively implemented the "Four Dual" measures (dual monitoring, dual driving, dual connection and dual service) to coordinate epidemic prevention and control with economic and social development. After the lockdown was lifted, the border trade achieved rapid recovery in 2023 and 2024. From January to May 2024, the number of border folk trade transactions reached 202,600, a year-on-year increase of 17%; the cargo value reached 1.552 billion yuan, up by 23% year on year; and the income of border residents increased by 19% to 7.4913 million yuan, realizing a V-shaped recovery of border folk trade ^[17]. The "Four Dual" measures reflect the government-led resilience construction — through public welfare posts, skill training, and industrial connection, the impact is transformed into an opportunity for structural adjustment.

3.3.2. Illegal cross-border mobility

Illegal cross-border mobility was once a pain point of governance, and the catalytic effect of geographical convenience on cross-border crimes is particularly prominent. From 2021 to June 2025, courts in Menglian concluded more than 1,000 cross-border criminal cases involving more than 3,000 people, with border residents accounting for more than half of the defendants, mainly involving illegal transportation and border crossing.

Existing studies on social vulnerability indicate that there is a positive correlation between the incidence of crime and the degree of poverty and the scarcity of social capital in a community, which can be verified by the research of Menglian County Court. Some border residents, with weak legal awareness, violate the law

under the mindset of “just doing a small favor.” From seemingly trivial acts such as “taking someone across the border” and “showing a path,” they gradually engage in cross-border crimes, including transportation and illegal border crossing. Illegal cross-border acts erode the foundation of social trust in communities and severely deplete community social capital.

3.3.3. Depletion of resilience

Smuggling is a common cross-border crime in border areas. It distorts the normal order of border folk trade, damages the interests of legal operators, and causes property losses to residents. To further stabilize the economic resilience of border communities, grassroots governments and judicial authorities often invest a large amount of resources in crackdowns and control, which squeezes the resources originally available for public services and community development, resulting in the loss of social resources. On the other hand, after border residents involved in cases are held criminally responsible, their families lose the main labor force, and the human capital of the community is also depleted.

When some residents profit through illegal channels, the sense of relative deprivation among law-abiding residents increases, breaking the internal interest balance of the community. From the perspective of social resilience, the spread of crimes intensifies residents’ anxiety about community security, reduces community cohesion, and weakens residents’ willingness to participate in community public affairs.

3.4. Mobility as a resource

For the vast majority of border residents, cross-border mobility is first and foremost a support for livelihood, a bond of emotion and a source of identity. The “risk side” and “resource side” of cross-border mobility are interdependent and dual in nature.

3.4.1. Informal security of kinship networks

Cross-border kinship networks are the core carrier of social capital for border residents, and also the most direct manifestation of the “resource side” of mobility. In Menglian County, cross-border marriage is common between the Dai people and the Shan people in Myanmar, the Lahu people and the Lahu people in Myanmar, and the Va people and the Va people in Myanmar, which constitutes the demographic foundation of cross-border kinship networks. Menglian is inhabited by multiple ethnic groups with a large number of overseas Chinese and their relatives. Overseas Chinese families maintain close ties with their relatives in Myanmar, forming a channel for cross-border information circulation and resource exchange. Under the framework of in-depth integration of overseas Chinese affairs and ethnic unity, the stable operation of kinship networks is also institutionally guaranteed.

Based on cross-border marriage as the demographic foundation, overseas Chinese and their relatives as the institutional extension, and cross-border employment as the economic carrier, an informal security network covering multiple functions such as production, life, and crisis response has been formed. When external shocks come, this network can quickly mobilize cross-border resources to mitigate the negative impacts of external forces. In daily life, cross-border kinship networks are important channels for border residents to obtain cross-border employment opportunities, participate in border folk trade, and expand family income channels.

3.4.2. Cohesion mechanism of cultural identity

Cultural identity endows social networks with meaning and cohesion. Shared ethnic languages, religious beliefs, festival traditions, and historical memory constitute the cultural background of cross-border mobility and shape the cultural dimension of community resilience.

The Dai, Lahu, and Va ethnic groups in Menglian County all share languages and similar customs with their homologous ethnic groups on the Myanmar side. The Dai language and the Shan language in Myanmar belong to the same language branch; the Lahu language is also widely used in Shan State, Myanmar; and the Va language is a common mother tongue across the border. According to field visits, local residents in Menglian basically use Chinese for daily communication, but switch to their own ethnic languages when meeting relatives of the same ethnic group. Border residents can communicate directly with overseas relatives, merchants, and farmers without translation, and this convenience itself is a kind of resilience resource.

Secondly, festival activities are the most intuitive embodiment of the cohesion function of cultural identity. During the Sacred Fish Festival in May 2025, Meng'a Port inspected a total of more than 25,000 entry-exit person-times, among which nearly 10,000 Myanmar tourists entered China to participate in activities, visit relatives, and go shopping. Myanmar tourists accounted for 36.8% of the total during the festival, making it a strong engine of cross-border population mobility in border communities ^[18].

3.4.3. Resilience transformation of “Binong Saihai”

“Binong Saihai” is a form of inter-ethnic mutual assistance in Menglian County, referring to the friendship relationship between different ethnic groups based on daily production and life exchanges, which is as close as relatives without blood ties. From the perspective of resilience theory, the tree-shaped star structure of the “Binong Saihai” network is the institutional basis of its resilience function ^[19]. The mutual assistance of “Binong Saihai” is not for immediate returns, but is based on the credibility accumulated in long-term relationships, with ethics and morality providing the foundation of trust. Members of different ethnic groups and regions can join this mechanism, and its openness and compatibility ensure the elasticity of the social network. From agricultural work assistance to industrial cooperation, from daily care to disaster relief, the functional gradability enables the network to cope with challenges of different scales and types.

At the community level, the resilience function of “Binong Saihai” is reflected in three dimensions. First, information sharing: in emergencies such as the epidemic, daily contact between “Binong Saihai” households can quickly transmit official notices and folk information, making up for the lag and blind spots of formal information channels. Second, resource mutual assistance: when a family falls into trouble due to shocks, “Binong Saihai” partners are often the first to lend a helping hand. This informal emergency assistance network is more timely and targeted than the formal social security system. Third, psychological support: in the process of long-term adaptation, the “Binong Saihai” relationship provides emotional comfort and psychological support, reducing the sense of isolation and anxiety.

Menglian County deeply integrates the “Binong Saihai” mutual assistance mechanism with characteristic industrial development, and implements the “Organization + Binong Saihai + X” model for industrial transformation. When external shocks occur, the industrialized “Binong Saihai” network provides alternative livelihoods. Border residents no longer completely rely on economic opportunities brought by cross-border mobility, but can find jobs in the local industrial chain. This reflects the practice of the functional

reorganization mechanism in dynamic resilience theory, that is, when the original path is blocked, the system realizes core functions in new ways by reallocating resources.

From the perspective of dynamic resilience theory, the case of Menglian County reveals the realistic logic of “mobility as a resource.” The social capital and cultural identity activated by cross-border mobility realize the dynamic resilience generation process of “reserve activation — functional reorganization — network expansion” through the institutionalized mechanism of “Binong Saihai”^[20]. When the impact side of mobility comes, the resource side of mobility provides the social foundation for community adaptation and transformation. The essence of resilience lies in the ability of the system to achieve a dynamic balance between impact and resources, and transform “mobility risks” into “mobility resources.”

The above findings confirm the “activation of reserve capacity” mechanism in the ADAPTOR model — cross-border kinship networks, as social reserves, are mobilized and transformed into adaptive resources during crises.

3.5. Resilience generation in interaction

The “impact side” and “resource side” of cross-border mobility reveal the objects and foundations of community resilience, while the path to realizing resilience requires multi-party collaboration. The generation of border community resilience is not unilaterally shaped by a single force, but dynamically generated in the continuous interaction between community self-organization and government-community collaboration. In Menglian County, this mechanism is concentrated in two intertwined dimensions: one is the endogenous power of community self-organization, and the other is the government-community collaborative governance network. The interaction between the two jointly constructs the resilience system of border communities.

The following case of Longhai Villager Group demonstrates how border communities achieve resilience transformation through self-organization and government-community collaboration under the pressure of the “impact side” of cross-border mobility. This process does not negate cross-border mobility, but provides a stable institutional environment for the “resource side” of mobility to play its role.

3.5.1. Community self-organization: generation of endogenous power

The governance transformation of Longhai Villager Group from a “problematic border village” to a “peaceful village” fully reflects the resilience path of community self-organization. Longhai Villager Group, subordinate to Meng’a Village of Mengma Town, has a 3.5-kilometer border line and is the village closest to Meng’a Port, with almost 100 households and 400 villagers living there for generations. Its special geographical location makes Longhai one of the most active areas for cross-border mobility, and once a hot spot for cross-border illegal activities. Some villagers here used to engage in smuggling and illegal transportation and guidance of border crossers. Tensions between village cadres and the masses, and conflicts between neighbors over business competition led to low public satisfaction. After governance, public satisfaction increased from around 60% before governance to 99%^[21].

The governance transformation of Longhai Group stems from organizing the endogenous forces of the community and constructing a systematic community self-organization mechanism. Since 2013, Longhai Group has divided nearly 100 households into several grids, with 10 to 15 households as a basic unit and at least 1 head in each grid. Each head is responsible for contacting 5 to 10 households and establishing a three-level governance system. Meanwhile, Longhai Group has set up a monthly council system. Villagers

have shifted from initial silence to active participation, and the council has become an open platform for community members to negotiate and reach consensus on public affairs.

“Binong Saihai” has also been formally embedded in the community. Families of different ethnic groups in Longhai Group have formed “Binong Saihai” pairs and set up an ethnic language mediation team. At the level of moral governance, family traditions and instructions are displayed on the walls, and each household hangs its own family motto. The traditional inter-ethnic mutual assistance based on the logic of acquaintance society has been transformed into a community self-organization force with institutional guarantee.

The community self-organization of Longhai Group has wide coverage, deep mutual trust among members, and can solve practical problems for members. The accumulation of trust and community confidence is exactly the core of social capital for community resilience.

3.5.2. Government-community collaboration: From single governance to two-way empowerment

Community self-organization cannot accomplish resilience building on its own. In the governance transformation of Longhai Group, grassroots organizations and state authorities are embedded in the community network in a collaborative rather than substitutive manner, forming a “two-way empowerment” collaborative framework.

Cadres dispatched to the grassroots carry out legal education and border policy learning initiatives, deeply instilling the notion that “guarding the border well is safeguarding one’s own home” among residents, which further fuels internal resilience building within the community.

In Longhai Group, a “Four Joins” mechanism for household-based groups—covering joint construction, joint defense, joint guarantee, and joint punishment—has been put in place. Villagers exercise mutual supervision: reporting violations is rewarded, while concealing violations results in joint penalties. Through self-management, self-education, and self-service, residents’ awareness of fulfilling their obligations, assuming corresponding responsibilities, and devoting themselves to border defense has been continuously enhanced.

Meanwhile, border-adjacent police posts have been established along the border, and checkpoints are set up in coordination with joint defense stations. Staffed with joint defense personnel and border guards for coordinated patrols, a three-dimensional prevention and control network integrating human, physical, and technical defense measures has been constructed, realizing full-coverage border patrols with zero blind spots.

Since 2022, Longhai Group has achieved three consecutive years of transformation from a “problem-ridden village” to a “peaceful village.” A defining feature that sets resilience governance apart from the traditional management and control model is that official authorities do not replace community self-organization; instead, they attain governance objectives by empowering the community’s endogenous forces.

4. Conclusion and implications

Based on the above analysis of community resilience in Menglian County, a preliminary model of border community resilience can be drawn, namely the process of “cross-border mobility → duality → transformation mechanism → resilience generation”:

First, self-organization is the endogenous foundation of resilience. Mechanisms such as grid-based management, councils, and “Binong Saihai” organize scattered community members into cohesive action units, enabling communities to independently identify risks, respond to shocks, and restore order. When trust

between neighbors accumulates to a certain extent, communities gain the motivation for self-organization.

Second, government-community collaboration is the institutional guarantee of resilience. The intervention of official forces, such as organizational leadership, police patrols, circuit trials, and bilingual legal popularization, does not replace community self-organization, but provides resources, norms, and support for it. When community self-organization lacks legal basis, the injection of official rule of law resources fills the institutional gap.

Third, the generation of resilience occurs at the boundary of interaction between the two. Resilience is not a static state, but a dynamic process continuously generated in the sustained interaction between the government and the people. In the negotiation and dialogue between villagers and village cadres at the council, in the daily cooperation between police and residents during joint patrols at border police offices, and in the interaction between judges and villagers at bilingual legal popularization sites, the self-organizing force of the community and the governance resources of the government are effectively combined.

Fourth, the sustainability of resilience depends on the transformation of governance effectiveness into industrial development. Governance reform reduces the transaction costs and security risks of communities, attracts industrial investment and commercial vitality; in turn, the increase in industrial income consolidates governance achievements and improves residents' enthusiasm for participating in governance, forming a positive cycle of "governance → industry → income increase → more stable governance," which makes resilience self-reinforcing.

The sustainability of resilience does not depend on a one-time investment of governance resources, but on the organic integration and continuous interaction between community endogenous forces and external support. Communities establish a resilience mechanism and transform it into "resilience in mobility" through interaction, so that cross-border mobility in border communities can find a dynamic balance in a complex field.

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